

## **Abstract**

**Title of Dissertation:** **Vienna's Transnational Fringe: Arts Funding, Aesthetic Agitation, and Europeanization**

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This dissertation deals with a subculture of transnational fringe artists, which is emerging in Europe in the early part of the twenty first century. It examines this subculture within the confines of Vienna, Austria, which was once the capital of a grand supra-national empire that spanned much of Central and Eastern Europe. Vienna is the site of this case study because in recent years the city has been instituting a self-conscious internationalization of its fringe scene, which resulted from local politicians' desires to help the city regain some of its long lost symbolic capital and become a legitimate competitor in an expanding and converging European field of cultural and economic production.

In Vienna's struggle for symbolic capital, the city's subculture of fringe artists is defined by their need to collaborate with the socio-political demands of the local government. They are also impacted by the requirement that they adhere to the economic, ideological, and aesthetic demands of transnational social spaces, i.e. co-production venues and fringe festivals, throughout Europe. The artists are enmeshed in external pressures as they forge paths for themselves within an increasingly uniform European fringe scene. The artists' complicity in the processes of globalization and Europeanization, which enable their subculture as they threaten to divest them of their "avant-garde impulse," causes the artists to adopt a highly ironic posture in their work. This posture, which is evident in their performances, may be partially to blame for a widespread claim that European fringe artists are suffering from an aesthetic crisis.

An examination of two fringe groups, i.e. Toxic Dreams and Superamas, which are thriving within Vienna's current system, reveals how any analysis of the aesthetics and ideologies of the performances being generated in the context of Europe's fringe scene must take into account the material realities that the artists are facing. In this dissertation the term *conglomerate performance* is used as a descriptor for the emergent genre that is adapted from a media-induced and "McDonalidized" system of cultural production within a specific, yet vital niche of European culture.

**VIENNA'S TRANSNATIONAL FRINGE:  
ARTS FUNDING, AESTHETIC AGITATION, AND EUROPEANIZATION**

**By**

**Justin Poole**

**Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
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Professor Franklin J. Hildy, Chair  
Professor Karen Bradley  
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## PREFACE

My choice to focus on Vienna's fringe performance scene was initially motivated by my ongoing travels to Europe.<sup>1</sup> These experiences began in 1999 when I attended a study abroad program in Salzburg, Austria. While in Salzburg, I began to study the socio-political affects of European integration and became intrigued with the influence of the European Union (EU) on the development of experimental performance. Other experiences involved an independent study at Villanova University on national identity in Austrian performance and extended doctoral research on EU-funded fringe performance. The latter began with a seminar paper exploring the 2006 European Dream Festival in New York City, which was developed in fiscal partnership with New York City-based European cultural centers, private foundations, and the EU. In 2008 I conducted a preliminary dissertation research trip to Austria, where I met with several of the subjects considered in this document and began to perceive the profound impact that Europeanization and globalization were having on the scene and its cultural agents (i.e. artists and administrators). From March through June of 2009 I conducted more extensive dissertation research, which included interviews, participant observation in Vienna's important performance venues including the Burgtheater, Brut Wien, Tanzquartier, and Brunnenpassage, and daily living within the city. Over the course of

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<sup>1</sup> Vienna may seem to be an unorthodox choice for examining the development of Europe's new fringe aesthetic. I became particularly aware of this while attending the 2009 Informal European Theatre Meetings (IETM) conference in Bratislava, Slovakia. While at the conference I met many artists who had either a negative or no opinion of Vienna's fringe scene. For example, a Belgian administrator told me that when she thinks of Austria she envisions "white horses" and "people in traditional costumes," not cutting-edge performance. By situating my study within Vienna, which I have found to possess an active if not unproblematic, scene I hope to correct such common misconceptions and to give English readers the opportunity to explore some of Austria's less well-known, but still highly important cultural artifacts.

these research trips I found certain aspects of Vienna's performance community to be particularly compelling and worthy of further theoretical and pragmatic consideration. These include the wide cultural gap between the city's established theatre venues and its fringe performance venues. Particularly compelling aspects of Vienna's fringe performance culture were the artists' desire to create work that transcends national categorization and their need to participate in a transnational European art market. These aspects coexisted with their dependency on the local government for support. Equally intriguing were the artists' search for new forms of expression and their widespread, yet not universal, belief that the fringe scene in Vienna suffers from a lack of innovation and/or creative vigor. Additional analysis of contemporary experimental performance in Europe made me aware that the realities of Vienna's fringe scene are not unique. Consequently, I began to consider that Vienna might be a suitable place to undertake a case study of contemporary experimental performance in Europe and the subculture of transnational performing artists who are instrumental in its creation.

As a result of my academic and *personal* exploration of Vienna's fringe scene, my dissertation tells a distinctly *human story* of cultural agents who operate within transnational social spaces (including Vienna's major fringe performance venues) and who often suffer from a lack of artistic innovation and/or fulfillment. Implicit in this story is the artists' quest for new forms of expression and their faith that they may achieve ideological and aesthetic breakthroughs. Based on my personal experiences within the scene (and anticipated future collaborations with Vienna-based transnational artists), I count myself as a participant in the cultural agents' faithful struggles to achieve their goals. As a result, any perceived criticism within my dissertation of the artists and

their methods should be understood as having arisen from a genuine desire to identify issues within the scene that may be limiting the artists' creative potential.

Implicit in my study is my belief that the new style/genre that is developing in Vienna, and the material factors that constitute the new style/genre, can be observed in other regions throughout Europe. For this reason, my dissertation has far wider implications to contemporary studies of fringe performance in Europe and the effects of Europeanization and globalization on artists working in Europe's widespread socialist-influenced cultural fields. In each chapter, I situate the events in Vienna's fringe scene within larger trends throughout Europe by referring to case studies on transnational artist mobility, cultural funding, and identity construction.

**DEDICATION**

**To Amanda**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My time at the University of Maryland has proven to bring the combination of tears and laughter, failures and triumphs that one *should* experience as a Ph.D. student. Although many professors and students exerted a profound impact on my personal and academic development in that context, I particularly wish to thank Franklin J. Hildy for being a source of support throughout this dissertation. Frank allowed me to believe that the seemingly insurmountable task of completing this crazy life goal of mine was actually attainable. I also wish to thank Laurie Frederik Meer who guided me through the early stages of this research and whose recommendations were critical in the process of securing funds for extended research in Austria. Catherine Schuler's early encouragements in this process were also invaluable to me, as have been the contributions of my humble, yet highly accomplished committee, Heather Nathans, Karen Bradley, and Steven Mansbach.

Additional thanks belong to another committee member, David Cregan, for leading me through the very early stages of my research on European performance while I was a graduate theatre student at Villanova University. At the time, the university's graduate theatre department, a stellar training ground in many other ways, was noticeably lacking his academic insights, and this has since changed. I like to think that our small independent study, which he did out of the goodness of his heart, had something to do with this.

I also wish to thank Charles Helmetag, a long-time professor of German at Villanova, who allowed me to audit his German classes, and who administered German language tests that qualified me for a necessary scholarship to study in Austria. Thanks also go to Patricia Pittman and Helga Halbfass for helping me keep my German skills sharp over the years.

This dissertation could not have been completed were it not for the generous contributions of the University of Maryland's Graduate School (Summer Graduate Student Research Fellowship, 2008, and Goldhaber Travel Grant, 2010), the School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies (International Initiatives Grants, 2010), and the Austrian Exchange Service (Ernst Mach Scholarship, 2009).

All of those mentioned in the body of this dissertation also deserve thanks for their willingness to meet with me, answer my questions, and provide me with further connections within Vienna and beyond. Standouts in this category include Gerhard Blasche of the Burgtheater and Yosi Wanunu of Toxic Dreams, speaking with these men is an education in itself. Other thanks belong to my generous and welcoming landlords in Vienna, Andrew and Renate Kain, and to my academic contacts at the Universitaet Wien (University of Vienna), Professor Stefan Hulfeld and Professor Margarete Rubik.

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The largest credit for this dissertation goes to my wife Amanda who has endured financial hardships, lack of sleep, several bad cases of European jet lag, and more, so that I could pursue my dreams. I truly could not have completed this task without Amanda's constant support. Throughout the trials, she maintained the ultimate faith in my abilities, even when my own belief failed.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is a moment of pure, unadorned human connectivity. Two Frenchmen speaking in the refined English of Europe's cosmopolitan elite sit in the front seats of a Suzuki SUV discussing their tumultuous relationships with their disapproving parents. Pause. The men leave the car to get some fresh air. The man formerly in the passenger seat turns to his friend and asks a question about the Suzuki, which the other answers. The man formerly in the driver's seat commends the car for its side impact airbags, ABS brakes, 240 horse power engine, and, its most practical and surprising feature, the built-in DVD entertainment system. Black out. Lights up. The last segment of the previous scene is replayed, but now the dialogue is re-contextualized. Instead of two friends discussing the merits of one man's car after an in-depth conversation about relational problems, the audience reads the action as two strangers, one a salesman and the other a customer. The scene morphs into a full-blown commercial for the Suzuki SUV complete with two females clad in bikinis who strike various sexual poses around the car to the tune of Madonna's "Nobody's Perfect" as the salesman hands business cards to audience members, asking them to "Please go and visit a Suzuki dealer near you." Black out.

The performance I have been describing is *Big 1st Episode*, the initial installment of the *Big Episode Trilogy*, by the Vienna-based, city-funded, self-dubbed "international performance collective" called Superamas.

In *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode* two members of Superamas stand at a bar. One portrays John Rosse from the Rolls Royce Company, the other a caricatured version of himself who appears to be pitching his group Superamas to John in the hopes of getting corporate

sponsorship. He states, “together with my group Superamas we are looking for new territories.” He continues, “The Superamas group is known for its extremely diversified activities, performances, installations, films, but I’m sure you’ve heard of it.”

*Big 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode* includes a long film segment chronicling Superamas’ trip to New York City to present *Big 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode* at a prominent fringe venue, The Kitchen. The audience sees the group snapping photographs of billboards in Times Square, holding auditions in a NYC dance studio, bowing to the elated cheers of NYC audiences, and celebrating their success at an afterparty for *Big 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode* in a New York City bar. At this point the action pauses, and a giant logo for the Austrian beer company Trumer Pils dominates the screen. The film ends having been recontextualized as an extended commercial for two corporate brands, one of them Superamas itself.

These moments, prevalent through Superamas’ productions signify the breakdown of the ontological difference between live and mediated performance and between fringe culture and global mass culture, just as they seemingly obliterate the distinction between the transactions that occur off stage and on stage as the members of Superamas struggle for legitimacy within Europe’s fringe scene. Offstage the group resorts to flagrant commercialization of their brand and onstage they construct performances that critique their own processes.

In another performance, this one created by the Vienna-based, city funded, fringe group Toxic Dreams, Israeli-born and New York-educated artistic director Yosi Wanunu steps onto a stage resembling a film studio littered with mismatched electrical wires, crew chairs, film camera tripods, and complete with a miniature model of the Empire State

Building and a conspicuous puppet made to resemble the disembodied hand of, none other than, King Kong.

Wanunu describes his impetus for selecting the Hollywood icon as the subject for his commentary on theatre and global mass culture stating that Kong is, “just like a Big Mac...you put in the possibilities like *Hamlet Kong*, *King Kong Lear*, *Streetcar Named Kong*, *Waiting for Kong*...and it’s endless.” Various other players from Toxic Dreams’ core acting ensemble enter the stage and play a variety of roles. The scenes happen in an extremely illogical order, alternating from personal interviews with the cast and snippets of action that resemble behind the scenes, making-of footage found on DVD extras. A fake documentary (i.e. a mockumentary) follows this live show, which further delves into the power of Kong as a commodity. The critiques of prominent intellectuals are featured within the mockumentary, which also includes interviews with actors, supposedly from the original Kong film and a myriad of make-believe spin-offs. The mockumentary is framed with an overarching story line of a news crew on the hunt for a real-life, massive predatory gorilla, who is wandering through the wooded surroundings of an unspecified American town. The news telecast helps to maintain the focus on the search for the real quality of Kong, a character who has been bastardized through several incarnations on film, for example, the 1968 multi-cultural comedy *Kong and his Eight Brides*, the 1977 country-boy-meets-big-city romance *King in the City*, and even the 1989 porn film *King Kong Cometh*. Over the course of the documentary the real Kong appears and laments the loneliness and isolation caused by his foray into global mass culture. In real life and on film he catered to the expectations of his audiences only to become an object, a fetishized and caricatured version of himself, and “a universally recognizable

commodity.” In the end the real Kong was banished from the screen, replaced by a human actor wearing a gorilla suit. His essence was robbed from him. All that remained of the impulsive, primal being born in the midst of a carnivorous jungle with the powers to wreck havoc on the very pillars of industrialized human civilization was the shell of an ape, who retained the hairy over-sized appearance, but none of the internal drive, the yearning for the sublime, the impassioned sense of revolution and revolt. The image of Kong at the end of this performance is at the heart of this dissertation’s analysis of Vienna’s transnational fringe scene.

The work of both *Toxic Dreams* and *Superamas* reveals a tragic irony derived from the very conditions of a European fringe scene, which is dominated by the will of local politicians who wage a battle for symbolic capital in an expanding and integrating European cultural field. In this struggle the artists themselves become witting participants, opportunistically seeking funding at the local and transnational levels, while developing signature brands that can be bought and sold within a European co-production and festival circuit dominated by superficial connections and aesthetic tastes recycled from the canonical avant-garde and global mass culture.

This dissertation is situated within Vienna, the capital of a once-grand, supranational empire, which has suffered a series of identity crisis at the local and international levels. A notable episode in recent history was the rise of Joerg Haider’s infamous, supposedly neo-Nazi *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Freedom Party of Austria, hereafter the *FPOe*). Although the *FPOe*’s sentiments made headlines and sent shock waves across a “united” Europe in 2000, they were actually the outcries of a large vocal *minority*, and they were countered by more progressive, outward-looking trends

within Austria aimed at expanding the nation's reach throughout the EU, which Austrian citizens had voted overwhelmingly in favor of joining in 1995. Feeling that European public opinion had historically been skewed by surface-level media treatments of Austrian provincialism, the city of Vienna, the long-time generator of artistic movements in the nation, got to work on improving international public opinion regarding its culture.

In the field of fringe performance the changes began to be visible with the development of Tanzquartier, a city-operated fringe venue with a budget of approximately 3 million Euros, in 2001. Further alterations came with the inauguration of the *Wiener Theaterreform (Theaterreform)* in 2003, and Brut Wien, another city-operated fringe venue with a budget of approximately 1.5 million Euros, in 2007. All of these were instituted by the city's ruling *Sozialdemokratische Partei Oesterreichs* (Social Democratic Party of Austria, hereafter the *SPOe*) using a top down approach that led to a fringe scene where artists with cosmopolitan perspectives could thrive and many of those with local orientations were effectively de-legitimized.

This occurred when the artistic directors of Tanzquartier and Brut took over two of the major "free spaces" where fringe performers once showed their work in a relatively un-juried system. These directors also popularized the idea that most local artists who dominated the scene before their tenure had been surviving on government handouts, while failing to bring international attention to a scene dominated by backwards aesthetics and, what Tanzquartier's artistic director referred to as, an "island mentality."<sup>2</sup> The artistic directors of Tanzquartier and Brut formed an informal partnership. The venues' artists and audiences were composed largely of the same people, i.e. those with

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<sup>2</sup> Sigrid Gareis, former artistic director of Tanzquartier, interview by author, 15 April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

sufficient cultural capital to be able to comprehend a brand of highly visual conceptual performance, characterized by constant recycling/recoding of global mass culture and the canonical avant-garde, and often performed using a variety of European languages, most notably English.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, these venues became part of an elaborate system of co-production venues and festivals throughout Europe where transnational artists converged.

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout my dissertation I describe how Vienna's fringe scene is characterized by a series of dialectical struggles between local and non-local impulses among Vienna's citizens, politicians, and artists. These struggles are intensified by the processes of globalization and Europeanization, which have led to the self-conscious internationalism of Vienna's fringe scene. The central motif of struggle is an integral component of Pierre Bourdieu's theories on the field of cultural production; therefore, Bourdieu's theoretical insights inform my overall analysis of Vienna's transnational fringe scene.

In *The Field of Cultural Production* Pierre Bourdieu argues that "Literature, art and their respective producers do not exist independently of complex institutional framework which authorizes, enables, empowers and legitimizes them." For this reason, any analysis of an emergent ideology and aesthetic must derive from a thorough examination of a cultural field, in this case Vienna. Because Vienna is so enmeshed in transnational processes brought on by the rise of globalization, any analysis of cultural production within the city must also take into account how Vienna interacts with other, larger cultural fields such as Europe. Furthermore, the types of struggles for legitimacy within Vienna's scene often materialize as bitter debates over what constitutes "quality" and "professionalism." These terms are not as concrete as they are often believed to be. One of my tasks in this dissertation is to determine how these contestable concepts are being debated and how these debates are effecting the development of a subculture and the overall production of fringe performance within Vienna's cultural field.

Central to Bourdieu's theories of cultural fields are the notions of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Economic capital refers to command over economic resources. This is the most direct and easily measured form of capital because it relates to the amount of accumulated items that have a tangible, equitable value attached to them. In Vienna's cultural field the established Burgtheater (Austria's National Theatre) has the greatest economic capital because it has the largest operational budget of all the city's theatrical venues, demands some of the highest fees for ticket sales, and has the potential to pump a great amount of money back into the local economy through generating tourism revenues. In contrast, Vienna's fringe venues do not have high amounts of economic capital because they sell far fewer tickets and generate little revenue for the city.

Social capital is linked to relationships and the interconnectedness of people, groups, and institutions. Vienna-based fringe artists who are thriving within the context of Europe's network of fringe venues and festivals have high degrees of social capital because their networks are extensive and productive. Fringe artists who are more confined to the local context have lesser amounts of social capital because their networks are not as expansive.

Cultural capital refers to forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are often derived from specific types of education and upbringing. This concept relates to a person's status in society. Historically, even though a fringe performing artist does not earn a high amount of economic capital, he/she is likely to possess a high level of cultural capital due to the intellectual prestige associated with being a cultural agent with the capacity to critique the prevailing ideologies and aesthetics that dominate his/her surroundings. There are three primary types of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. In the case of Vienna's fringe scene, the demand for artists to demonstrate their institutionalized cultural capital, i.e. their legitimizing credentials such as artistic degrees and previous performance engagements, is a dominant precursor to long-term success. In addition, the artists' embodied cultural capital, i.e. how the individuals are socialized into certain ways of consuming and producing cultural products, determines whether or not they will be able to participate in the fringe scene, which is dominated by a specific neo-avant-garde cultural logic that is not easily comprehended by the majority of

Brut and Tanzquartier, the city's transnational social spaces for fringe artists, had even greater power to constitute and perpetuate dominant, decisively cosmopolitan ideologies due to their integral connections with members of the city's system of jurors and curators, established by the *Theaterreform* to create a fringe scene defined by greater "quality." These government-appointed officials' decisions to fund certain artists over others were often, self-admittedly, defined by their perception of how the artists would fair in the transnational fringe spaces with which Tanzquartier and Brut had partnerships. This was because the niche market within Vienna's limited number of fringe venues could only supplement, not replace public funding, which itself was dwindling as neo-liberal economic policies arose in Europe as a result of globalization and Europeanization.

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cultural consumers. Related to the concept of embodied cultural capital is the issue of language. For example, artists who do not have a high command of English do not have the proper embodied cultural capital needed to achieve long term success in Europe's transnational fringe scene because the cultural agents in this scene typically use English as their common trade language. Usually when I am referring to fringe artists as individuals, my use of the term cultural capital denotes an amalgamation of the embodied and institutionalized types. Objectified cultural capital refers to material items that may translate to economic profit or that may merely symbolize one's cultural capital. Objectified cultural capital is, therefore, an important concept when dealing with Vienna's primary fringe venues and how the artistic directors of these venues use artists to increase the economic and symbolic capital of their institutions. For example, in Vienna's struggle to enhance its cultural prestige within Europe's expansive cultural field, certain artists may be endowed with a level of objectified cultural capital and given opportunities by the local government and the fringe venues to be more visible abroad. In this context the artists themselves become objects of trade. Symbolic capital is somewhat of an aggregate sum of social and cultural capital. It refers to the resources available to a person, group, or brand based on honor or prestige within specific fields. The ability to have one's voice be heard within a public forum is a sign of one's high symbolic capital. This ability may be limited by acts of symbolic violence, described below.

The various forms of capital are intertwined. As Bourdieu states in *The Logic of Practice*, in economic terms "symbolic capital is credit," meaning that it often breeds economic gain. For example, by pumping money into projects that showcase cultural diversity and transnational co-operation, and making this funding visible throughout Europe, Vienna increases its symbolic capital, develops international trust, and stands to get more economic capital from co-operation with its European neighbors in areas within and outside of the cultural field. The worth attached to a given product or artist, i.e. its objectified cultural capital, may be used to increase Vienna's symbolic and economic capital; however, at various times throughout history and within the context of different subcultures, having a high level of economic capital has been understood as antithetical to having a high level of cultural capital. Bourdieu argues that most European avant-garde movements charted their success based on "loser wins logic." This logic is dominated by the principal that avant-garde artists have a high level of artistic quality, i.e. cultural capital, and a low level of commercial value, i.e. economic capital. To a large extent, this "winner loses logic" persists within Vienna's subculture of transnational fringe performing artists, despite evidence that suggests the artists are, indeed, heavily influenced by market pressures and cater to market demands.

Increasingly, the artists who emerged as the victors of the struggles in the fringe scene found themselves collaborating, not only with an integral community of professional friendships at the local level, but also with the demands of the transnational fringe scene throughout Europe.

These recent historical movements are creating a certain crisis within Europe's fringe scene, where artists link their desired mode of operation to liminality, a term borrowed from anthropologist Victor Turner to describe a process where old roles are questioned, transformation is imminent, and there is a striving after new forms and structures.<sup>4</sup> Believing their works to be liminal, these artists tend to align with what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu refers to as the avant-garde "winner loses logic," in which temporary economic failure is seen as a sign of election, or as proof that artists' esoteric, non-commercial products are breaking ideological and aesthetic ground, agitating an anesthetized public, who consume dominant modes of culture while being tied to regressive conservatism. The belief that these artists are operating according to the liminal paradigm is somewhat abetted by the factor that they *are* seemingly charting new territory by frequently engaging in collaborations with people outside their nations of origin; however, other circumstances related to cultural production suggest that these artists are better understood according to the logic of the *carnavalesque*, a term I borrow liberally from Mikhail Bakhtin, to describe how European fringe artists operate in a

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<sup>4</sup> Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, (PAJ Publications: New York, 1982).

quasi-inverted, outwardly pluralistic niche environment sanctioned by a more traditional, monolithic government and populous.<sup>5</sup>

My findings suggest that some artists, those from Toxic Dreams and Superamas in particular, are fully aware of their powerlessness to enact actual long-term structural change related to the problems wrought by Europeanization and globalization. Such issues associated with these processes include reactionary nationalism, but even more so they include the pervasiveness of global mass culture and the fetishization of the European fringe artist, a cultural agent who has a superficial appearance of “unity in diversity,” to quote from the EU’s motto for culture. The performers’ discourse and creations suggest unmitigated entropy, which the artists do not know how to counter from within their present circumstances. This is mostly found in their self-referential commentary on the international fringe market, their flagrant commercialization, their homogenized aesthetics, their glaring superficiality, and their tendency to treat their own ideas with an extremely irreverent irony that goes beyond the social consciousness-inducing outcomes of the Brechtian alienation effect and into the realm of the absurd. The prevailing trends of a European fringe scene amount to the artists’ absurd condition, and an analysis of their products is not possible without an understanding of such

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<sup>5</sup> Informing this dissertation is my belief that the government sponsorship of fringe performance appears to be antithetical to the avant-garde impulse and that Vienna’s fringe scene may be understood as an example of Mikhail Bakhtin’s *carnavalesque*, a form of open rebellion against the status quo that is sanctioned by society. This notion refers to a state where society is temporarily inverted, yet at the end of a specified time, society reverts to its old ways. Essentially, in allowing the fringe theatre scene to be a place of discovery, where artists believe that the cultural hegemony of the nation state does not fully apply, Vienna’s government is allowing for the appearance of cultural openness that, perhaps, does not exist outside the insular fringe scene. The prevailing *carnavalesque* qualities in Vienna’s system of arts funding do not fully preclude the idea that the fringe scene and its cultural agents are experiencing real transitions, which constitute a niche or subculture of newly legitimized artists.

material realities. This dissertation's investigation of such circumstances begins with an historical assessment of internationalism within the context of Vienna-based performance.

### **Vienna's Performance Scene in Historical Perspective: Internationalism as a Prerequisite to Innovation**

A prevailing catch phrase used by Austrians to describe their nation is “small country, many borders.” The historian Friedrich Heer once remarked that no nation has been so affected by outside forces as Austria.<sup>6</sup> This observation stems from the long and complicated history of the many lands that are now know as Austria, which until 1918 had been under monarchical rule for hundreds of years. Until its dissolution following World War I, the Hapsburg Empire with its seat of power in Vienna, brought an unprecedented amount of flow of cultural products from areas to the South, North, East, and West. These international influences shaped the course of Viennese culture, often with remarkable results.

During the last days of the eighteenth century Vienna was often considered to be “the center of Enlightened hopes in all of Germany and Central Europe.”<sup>7</sup> This reputation was largely inspired by the policies of Emperor Joseph II (1741-1790) of the house of Hapsburg-Lorraine (from 1780) who instituted a golden age of European Enlightenment culture during the final days of the Holy Roman Empire (dissolved in 1804). During his life span Vienna was reimagined as a center of recreation and culture, all provided by generous monarchical support. At this time, two public parks the Augarden and Prater, which to this day remain vital aspects of the capital's public landscape, opened in the city and a variety of reforms designed to increase the universal

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<sup>6</sup> Guenter Bischoff, Anton Pelinka, and Michael Gehler, *Austrian Foreign Policy in Historical Context* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Steven Beller, *A Concise History of Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 95.

rights of the public were instituted.<sup>8</sup> The Burgtheater remains one of the most prominent cultural institutions to come from this era.

Given the Burgtheater's foundations, stemming from an odd amalgamation of Enlightenment thought and German cultural nationalism, it is ironic that the institution transformed into a bastion of Austrian national pride and insular provincialism in the immediate decades following its re-consecration in 1955. To a large degree, this important cultural institution, which contributed to the development of Vienna's counter-cultural fringe scene, has a complex history as a European venue. In the tradition of the Hamburg National Theater (1767-1769), the venue was originally intended to be a cultural institution dedicated to uniting people from the German cultural nation, which included citizens of Austria and people from the neighboring lands of Prussia.<sup>9</sup> Although this institution, placed under court administration in 1776 during the reign of Emperor Josef II, boasted an ensemble of German speaking actors and omitted French language drama and Italian opera, the operating structure was rooted in a model already established by the decisively foreign *Comedie Francaise*. Even when all French language dramas were removed from the Burgtheater's repertoire, the French neoclassical ideal persisted.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Most notable of these were the Toleration Edicts of 1781, which expanded freedoms for Protestants and Jews within the predominantly Catholic empire.

<sup>9</sup> From the outset, the national character of Austria's National Theatre, was in dispute. Although Heinrich August Ottokar Reichard (1751-1828), publisher of the annual *Theaterkalender*, praised the founding stating, "What a ravishing, splendid thought for anyone capable of feeling that he is a German!," Goethe urged people not to "bestow the title of a national company on the Viennese company of actors until further notice but rather to wait until we are a nation, until Vienna has become its representative, and until the company there has taken on the character of the same." It appears that the division of the German cultural nation into linguistic dialects and isolated geographical regions, coupled with the inability to find and maintain innovative forms native to German lands, created much confusion as to what could constitute a truly German National Theatre.

Michael J. Sosulski, *Theatre and Nation in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2007), 21.

<sup>10</sup> Sonnenfels was particularly responsible for this, because many of his speeches argued that the Burgtheater's repertoire should conform to "the rules of a purified theatre" and that tragedy should include highborn characters and comedy should include lower classes.

Furthermore, during the theatre's nascent stages, the Burgtheater's German language dramas failed to attract audiences and Italian operas and ballets were reintroduced. In the conflict-ridden century that followed, the Burgtheater continued to swing back and forth, along with shifts at the governmental level, between extreme German cultural nationalism and European cosmopolitanism. These forces stemmed from Vienna's position as the capital of a waxing and waning supranational empire.<sup>11</sup>

Vienna's transformation away from the epicenter of Enlightenment hopes coincided with a dialectical struggle in European culture and a series of wars, ideological and actual, with Austria's neighboring post-revolutionary France. This nation appalled Austria's ruling class with the execution of its monarch in 1793. In 1799 Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) seized power in France and in 1804 he declared himself emperor leading to Emperor Franz II's reactionary declaration of the Austrian Empire (1804-1867). Napoleon's military campaign against Austria, which included the French occupation of Vienna, essentially crippled the empire's economic and cultural power. In 1815 at the near end of the Napoleonic Wars (1799-1815) the Congress of Vienna divided Europe along new lines, leading to the establishment of the German Confederation of thirty-eight states controlled by Austria and Prussia. Even though temporary stability followed in the wake of the newly divided political lines, the

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Raymond Erickson, *Schubert's Vienna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 228.

<sup>11</sup> In 1808, Napoleon's victories over Austria placed Vienna under French occupation and German dramatists disappeared from their stage, replaced by French playwrights. But in 1810 a surge of national pride and waning French influence caused more German plays to be performed. Later Burgtheater directors developed eclectic approaches to dramatic repertoires in order to cater to expanding audience pallets. When Heinrich Laube took over directorship of the Burgtheater in 1849 and held it until 1867, he strove for a more comprehensive repertoire that included the works of Lessing, other German dramatists, Shakespeare, and French neoclassicists who did not contradict German "customs." Laube also included the popular French plays of Scribe and Dumas Fils. These later developments, which led to a more eclectic Burgtheater repertoire, are more representative of overarching historical factors in Europe than they are the exclusive result of initiatives by important Austrian German theorists and practitioners.

Congress of Vienna did not signal a return to the former glory of the empire. Instead post 1815 the center of cultural life within the German speaking world transferred to Berlin.<sup>12</sup> This was partially the result of the rise of nationalist sentiments among the ethnically and culturally diverse regions of Austria's expansive empire and subsequent alterations to Austria's political structure, most notably the *Ausgleich* (compromise) of 1867. This compromise established the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918) after a total defeat of Austria during the Austro-Prussian War (1866). It was reached at the beckoning of Emperor Franz Josef (1830-1916) of Austria who believed that a dual monarchy with Austria and its neighboring Hungary was a better option than the complete separation of the two. A variety of multi-cultural projects resulted from the dual monarchy's continued efforts to keep extreme nationalism within the empire at bay by infusing the capital city's cultural life with a visible form of European cosmopolitanism. This appearance of cultural openness led to what has been deemed the most notable flourishing of a modernist European culture in Vienna.<sup>13</sup>

Specific rationale provided for the booming of culture in *fin de siecle* Vienna is varied, but it is nearly always attributed to the patronage of cosmopolitan-minded artists from various parts of the empire and Europe. Historian Steven Beller claims that, "national ambition in such cities as Prague, Budapest and Cracow does much to explain

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<sup>12</sup> In *A History of German Theatre* Maik Hamburger and Simon Williams argue that immediately after the Congress of Vienna the city had "the most diverse theatre culture" in Europe. However, by 1817 this mark of openness and prestige had transferred to the *other* major German language city, Berlin.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Beller argues that *fin de siecle* Vienna was not really seen "at the cutting edge of modernity" in the same way that Paris, Germany or America were, but that it is only in hind sight that we envision it in this way. Similarly, in his influential study on late-nineteenth-century Viennese culture entitled *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, Carl E. Schorske claims that during this era the city was later to develop the so-called post Nietzschean cultural decadence, i.e. fragmented forms and "infinite innovation," than its sister cities of Berlin, London, and Paris.

Beller, 170-171.

Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (London: Vintage, 1980), xix.

the cultural flourishing in those cities, but in Vienna, as the capital of a supra-national empire, did not share in this, and the attempt at an ‘Austrian’ culture never carried much conviction.”<sup>14</sup> This lack of “conviction” resulted from the division between Vienna’s culturally German majority and the German people from the areas of Prussia to the north. It further materialized out of the diversity within the borders of Europe’s supranational empire and the influx of people from the empire’s diverse lands into the capital city. Scholars also cite the migration of German-speaking Jewish bourgeoisie into the city as rationale for its cultural golden age.<sup>15</sup> Historian Carl E. Schorske cites the government-funded Vienna Secession movement as an important step in the city’s overall effort to “break the manacles of tradition and open Austria to European innovations in the plastic arts.”<sup>16</sup> The Secession did this by opening up its galleries to artists outside of the city and introducing the Viennese public to a variety of European art schools and movements including the highly influential French Impressionists. *Fin de siecle* Vienna presented the thriving of a seemingly open cosmopolitan European modernist culture supported by the monarchy for the purpose of increasing stability within the region and warding off dangerous nationalist sentiments that would threaten to divide the empire.<sup>17</sup> Although it is problematic to perceive an exact one-to-one ratio between the events of *fin de siecle* Vienna and now, it is important to understand that contemporary movements within Vienna’s present fringe scene are at least partially motivated by the city’s historical precedents.

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<sup>14</sup> Beller, 170.

<sup>15</sup> At this time German was the primary language of cosmopolitan Europeans.

<sup>16</sup> Schorske, 84.

<sup>17</sup> At present readers should be aware that the context of *fin de siecle* Vienna birthed numerous cultural visionaries including Sigmund Freud, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Arnold Schoenberg, Adolf Loos, and Gustav Klimt, to name only a few.

During the years immediately following the First World War, the flow of ethnicities and cultural perspectives within Austria's capital was curtailed when the empire was dismantled and the First Austrian Republic (1919-1938) was created.<sup>18</sup> Historian Michael Wimmer describes this as a time when Austria became a small country "against one's will" and a state "that nobody wanted."<sup>19</sup> This half-hearted Wilsonian-era attempt at national self-creation ultimately failed with Hitler's annexation of Austria in 1938 and, in the aftermath of World War II, a new Austrian Republic (1955-present) was established. According to Rolf Steininger, Guenter Bischof, and Michael Gehler, the cultural isolation that resulted from this period stemmed from this second iteration of a newly-founded nation's "overriding strategic aim, which was almost universally accepted in Austria, of negotiating the withdraw of allied occupation troops and regaining national sovereignty."<sup>20</sup> Significantly, most English-language studies of Austrian theatre between the outbreak of World War I in 1914 up until the present make little mention of experimental performances done in Austria's capital city. This may be partially due to the nation's relative cultural isolation during this period in comparison to the cultural openness when Vienna was the capital of one of Europe's grandest empires. Historically a great deal of experimental performance in Europe had been constructed by artists who thrived within transnational networks and who held cosmopolitan ideologies. This was certainly true of the modernist avant-garde artists who thrived in Vienna during the last

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<sup>18</sup> Following the collapse of the multi-national empire, Austrians dedicated themselves to the collective project of nation-building, which involved crafting a new national identity and an imagined community from people who resided in the delineated German language regions, now dubbed the First Austrian Republic. This era brought Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Max Reinhardt's experiments in the construction of a German Austrian identity and performance tradition, best exemplified in the creation of the Salzburg Festival (1919-present).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Wimmer, "Reflections on a Special Case: What Makes Cultural Policy Truly Austrian?," *Journal of Arts, Management, Law and Society*, (2006): 4.

<sup>20</sup> Rolf Steininger, Guenter Bischof, and Michael Gehler, eds., *Austria in the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 296.

decades of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Many scholars of experimental performance would not tend to associate it with artists who have a local orientation and who are driven by pressure to advance a monolithic and traditional perception of a national culture. The goal of nation building was at the forefront of Austria's efforts in the decades following 1955. Perhaps Patrick Werkner, writing in 1986, described the insular status of Austrian culture during these early decades of the second Austrian Republic best when he stated that contemporary scholars' fascination with the bygone cosmopolitan era of *fin de siècle* Vienna represents:

a hankering after a federal, multiracial state, such as was mapped out...for the fissiparous Danubian empire; or a transfiguring longing for the idyll of the 'good old days;' or a nostalgia for a now scarcely conceivable diversity of outlook— ethnic, political, cultural, individual-in contrast to the creeping advance of uniformity in the present.<sup>21</sup>

A little over a decade after Werkner's words, these qualities would resurface in a highly self-conscious, nostalgia-ridden, and top-down manner. The reanimation and reemphasis of a cosmopolitan culture in certain cultural niches throughout Vienna would be spawned by the operations of government officials operating out of a need to reestablish Austria's legitimacy after the Second Republic's xenophobic nationalism reached a breaking point.

In cultural terms, the Second Austrian Republic was constituted according to several foundational myths, which are noted in the majority of studies on Austrian culture.<sup>22</sup> These include the myth of permanent neutrality,<sup>23</sup> the myth of Austria as the

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<sup>21</sup> Patrick Werkner, *Austrian Expressionism: the Formative Years*, trans. Nicholas T. Parsons (Palo Alto, CA: Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 1993), 1.

<sup>22</sup> The *Kulturturnation* ideology has mutated and been used for various purposes since the collapse of Austria-Hungary dethroned Austria's culture industry from its position of European prominence. After the demise of the empire, a different form of the *Kulturturnation* ideology guided Hugo von Hofmannsthal and others to create the now-world-famous Salzburg Festival, mentioned above, within the context of the First Austrian Republic (1919-1938). Following the carnage of World War II and the defeat of National Socialist Germany, the *Kulturturnation* ideology was used by the founders of the Second Austrian Republic (1955-present) as a primary tool to distance Austria from the post-Nazi nation to the north. Consequently, it

first victim of the Third Reich,<sup>24</sup> and, most significantly for my study, the myth of Austria as *Kulturnation* (cultural nation).<sup>25</sup> During the early years of the Second Austrian Republic the nation's myriad cultural influences still existed; however, attention was drawn towards what would further unite this "island of the blessed," which was threatened by communist propaganda to its east, American mass culture to its extreme west, and the resurgence of National Socialism from within.<sup>26</sup> Austria's character as a European melting pot, or *mélange* as the Viennese call it, persisted in a dormant form, waiting to be capitalized upon as the nation emerged from the twentieth century, with its bent towards extreme nationalism, and into the multi-cultural twenty-first century.<sup>27</sup>

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tended to refer to talented German-speaking individuals (such as Mozart, Wittgenstein, and Freud) native to former Austro-Hungarian lands. In the ensuing years the term *Kulturnation* appeared in various publicity materials designed to expand Austria's tourism industry. However, despite successful uses of the term in tourist campaigns, many studies published during the 1980s and 1990s decried Vienna's waning image as a European cultural metropolis.

<sup>23</sup> Here I refer mainly to the notion that Austria functioned as the neutral moderator between the East and West. Austria's neutral status was a prerequisite for withdraw of Soviet troops from the nation post-World War II. The myth of Austria's permanent neutrality came to extreme prominence during Bruno Kreisky's reign as Austrian Chancellor (1970-1983), when he actually did manage to expand the nation's political role, in regards to East-West relations, out of proportion to the nation's actual size and economic infrastructure.

<sup>24</sup> In the *Moscow Declaration* of 1943 the Allied Forces singled out Austria as the first victim of Nazi oppression. This was a problematic belief that was widely accepted by Austrians and appropriated into the development of the nation's fresh cultural policies.

<sup>25</sup> Uwe Mattheiss, who co-authored the *Wiener Theaterreform*, which I discuss in chapters one and two, argues that "we are no longer important as a European power, but we are important as a center for arts." He argues that this central national myth creates the belief that "everything related to culture is good."

Uwe Mattheiss (co-author of the *Wiener Theaterreform*), interview by author, 29 April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>26</sup> The "island of the blessed" is a term trumpeted by Pope Paul VI. This phrase, which was and is aptly criticized by a number of Austrian scholars, took hold during the 1970s and 1980s. Although this term often meant that the nation was home to citizens with a degree of privilege in contrast to their Eastern neighbors, the images of isolation that the name invokes should not be ignored. Although Austrian politicians participated in foreign relations with its Eastern neighbors, its general citizenry was characterized by a degree of cultural isolation.

Bischoff, Pelinka, and Geller, 6.

<sup>27</sup> In the present era visible remnants of the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity that once defined Vienna during the height of the supra-national empire are undercut by statistical data. According to the CIA world fact book, as of 2009 there were 1.693 million people residing in Vienna, 91.1% were Austrians, 4% came from the former Yugoslavia, 1.6% were Turks, 0.9% were German, and 2.4% were other or unspecified. The difficulty with accepting this data at face value stems from the reality that many of those who are classified as native Austrian have last names that are Hungarian, Slovakian, or other in origin, signifying the ethnic mixing that largely occurred in the city during the height of its imperial power. Nevertheless, the

During this period few attempts were made to restore the once lively, if not thriving, avant-garde scene that had been intentionally disrupted when a vast array of artists (Jewish and other) were expelled from the city during the brief, but decisive period of Nazi reign. The lack of a thriving avant-garde persisted into the mid-to late-1980s, which were characterized by a degree of isolation, mostly brought on by the election of Kurt Waldheim to the Austrian presidency. Waldheim, was the first of many Austrians at that time who were appointed to office despite their service in the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>28</sup> The 1980s and 1990s also gave rise to the *FPOe*, mentioned above.<sup>29</sup> Despite these movements, certain cultural niches persisted within the nation, which offered ongoing criticism of local trends.

Scholarship on Austrian theatre and performance during the latter half of the twentieth century tends to focus on exceptions to the insular nationalist mentalities that birthed more and more traditional art in Vienna during the early decades of Austria's Second Republic. These exceptions are typified in the plays of Thomas Bernhard (1931-1989), Peter Handke (1942-present), and Elfriede Jelinek (1946-present), all of whom were generally more accepted in Germany than in their native country and who were decisively playwrights in the more traditional theatrical fashion, despite their practice of

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statistical data does appear to confirm the notion that there is a disproportionate amount of foreigners visible within Vienna's fringe scene, as opposed to society at large.

CIA world fact book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/au.html>.

<sup>28</sup> See the American play *Old Wicked Songs* (1996) by Jon Marans for a poetic treatment of this era from an American playwright.

<sup>29</sup> As many scholars attest, EU integration has proceeded in the hope of providing a check to the rise of neo-fascist governments, and extreme nationalist leanings in the wake of World War II. Therefore, Austria's own isolationist tendencies probably sped on the need for integration.

Richard K. Herrmann, Thomas Risse, and Marilyn B. Brewer, eds., *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), vii.

constructing narratives that diverted from Aristotelian structure.<sup>30</sup> However, Thomas Bernhard's plays, which presented a critical interpretation of Austrian culture, were made more visible in the nation's capital city when Claus Peymann (1937-present) was appointed by the government as the artistic director of the Burgtheater. According to Austrian theatre scholar W.E. Yates, Peymann saw that his personal mission was to reform the Burgtheater, transforming it into a powerhouse of European theatrical expression in the German language rather than the bastion of nationalist traditionalism, which many feared it had become in the years since its reopening in 1955.<sup>31</sup> Between 1986 and 1994 Peymann brought his more cosmopolitan German perspective to the capital and instituted a *carnavalesque* era at the Austrian national theatre, which gave rise to various protests from the conservative and, arguably provincial, Austrian majority.<sup>32</sup> Another exception to the prevailing nationalistic and conservative trends in Vienna is the Viennese Actionists who, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, began staging protests against the majority using, among other materials, animal guts and human fecal matter. Although these artists incurred fines and imprisonment on account of their work, soon after the Viennese Actionists' performances gained international scholarly attention, the once-renegade artists were co-opted into the mainstream of Viennese culture. These Austrian artists/groups managed to forge a legitimate space within the compendium of

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<sup>30</sup> For the purpose of this dissertation Aristotelian dramatic structure refers to forms of text-based theatre, derived from the traditions of canonical Western plays. This type of theatrical model typically involves attention to sharply delineated characters that operate according to a dynamic plot structure involving introduction, climax, and resolution, constructed with the intent of bringing a catharsis of purgation of audience emotions.

<sup>31</sup> Yates, 238.

<sup>32</sup> Peymann's appointment to the Burgtheater is an example of how Vienna has historically demonstrated a tendency to support works that somehow critique prevailing ideological trends within the nation. The most controversial of Peymann's productions, *Heldenplatz* (1988) by Thomas Bernhard, was shown during a celebration marking the centenary of the Burgtheater building on the *Ringstrasse*. This play represented Austrians as as willing participants in the *Anschluss* rather than as victims of the affair. It stimulated a series of riots in the city.

English-language scholarship on European experimental performance traditions. This fact demonstrated to Austrian politicians that the most significant artists in terms of bringing international attention to *contemporary* Austrian culture were those who broke the conservative mold and leaned towards a broader, international perspective.

The various missteps on the way to harmonious foreign relations and recognition of the mixed nature of Austria's cultural heritage were countered during the mid-1990s by the majority vote for Austrians to enter into the EU.<sup>33</sup> In the late 1990s this decision was followed by strong efforts on the part of the *SPOe*<sup>34</sup> towards expanding Austria's reach in the European field of cultural production.<sup>35</sup> According to European cultural policy researcher Sarah Gardner, when governments decide to fund projects with an explicit international appearance and approach, they are often seeking to fulfill one of four policy objectives. These include "arts development (cultural policy), cultural diplomacy (international relations/foreign policy), export development (international trade), culture and development (international aid).<sup>36</sup> The creation of transnational networks of fringe artists within Vienna during the late 1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century resulted from a pendulum swing at the government level from the

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<sup>33</sup> In the EU referendum of 1994 two-thirds of Austrian voters ratified Austria's EU membership. Bischoff, Pelinka, and Geller, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Incidentally the *SPOe* has long been a proponent of EU integration and the development of a more cosmopolitan worldview in Austria. As early as April 1989 the party voted 54 to 4 in favor of Austria joining the European Community (EC).

<sup>35</sup> According to Geller and Bischoff, "Austria's path towards Brussels was designed to lead the country out of its increasingly marginalized position as a result of Waldheim's election." Similarly, I argue that Austria's work on the cultural front in the late 1990s and early 2000s was a small-scale attempt to lead the country toward a more positive international reputation.

Bischoff, Pelinka, and Geller, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Judith Staines, "Artists' International Mobility Programs," *D'Art Topics in Arts Policy*, no.17, International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, (2004), <http://www.ifacca.org/media/files/artistsmobilityreport.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2011).

extreme right to the left, at least in terms of national culture.<sup>37</sup> The subsequent movements within the city's cultural field were stimulated by several motivating factors related to overall national and regional interests, which stemmed from the nation's entrance into the EU.

Despite Austria's more insular cultural leanings during the twentieth century, the patronage offered to artists from myriad transnational movements in the experimental arts remains a testament to Vienna's historical outward-looking cultural focus and cosmopolitan leanings. In recent years older, more open trends have resulted from the city's need to exert its legitimacy within the expansive political, economic, and cultural fields of a new supranational entity, i.e. the EU. Vienna's long-standing historical tradition of looking outside and within its borders to heterogeneous sources of cultural inspiration was poised to increase and/or to become a more self-conscious motivating factor as the nation's competition for ideological and cultural prominence in an expansive European cultural field began to rise.

Recent studies have revealed the ways that contemporary Austrian cultural policy is an extension of historical precedents. For example, a 2008 study on the transnational mobility of European artists conducted by the ERICarts Institute (hereafter ERICarts) on behalf of the European Commission states that, "National policies and practices in cultural diplomacy are often shaped by *historical links*: for example, many activities of the agency *KulturKontakt* in Austria involve countries of Central and South-Eastern

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<sup>37</sup> Some scholars, such as Philip G. Cerny in *Rethinking World Politics: A Theory of Transnational Neopluralism*, point to growing "transnational linkages" among interest and value groups and how these are not replacing the nation-state but "crystallizing into transnational webs of power" that nation-states are intrinsically trapped within.

Philip G. Cerny, *Rethinking World Politics: A Theory of Transnational Neopluralism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 42.

Europe, which used to be part of the former Habsburg Empire.”<sup>38</sup> Although it is difficult to verify empirically whether the greater motivating factor for Austria’s self-conscious internationalization is economics or a desire to reclaim something from its history that has since been lost, both are exerting an influence on the city as it creates policies aimed at reviving an historical international quality in its cultural field.

### **Explanation of Key Terms Related to Globalization and Europeanization in Austrian Culture Today**

To this date no other dissertation-length study in English has been conducted on the movement towards increasing internationalism in Vienna’s fringe performing arts scene. Many of those I interviewed during the course of my residency in Vienna noted that the fringe scene’s recent self-conscious internationalism would be an intriguing and relevant topic of scholarly inquiry, although they had yet to see such a study undertaken by someone outside of the scene. I do not believe that this alone is evidence for the legitimacy of my study, but rather I argue that my study is important for the insights it provides on the effects of globalization and Europeanization on fringe performance within a given geographically-bounded space.

Although this dissertation has heretofore merely mentioned the term cosmopolitan in conjunction with Vienna’s historical and contemporary trends within its cultural field, before thickly describing the artists who are now thriving within the cultural niche of Vienna’s fringe scene a more in-depth treatment of this term is needed.

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines cosmopolitanism as the idea that:

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<sup>38</sup> Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Educationa dn Culture)*, (2008), [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, do (or at least can) belong to a single community, and that this community should be cultivated. Different versions of cosmopolitanism envision this community in different ways, some focusing on political institutions, others on moral norms or relationships, and still others focusing on shared markets or forms of cultural expression.<sup>39</sup>

Kimberly Hutchings describes three interlinked aspects of early cosmopolitanism, which shape contemporary trends. Most of these derive from the Enlightenment-era theories of Immanuel Kant and they include the following three aspects: one, “deriving from the natural law tradition,” which “makes the claim that humans share a common moral identity and are subject to a common moral law;” two, an aspect that “builds on the presumption of human moral commonality to argue for trans-state, international or global economic and political institutions and government, thus replicating the Lockean move from natural to political right at a global level;” and three, an aspect that “draws on the presumption of human moral commonality and the rational accessibility of the moral law to argue for a common universal or cosmopolitan standard of judgment by which to assess actual political arrangements.”<sup>40</sup> In *Rethinking Europe: Social Theory and the Implications of Europeanization* Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford also link the idea of cosmopolitanism with a European Enlightenment sensibility. They state that, “Rousseau...saw the coming of an age when ‘there are no more French, German, Spanish, even Englishmen...only Europeans. They all have the same tastes, the same passions, and the same way of life.’<sup>41</sup> According to Delanty and Rumford, the European spirit, intensified due to the EU is, “expressed more in an orientation to the world which might

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<sup>39</sup>Stanford Encyclopedia. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmopolitanism/>> (November 17, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> Hutchings and Dannreuther, 11-12.

<sup>41</sup> Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, *Rethinking Europe: Social Theory and the Implications of Europeanization*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 75.

be identified with the cosmopolitan spirit.”<sup>42</sup> EU literature does not reference the term cosmopolitan, i.e. the notion that people are citizens of the world with similar perspectives and tastes, opting instead to emphasize the mantra of “unity in diversity” established by the Treaty of Maastricht (1992), the document granting the status of EU citizen to all nationals residing in the union.<sup>43</sup> The notion was that EU citizenship was meant to supplement, not replace, national citizenship.<sup>44</sup> Despite the EU’s rhetoric, the term cosmopolitan is useful in order to form an understanding of how cultural agents who operate in Europe’s transnational fringe scene function. This community is characterized by certain values, arguably the ideas that certain fringe artists somehow exist on a plane that is divorced from the limitations of nationalistic discourse and that they are decisively citizens of the world.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Delanty, 75.

<sup>43</sup> The Treaty of Maastricht strengthened the European Economic Community and gave it broader responsibility. The EU’s makeup may be perplexing to many readers of this dissertation; therefore, a brief descriptor of some of its main components is needed at this time. The European Commission is the EU’s executive body. Along with the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, it is one of the three main bodies that govern the union. The European Parliament is a body directly elected by the European citizens once every five years. The Parliament supervises every action of the European Commission. It also has the right to control the EU budget. The Council of the EU is a governing body that forms the legislative arm of the EU along with the European Parliament. The Council of the EU is sometimes referred to as the Council of Ministers. The President of the Council is the Minister of the state that currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU.

<sup>44</sup> According to Boxhoorn, this phrasing was a reversal of older policies including a departure from Delore’s wishes for cultural amalgamation.

Boxhoorn, 142.

<sup>45</sup> The idea of a common European culture, like that of a politically integrated Europe, also has a long history. During the years of the establishment of the European Economic Community, the notion was made more visible and became widely debated. The first time the concept of European identity was put forth in an official governmental setting was in the 1960s when President Kennedy recognized that the initial conflicts of the Atlantic Alliance stemmed from the differing interests of people of the United States and “people of Europe.” It was in 1973 that the Copenhagen Declaration on European Identity specifically referenced the term. In 1983, the Solemn Declaration on the European Union was the first official document from the emerging EU that recognized the monetary union’s potential cultural dimension. In 1985, when Jacques Delors, European Commission President, first proposed his radical plan to unite the twelve EMS members in a single market, he argued that cultural amalgamation was the only solution to Europe’s ideologically fragmented past. Essentially, he proposed that monetary unification must coincide with cultural unification.

The notion of EU citizenship is crucial to creating cohesion in the EU. One of the EU’s publications on its cultural initiatives states that EU citizenship:

The term cosmopolitan as used in the context of contemporary Vienna is largely divorced from a certain negative historical connotation within the region. It is not intended to evoke the adjective employed in anti-Semitic discourse, such as what was waged against Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929) and Max Reinhardt (1873-1943), during the years of the First Austrian Republic. In historical context the German term for cosmopolitan, i.e. *kosmopolitisch*, was used by Austrian conservatives as a declamation of resistance to a rootless, nation-less class of which European Jewry was thought to belong. The usage of the term evoked the decisively anti-modern, anti-multiple currents within Austrian and German nationalism. In the contemporary context the term cosmopolitan is linked to the notion of cultural openness, particularly regarding cultural trends in Western Europe, and some derived from European confrontations with American mass culture. The term cosmopolitan is not often used as a self-identifier by many of Vienna's cultural agents, however, it does evoke the prevailing ideological

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reflects the fundamental values that people throughout Europe share...Its strength lies in Europe's immense cultural heritage. Transcending all manner of geographical, religious and political divides, artistic...currents have influenced and enriched one another over the centuries, laying down a common heritage for the many cultures of today's European Union.

These statements acknowledge diversity and commonalities among EU citizens. Recently, a European Union-wide study was conducted resulting in a collection of essays entitled *Making European Citizens*. In the introduction, the editors stress that the EU is an evolving entity: it is not yet completed and, consequently, it is only possible to comment on the *development* of EU citizenship. The concern of the study was citizens' self-creation accomplished through organizing themselves both "socially and politically to promote certain ideals and interests." Citizenship is, therefore, both the result of an official government status and the result of a process undertaken by those who are granted the status. The authors of the study conclude that the concept of citizenship creates the social cohesion necessary to implement economic and civic regulations. Similarly, in Boxhoorn's study on the history of European integration he argues that "culture and politics can seldom be separated" and that "notions of unification and diversity are contradictory and will be difficult to reconcile." Such findings echo Jacques Delors' initial opinion that a lasting monetary union requires ideological commonalities among those within the EU.

Boxhoorn, 137.

European Commission, *A Community of Cultures: The European Union and the Arts* (Brussels: European Communities, 2002).

Richard Bellamy, Dario Castiglione, and Jo Shaw, eds. *Making European Citizens*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006). vii.

Bellamy, 6.

Boxhoorn, 142.

trends rooted in international openness, found within Vienna's contemporary field of fringe production.

In this introduction I often mention the term transnational to describe what is happening among artists in Vienna's fringe scene. This notion is fundamentally related to the concept of globalization, which refers to the ways that states are increasingly enmeshed in overlapping power relations with transnational structures, such as corporations that cut across national boundaries, and processes. According to Michael P. Smith, author of *Transnational Urbanism*,

Globalization discourses...often explicitly assume the growing insignificance of national borders, boundaries, and identities. In contrast, the transnationalist discourse insists on the continuing significance of borders, state policies, and national identities even as these are often transgressed by transnational communication circuits and social practices.<sup>46</sup>

Here Smith references the one extreme in globalization discourse, which exists alongside of more nuanced approaches to the phenomenon, where the significance of national identities, boundaries, and identities are recognized as persistent aspects that take on new significance when local populations interact with non-local ones. In my dissertation, I am interested in developing a discourse that considers both the homogenizing factors of globalization and the factors of division and cultural heterogeneity that persist in European nations and regions. It is legitimate to recognize both trends and how they overlap and influence the creation of European fringe performance in the early part of the twenty-first century. A concrete example of a phenomenon that is associated with globalization processes is the common European trend of removing travel restrictions in

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<sup>46</sup> Michael P. Smith, *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2001), 3.

order to bolster tourism across borders.<sup>47</sup> Time-space compression and/or annihilation are important, if subjective, elements that factor into the lives of artists who deal with globalization on a daily basis. What often results from these factors is the rise of geographical and ideological promiscuity among cultural agents and their products.<sup>48</sup> Yet my dissertation fits within the category of transnational discourse because I emphasize the constitutive role of the local Viennese system of cultural funding alongside of globalization processes, which intensify Vienna's control of the international artists within their cultural field. As a city Vienna has much agency in Europe's expanding cultural field, even if the artists themselves have little.

Related to globalization is the concept of Europeanization. In the past several decades, this term has been employed in a number of ways, but it mainly refers to how the EU's transnational economic, political, and cultural processes effect change at the local level.<sup>49</sup> These factors amount to glocalization, defined as the ways that global processes alter regional products and/or services according to local tastes, albeit confined to the European continent.<sup>50</sup> Any study on the performance scene within a given city, such as Vienna, must take into account the EU's direct and indirect influence on the local cultural field. This influence is highly pronounced in Vienna's domestic fringe scene, which is characterized by non-text-based performance and/or multi-language productions

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<sup>47</sup> See the studies of Andrew Hurrell, 2007, and Philip G. Cerny, 2010, for more in-depth information on globalization.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Maarten Vink, "What is Europeanization and Other Questions on a New Research Agenda," Paper for the Second YEN Research Meeting on Europeanization, University of Bocconi, Milan, (22-23 November 2002),

[https://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/standinggroups/yen/paper\\_archive/2nd\\_yen\\_rm\\_papers/vink2002.pdf](https://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/standinggroups/yen/paper_archive/2nd_yen_rm_papers/vink2002.pdf)

(accessed December 13, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> Some scholars define Europeanization as "the emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance."

Thomas Risse et al, eds., *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1.

and which involves artists from various European nations who cooperate within Europe's elaborate network of co-production venues and festivals. I refer to these key cultural agents as transnational and to their venues as transnational social spaces.

The impetus for my dissertation's title, *Vienna's Transnational Fringe*, comes from a relatively obscure document entitled *Manifest: an die Europaeische Kommission und deren Kulturpolitische Vertreter/innen* (translated as *Manifesto: to the European Commission and its Cultural Representatives*).<sup>51</sup> This article was published in *GIFT-zeitschrift für freies theater* (hereafter *GIFT*) in 2002.<sup>52</sup> This date is significant because it was approximately one year after the establishment of the city's first self-consciously international venue, called Tanzquartier. It was also one year after Austria's International Cultural Policy concept went into effect.<sup>53</sup> Because the artists who drafted the manifesto so clearly define themselves as transnational, I have adopted the term to define fringe artists who tend to traverse national borders (working and living in diverse nation-states), seek funding from the various locations where they temporarily reside, and form connections with other transnational artists, especially throughout Europe. Although not all the artists who I interviewed for this dissertation readily categorize themselves as transnational, many tend to exhibit similar ideological and aesthetic orientations to those found in the manifesto. These include a belief that artists operate in a sphere of influence that transcends the nation-state, an understanding that their work could not exist without the support of local and transnational funding institutions, an affinity with the anti-textual

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<sup>51</sup> Jerome Bel, et al "Manifest: an die Europaeische Kommission und deren Kulturpolitische Vertreter/innen," *GIFT* (July, 2002), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61304&jahr=2002> (accessed December 13, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> *GIFT* is Vienna's journal for fringe performance. Incidentally, the direct English translation of *GIFT* is poison, which gives credence to this dissertation's argument that the fringe scene in Vienna self-identifies with the "avant-garde impulse," defined below.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/foreign-ministry/foreign-policy/international-cultural-policy.html>

avant-garde as opposed to the text-based established theatre,<sup>54</sup> and a desire to locate new forms of expression that cohere to their ideological orientations.<sup>55</sup> In the following chapters I will describe each of these tendencies in detail. At present, only note that the bulk of literature being generated on this group of transnational fringe artists comes from the artists and administrators themselves. Along with my interviews and personal experiences as a participant-observer in Vienna's fringe scene, this literature constitutes the bulk of my primary sources. The ways that the authors of these texts, such as the one mentioned above, describe their own community provides me with material that is ready-made for analytical treatment. Furthermore, these documents are being drafted by cultural agents who are part of an elaborate network of production venues, which are at once geographically bounded and de-localized.

The artists whom I examine for my dissertation may be understood in two seemingly disparate ways. From one perspective, the artists are agents in Austria's struggle to proclaim its legitimacy in the European cultural field of alternative, or fringe performance. From another vantage point, the artists are active participants in an elaborate system of production venues, which may be understood as transnational social spaces. Transnational social spaces are defined as "configurations of social practices, artifacts and symbolic systems that span different geographical spaces in at least two

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<sup>54</sup> According to Phillippe Riera, co-founder of Superamas and co-author of *Manifest: an die Europaeische Kommission und deren Kulturpolitische Vertreter/innen*, established "theatre is very corrupt" and "very conservative."

Phillippe Riera, co-founder of Superamas, interview by author, 21 May 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>55</sup> The term established theatre is used to refer to more traditional theatre houses, which (in the Austrian context) receive a greater amount of funding from the city, state, or federal government. These houses tend to feature performances in the German language and have a rigid structure of playwrights, directors, designers, actors, and other technicians who are highly specialized in their crafts and who are indoctrinated into the system through formalized educational institutions and/or internship/apprentice systems. As Austria's national theatre, the Burgtheater is the epitome of the established tradition (with an annual operating budget of over 65 million Euros). Other established theatres in Vienna include Theater in der Josefstadt and the Volkstheater.

nation-states without constituting a new ‘deterritorialized’ nation-state or being the prolongation of one of these nation-states.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, transnational social spaces are “webs of contacts across nation-states that somehow exist above and beyond the social contexts of national societies.”<sup>57</sup> According to various scholars, these webs of contacts have the effect of weakening the nation-state from above or from below.<sup>58</sup> Many artists who live and work within Vienna’s fringe venues do not believe that they contribute to the weakening of the nation-state or any form of national culture. Instead, these cosmopolitan social actors believe that they occupy spaces that transcend the nation state. I argue that this claim of national transcendence is highly problematic for two primary reasons. One, Vienna’s fringe venues were created by the local government. Two, it is not possible for any artist, no matter how nationally transient, to completely transcend his/her culture of origin. Despite these complications, I do believe that artists who are involved in Vienna’s fringe venues are part of a unique community of nationally-fluid, mobile individuals who proclaim fewer affinities with citizens of their origin nation than with the nationally diverse artists with whom they associate on a daily basis.<sup>59</sup> For this reason, I refer to Vienna’s fringe venues as transnational social spaces, even though I am aware that the venues do not neatly fit within the model. Ultimately, I argue that within the confines of Vienna’s transnational fringe venues artists are participating in the

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<sup>56</sup> Ludger Pries, *New Transnational Social Spaces: International Migration and Transnational Companies in the Early Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2001), 18.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>58</sup> As it moves towards Europeanizing citizens and systems, the EU is an obvious example of the from-above approach.

Ibid, 4.

<sup>59</sup> According to *Transnational Identities*, both the nation, i.e. Austria, and Europe as a whole are imagined communities. It appears that the webs of transnational relations that are being developed as a result of globalization and Europeanization are quickly leading to the creation of many smaller imagined communities, based more upon vocational interests and less upon linguistic connections and nationalist myths. Europe’s fringe community is a primary examine of this new breed of imagined community.

Richard K. Herrmann, Thomas Risse, and Marilyn B. Brewer, eds., *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 248.

reconstitution of theatrical performance in accord with the effects of Europeanization and globalization.

In the past decade the effects of globalization on theatre and performance have come to the forefront of scholarly attention and have been aptly highlighted in studies by Dan Rebellato (England), Rustom Bharucha (India), and Patrick Lonergan (Ireland).<sup>60</sup> A common point of intersection between these divergent studies is the idea that theatrical forms of performance are increasingly marked by greater emphasis on visual or non-linguistic forms of communication, which allow artists to be successfully mobile. Although this is a commonality shared by many scholars of theatre/performance and globalization, all of the scholars mentioned above use different tactics to explore the de-localized nature of theatre/performance in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For this reason, a more in-depth treatment of each study is appropriate.<sup>61</sup>

Patrick Lonergan provides many important insights into the ways that material factors related to globalization effect theatre/performance. This is partially due to the pronounced tendency of recent scholarship to focus on how the economic circumstances

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<sup>60</sup> Here I define globalization as the increasing interconnectedness of people, companies, and processes, as a result of various factors such as increased global trade, the swift and wide spread dissemination of information, the increase of transnational social spaces, and the transient nature of business men and women.

<sup>61</sup> Another important study that relates directly to how globalization has affected experimental performance in Europe is a collection of essays edited by Hugh Harding and John Rouse entitled *Not the Other Avant-Garde: the Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance*. In their text Harding, Rouse, and their contributors mainly refer to the ways that early-twentieth-century avant-garde artists borrowed from the Eastern *mise en scene* as a way of innovating their practices. The major significance of Harding and Rouse's study to my own is how performance at the margins of Europe's performance culture has, at least for the past century, borrowed extensively from outside traditions. Harding and Rouse's text illuminates how, even before globalization discourses in traditional theatre were in vogue, this phenomenon was affecting the development of European performance practice. Experimental artists' practice of cultural borrowing has created the need for these artists to consistently obscure text-based theatre in favor of anti-textual performance. In his introduction to the text, Harding mentions a textual bias as one of the deficiencies of many scholarly treatments of the European avant-garde. By focusing mainly on the *mise en scene* and material factors surrounding the creation of pieces, I hope to avoid these deficiencies.

Hugo Harding and John Rouse, eds., *Not the Other Avant-Garde: the Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

of globalization effect cultural production. For example, Lonergan discusses national identity using economic terms, i.e. name branding. He argues that “to see a play that is branded as ‘Irish’ does not mean that we encounter a work that literally originated in Ireland itself. It means that we consume a work that accords with our predetermined notions of Irishness.”<sup>62</sup> This very real phenomenon is a prominent example of glocalization, which is described above. My focus on the issue of branding a performance according to a national or regional identity differs from Lonergan’s because I highlight the way that national and regional brand names are used by politicians in an international competition for symbolic capital, described in detail below.

Progressive, globally-minded Austrians have consistently needed to salvage their international reputation as a result of conservative-led friction from within. In the case of Vienna, it appears that politicians attach the Vienna brand name to performances because they wish to alter outside perceptions of Viennese culture. By funding work that clashes with the existing horizon of audience expectations, politicians and culture makers are hoping to combat negative stereotypes, for example, that Vienna’s culture is antiquated and not consistent with the new sensibilities of a globally-aware, activist performance culture. I argue that within Vienna’s fringe scene, politicians are betting that audiences will consume pieces not in accord to their preconditioned notions of Austrianness but in opposition to their preconceived notions.

In order to further describe the phenomenon of glocalization in performance, Lonergan utilizes the term reflexivity, which he defines as the “ability to allow audiences

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<sup>62</sup> Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalization : Irish Drama in the Celtic Tiger Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 217.

to relate the play's meaning to personal and/or local contexts."<sup>63</sup> Lonergan argues that the most successful, and mobile plays on the global market are those that have the quality of reflexivity, but I contend that Lonergan's notion of "reflexivity" appears to be rooted in the assumption that theatre is produced in social spaces where performers and audiences overwhelmingly identify with traditional concepts such as nation and region. While this may be true in the context of traditional text-driven theatre, where plays are translated into the language of a new locale and produced for a mono-linguistic audience, this does not seem to be the case in the context of the fringe scene's transnational social spaces. This dissertation poses the following question related to Lonergan's notion of reflexivity. How can performances be adapted to a specific local context when they are developed and presented within the culturally nebulous transnational social spaces of Europe's fringe scene?

Within Vienna's fringe scene, a group of performers and audiences have crafted their own identity, which, despite their dependency on the local context, is defined by national transience and local detachment. The conditions of this new identity appear to add a unique nuance to Lonergan's notion of "reflectivity." Furthermore, this new identity appears to create conditions where a kind of "McTheatre" or "McDonalds Performance" may thrive.

The concept of "McTheatre," described below, is highlighted by Dan Rebellato in his study on globalization's impact in theatre; however, rather than merely lamenting how the concerns of the global market and the widespread commercialization of culture is negatively impacting certain strands of theatre, Rebellato pays more attention to the ways that theatre in the global era is an important site of resistance to the dehumanizing

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<sup>63</sup> Lonergan, 216.

effects of globalization. The same is true of Rustom Bharucha's study, which examines theatre in India as a site of resistance to the hegemonic global market and culture industry. My study differs from Bharucha's and Rebellato's in two major ways. One, it describes how, despite artists' efforts to resist the dehumanizing effects of globalization, they are intuitively feeling and perpetuating them. Two, my study focuses more on the anti-textual fringe scene in Europe than the studies of Rebellato, Bharucha, and Lonergan. This scene, which is nationally transient by its very nature, is probably in greater danger of becoming "McDonaldized" than more locally-bounded text-base theatre.

It is likely that aesthetic similarities in the fringe work that is produced in Europe's transnational social spaces (i.e. co-production venues and festivals) are the indirect result of the modernist EU project. Although the EU's cultural arm (including the Culture 2007 program) appears to have little direct impact on artists' work, the transnational networks that develop as a result of the EU increase the sensitivity of local cultural agents to their region's presence and impact in Europe's cultural field.<sup>64</sup> These agents must struggle to compete in an increasingly transnational art market in order to raise the perceived quality of the local brand name (i.e. *the city of Vienna*, or *the Federal Republic of Austria*). Yet attracting non-local talent to the local scene in an effort to boost its European presence often results in products that lack cultural specificity. This lack of specificity (or generic nature) appears to be the result of culturally diverse artists shifting their focus to the visual *mise en scene*, thus losing the concreteness of culturally-bounded language. This shift is related to the local cultural agents' desires to compete in an increasingly transnational field of cultural production. This competition often results

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<sup>64</sup> In the first section of chapter one I explain why the EU's cultural programs appear to have a limited impact on Europe's fringe scene.

in streamlining the artistic process, producing a greater quantity of work, predicting products' reception, and controlling the image of the local brand name responsible for the work's funding. These four aspects (efficiency, calculability, standardization, and control) are related to concept of McDonaldization, which represents the culmination of modernism.<sup>65</sup> In Vienna, pieces that are constructed in this fashion are sometimes labeled the "McDonalds Avant-Garde." I do not view the "McDonalds Avant-Garde" as something that came after modernity.<sup>66</sup> Instead, I understand it as something that materialized in modernity's adulthood, which is this present era.

In the chapters that follow I describe how artists are dealing with the shallow nature of the generic performance culture, which appears to be thriving within the transnational social spaces of Europe's fringe scene, including those found in Vienna. Furthermore, I argue that the productions of the fringe scene's "McDonalds Avant-Garde" represent a bastardization of the historical avant-garde upon which much contemporary European fringe performance is theoretically built.

### **The Avant-Garde in Historical and Contemporary Context**

Although other terms such as avant-garde, off, and independent theatre are often more readily used by Vienna-based performing artists to describe their work, I use the term fringe performance.<sup>67</sup> The word fringe is often associated with work that is

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<sup>65</sup> Georg Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> I have found that postmodernism is often used by scholars as a way of describing an extreme form of modernism and that the term postmodern has little admirable descriptive possibilities. To this end, I align myself with scholars who view postmodern performance as an outgrowth, or extension of, modernism.

<sup>67</sup> I refrain from using the terms off theatre and independent theatre for the following reasons. The term off theatre is often used within the context of German speaking nation-states to denote work that is set apart from the more established and traditional theatre venues, which have larger amounts of government subsidies than their off theatre counterparts. The term off theatre is too culturally bounded and may confuse certain readers. The term independent theatre is a complete misnomer because it implies that performances in the scene are developed in a grassroots manner without much government support, which they are not.

performed at the margins of society. It may be contrasted with established theatre, which is more geared towards popular audiences. In many contexts, such as in cities of the United States, fringe performance is associated with low-budget performances done by young, inexperienced, or amateur performers; however, this is not the case within Europe. I consider Tanzquartier and Brut to be Vienna's major fringe venues. These have relatively large operational budgets compared to experimental venues in the United States. In addition, many who work in Vienna's fringe scene are young, but some are over forty years old and express no real desire to work in the city's established venues, such as the Burgtheater. The vast majority of performances in the fringe scene are developed through improvisation and do not tend to emphasize the separation between playwright, director, and actors, which is common in the more traditional established theatre scene. I do not use the term avant-garde to describe the performance in Vienna because, although the works are derived from historical anti-textual avant-garde styles, they appear to lack certain fundamental characteristics of the avant-garde.

Most scholars of Europe's avant-garde and its contemporary manifestations have come to accept Renato Poggioli's claim that this movement stems from "activism" and or "antagonism."<sup>68</sup> These qualities, which I understand to be the defining features of the "avant-garde impulse," help describe the artists' tendencies to push against the prevailing morals and tastes of the general public. Poggioli argues that "often a movement takes shape and agitates for no other end than its own self, out of the sheer joy of dynamism, a taste for

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<sup>68</sup> Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 25-26.

action, a sportive enthusiasm, and the emotional fascination of adventure.”<sup>69</sup> I argue that these qualities, linked to the “avant-garde impulse,” are lacking within Vienna’s scene, where artists collaborate with the prevailing ideologies and aesthetic leanings of a wide-spread, yet integral, community of transnational fringe artists. This observation means that I align myself with most scholars who have long since announced the death of the avant-garde.

Death theories of the avant-garde have been circulating for the past three decades. These ideas began shortly after scholars canonized these styles in the form of avant-garde play anthologies and textbooks, thus bringing products that were once at the margins of culture into the center of public life. In Richard Schechner’s 1982 essay entitled *The End of Humanism*, he argues that the avant-garde in the United States has died out due to “the end of an activist culture, a drying up of economic support for experimental work, a creeping formalism, and the aesthetic, organizational, and pedagogical shortsightedness of its practices and critics.”<sup>70</sup> Schechner, along with David Savran and other scholars of fringe performance, the successor to the historical avant-garde, claim that this type of performance suffers from the tendency of its adherents to rehash the practices of their avant-garde forbearers, which leads to a loss of shock value and artistic innovation.<sup>71</sup> This loss is a critical indicator that fringe performance has somehow been divested of the historical avant-garde’s ability to showcase, often lurid, surprise, effectively agitating prevailing ideological and aesthetic trends.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>70</sup> Richard Schechner, *The End of Humanism* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982).

<sup>71</sup> David Savran, “The Death of the Avant-Garde,” *The Drama Review* 49, no. 3 (Fall 2005).

Schechner and Savran's studies can be understood as investigations into a contemporary fringe scene that is lacking the caustic qualities of its progenitor; therefore, their remarks are situated within discourse related to a present crisis of aesthetics, ideologies, and identities. It appears that the so-called crisis in the fringe scene of Vienna, and analogous European capitals, results from different factors than those to which Schechner and Savran refer. For example, in Vienna this crisis prevails *despite* strong government support for fringe performance (relative to the United States). The scene also suffers *despite* recent political movements aimed at attracting transnational artists to the city. These policies were implemented with the forward-looking goal of creating a stronger cultural future for Vienna and greater prestige for the city's artists who are active in Europe's developing cultural field. However, similar to what Schechner and Savran observe in the United States, Vienna's fringe scene appears to suffer from a "creeping formalism," the absence of an "activist culture," and a tendency of artists to rely on aesthetics derived from, not only past avant-garde movements, but also, and more readily accessible, global mainstream mass culture.

Understanding the ways that Europe's current fringe scene diverts from the historical avant-garde is paramount to developing a nuanced perspective on the contemporary culture of fringe artists. The term avant-garde is properly used to evoke a specific modernist movement, which has passed into history. It is not an adjective appropriately applied as a descriptor for artists in the present era who claim to possess progressive and revolutionary qualities. However, the artists' discourse retains remnants of the language employed by their avant-garde forbearers in now-canonized

representative manifestos and other theoretical tracts. For this reason it is possible to speak of a remaining “avant-garde impulse,” linked to the notion of liminality, within the artists’ language. The following chapters of this dissertation will describe how the “avant-garde impulse” exists largely in theory alone, and how this factor leads to feelings of unease within the fringe scene.

### **The Cultural Field in Austria: Past and Present**

Fringe artists residing in Vienna must wrestle with the realities of the city’s socialist-influenced policies towards arts funding. In his 1984 study *A History of European Socialism* Albert S. Lindemann traces the etymology of the word socialism to the 1830s where it was first used in direct opposition to the word individualism, which appeared to be the logical outcome of the nascent capitalist system with the concomitant disregard for those unable to be economically competitive. The term was used to describe the value of the collective will and the responsibility of the stronger and more economically fortunate to help the weaker and less affluent. Lindemann argues that socialism’s following came from the “lower orders” who banded together in order to institute programs to protect workers from economic exploitation. It also derived from the social need to stop those unable to work from falling prey to the unforgiving economic system. However, Lindemann also recognizes that most socialist governments developed in areas where “individualism was not a virtue” such as the dissolving monarchical and pre-industrial areas of Europe.<sup>72</sup> Austria may be counted among these lands as may many other areas that are now part of the EU.

It is not accidental that Austrians moved from a monarchy to a socialist-influenced state. This socialist influence is a primary component of the leadership of

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<sup>72</sup> Lindemann, xv.

Austria's capital city, Vienna.<sup>73</sup> Among the founders of the Austrian Republic were the children and grandchildren of subjects from the Austrian Empire. Having lived for hundreds of years under a monarchical regime, the citizens of the nascent nation were bred on a collectivist value system that rejected radical individualism and emphasized centralized economic control. Austrian socialism developed among a people who tended to “link freedom with economic security” and who emphasized “the value of equality” or equal opportunity over “freedom in the abstract.”<sup>74</sup>

The idea of the government sponsoring art in a top-down manner is highly familiar to the Austrian people who had long been the recipients of the social programs instituted by the ruling Hapsburg monarchy. The most noteworthy of these ventures began on 23 March 1776 when Josef II and Maria Theresa established the “Imperial and National Theater” (later dubbed the Burgtheater, which is described above) on the grounds that it would be a theatre by the aristocracy and for the people.<sup>75</sup> The Burgtheater's resident ensemble was officially in service of the court, which paid their wages and assured that they maintained a level of respectability and prestige.<sup>76</sup> In his highly influential text *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, Carl Emil Schorske argues that the Hapsburg's generous arts funding programs stemmed from the monarchy's increasing inability to galvanize the people towards civic action. As he claims, “as civic action proved increasingly futile, art became almost a religion, the

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<sup>73</sup> The official beginning of Austrian socialism is often marked as January 1, 1889, which marks the date of the unification of the Austrian Labor Movement.

Kurt L. Shell, *The Transformation of Austrian Socialism*, (New York: New York State University, 1962), 9.

<sup>74</sup> Shell, 256.

<sup>75</sup> The title of National Theater was originally bestowed upon the venture because the alternative title, the Deutschestheater, was already associated with the Kaerntnerortheater.

<sup>76</sup> Although, in the Enlightenment tradition, Josef II declared all his subjects “citizens” and attempted to project an image that he was one of the people, his project of a National Theatre was still very much a top-down initiative.

source of meaning and the food for the soul.”<sup>77</sup> This tendency to fill the artists’ coffers in a top-down manner as a way of legitimizing rule and diverting attention away from national problems mirrors the claims made by many contemporary Austrians that, although the nation is “no longer important as a European power,” it is “important as a center for arts.” This tendency, which has an historical precedent in Austria, has given fuel to the central national myth that “everything related to culture is good” and should be funded.<sup>78</sup>

Myriad studies on the Austrian cultural field and its citizenry substantiate my own findings that most contemporary Viennese and artists based in Vienna believe that funding for the arts is the government’s responsibility. For example, in a survey conducted in December of 1988 and January of 1989, 500 Austrians were asked about the functions of theatre and whether or not it should be funded by the government. The survey showed that 79% of all theatergoers believed it should be funded by public support. 62% of non-theatre goers argued the same.<sup>79</sup> Based on my own ethnographic data, I concur that artists in contemporary Vienna overwhelmingly favor the idea that arts funding is the government’s responsibility. For example, Christine Standfest, a German native and member of the Vienna-based fringe group Theatercombinant, claims that she frequently hears artists state “the government should fund my art” and that outside of Vienna she has never encountered this statement with such frequency.<sup>80</sup> As my findings suggest, heavily socialist-influenced mentalities towards arts funding still have a strong

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<sup>77</sup> Schorske, 15.

<sup>78</sup> Uwe Mattheiss, co-author of the *Theaterreform*, interview by author, 29 April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>79</sup> Ernst Bruckmueller, *The Austrian Nation: Cultural Consciousness and Socio-Political Processes*, (Riverside, Ariadne Press, 2003), 121.

<sup>80</sup> Christine Staendfest, co-founder of Theatercombinant, interview by author, 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

hold on Vienna-based artists, particularly artists within the more marginalized areas of the city's arts community, such as fringe performance.

As globalization takes hold throughout Europe, cultural administrators within Austria are adapting their policies in order to cater to the demands of the international art market. (I will describe how this occurs in chapters one and two.) However, to a large degree, Austrian socialism has always been tempered by market concerns, especially in regards to the economic relationships between Austria and its many neighbors.

Many scholars note the mix of socialism and capitalism that dominates Austria's political system and they tend to be in agreement that, despite the overarching control of Vienna by the *SPOe* political party, the city still does give funding to citizens in proportion to what they are perceived to contribute in terms of symbolic and economic capital.<sup>81</sup> Following these claims it seems logical that artists who are funded by the city, even in the more marginalized fringe scene, have the potential to offer something to the city. However, in Vienna's fringe scene economics do not appear to be a primary motivating factor when the government determines the distribution of funds. This is the case because few to no fringe performances stand to give the city an equitable return on its investments. If the projected contribution of artists in the scene is not expected to be in terms of economic capital, then it should at least materialize in the form of symbolic capital, i.e. recognition and cultural prestige in the cultural field that may translate to economic capital in other fields. However, symbolic capital is a very difficult notion to gauge. This makes it nearly impossible to accept or deny the legitimacy of fringe artists and their products according to the parameters described in many contemporary studies on Austria's socialist-influenced cultural economy. Consequently, this is not another

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<sup>81</sup> Shell, 260.

dissertation from the perspective of a more market-influenced American scholar who wishes to debunk the utopian myths that many American artists have built around Europe's socialist-influenced system of arts funding.

Rather than trying to assess all the failures and successes of Austria's socialist-influenced cultural field, I will mention this system in order to highlight two principal factors. One, that Vienna's contemporary fringe scene has been formed by a socialist-influenced system dominated by the *SPOe* political party, with the aim to increase the symbolic capital of the Viennese name brand within the transnational social spaces of Europe's larger fringe performance community.<sup>82</sup> Two, that this socialist-influenced system generates a great deal of internal competition, which may lead to the artists' self-censorship and, ultimate, lack of fulfillment. This competition is intensified by the gradual erosion of the centralized socialist system of arts funding, which occurs as a result of globalization and Europeanization.

To a large extent these factors generate a mentality among Vienna-based fringe artists that is antithetical to the production of alternative, or fringe art, which according to the studies of Poggioli and others is characterized by grassroots attempts led by an aggressive, and often, individualistic impulse. Gone are the days when alternative artists such as the Vienna Actionists used blood and guts to wage their aesthetic war against the

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<sup>82</sup> The development of Vienna's transnational fringe scene during the late 1990s and the early part of the twenty-first century can be understood as Vienna's attempt to reclaim its status as the capital of a *Kulturnation*. In terms of contributions to European cultural life, Vienna was once at the center of the old empire (Austria-Hungary), while it is currently at the margins of the new empire (the EU). Recent cultural movements in Austria result from Vienna's present position of cultural impotence and the tension between this contemporary reality and Austria's former position of cultural power. In contrast to larger cultural metropolises such as London, Paris, or Berlin, where it is largely taken for granted that local artists produce quality work, Vienna-based artists' need to fight against European conceptions that the city is a provincial capital devoid of cutting-edge performance.

Austrian system.<sup>83</sup> Gone, too, are the days when the conservative forces were able to fully keep these artists at bay, bringing them to court in campaigns against “dust and trash.”<sup>84</sup> Nowadays such projects happen, but in wide open spaces with the explicit sanctioning of committees appointed by the ruling *SPOe* political party. In Vienna, the *carnavalesque* is the dominating principal and this threatens to render all attempts at agitation void.

### Theoretical Framework

This dissertation’s analysis of Vienna’s transnational fringe scene is rooted in a diverse methodological framework, stemming from an understanding that the most useful way to thickly describe any aspect, or sub-field, of the contemporary globalized era in the industrialized West is characterized by the interplay of identity politics, policies of the state, and economic rhetoric.

Benedict Anderson’s study on nation building is now decades old; therefore, he could not have foreseen many constitutive aspects of the imagined community, nor did he fully consider all those that existed during his era. In dealing with Austria this dissertation borrows from Anderson’s notion of the development of identity through linguistic forms of communication, including print media. Although it frequently references a supposed battle between more locally oriented fringe artists and those with

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<sup>83</sup> Of Actionism Susan Broadhurst states, “Their desperate type of protest, which led to orgies of hatred, mutilation and even suicide, seems to have resulted from the specific Austrian situation, where because of the restrictions placed on society by a slow, outdated and cumbersome government, effective protest could find its place only through the deeds of creative individuals.” To a large degree I concur with Broadhurst’s assessment of the Actionist movement. However, I argue that Actionism cannot have occurred within the context of early twenty-first century Vienna, where creative individuals collaborate with the institutionalization of the fringe scene, which stems more from the international art market and the pressures on Vienna by the European cultural field than by any “cumbersome” and regressive government.

Susan Broadhurst, *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory* (London: Cassell, 1999), 100.

<sup>84</sup>Michael Wimmer, “Reflections on a Special Case: What Makes Cultural Policy Truly Austrian?,” *Journal of Arts, Management, Law and Society*, (2006): 8.

cosmopolitan perspectives the use of the verbal dualisms such as Austrian/non-Austrian and local/non-local does not stem from any falsely-held notion of ethnic or even historically-bounded cultural homogeneity. The family names of the Viennese bear testimony to the strong mixture of ethnicities (i.e. Hungarian, Slovakian, and more) forged over the course of centuries, millennia even, of migration throughout the lands of Austria. In the context of this dissertation the function of art is tied to the role of Anderson's print media. It serves to unite people from disparate walks of life under the common flag of a motherland. Despite having no immediate connection to all who compose the nation of Austria, those who consume a given work of art, in this instance a performance, can perceive it as being imbued with the notion of a common national identity. Incidentally the local artists to whom this dissertation refers, but who are not this dissertation's primary subject, often deal with material derived from locations outside of present day Austria as well as artifacts that are more readily associated with the geographical epicenter of Vienna. As Susanne Tabaka-Pillhofer of the Vienna-based fringe group Theater Tanto informed me after her production of an adaptation of *Forschungen eines Hundes* (a text also know as *Lufthunde*, or *Air Dogs*), Prague-born Franz Kafka is a German speaking artist from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire and, therefore, part of her native Austrian heritage, just as the Viennese Waltz is.<sup>85</sup> Incidentally the performances that I label as non-local, or transnational, are less likely to be articulated as cultural products used in the construction or affirmation of the imagined community of Austria. Instead they are more likely to have their epicenter outside of the geographical locales and cultural traditions often associated with more widely accepted

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<sup>85</sup> Susanne Tabaka-Pillhofer and Jan Tabaka, artistic directors of Theater Tanto, interview by author, 20 May 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

forms of Austrian national identity. Many of these non-local materials are derived from a more expansive context, i.e. global mass culture, which is now transmitted through various media, principally the internet. It is possible that the deluge of stimuli provided within the context of such media problematize the possibility of more monolithic notions of national identity as they make it possible for conglomerate identities, such as European identity, to develop at a swifter rate.

The cognitive processes of cultural agents, i.e. those who often assist in constituting imagined communities through their cultural products, are shaped by myriad economic realities tied to the process of globalization. In such a process a new economic and philosophical tradition called neo-liberalism is on the rise. Neo-liberalism is often linked to the notion of the Americanization of global communities and it describes how policies of local states and regions are increasingly being influenced by the values of the market. In this context cultural agents and their products are conceived as commodities that have economic values attached to them. The agents themselves, in turn, craft performances that can be economically sustainable in a variety of national contexts throughout Europe, thus deterritorializing them in terms of a specific cultural framework. The reality that the majority of the spaces where these groups perform are located within the confines of the EU gives rise to the possibility for a new brand of European identity to be constructed in line with more superficial, market-induced tastes.

### **Conclusion and Chapter Summaries**

I am concerned primarily with identifying the emergent aesthetic and ideological qualities within work being produced in a subculture of Vienna-based transnational fringe artists. I am also concerned with identifying the realities that this subculture faces.

When data on Vienna's government policies is provided within this dissertation, it is used to describe such factors and how they contribute to artists' creative processes. The data is also used to better contextualize how the artists themselves perceive their surroundings, especially the political stronghold, Vienna. Anyone wishing to know more factual information about Vienna's arts funding policies may consult a number of websites dedicated to explicating the complicated governmental processes.<sup>86</sup>

According to the 2008 EICCR report on artists' mobility, it is difficult or impossible to obtain information on all the programs at the European, national, regional, and city levels that are dedicated to increasing the internationalism within Europe's artistic community.<sup>87</sup> Consistent with the report's findings, throughout my research I encountered a number of obstacles regarding obtaining actual statistics on the ratio of local to international artists within Vienna and the concrete frequency of their travel across geographical borders. However, through various research methods I was able to conclude that the artists who are currently the most visible and economically viable within the scene are those that appear to have the most international orientations and who work with like-minded artists. Although a detailed list of projects that are funded by the city of Vienna is available on the city's government websites, this dissertation does not present a comprehensive list of all the works that are being given money by the city. Instead it provides an overview of the disparities between the locally-minded artists who

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<sup>86</sup> The following websites are particularly helpful due to the depth and breadth of their coverage of current cultural policies within the city.

<http://www.wien.gv.at/kultur/abteilung/>

<http://www.kuratoren-theatertanz.at/>

<sup>87</sup> Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Educationa dn Culture)*, (2008), [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

are “losing” and the internationally-minded artists who are “winning” in Vienna’s contemporary fringe scene.

The current transnational orientation of the artists and administrators in Vienna’s scene can be understood as an outgrowth of historical precedents to infuse Viennese culture with innovation through cultural importation. Despite the policies of administrators and the practices of transnational artists who desire to bring innovation to the scene through this method, many Vienna-based fringe artists point to an overall mediocre quality in the work. Andre Turnheim, former curator of the city of Vienna argues that the Burgtheater often produces more innovative work than the fringe scene, which is actually designed to act as a support and tributary for the major established venues.<sup>88</sup> Maria Haender-Kulterer, publicist for various fringe groups, argues that “there is a crisis in the scene” because “we can’t find revolutionary productions.”<sup>89</sup> Warren Rosenzweig, artistic director of the Jewish Theatre of Austria argues that Vienna “is a city with a great cultural and artistic history, yet...much radical experimentation is not possible.”<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, Yosi Wanunu of the Viennese-based fringe group Toxic Dreams argues that the scene suffers from an overall generic quality where the performances are nearly indistinguishable from products developed in other European capital cities.<sup>91</sup> Wanunu’s comment relates directly to the critique of the cultural industry posed by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* when they argue that, “It is as if some omnipresent agency had reviewed the material and

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<sup>88</sup> Andre Turnheim, former curator for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 8 May 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>89</sup> Maria Haneder-Kulterer, publicist for Theater Tanto, interview by author, 21 May 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>90</sup> Warren Rosenzweig, director of the Jewish Theater of Austria, interview by author, 22 May 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>91</sup> Yosi Wanunu, director of Toxic Dreams, interview by author, 15 June, 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

issued an authoritative catalog tersely listing the products available. The ideal forms are inscribed in the cultural heavens where they are already numbered by Plato.”<sup>92</sup> The discourse generated by cultural agents in the fringe scene demonstrates an acknowledgement that their own processes and products are somehow linked to the culture industry, highlighted by Horkheimer and Adorno’s modernist critique. At the same time these fringe artists, either through their explicit language or cultural products, seem to acknowledge the inescapable realities of their circumstances.

To a large extent, I sympathize with the cultural agents who lament the scene’s waning creative vigor. I do not believe that the fringe scene’s creative entropy is unique to Vienna, but that it can also be observed in many cities throughout Europe, especially among the most nationally transient artists and groups. However, in order to comprehend the root-cause of the crisis, if one does exist, I must place my study in a geographically-bounded area. I understand that the fringe scenes in many European cities are being faced with a dearth of innovation and that by focusing on Vienna I may be able to uncover the reasons for this.

In this dissertation I highlight a few possible aspects responsible for the fringe scene’s dearth of innovation. These include the combined influence of local, socialist-oriented funding structures and market pressures in Europe’s cultural field. Other potential causes are the artists themselves who collaborate with the prevailing demands of the local and transnational art market while manufacturing extreme critical distance from their products and developing their own integral community, which is ideologically

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<sup>92</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Cultural Memory in the Present*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 107.

detached from local audiences. Although I wish to avoid a simplistic conclusion that globalization and Europeanization are wholly destructive forces to aesthetic innovation at the margins of performance culture, I must recognize how these processes catalyze the phenomena listed above.

In my dissertation, I take a multi-directional approach to a thick analysis of Vienna's transnational fringe scene and to the processes of globalization and Europeanization that affect it. This method consists of examining how the different segments of Vienna's fringe scene are impacted by a series of dialectical struggles for legitimacy in the local and international cultural fields of Europe.

Chapter one includes a detailed analysis of Vienna's policies towards arts funding. Beginning with the rise of Tanzquartier in 2001 and the *Wiener Theaterreform* (Vienna Theater Reform) in 2003, I argue that the project towards increased internationalism in the scene stems from a self-conscious movement on the part of Vienna's ruling socialist party, the *SPOe*, to increase the symbolic capital of the Vienna brand name within the European cultural field at large. By highlighting various aspects of Vienna's socialist-influenced model of cultural funding, I also argue that external factors, such as the rise of neo-liberalism throughout the EU, are increasing the artists' competition for limited funding and creating conditions where artists need to pander to the demands of the local government to an even greater extent than in past decades.

Chapter two includes an in-depth analysis of Vienna's primary fringe performance venues, Brut and Tanzquartier. In this chapter I argue that the transnational orientations of the government-created Brut and Tanzquartier led the venues into an informal partnership. This partnership created even more of an integral community of

fringe culture makers who tended to create for other producers within the city of Vienna and the various transnational social spaces of Europe's co-production venue and festival circuits. Many local artists were shut out of this community, which became more transnational in character. This led to bitter resentment. Furthermore, although the artistic directors of both venues argue that their practices led to the possibility of more experimentation, their partnership may have actually hindered the development of liminal possibilities within Vienna's fringe scene. This resulted from a hierarchical structure of selection and competition that was imposed on venues, which were formerly free and unjuried spaces for the creation of fringe performance. This also resulted from the desires and demands of the artistic directors of Brut and Tanzquartier to develop artists who had the potential to be economically successful in the transnational social spaces of Europe's co-production houses and festivals.

In chapter three I examine the struggle for legitimacy between Vienna's fringe performance venues and the hegemonic Burgtheater, which also has two experimental venues, i.e. the Kasino and Vestibuel. In this chapter I conduct a comparison between the mentalities of artists in the established theatre, i.e. the Burgtheater, and the fringe performance scenes. I do this by including the artists' words themselves and how they view key aspects that affect the development of their work. In this chapter I argue that the artists in the established and fringe scenes constitute two distinct communities. These are separated by key issues, the greatest of which is the established theatre's practice of relying on language-based theatre as opposed to the fringe venues' practices of relying more on the visual *mise en scene*. However, in ideological terms, artists from the two scenes are united based on their orientation towards the EU, mass culture, and the ever-

present demand for innovation. This unification causes fear among artists in the fringe scene, which is manifest in the community's constant attempt to prove its legitimacy. The most recent outcome of this struggle for fringe artists to proclaim their legitimacy is the tendency to emphasize that their work falls under the catch-all phrase *zeitgenössische Performance* (hereafter "contemporary performance"). I place the label of "contemporary performance" in quotation marks because it differs from the un-quoted term contemporary performance, which merely means performance happening today, and carries a more specific meaning and other cultural implications. I will conclude this chapter by highlighting how Vienna-based artists are describing and theorizing this new style. I will also offer a more descriptive term for work being produced by the more international and most successful groups within Vienna's transnational fringe scene.

Chapters four and five include a detailed examination of two specific fringe groups, Toxic Dreams and Superamas. I have opted to conduct an in-depth analysis of these groups because they are both highly international and because the artists in these groups display an extremely self-critical posture related to their participation in mass culture and globalization processes. Additional rationale for concentrating on these groups includes their common European fringe practices of relying on English language, developing pieces in an improvisational manner, focusing on a highly visual *mise en scene*, and dismantling the ontological differences between live and mediated culture as they lament their own lack of presence and agency within the global culture industry. Despite the many similarities of these groups, Toxic Dreams and Superamas also present contrasting ways of dealing with the de-localization of fringe performance and the construction of the "McDonalds Avant-Garde." For example, Toxic Dreams claims to

combat the de-localization of the scene by nurturing a specific audience of expatriates and international transplants who have made Vienna their home, while Superamas distances themselves from Vienna by viewing the city as more of a corporate funding entity and base for their fruitful endeavors in Europe's co-production venues and festivals. I have divided these two chapters in the following manner. Chapter four focuses on how the artists create unique brand names in order to compete for legitimacy within Vienna's transnational social spaces. Chapter five focuses on the artists' products and how the artists manufacture extreme distance from the processes of globalization while still participating in them. In this chapter I provide a counter argument to David Savran and other scholars who claim that artists may maintain their avant-garde impulse and internal sense of dignity while participating in dominant modes of representation by adopting a form of the Brechtian alienation effect. This chapter represents the culmination of my dissertation because it describes how the interplay between Vienna's socialist funding structure and the forces of globalization have led the artists into an extremely self-conscious and self-critical discourse, which may alienate them from their work and result in a lack of artistic fulfillment.

## CHAPTER 1

### VIENNA'S FRINGE SCENE AS A LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL SITE OF STRUGGLES FOR LEGITIMACY

Within the context of Vienna, a highly socialist-influenced economy, policies tend to stem from regional motivations. If a fringe group thrives within Vienna, it is often the direct result of the city's support. Consequently, if Vienna's fringe scene now resembles (however superficially) those of other European cultural metropolises, the most probable explanation for this is that the Viennese government wills it. The will to create a transnational fringe scene in Vienna is one result of an ongoing battle for Vienna to reclaim a cultural status that it held during the height of its empire and that the city still holds within a national mythology. In this chapter I highlight some words of Austrian officials and cultural workers that suggest a self-conscious internationalization of Vienna's fringe scene. This movement stems from an effort to increase the symbolic capital of the city's brand name in Europe's cultural field. In doing so, I reference some major outcomes of the *Wiener Theaterreform* (hereafter *Theaterreform*), which began in 2003 and represented one of the most concrete methods of achieving the fringe scene's internationalization. The immediate outcome of the reform was increased competition for limited funds, which were placed into the hands of a few. This led artists into a more open dialogue, not only about the level of internationalism in their work, but also in regard to their marketability in Europe's network of co-production venues and festivals. Questions that guide this chapter are related to how Vienna's battle for symbolic capital at the international or European level plays out at the local level. These include the following. Who are the "winners" and the "losers" of the self-conscious

internationalization of Vienna's fringe scene? What relegated these artists to such positions? In other words, how does the integral, politicized community in control of funding determine artistic "quality?" Is the community's notion of quality somehow related to external market concerns that develop as a result of Europeanization? A guiding factor of my dissertation is my understanding that, despite the well-intentioned efforts of Vienna's integral community of culture makers to innovate the local scene, a level of artistic dissatisfaction is still present after the reforms.

### **Impetus for Transnational Art at the European and Local Levels**

In recent years, the impetus to forge transnational ties among artists in European fringe scenes has become widespread. For example in Austria's neighboring Czech Republic, cultural agents are actively engaged in promoting a "new educational process towards an open minded, creative, cosmopolitan thinking in the arts" in the wake of its 2004 entry into the EU.<sup>93</sup> In addition, Czech law mandates that any legal resident (i.e. any citizen of the EU including those who are not Czech nationals) may legitimately operate a theatre company and apply for local funding.<sup>94</sup> Other areas of EU lands, which were part of Austria's once-expansive empire, are involved in similar processes. These stem from the need for these marginalized Central and Eastern European nations to proclaim their cultural, if not their political and economic, importance and openness in the developing EU. To many of these nations' governments, fringe performance, dance, and music are logical sub-fields to establish their presence because they are not thought

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<sup>93</sup> Bohumil Nekolny and Ondrej Cerny, "The Theater Network, its Function, System of Financing and Support," *Theatre Institute, Prague* (April 2000), [http://www.freitheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country\\_report#4](http://www.freitheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country_report#4) (accessed December 20, 2010).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

to be nationally bounded. Cross-cultural collaborations can be actively pursued in these sub-fields because the artists who are involved naturally possess a more cosmopolitan outlook and are often able to speak and perform in English, a common international trade language.<sup>95</sup> Austria has a history of being perceived as a lesser power among the EU fifteen.<sup>96</sup> Rationale for this includes the nation's relatively small size and history of xenophobic tendencies, which seem to arise at inopportune moments. Consequently, despite its post-World War II Western orientation, Austria may be counted among the culturally marginalized nations mentioned above.

The self-conscious internationalization of Vienna's fringe scene is at once a top-down and bottom-up initiative, which should be understood according to the nation's complicated history. It is top-down because the infusion of this ideology into the scene is catalyzed by the local Viennese government and imposed upon the artists who live and produce under its auspices. In this process, particular attention should be placed on Vienna rather than on Austria due to the nation's federal model of cultural support, where less than 40% of funding comes from the Federal Republic and more than 60% is offered by regions such as Vienna.<sup>97</sup> The capital city's self-conscious internationalization is bottom-up because policies are constructed within Vienna as a result of the city's need to be perceived as culturally important and ideologically open at the EU level. Although the

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<sup>95</sup> Artists can succeed internationally as long as they have a basic command of English, the trade language of the cosmopolitan artistic community. Conversely, the sub-fields where cultural blending is often not pursued include establish theatre, which despite adopting residual avant-garde styles, maintains its dependency on language and a degree of national conservatism. This may account for the thriving status of national theatres over the past decades. The fear of cultural erosion brought on by the EU sometimes increases the power of such national institutions.

<sup>96</sup> The EU 15 is a network of nations, often thought to be the core nations of the EU, which were part of the union before an additional 10 nations were added to the roster in May 2004.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Arjo Klamer, Anna Mignosa, Lyudmilla Petrova, *The Relationship Between Public and Private Financing of Culture in the EU*, <http://www.klamer.nl/docs/kmp.pdf> (Accessed March 11, 2011).

EU has a specific cultural arm designed to increase feelings of Europeanness among its citizens, top-down (i.e. EU-instituted) approaches are not the ones that are most actively shaping the subculture of transnational fringe artists who are dispersed throughout the union.<sup>98</sup> It appears that cultural agents working at the regional level are doing far more to develop feelings of Europeanness among transnational fringe artists than the politicians in Brussels ever could. To the artists who function at both the regional and European levels, both structures are beyond their immediate control. Consequently, they are often left with little recourse but to either opportunistically take advantage of the structures or find themselves outside of them and unable to produce their art.<sup>99</sup>

Among the options available to artists include cultural funding programs developed and administered by the EU. In 1995, soon after Austria's entrance into the EU, a Cultural Contact Point for such programs was instituted in Vienna. This position was designed to make local artists aware of the EU's cultural programs. In the words of EU scholar Michael Bruter, such programs were instituted in order to fulfill "obvious social objectives," which are "to propose a new 'Social Contract' to European citizens, and to develop a new mass European identity rather than let citizens be mere 'consumers' of the economic benefits associated with Europe."<sup>100</sup> The EU has produced powerful rhetoric aimed at transnational performing artists and their contribution to the project of unification. For example, in 1991 a document expressed the EU's "determination" to

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<sup>98</sup> In this instance I define a supranational entity as a collective wherein separate nation states each vote on issues that transcend their national borders. In such an entity, control is shared by politicians who are elected by the individual governments, but who are not necessarily influenced exclusively by national interests. The EU is a prominent example of a supranational entity. Another example is the World Trade Organization (WTO).

<sup>99</sup> I will explore these ideas in later chapters, but at this point I will note how structures and ideologies at the European level influence policies at the regional level and have a bearing on Vienna's culture of transnational fringe performing artists.

<sup>100</sup> Michael Bruter, *Citizens of Europe?: the Emergence of a Mass European Identity*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

encourage theatre in Europe and to enhance its European dimension by promoting the mobility of artists. In the past decades the EU has become more active in the cultural field, developing a variety of programs such as Culture 2000 and Culture 2007 and providing support to artists from a variety of nations who gather to develop performances. However, the EU's marginal support for culture, in comparison to its total annual revenue, and the bureaucratic nature of its cultural policies limit its direct impact on Europe's transnational fringe scene.<sup>101</sup> For example, in an effort to increase the "European dimension" of performances, the EU provides matching grants of anywhere between 50,000 and 200,000 Euros for projects that involve at least three member nations.<sup>102</sup> This means that artists who have banded together to create a multi-national performance must find at least 50,000 Euros in support *before* they can receive the EU's economic benefits. The process of securing this funding involves applying at the local or national level for money, often with the assistance of their resident EU Cultural Contact Point, and simultaneously working with artists from two or more nations who also solicit funds from their local contexts. The implications of this process are that artists who can participate already have the necessary social capital outside of their local contexts and that they also have already managed to secure the startup funds prior to applying for EU co-financing. This means that the EU's cultural programs are merely a support to transnational artists and not the progenitor of their networks.

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<sup>101</sup> The EU's total revenue for 2010 was approximately 122.9 billion Euros. Only 400 million Euros are dedicated to the EU's Culture 2007-2013 Programme, which co-finances around 300 different cultural actions per year. These figures come from the following EU sites:

[http://ec.europa.eu/budget/budget\\_glance/where\\_from\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/budget/budget_glance/where_from_en.htm) (accessed December 20, 2010).  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/culture/programme/about\\_culture\\_en.php](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/culture/programme/about_culture_en.php) (accessed December 20, 2010).

<sup>102</sup> These figures are based on data collected at a meeting with the Cultural Contact Point for Austria in May 2008. These numbers may have altered slightly over the past two years, however, not significantly. Elisabeth Pacher, Cultural Contact Point for Austria, interview by author, 23 May 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

Many Vienna-based fringe artists cite the EU's extremely complicated funding structure as rationale for their lack of participation. For example, Christine Standfest of the Vienna-based fringe group theatercombinant argues that artists need "enormous apparatuses to apply for EU funding," which most people in the local fringe scene do not have.<sup>103</sup> These apparatuses are not only required to secure the necessary social connections and startup funds but also to develop an understanding of what funding options are available to them and to meet the EU's strict structural, chronological, and budgetary mandates. Artists believe that the EU is not flexible if a given project does not adhere to the original project proposal. Furthermore, they claim that the EU does not allow for long developmental processes, which most fringe products require because they often evolve in a collaborative, improvisational manner and develop as a result of a period of extensive scholarly and experiential research, which the artists dub "non-productive periods." For example, the Vienna-based groups Superamas and Toxic Dreams have non-productive periods lasting several months each year. Yosi Wanunu of Toxic Dreams complains that "the EU does not understand our process...there is no project that doesn't require pre-work."<sup>104</sup> Similarly, Standfest argues that artists "need to be much more precise with budget proposals and concepts" at the EU level than they do at the local level. This makes it difficult for EU-funded pieces to develop in an organic manner.<sup>105</sup> The EU's so-called "lack of understanding" prompted a number of Vienna-based artists to draft the *Manifesto for an European Performance Policy* (highlighted in

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<sup>103</sup> Christine Standfest, member of theatercombinant, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>104</sup> Yosi Wanunu, artistic director of Toxic Dreams, interview by author, 20 May 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>105</sup> Christine Standfest, member of theatercombinant, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

this dissertation's introduction) in which the artists requested that the EU make its funds more easily accessible and give money to artists for long-term project development, including research and experimentation.<sup>106</sup> Thus far, the EU has not fully complied with the artists' requests, nor are they likely to do so.

Another reason for artists' lack of participation in EU funded projects stems from their belief that projects funded at the EU level stem from a social agenda, rather than from an artist's internal artistic drive. The artists believe that this decreases the project's legitimacy, or objectified cultural capital. For example, Yosi Wanunu of Toxic Dreams argues that "art must come from a drive first," meaning a creative need, and that most attempts to develop projects with the required "European dimension" stem from mere economic motivations. Similarly, Standfest argues that the EU expects artists who receive funding to fulfill their "social obligation," which is to help nations integrate under the EU umbrella. She contends that the focus of these artists is removed from the actual art and placed on the project's social outcome.<sup>107</sup> Such critiques are fairly common throughout Europe's transnational fringe network. For example, in 2007 Guy Cools, former curator of the Belgian fringe venue Vooruit Arts Center authored a study in conjunction with the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts on European co-productions. In his text Cools states that if artists try to design their "artistic project in such a way that it matches the criteria of the international funding and co-production schemes, (he/she) might be reversing the priorities and as such seriously

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<sup>106</sup> Jerome Bel, et al "Manifest: an die Europaeische Kommission und deren Kulturpolitische Vertreter/innen," *GIFT* (July, 2002), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61304&jahr=2002> (accessed December 13, 2010).

<sup>107</sup> Christine Standfest, member of theatercombinant, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

compromise it.”<sup>108</sup> Cools argues that such artistic compromise is the result of crafting a performance from financial rather than artistic motivation. This criticism is evidence for the feeling among many fringe artists that forging social connections and creating international co-productions for the sake of financial gain is undesirable. Doing so denotes a form of economic opportunism, especially among those who participate in EU-funded projects, which is outwardly shunned.

Fringe artists’ widely-held antagonism towards regarding this issue is highly idiosyncratic. For example, those artists who are currently favored by Vienna’s funding structure, i.e. the “winners” of the *Theaterreform* (described below), appear to have little or no problem taking money from the local Viennese government, which also funds culture based on a social agenda. Despite fringe artists’ supposedly high standards, in relation to the economic capital endowed upon their colleagues by the EU, their overall outlook may be far more opportunistic than they appear to admit. However, perhaps this opportunism is nullified or assuaged by the artists’ comparative reasoning. For example, it is possible that when artists place the city of Vienna’s funding policies alongside those of the EU, they are able to perceive the city, with all of its bureaucracy and control, as something smaller, more local, more personal, and more fringe-like than the grand supranational entity based in Brussels. To understand this requires an analysis of the ways that the local government struggles to proclaim its cultural legitimacy within the EU. Vienna’s *Theaterreform* must be understood in relation to this struggle.

### **Vienna’s Transnational Fringe Scene and the Struggle for Symbolic Capital**

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<sup>108</sup> Guy Cools, “International Co-Production and Touring,” *International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts*, <http://on-the-move.org/library/article/13862/co-production-and-touring/> (accessed March 13, 2011)

2003 is believed to mark a new infusion of “self-conscious internationalism” or Europeanism into Vienna’s fringe scene.<sup>109</sup> This year marked the birth of the *Theaterreform*, which began in the midst of a social and cultural crisis within the fringe scene. For example, in a 2002 article published in *GIFT* the authors complained that on the European level contemporary Austrian cultural policies and products are either not fully understood or negative perceived.<sup>110</sup> Partial rationale for the perception was the rise of various conservative forces within the nation. The most notable and visible of these was the right wing *FPOe* party as led by Joerg Haider, which according to scholar Michael Wimmer, sparked “the superficial impression of the ongoing Nazism” and produced “a severe deterioration of (Austria’s) image in the world.”<sup>111</sup> But the Haider incident was merely the culmination of several conservative and nationalistic uprisings that caused concern among Austria’s more liberal and European-minded cultural agents.<sup>112</sup> For example, during the 1995 Viennese elections, incidentally the same year that the nation entered into the EU with an Austrian majority vote, the *FPOe* issued a campaign of defiance against Austrian-based artists who they believed went against the cultural mainstream and threatened their traditional feelings of homeland (*Heimatgefuehl*).<sup>113</sup> Many in Vienna’s fringe scene believed that such incidents needed to be countered by tangible shifts in local cultural policy. For example, in an article published in *GIFT* the same year that the impending *Theaterreform* was announced, artists and administrators decried the state of Austria’s coalition government, which

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<sup>109</sup> This was preceded by another effort on the part of Tanzquartier, which is discussed in chapter two.

<sup>110</sup> Gerhard Ruiss and others, “Kulturpolitische Halbzeitbilanz der neuen österreichischen Bundesregierung,” *GIFT* (Vienna: IG Freie Theaterarbeit, 4 February 2002).

<sup>111</sup> Michael Wimmer, “Reflections on a Special Case: What Makes Cultural Policy Truly Austrian?,” *Journal of Arts, Management, Law and Society*, (2006): 11.

<sup>112</sup> For more information on this: <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/countries.php?pcid=1040>

<sup>113</sup> These artists included Claus Peymann and Elfriede Jelinek, which I mentioned in the introduction.

consisted of two widely divergent parties, one elected because it had the largest number of votes (the *Oesterreichische Volkspartei*, or the Austrian People's Party, hereafter referred to as the *OeVP*) and the other elected in order to "appease" the large right-wing minority (*FPOe*).<sup>114</sup> This same article stressed how the *FPOe*'s role in Austria's coalition government had weakened Austria's respect among other EU member nations and compromised their once-pivotal say in EU expansion.<sup>115</sup> Such observations were combined with many government-instituted surveys of the fringe scene itself, which revealed a dearth of international perspective in comparison to more cosmopolitan cities like Berlin.<sup>116</sup>

Incidentally, the *Theaterreform* was the local, effectual manifestation of nation-wide attempts, since Austria's entrance into the EU, to create structural rearrangements in the local cultural field. For example in 1998 the Austrian Chancellor and Secretary of State for arts affairs commissioned a nation-wide study on the state of culture in Austria.<sup>117</sup> This study, published in a document called the *Weissbuch* (or the White Book), included a variety of suggestions for an overhaul of Austrian cultural policies that were never fully implemented. A more tangible move towards structural changes occurred in 2001, with an explicit nation-wide policy measure aimed at improving the international visibility of Austrian culture for the purpose of supporting foreign relations. The *International Cultural Policy Concept*, as it came to be called, declared the nation's

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<sup>114</sup> Incidentally, the *SPOe* and *OeVP* shared leadership of Vienna until the *SPOe* took over sole control of the city in 2001 and held it until 2010.

<sup>115</sup> Gerhard Ruiss, et al., "Kulturpolitische Halbzeitbilanz der neuen österreichischen Bundesregierung," GIFT (4 February 2002), [www.freietheater.at/index.php?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61259&jahr=2002](http://www.freietheater.at/index.php?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61259&jahr=2002) (Accessed March 10, 2011).

<sup>116</sup> Kornelia Kilga and Yosi Wanunu, producer and director of *Toxic Dreams*, interview by author, 20 May 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>117</sup> The following website includes a brief description in English of contemporary trends in Austrian cultural policy.

<http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/countries.php?pcid=1040> (accessed March 13, 2011).

intent to use culture “as an instrument to communicate Austria’s position in Europe.” Simultaneously it represented an attempt to showcase the nation’s “diversity” by “preventing an excessive focus on policies promoting national identity” and developing “an open-minded approach to cultural work.” As Ambassador Emil Brix, who served as the Head of the Cultural Policy Section at the time, stated, this policy was instituted to “make concrete efforts to foster the dialogue between cultures and civilizations, not least because (Austria’s) own history is tainted with conflicts of language and culture and the presence of totalitarian ideologies.”<sup>118</sup> The *International Cultural Policy Concept* is consistent with a national agenda that is at once apologetic, progressive, and outward-looking, with a focus on Europe.

The language of the nation’s *International Cultural Policy Concept* coheres to the findings of a case study on the mobility of artists in Austria conducted in 2008. This study states that the nation, especially under the auspices of local organizations such as the Vienna-based, city-run *Kultur Kontakt* Austria, began to foster “cross-border dialogue and cooperation with its neighbors” in part because they considered “the country as an ‘intercultural stage for Central and Eastern Europe.’”<sup>119</sup> The report also states that “the Austrian Government aims to promote a central role for the country in the region and to establish itself as a cultural mediator for artists from old and new EU member states.” The study’s findings suggest that in Austria, artistic policies, especially when they relate to internationalism, appear to follow broader socio-political policies. Regarding the

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<sup>118</sup> Austrian Foreign Ministry Worldwide, <http://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/foreign-ministry/foreign-policy/international-cultural-policy/austrian-international-cultural-policy.html> (accessed March 13, 2011).

<sup>119</sup> Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Education and Culture)*, (2008), [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

specific case of the *Theaterreform*, instituting an overhaul of cultural policies in favor of increasing the internationalism of Austria's artists would allow the nation to "promote the image of (the) nation abroad."<sup>120</sup> This was particularly important due to statements like the one made by Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Michael Spindelegger that, "Culture defines Austria's image in the world."<sup>121</sup>

These other movements in Austrian cultural policy are evidence that the entire nation sought to internationalize around the time that the *Theaterreform* took effect; therefore, this reform is one outcome of a general overhaul designed to bring Austria further in line with the cultural output of its neighboring Western European nations. The *Theaterreform* was instituted by the government of the city of Vienna and spearheaded by a group of cultural critics/administrators including Anna Thier, Uwe Mattheiss, and Guenter Lackenbucher.<sup>122</sup> In a foundational document of the *Theaterreform* these three articulated the following. One, although Vienna is historically characterized by its diversity, such variety does not now readily appear on stage. Two, although the city is noted for its rich cultural past, its current prominence as a European cultural metropolis is questionable because Vienna's fringe performance scene is characterized by artists with varying degrees of professional prowess. Three, the aesthetics of the fringe venues and established theatres within the capital are becoming more unified. The main factors that differentiate these venues are money and quality, and the fringe venues have less of both.

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<sup>120</sup> Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals, Case study # 5: Austria)

<sup>121</sup> Manfred Keller, *Interview with Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Michael Spindelegger*, <http://www.acfny.org/about/the-austrian-foreign-ministry/michael-spindelegger-on-the-acfny/> (accessed March 13, 2011).

<sup>122</sup> Anna Thier, Uwe Mattheiß, and Günter Lackenbucher, "Freies Theater in Wien," *GIFT* (Vienna: IG Freie Theaterarbeit, 2002).

Contributing to the lack of quality is the fringe artists' shortage of time and resources. The reformers argued that without a strong fringe tradition the established institutions could not be inspired to innovate, because many innovations begin in the fringe scene before trickling into the established scene. As this final point made evident, the lack of innovation in the fringe scene compromised Vienna's position in Europe's cultural field and risked de-legitimizing the central national myth that Austria is a *Kulturnation*.<sup>123</sup>

The main proposals of the *Theaterreform* were as follows. In order to combat the lack of diversity in Vienna's fringe scene, the city should open its doors to more international collaborative networks among fringe performing artists. The city should also determine new ways to develop audiences, especially young audiences.<sup>124</sup> It should specifically target communities in the modern city that have heretofore been underrepresented in the performing arts. In order to improve the cultural standing of Vienna's performing arts scene, the city should be more selective in supporting fringe artists and groups. It should do this by establishing a more rigid funding process, spearheaded by a group of administrators in charge of recommending artists to the *Kulturstadrat* (the city's cultural minister) for funding. Theoretically, this motion would allow the city of Vienna to focus more on developing challenging, high quality fringe performance, letting the groups that exhibited less quality fall out of the scene and into oblivion. The reformers argued that these improved conditions would set the stage for a

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<sup>123</sup> For a more detailed description of the concept of Austrian as *Kulturnation* refer to the studies of Linda DeMeritt and Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger (2002) and Gitta Hoenegger (2002).

<sup>124</sup> It is pertinent to note that Europe's youth, categorized as those between 13 and 30, is the most internationally diverse demographic in each member state. Due to an increasingly low birthrate among EU citizens, a large percentage of this demographic is made of immigrants. Also, this demographic tends to take the most advantage of the Schengen Agreement, which allows them to travel, study, and work (relatively) freely across national borders within the EU.

more dynamic, higher quality cultural field, which would effectively transition the city into a greater position of cultural prominence in relation to other European capital cities.

Many cultural agents in Vienna's fringe scene followed the nascent stages of the reform and felt led to provide their opinions on subsequent development. For example, *IG Freie Theaterarbeit* (*IG* is short for *Interessen-Gemeinschaft*, meaning a community of interest, and the remainder of the title is translated as "free theater work") a group dedicated to lobbying for better working conditions in the fringe scene, would later become critical of the displacement of native Austrian talent by the influx of foreign artists that resulted from the *Theaterreform*.<sup>125</sup> However, initially, *IG Theater* called for a group of judges with a broad knowledge of European art and a history of participating in publications, public rehearsals, symposia, showings, open labs, and performances across the continent.<sup>126</sup> The *Theaterreform* appeared to lead to a self-conscious discourse about the state of Vienna's fringe scene and its position within Europe's interconnected cultural field. Many of Vienna's culture makers followed suit, pushing for a more international

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<sup>125</sup> Incidentally it is possible that within the Austrian context the name *IG Theater* conjures images of the German chemical plant *IG Farben* (taken from *Interessen-Gemeinschaft Farbenindustrie AG*, translated as Community of Interest of the Dye Industry), which held the patent for the pesticide used in Holocaust gas chambers during World War II. The fact that *IG Theater* produces a fringe journal called *GIFT* (translated as poison) is evidence for this link and for the reality that the organization views itself as an agent capable of disrupting dominant cultural trends.

<sup>126</sup> The exact German wording of the *GIFT* article is as follows:

*Kompetenzkriterien fuer die Konservatoren: Die Experten sollten eine theoretische Intelligenz besitzen, sowie Interesse in der zeitgenoessischen Kunstentwicklung in den letzten Jahren weltweit verfolgt haben. Auch muessen sie aktuelle Berichte ueber die folgenden Aktivitaeten in ganz Europa nachweisen, (durch Besuche von oeffentlichen und geschlossenen Proben, Fachkonferenzen, Vorstellungen, open labs, Vorfuehrungen, Inszenierungen, Ausstellungen, Installationen etc.)*

I translate this as follows:

the experts should have a theoretical intelligence and interest, as well as the world's contemporary art development in recent years and have actively pursued across Europe (through the visit of publications, public rehearsals, symposia, showings, open labs, performances, performances, exhibitions, installations, etc.).

Daniel Aschwanden et al., "Re-form: Aussendung von im Tanz- und Performance-Bereich Tätigen," *GIFT*, (2003), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61333&jahr=2003> (accessed December 21, 2010).

scene, one that could produce artists with the ability to compete in Europe's transnational social spaces, which already featured a thriving community of highly mobile European artists with cosmopolitan ideologies.

A 2004 report by the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (hereafter IFACCA) on European artists' mobility claims that a general push on the regional and national levels towards increasing the mobility of artists has characterized the past ten years. As the report states:

Programs have been launched, refined and revised as national and regional borders have changed and new global concerns have emerged. Debate on artists' mobility has intensified...as demonstrated by the number of meetings and reports dedicated to the subject.<sup>127</sup>

The self-conscious internationalization of Vienna's fringe scene can be understood as an extension of the larger European trend, which is rising so rapidly as to make it impossible to "cite all the interesting and pertinent events" that aim at promoting artists' mobility throughout the EU.<sup>128</sup>

With the *Theaterreform*, Vienna was poised to make a more fully articulated commitment to those who composed the expanding niche culture of transnational fringe performing artists. When the tenets of the *Theaterreform* were finally established and instituted, the money funneled into Vienna's fringe scene became more regulated by an integral community of cultural agents. A system composed of *Jurors* (hereafter jurors) and the *Kuratorium* (hereafter curators) was established. In control of long-term artist and company grants were the five jurors. Of these five, one to two were selected by the *Kulturstadtrat* (city cultural minister), an office held since 2001 by Andreas Mailath-

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<sup>127</sup> Judith Staines, "Artists' International Mobility Programs," *D'Art Topics in Arts Policy*, no.17, Sydney: International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, (December 2004), [http://www.ifacca.org/ifacca2/en/organisation/page09\\_BrowseDart.asp](http://www.ifacca.org/ifacca2/en/organisation/page09_BrowseDart.asp), 4 (accessed March 20, 2011).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

Pokorny, with the assistance of his own cultural adviser called the *Referant*.<sup>129</sup> However, the *Kulturstadtrat* also had veto power on the other jurors after they had been selected.<sup>130</sup> As of June 2009 the jurors were in control of recommending artists for a total of 14.5 million Euros of annual city support.<sup>131</sup> As of June 2009 the curators (appointed for two-year terms) were in control of recommending artists for an annual total of 2.5 million Euros.<sup>132</sup> Support for individual artists and/or companies, called *Verein*, were in the form of production grants (for individual production concepts up to two years) and concept grants (for up to 14 fringe groups for four years total).<sup>133</sup> Also, an additional 7 million Euros were dedicated to be used at the *Kulturstadtrat*'s discretion. Uwe Mattheiss, one of the original authors of the *Theaterreform*, argues that this was instituted in order "to keep the groups (who did not get funding from the jury and curators) quiet."<sup>134</sup> Another important outcome of the *Theaterreform* was the development of Brut, a second co-production house to compliment Tanzquartier, which had existed since 2001. The leaders of both venues were appointed by the *Kulturstadtrat*, a sign that the spaces would be

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<sup>129</sup> Throughout this article when I refer to the *Kulturstadtrat*, I am primarily referencing the works of the current reigning *Kulturstadtrat* Andreas Mailath-Pokorny who was appointed to his post in 2001 and initiated/oversaw the *Wiener Theaterreform*.

<sup>130</sup> In an interview with the current curators of the city of Vienna, they argued that the large four year grants do enable fringe artists to subsist on public funds, but these are administrated by the jury system. In essence, the jurors have greater power within the scene than the curators.

Andrea Amort, Angela Heide, and Juergen Weishaeupl, curators of the city of Vienna, interview by author, 19 August 2010, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>131</sup>Uwe Mattheiss, co-author of the *Theaterreform*, interview by author, 29 April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>132</sup> An additional segmenting of funding (approximately 6 million Euros) includes *Standort Forderung*. According to Bettina Jelik of MA-7 this includes projects that "fall through all these pots." In other words these are funded "because the *Kulturstadtrat* says we should" fund them.

<sup>133</sup> Barbara Stuewe-Essl, "Austria: Professional Independent Performing Arts - Financially Still on the Fringe," *GIFT*, (2006), [http://www.freitheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country\\_report#22](http://www.freitheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country_report#22) (accessed December 21, 2010).

<sup>134</sup>Uwe Mattheiss, co-author of the *Theaterreform*, interview by author, 29 April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

operated according to the blessing of the prevailing *SPOe*-led government.<sup>135</sup> In addition, the system assured that there would be close communication between the jurors, curators, and artistic directors of the major fringe venues. These diverse branches of Vienna's new funding system were held together by a system of close personal and professional ties.<sup>136</sup> When I asked the current curators if Brut funds projects that have not been funded by the jurors and curators, they stated that this happens, but only in rare instances. Their exact answer was that this happened, "in two or three occasions" during the last year, which is evidence for the closeness and similar aesthetic tastes of the jurors, curators, and artistic directors of the two major fringe venues. These similar tastes dictate the scene's overarching aesthetic orientation.<sup>137</sup>

It was thought that creating this integral system of administrators who were collectively charged with the task of selecting artists and projects to be funded would raise the quality of the scene and make the Viennese (and by extension the Austrian) brand name more legitimate within the elaborate system of transnational social spaces that composed Europe's cultural field of fringe performance. However, by 2008 when I began my fieldwork in Vienna, discourse within the fringe scene suggested that this had not fully occurred.

*IG Theater* led the charge with accusations against the *Theaterreform* and its failure to innovate. In 2006 one of its publications reported that "disillusionment, resignation, and paralysis instead of awakening and joy characterize the general local

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<sup>135</sup> Thomas Frank, co-artistic director of Brut Wien, interview by author, 17 May 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Andrea Amort, Angela Heide, and Juergen Weishaeupl, curators of the city of Vienna, interview by author, 19 August 2010, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

climate.”<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, after a February 2006 survey of theatre and dance professionals in the fringe scene, *IG Theater* reported that the vast majority were in favor of altering the funding system instituted by the initial reform. 67% of those polled were in favor of increasing the democratic nature of the funding system by creating a more mixed panel of jurors, increasing the number on the panel to seven, replacing one member each year, and holding the jury meetings in a more public forum.<sup>139</sup> This survey is evidence for the divisive effect that the *Theaterreform* had on the fringe scene’s cultural agents.

The root of the divisiveness within Vienna’s fringe scene was related to the displacement of the more localized artists by the more transnational artists that were grafted into the scene as a result of the self-conscious internationalization instituted by the *Theaterreform*. This division caused rifts between *IG Theater* and the international artists who had already been active in the scene before the *Theaterreform* began. For example, Russian artist Oleg Soulimenko and French artist Phillippe Riera were once more engaged with *IG Theater*. In 2003, these artists and the people at *IG Theater* presented a

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<sup>138</sup> The exact German phrasing is, “*Ernüchterung, Resignation und Lähmung statt Aufbruch und Freude kennzeichnen das allgemeine Klima.*” I translate this as, “Disenchantment, resignation, and paralysis instead of newness and pleasure characterize the total climate.”

“Wiener Theaterreform 2006: Entschiedene Ablehnung des Kuratorenmodells,” *GIFT*, (May 12, 2006), <http://www.freietheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=63028&jahr=2006> (accessed December 21, 2010).

<sup>139</sup> The exact German phrasings is as follows,

*67% sprachen sich für ein gemischtes Gremium mit Theaterschaffenden sowie ExpertInnen anderer Bereiche aus; gefordert wurden: die Sitzungen öffentlich abzuhalten, eine Auseinandersetzung über ästhetische und inhaltliche Zielsetzungen in Form von öffentlichen Hearings und die Einführung eines Rotationssystems (jährlich wird mindestens eine Person durch eine neue ersetzt).*

I translate this as,

67% speak for a mixed committee with theatre makers as well as experts in other areas who will support: holding open meetings, a discussion about setting aesthetic and content goals in the form of open hearings, and the inauguration of a rotation system (annually at least one new person should be established).

Ibid.

united front regarding their desires for the *Theaterreform*'s outcomes and published these in *GIFT*. However, in recent years, there have been no additional *GIFT* publications authored by Soulimenko and Riera, two of the scene's most prominent transnational fringe artists. Although it is likely that those at *IG Theater* would deny the rift between them and these early pioneers of Vienna's transnational fringe scene, it is possible to perceive their lack of collaboration as having stemmed from the division caused by the city's push towards funding artists with more international backgrounds and cosmopolitan outlooks over artists who retained more local mentalities.

During the late 1990s and early part of the past decade international artists/groups like Oleg Soulimenko (Russia), Yosi Wanunu (Israel and New York), and Superamas (five Frenchmen and one Austrian woman) represented a new wave of transnational fringe artists to Vienna. Around the time of the *Theaterreform* they were followed by others. These included Cezary Tomaszewski (Poland), Robert Steijn (Netherlands), Alexander Gottfarbe (Sweden), Kroot Jurek (Estonia), all of whom have made significant contributions to the scene through independent projects and collaborations with other artists. Linked with these artists were native Austrians with cosmopolitan outlooks who traveled the transnational festival circuit and who did not necessarily view a local orientation as an intrinsic aspect of their work. These include Milli Bitterli, Thomas Kasebacher, Doris Uhlich, and Cie. Willi Dorner. Such artists would eventually come to displace many locally-oriented artists who had lived and functioned within the scene during Austria's period of greater national isolation. Such artists included Susanne Tabaka-Pillhofer (Theater Tanto), Sebastian Protl (Tanz Atelier), and Elisabeth Orłowsky (Compagnie Smafu), to name a few. Within the cultural agents' discourse regarding

Vienna's fringe scene, it has become very common for those who associate with *IG Theater*, and who lament the results of the *Theaterreform*, to be labeled the "losers" and for artists like Soulimenko and Riera to be dubbed the "winners."<sup>140</sup> In the "winners" discourse the "losers" are associated with illegitimate complaints about a system operated by a small group of well-intentioned bureaucrats who truly attempt to make conditions better for artists and for the sustained symbolic capital of Vienna's fringe scene as a whole.

In sum, the *Theaterreform* created a self-conscious discourse on internationalism and Vienna's position in Europe's interconnected cultural field. Simultaneously, the reform led to increased exclusion and greater government dependency. The *Theaterreform* did this by granting a small group of people, who were appointed by the city of Vienna, more control over the means of production. Although Vienna's socialist-inspired model of arts funding had already established its influence over artists long before the *Theaterreform* began, in one of the many ironies associated with Europeanization, it appears that this phenomenon may have actually increased the authority that once existed.

### **Socialism and Neo-Liberalism in Vienna's Transnational Fringe Scene**

A plethora of scholars theorize Europeanization and globalization as complimentary processes, and argue that one of the primary factors in these interrelated processes is the liberalization of social and economic policy.<sup>141</sup> This often manifests as moves towards mixed models of cultural funding, which feature governments divesting

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<sup>140</sup> Haiko Pfof, co-artistic director of Brut Wien, interview by author, 12 May 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>141</sup> See chapter four for a more in-depth discussion of these terms and how they influence the culture of transnational fringe performing artists.

themselves of economic responsibilities while allowing private corporations, non-governmental organizations, foundations, and other systems of philanthropy to increase their cultural support. It could be argued that the increase in neo-liberalism spurred on by Europeanization threatens to erode socialist-inspired systems of cultural funding, like what has existed in Vienna for quite some time. Such erosion would force artists to seek support from private corporations, rather than public funds. People who hold this position would claim that Vienna's control over its culture is being weakened from the outside and that artists will soon enjoy greater independence, or freedom from government control. Although this may be a future outcome of the structural changes, the current circumstances are bleaker.

When dealing with small niche markets such as Europe's fringe scene, mixed models of cultural funding are problematic at best. As an ERICarts Institute report on the economic status of artists in Europe states, many non-governmental agencies and foundations "are often more money-seekers than money providers" and, therefore, "still operate on a weak economic fundament."<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, although there is evidence that European governments are offering more incentives for private corporations to make donations in the cultural arena, these reforms are difficult and slow to institute.<sup>143</sup> In a recent *New York Times* article Michael Kimmelman points to the time needed for certain European nations to make an effective transition from socialist to neo-liberal forms of arts funding. He also addresses the hurt that European culture makers will accrue as they

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<sup>142</sup> Danielle Cliche and Andreas Wiesand, *Arts and Artists in Europe: New Challenges*, ERICarts Institute, (2007), <http://www.ifacca.org/media/files/Arts%20and%20Artists%20in%20Europe.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2011).

<sup>143</sup> This is especially the case when private corporations do not stand to increase their visibility, and expand their profit margin, when dealing with small niche markets like Vienna's year-round fringe scene.

await adjustments within the system.<sup>144</sup> Kimmelmand highlights several factors that have been argued in this chapter. For example, he states that European nations have “next to no tradition of private giving” and that “there are few, if any, tax incentives to entice private donations in many countries.”<sup>145</sup> He points to Britain as a model for the transformation happening throughout Europe, describing how the shadow culture secretary for Britain’s Conservative Party, Jeremy Hunt, promised to introduce a more philanthropic method of arts funding modeled after the United States. In Britain, this promise met with a large amount of skepticism. Although Hunt maintained that he still believed in state subsidies, but merely wished for a more “mixed-economic funding model for the arts,” some feared that a system of philanthropy would not develop quickly enough to replace the cuts in state funding that would inevitably happen as the state moved towards a more “mixed” model. Ultimately, Kimmelmand argues that it would take at least a generation for the philanthropic system to develop in many European nations.<sup>146</sup> The necessity of this generation-long development period plays a large factor in the fierce competition derived from Vienna’s *Theaterreform*.<sup>147</sup>

In Europe, the rise of neo-liberal policies, which partially result from the expansion of the EU, are causing artists to confront a difficult process of adaptation. In her article entitled “The Globalization of the Economy and the Effects of EU-Policy: the Case of Austria,” Elisabeth Lichtenberger argues that in Austria’s new system

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<sup>144</sup> Although this journalism is directed towards other European nations I include it in this chapter on Vienna’s funding structure because it provides the reader with important insights into the economic crisis being faced by artists within Europe’s cultural field at large.

<sup>145</sup> Michael Kimmelman, “In Europe the Arts Ask for Alms,” *New York Times*, January 10, 2010, Art and Design Section, online edition, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/21/arts/design/21abroad.html> (accessed, December, 2010).

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Elisabeth Lichtenberger, *The Globalization of Economy and the Effects of EU-Policy: the Case of Austria*, *Enyedi-Regions and Cities in the Global World*, (2000): 115-125.

“Entrepreneurial thinking and risk taking are needed” but that “decades of social distribution strategies have all but eradicated” these attitudes.<sup>148</sup> This statement is consistent with studies conducted in other socialist-influenced economies throughout Western and Eastern Europe. For example Sophie Meunier of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University claims that the rise of neo-liberal policies as a result of globalization is “particularly difficult for a society that is used to looking to the state to provide jobs, redistribute incomes, protect against unwanted imports, and promote prestigious industrial sectors and perceived national interests.”<sup>149</sup> Meunier cites the 1999 case where France’s former Prime Minister Lionel Jospin declared that the state could do nothing to assuage the pain of his Frenchmen when the tire-maker Michelin announced massive layoffs because “it was no longer the state’s duty to administer the economy.” When confronted with such new government attitudes towards the French economy, the people were without a reference point and found coping extremely difficult. This is happening throughout Europe, and particularly in Vienna.

In Europe, as elsewhere, the market for fringe performance is not large enough to allow artists to sustain themselves on ticket sales alone. Furthermore, organizations apart from the government are not doing enough to keep the niche alive. The confluence of events means that more fringe artists will pine for diminished government resources while they lament the dearth of government support. This is occurring within Vienna and creating a visible struggle among cultural agents.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Sophie Meunier, “Globalization and Europeanization: A Challenge to French Politics,” *French Politics* 2 (2004): 125-150, 2, <https://www.princeton.edu/~smeunier/Meunier%20Globalization%20Europeanization%20French%20Politics.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2011).

In Vienna's scene the "winners" of the *Theaterreform* tend to argue that the local artists they displaced were ousted from the scene, or pushed to a marginalized position, due to their cultural insignificance. The "winners," who now often enjoy a level of economic success abroad as well as domestically, argue that the "losers" had long been the recipients of Vienna's socialist "handouts" and did not deserve such support. This claim is consistent with current journalistic and scholarly discourse, where it is argued that individuals and groups who do not quickly adapt and flourish within the new mixed system of cultural funding are merely victims of their own irrelevance. For example, Alan Riding of *The New York Times* argues that French artists "often seem out of touch with society" and he blames this on their tendency to view government subsidies as a "birth right," despite the artists' lack of contemporary resonance. Furthermore, Riding argues that the government has tended to cater to the demands of this vocal group of artists who demand their subsidies, rather than allowing the new model to act as a filtration system.<sup>150</sup> According to this logic, government funding has unnecessarily safeguarded artists who fail to connect with mainstream audiences. This angle is rooted in the reality that in a more mixed economic system, mainstream success would be far more important because private corporations tend only to fund projects that increase their visibility among target demographics. The problem with this angle is that most "winning" fringe artists in Vienna are also irrelevant according to these parameters. Even when they perform outside of Vienna, these artists tend to showcase their work within a small niche community composed of an integral audience of other transnational fringe producers. This community is barely self-sustaining and does not have the reach that

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<sup>150</sup> Alan Riding, "No Stumping for Culture in the French Presidential Election," *The New York Times*, Culture section. Online addition, March 14, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/14/arts/14cult.html?pagewanted=print> (accessed December 21, 2010).

most private corporations demand. In Vienna, as elsewhere, the fringe scene is non-commercial by its very nature.

In Vienna's fringe scene, which includes cultural agents who are accustomed to working according to the belief that alternative and antagonistic culture is the government's responsibility to the people, fringe artists will continue to seek government support for their work. Concurrently fringe artists will continue to be faced with difficulty obtaining support from other local sources because most corporations tend to be driven by a desire to accrue more economic capital. To these corporations, arts funding is often understood as a marketing ploy. In Vienna, the few cultural projects that *did* receive private sponsorship over the past years were usually more internationally visible than the pieces that are often displayed in Brut and Tanzquartier throughout the year. The Wiener Festwochen is one example of an international festival that features fringe performance from around Europe and that receives sponsorship from corporations as diverse as Casino Wien, Ottakringer (an Austrian beer company), and Siemens.<sup>151</sup> Funding larger events like these affords the corporations more opportunities to get their corporate logo seen by potential costumers, thus creating greater profit potential. Although the productions currently dominating the stages of Brut and Tanzquartier sometimes enjoy longer runs throughout Europe's transnational fringe spaces, the audiences for these are limited and, therefore, the exact profit potential of funding these works is difficult for corporations to gauge. Evidence for the lack of corporate support for Vienna-based fringe artists is found on the company websites, which are mandated to include the logos of their sponsorship. Most of these sites include the signature label of

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<sup>151</sup> The prominence of such sponsors' logos is evident on the Wiener Festwochen's website and all accompanying publicity materials for the event.

<http://www.festwochen.at/> (accessed December 21, 2010).

the city of Vienna and/or the Federal Republic of Austria. Conspicuously absent are the corporate logos that readily appear on the brochures for the Wiener Festwochen.<sup>152</sup>

Further evidence for the dearth of support for the fringe scene offered by corporations is found in the quantitative data from the 2006 Klamer et al. study on financing the arts and culture in Europe, which shows that artists in Austria (as well as in France, the Netherlands, and Spain) receive less than 3% of private support for culture in relation to public funding.<sup>153</sup> Despite these factors, Vienna's budgets for cultural funding are stagnating; and many fear that the city will gradually decrease support for cultural projects in the coming years.<sup>154</sup> This is happening alongside of the city's growing prominence as a European destination and the gentrification of sections of the city formerly home to people from lower income brackets, including most fringe artists.<sup>155</sup>

In Vienna, the city's diminished support for fringe performance is being, and will continue to be, divided among artists who are creating works that fit into a certain aesthetic mold, which can translate across national borders and thrive within a niche market that is dominated by cultural agents with similar tastes. A select group of these successful government-funded transnational fringe artists will present their work at larger, more visible festivals like the Wiener Festwochen, which corporations also tend to fund. Both the government and the corporations may neglect fringe artists who are attempting

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<sup>152</sup> The websites below are provided as a sampling of the types of funding that Vienna's transnational fringe artists receive.

<http://www.notfoundyettheatre.com/> (accessed March 14, 2011).

<http://www.unitedsorry.com/> (accessed March 14, 2011).

<sup>153</sup> Quoted in Arjo Klamer, Anna Mignosa, Lyudmilla Petrova, *The Relationship Between Public and Private Financing of Culture in the EU*, <http://www.klamer.nl/docs/kmp.pdf> (Accessed March 11, 2011).

<sup>154</sup> In a *Country Report* issued by *IG Theater* in 2006 the authors lament the "stagnation" in budgets for the performing arts, which have not been adjusted for general inflation and the rising costs of living in Vienna.

<sup>155</sup> Sabine Kock, business director for *IG Theater*, interview by author, 16 May 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

to create innovative projects according to an internal creative drive that works as a counter to the prevailing, and increasingly uniform, tastes of Europe's transnational fringe scene. This is likely because these artists, who may also be the ones more apt to intentionally antagonize against local traditions, have far less potential to increase the symbolic and economic capital of the local government and corporations. Despite the lack of support available to fringe artists who do not fit within the current aesthetic and ideological leanings of Europe's transnational fringe scene, they will not cease trying to secure funding from the very sources that have no vested interest in funding them. This is a bleak situation, of which fringe artists are well aware. Consequently, they are making greater artistic compromises. Principal among these compromises includes the tendency to reverse the classic avant-garde "winner loses logic," which has long played an important role in the development of European fringe performance.

The current system in Europe's fringe scene is somewhat antithetical to the "avant-garde impulse," which many of the city's fringe artists claim to possess. European fringe artists are not likely to eschew government funding nor are they likely to generate products until they have first secured external financial support.<sup>156</sup> They have become so naturalized into socialist-inspired models of arts funding and into the progressively economic demands of a niche transnational cultural market that their dependency on these has become a dominant part of their performance culture.

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<sup>156</sup> In an interview with New York's alternative culture publication *Bomb*, Pavel Liska of the Nature Theater of Oklahoma, a prominent New-York-based fringe group that has enjoyed a great deal of success in Vienna's cultural field (see chapter three), claims:

artists in Europe sometimes say 'I didn't receive my subsidies so I'm not going to produce any work.' I don't understand that. I would still try, but in Europe there is no infrastructure for that. I would feel very lonely to be the only one rehearsing in my own apartment where most of our shows are created.<sup>156</sup>

Pavel's statement is evidence for the dependency on external sources of funding that most European fringe artists have.

According to the classic avant-garde “winner loses logic” dependency on outside economic support threatens to disinherit fringe artists of their self-identification as outsiders and limit their creative freedom. Within the fringe scene there is a complex interplay between the artists’ dependency on external support and their tendency to hold onto the last vestiges of their “avant-garde impulse,” which is rooted in a belief that artists are autonomous agents able to free themselves from the manacles of the corruptions of established society. This interplay amounts to an identity crisis, which the artists often knowingly confront in their discourse and products.

There are some artists who exist in a more autonomous field than those I have been describing. These cultural agents are not as subject to financial dependency on the transnational fringe scene or the local government; instead, they intentionally become non-participants in the processes that tend to create the identity crisis mentioned above. The scant presence of such relatively autonomous agents within Vienna’s fringe scene is evidence for the majority’s extreme lack of independence.

Warren Rosenzweig of the Jewish Theater of Austria, who is himself a transnational fringe artist, is perhaps the most vocal non-participant in Vienna’s institutionalized fringe scene. Although his theatre has existed since 1999, the theater’s website proudly proclaims that it is “an international stage for an intercultural Diaspora...*not sponsored by the city of Vienna.*”<sup>157</sup> The theatre’s disassociation with the city of Vienna’s institutional system of cultural support is a way for those at the theatre to articulate their independence and “loser wins” mentality. Rosenzweig describes his position as “marginalized,” “non-mainstream,” and “non-normative,” as opposed to many

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<sup>157</sup> The Jewish Theatre of Austria, <http://www.jta.at/> (accessed December 21, 2010)

other European fringe artists who, he claims, demonstrate opposite characteristics.<sup>158</sup> Rosenzweig understands that his duty is to force the local population into confronting their Nazi past, which he argues is still underrepresented in the culture as a whole. Believing that xenophobia is still a prominent issue within Austrian society, he cannot anticipate ever receiving funding from the city of Vienna for his Jewish theatre. Even if funding were an option, he would fear the underhanded, and subtle censorship, or even self-censorship, which might result.<sup>159</sup> Rosenzweig fully demonstrates his own “avant-garde impulse” when he states, I believe “that the (funding) system should be torn down.”<sup>160</sup>

This theatre’s renegade posture functions as a sharp contrast to the mentalities of the vast majority of established and fringe artists in Vienna who find themselves in a seemingly inescapable position of collaborating with the demands of an aesthetically, unified European fringe culture industry and to the socio-economic interests of Viennese cultural policy. It appears that there are, indeed, artists within Vienna who still function according to the “avant-garde impulse,” however, these artists are located far at the margins of culture and have no place within the city’s consecrated fringe scene, which is the subject of this dissertation’s analysis. These artists are also in a different category than the so-called “losers” of the *Theaterreform* because they manage to sustain themselves by occupying specific niche markets within the city that have little to do with state policies, and more to do with audience desires, albeit the desires of a few. Bourdieu refers to two principles of hierarchicalization, the heteronomous, “favorable to those who

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<sup>158</sup> Warren Rosenzweig, director of Austria’s Jewish Theater, interview by author, 22 May, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

dominate the field economically and politically” and the autonomous, those who “tend to identify with a degree of independence from the economy, seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise.”<sup>161</sup> When placed alongside the more autonomous Jewish Theatre of Austria, it appears that those in Vienna’s institutionalized transnational fringe scene (or at least the scene’s “winners”) may somehow be in the former category, despite their claims of independence and marginalization. More so than ever, as a result of various factors related to Europeanization, it appears that artists in the city’s consecrated transnational fringe scene are indeed subject a degree of self-editing, if not self-censorship, that artists at the true margins of Viennese culture appear to largely avoid.

### **Vienna’s Integral Fringe Community and its Top-Down Imposition of Internationalization and Quality**

Vienna’s struggle for legitimacy in Europe’s cultural field has been most manifested in the city’s *Theaterreform*, which placed more power into the hands of a few administrators. These administrators, who had an overwhelming orientation towards Europe, had the specific task of funding fringe artists who had the potential to succeed in Europe’s transnational social spaces. This promised to bring greater symbolic capital to Vienna’s brand. Despite its non-local, European orientation this group of administrators and the artists they support constitute an integral community, which is firmly affiliated with the city’s socialist *SPOe* party. In this community, the notion of quality appears to be manufactured in a top-down manner. Furthermore, as the government-issued funds of this integral community become more limited, it seems that self-editing among the artists will ensue. Transnational fringe artists’ self-editing resulting from collaborating with the

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<sup>161</sup> Bourdieu, 40.

prevailing tastes of those in charge of financing is a factor recognized in the ERICarts study on artists' mobility when the authors recommend that artists "devise and define first the content of (an) artistic proposal, independent from how it will be realized and financed; then look for the appropriate funding schemes and possible co-producers."<sup>162</sup> This suggestion comes with a warning that the opposite scheme, i.e. perceiving the tastes of those who fund and developing a project with this in mind is a detriment to quality artistic production, although it is often done in this way. In Vienna's fringe scene it does appear that self-editing has already been happening, albeit in subtle ways, as centralized notions of quality are encouraged by those in charge of distributing funds among artists. Even though there is no explicit censorship within Vienna's system of arts funding, the small, univocal nature of the community means that a certain level of self-editing will persist.

Vienna's funding system is operated by a system of internal connections and professional friendships. Although this system is driven by well-intentioned individuals, these culture makers, or social agents, constitute one arm of the city's prevailing *SPOe* party and must function according to its precepts. Likewise, the artists who depend on these individuals must cater to the party's predominate notions of aesthetic quality. Gossip about the prevailing tastes of the curators and artistic directors of Vienna's major fringe venues abounds. Such conversation is partially rooted in the writings of various journalists from publications such as *GIFT*, *Der Falter* (translated as the folder, a satirical Vienna-based news magazine), and the *Wiener Zeitung* (Viennese newspaper), who often

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<sup>162</sup> Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Educationa dn Culture)*, (2008), [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

comment on cultural issues that affect the fringe scene. However, the majority of this hearsay stems from the artists' own personal dealings with the curators and artistic directors.

Within the context of Vienna, it appears that all the artists who are successfully working know the curators and the artistic directors of the major venues on a first-name basis and have met with many of them to discuss their work. In an interview with the current curators of the city of Vienna they claimed that they have “never refused to meet” a given artist about a project. Furthermore, they emphasized the “direct communication” that occurs between themselves and all the artists within the scene.<sup>163</sup> They argue that this openness is essential to assure that the artists are given a fair opportunity to function within the system. Juergen Weishaeupl, current curator of the city of Vienna, says that he and his fellow curators often know the artists by the time they meet with them to discuss their project proposals. He adds that he gets to know these artists in a number of ways, i.e. by spending time at Brut's bar after a performance and having a drink with the artists, observing DVDs of artists' prior productions, and/or receiving emails or letters from potential artists. It appears that the curators have a multi-directional approach to determining who gets funding and that this is presided over by personal communication with the artists. Despite their well-intentioned efforts, it must be noted that the curators themselves are part of a larger system that is dominated by political agendas.

Vienna's curators, who are seemingly given a level of autonomy, are appointed to their positions because they already had an established track record of taste that aligned with the city's overall goals for the fringe scene. Those who initiated the *Theaterreform*

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<sup>163</sup> Andrea Amort, Angela Heide, and Juergen Weishaeupl, curators of the city of Vienna, interview by author, 19 August 2010, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

insisted that the curators should be determined based on their “theoretical intelligence and interest” regarding “the world’s contemporary art development in recent years” and on their current activity and visibility in Europe’s expansive fringe scene.<sup>164</sup> Since the reform, it appears that the curators have cohered universally to this insistence. For example, Andre Turnheim, who was among the second wave of curators after the *Theaterreform* went into effect, demonstrates his orientation toward transnational social spaces outside of Vienna when he states that it is “necessary” for administrators to be well informed regarding what aesthetics are materializing throughout Europe.<sup>165</sup> He also stresses that although cultural diversity is not necessarily the priority, when determining which artist will get funding, it is a large factor.<sup>166</sup> Similarly, Marianne Vejtisek, also among the second wave of curators, states that “Viennese taste needs to adapt to international tastes, not the other way (around).”<sup>167</sup> All the curators from the time of the *Theaterreform* until now have had a degree of international experience. Their resumes include performance and administrative work in Berlin’s historically international fringe scene, education in places like London and Australia, and a record of performances and/or journal publications on highly international performances presented throughout Europe’s system of co-production venues and festivals.<sup>168</sup> In sum, it appears that Vienna’s integral community, led by a *SPOe*-concentrated group of administrators, was appointed based on their exposure to the transnational art market and due to their non-local ideological orientation. Even though the curators have changed a few times since

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<sup>164</sup> Aschwanden et al.

<sup>165</sup> Andre Turnheim, former curator for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 8 May 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Marianne Vejtisek, former curator of the city of Vienna, interview by author, 3 June 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>168</sup> The following website provides more specific information on the current curators’ resumes. <http://www.kuratoren-theatertanz.at/team.html> (accessed March 13, 2011).

the initiation of the *Theaterreform*, this transnational orientation has remained a constant. Furthermore, Vienna's fringe artists appear to possess an acute awareness of the international tastes of these curators.

Generally, it is the artists' responsibility to make contact with the city's curators and to pitch their ideas to them in the hope of being considered artistically viable and fundable. Although the curators attempt to make the communication process as open as possible, there are potential issues within the system. In most instances the curators meet the artists several times. During these meetings the curators help the artists adapt their projects in order to assure that they will have the potential to reach a given level of quality determined by themselves and the office of the *Kulturstadtrat*. Regarding quality, the curators stress that "we have some know how," which they argue comes from their extensive experience as administrators, critics, and academics within the field of "contemporary performance."<sup>169</sup> When asked how they determine funding, they argued that their decisions are the result of a complex formula, where all aspects of the artists' work, from process to performance, are under investigation.<sup>170</sup> This notion of a "formula" for determining quality, also mentioned by the people who held positions as curators between 2007 and 2009, is unwritten and the curators freely admit that it is not something that can be simply articulated or objectified. Furthermore, the curators acknowledge their own mentorship role within the system. To a certain extent the curators contribute not only city funds but also artistic input, which the artists must graciously accept in order to receive the money. Andre Turnheim insists that the

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Andrea Amort states that the artists' "process is important," signaling that this too is under investigation by those who determine the funding. In addition, it is "important for artists to show it (their process)." Ibid.

curators' authority is held in check by the fact that they do not stand to earn better reputations based on the projects they fund, whereas the artistic directors of the city's fringe venues do; however, the curator's notoriety among the fringe community seems to be contrary evidence to Turnheim's claim.<sup>171</sup> Nevertheless, I am not arguing that the curators wish to establish their authority over the artists' aesthetic constructions.<sup>172</sup> Instead, I am suggesting that the city's current system does have the potential to sway younger artists in a certain direction, which is in line with the aesthetic tastes of the curators, jurors, and artistic directors of Brut and Tanzquartier.

Turnheim states that, although some claim that the prevailing tastes of the curators who operated between 2007 and 2009 was "avant-garde," he and his fellow curators merely located artists in the scene who were "strong" and funded them based on their "quality" rather than the artists' aesthetic orientation.<sup>173</sup> Similarly, Thomas Frank of Brut claims that when deciding on Brut's programming he looks for "quality." When past and present curators and the artistic directors were asked how they define "quality," the concrete nature of the term began to break down. For example, Frank claims that "quality" is synonymous with whether or not an idea is "striking."<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, Turnheim admitted that "there are no common standards" and that there is no direct rubric for determining quality.<sup>175</sup> The ambiguity in these administrators' responses is representative of the inability of individuals and collectives to define what is professional

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<sup>171</sup> Andre Turnheim, former curator for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 8 May 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>172</sup> In chapter two I will discuss the power of the artistic directors of Brut and Tanzquartier.

<sup>173</sup> Andre Turnheim, former curator for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 8 May 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>174</sup> Thomas Frank, co-artistic director of Brut, interview by author, 17 May 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>175</sup> Andre Turnheim, former curator for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 8 May 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

or not. Evidently, a specific standard for judging a performance or an artistic concept does not exist. When searching to determine criteria for judging taste it is best to examine the track record of the arbiters, who in this case are a small group of administrators appointed directly by Vienna's ruling *SPOe* party.

Pierre Bourdieu claims that what is at stake in the field of cultural production is the ability to define the artist and to impose a dominant aesthetic notion on those who operate in the field.<sup>176</sup> He argues that the notion of quality is generated by various social agents within the cultural field who act according to a wide array of personal preferences, which stem from economic, political, and other leanings. These social agents, in this instance curators, jurors, and artistic directors, manufacture the notion of quality in order to limit which artists may be consecrated within the cultural field. The social agents argue that limiting is necessary, especially when considering the exhaustible amount of funds available to sustain the artists in the field. Thus, in Bourdieu's analysis the concept of a universal aesthetic, an idea derived from the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant, is de-legitimized and replaced with a more subjective notion of quality.<sup>177</sup> The implication of Bourdieu's theory is twofold. One, it suggests that the notion of quality can be nothing more than a subjective phenomenon and that when social agents claim that it is objective they are in error. As Bourdieu claims, "culture is not what one is but what one has, or rather, what one has become," which means that there is no natural arbiter of quality except what one has been conditioned to accept through various social forces.<sup>178</sup> Two, by claiming to have a solid, objective notion of quality the administrators are exerting their ability to exclude certain artists from the field of cultural production.

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<sup>176</sup> Bourdieu, 42.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 234.

They are perpetuating the competition within the scene. This dissertation has heretofore argued that, within Vienna, quality has become synonymous with international, or at least with the ability for a product to be marketed in a transnational fringe scene, which is critiqued by the artists themselves as being somewhat aesthetically and ideologically uniform. Those who do not cater to this dominant notion of quality are pushed out of the local field. Furthermore, due to their complete dependence on the integral community of curators, jurors, and artistic directors, those who have been pushed out of the scene are rendered all but powerless to exert their own influence through more grassroots means.<sup>179</sup>

The “winners” of the *Theaterreform* tend to argue that funding decisions are based on a more objective sense of quality and the “losers” of the *Theaterreform* claim that the system is rooted in subjective notions of quality, derived from *SPOe* leanings. Those artists and administrators who occupy the “loser’s circle,” claim that the entire *Theaterreform* was merely an effort to push one, centralized version of quality and eliminate the artists who did not submit to it. For example, Sebastian Protl of Tanz Atelier offers a highly cynical and yet, in terms of Bourdieu’s theory, consistent explanation for the *Theaterreform*. He suggests that the reform was instituted in order to “cut down the scene.”<sup>180</sup> Many of the scene’s consecrated artists claim to be weary of the scene’s vocal majority, of which Protl is a member, who receive little to none of the city’s dwindling support. Haiko Pfof claims that in the past years these “losers” of the *Theaterreform* have banded together under the umbrella of the *IG Theater* in order to

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<sup>179</sup> I am not suggesting that all local artists are being pushed out of the scene; however, it does appear that many of these artists have been somewhat divested of their cultural and symbolic capital, and that perhaps subtle acts of symbolic violence are being inflicted upon them due to prevailing trends within the city’s cultural funding policy.

<sup>180</sup> Sebastian Protl, artistic director of Tanz Atelier, interview by author, 19 June 2010, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

form a united front against the system, which they believe to be subjective and corrupt. He also argues that, as a “professional,” he has no need to pander to the “losers” demands.<sup>181</sup> Uwe Mattheiss, an original author of the *Theaterreform*, argues that the artists who do not get funding “say it’s personal taste” while the artists who do get funding “say it’s because they were great.” In other words, those who do not receive funding see the system as subjective while those who do receive funding view the structure as objective.<sup>182</sup> Mattheiss admits that he has personal taste, but that his taste alone is not what dictates his funding decisions.<sup>183</sup> The artists need to engage with him and other curators in an open dialogue. If the curators believe that the artists have a level of professionalism, then they are funded. But it is impossible for artists and administrators to be completely objective in this process. When determining funding criteria, they must, therefore, consider certain projected outcomes of their funding decisions, namely the explicit and implicit intent of Vienna’s current cultural funding policy, which is to help increase its symbolic capital in an expanding European field of cultural production. Based on these material factors, it appears that Vienna-based fringe artist Yosi Wanunu’s claim that in Vienna “people run away from being local at all” has a high level of credence.<sup>184</sup> Thus another seemingly ironic, yet dominant, aspect of

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<sup>181</sup> Many others within the scene who are currently associated with the prevailing regime also refer to the *IG Theater* and those associated with it as “losers.” For example, Andre Turnheim refers to the whole organization as “an association of losers” who are “not in touch with what is going on.” There are biases on both the “winning” and “losing” sides and none of their comments should be taken at face value.

Andre Turnheim, former curator for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 8 May 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>182</sup>Uwe Mattheiss, co-author of the *Theaterreform*, interview by author, 29 April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Yosi Wanunu and Kornelia Kilga, artistic director and producer of *Toxic Dreams*, interview by author, 20 May 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

Vienna's fringe performance culture is revealed to be the artists' need to collaborate with the local governments' process of internationalization, which is imposed from above.

### **The *SPOe*'s Non-Local Agenda for Vienna's Fringe Scene**

In Vienna the ability to dictate taste is placed into the hands of select administrators who are appointed by the *SPOe*. Furthermore, the fringe scene is inhabited by artists who act as willing, yet critical participants in this agenda.<sup>185</sup> The artists are well aware that the city's principle venues, Tanzquartier and Brut, "belong to the city and (that) the city decides their leadership."<sup>186</sup> In addition, the artistic directors of these venues admit that they are deeply entrenched within the *SPOe* agenda, and are politicized just as the curators and jurors are.<sup>187</sup> In most instances, in order for an artist or group to be considered by Brut, it must first have been approved for funding by the city of Vienna or the Federal Republic of Austria.<sup>188</sup> Also, the impact of an individual artistic director, while potentially great, is somewhat limited by the caps placed on their tenures. In a recent article published on the eve of Gareis' forced retirement from the directorship of the Tanzquartier, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* (translated as South German newspaper) critic Eva-Elisabeth Fischer called Sigrid Gareis, "the most prominent victim of Vienna's

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<sup>185</sup> Sophie Meunier acknowledges how in France politicians must demonstrate their control over the economic system in the presence of accusations that the global market decreases it. This may be one more reason why Austria's *SPOe* emphasizes its role in the cultural arena. In Austria, as in France, politicians still have a need to articulate their prominent role in the success and/or failure of certain niches.

Sophie Meunier, "Globalization and Europeanization: A Challenge to French Politics," *French Politics* 2 (2004): 125-150, 4, <https://www.princeton.edu/~smeunier/Meunier%20Globalization%20Europeanization%20French%20Politics.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2011).

<sup>186</sup> Bettina Jilek, researcher for MA-7, interview by author, June 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>187</sup> In an article entitled "Restaging Europe: a Critical Diary" Dragan Klaic argues that "those running performing arts venues, companies, and festivals are becoming politicized—perhaps even more than the artists—because they are intermediaries, standing under the multidirectional pressures of subsidy givers, boards, competing institutions, and the media."

Dragan Klaic, "Restaging Europe: a Critical Diary," *Theatre* 32, no. 3, (2002).

<sup>188</sup> Thomas Frank, co-artistic director of Brut, interview by author, 17 May 2008, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

theatre reform which stipulates that posts such as hers may only be prolonged twice.”<sup>189</sup> Although this stipulation may have been instituted by the government as an important safeguard against further stagnation, the discourse generated in the fringe scene surrounding Gareis’ retirement from Tanzquartier had the distinct marker of fear coming from the artists who had enjoyed success under her tenure and worried that the shift in leadership would require them to cater to a new set of aesthetic demands handed down from above. The limits on the terms of the artistic directors proves that although the personal and political are highly enmeshed within Vienna’s transnational fringe scene, the political sphere always has the upper hand.

The thick political atmosphere within Vienna is a factor noted by many within the scene. Sigrid Gareis, former artistic director of Tanzquartier, has commented on her “institutional burden” while working at the venue. She acknowledges that the success and failure of administrators and artists within the scene corresponds to the rise and fall of politicians. This factor is at the forefront of artists’ minds because they have limited options for developing work outside the politically-charged capital. As Gareis states, for Austrian artists “it’s Vienna or nothing...politicians know this...people depend on this.”<sup>190</sup> Gareis explicitly links the fates of people working in the fringe scene to “the party policy” of the ruling *SPOe*, which “means everything in culture.”<sup>191</sup> The increased control by the *SPOe* over the ability to legitimize cultural agents continues to play a dominant role in the emergent culture and aesthetic of Vienna’s transnational fringe scene.

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<sup>189</sup> Eva-Elisabeth Fischer, “The Founding Director – Sigrid Gareis bids farewell to the Tanzquartier Vienna,” (2009), <http://www.goethe.de/kue/tut/iba/bue/en4889189.htm> (accessed December 21, 2010).

<sup>190</sup> Sigrid Gareis, former artistic director of Tanzquartier, interview by author, 15 April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

The more radical opinions held by artists, located at the margins of the fringe scene, are not far removed from Gareis' own comments. For example, Sebastian Protl of the fringe group Tanz Atelier argues that the entire *Theaterreform* was not generated and carried out by the artists themselves, but by the politicians. Not only the reform at large, but also the smaller-scale daily operations of the city's fringe venues are directly influenced by the *SPOe*. Warren Rosenzweig of the Jewish Theater of Austria claims that "if you are an artistic director, chances are you are a socialist."<sup>192</sup> The prevailing political trends that have kept the prominent *SPOe* political party member Andreas Mailath-Pokorny in the position of Vienna's *Kulturstadtrat* (officially called the *Stadtrat für Kultur und Wissenschaft*, translated as the city councilor for culture and science) since 2001 have assured that the political affiliations of those in charge of administering the city's major cultural venues would remain in a similar position. Christine Standfest of the Vienna-based fringe group theatercombinant argues that a more "authoritative attitude towards culture and the arts" has developed in the wake of the reform.<sup>193</sup> Former curator Andre Turnheim admits that, although the *SPOe* would deny it, they still "want the power to decide" aesthetics and, therefore, are not apt to give artists free spaces to develop their work outside of the scene's institutionalized venues, which are controlled by artistic directors with socialist sympathies.<sup>194</sup> Indeed, even though the current artistic directors

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<sup>192</sup> Warren Rosenzweig, director of the Jewish Theater of Austria, interview by author, 22 May 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>193</sup> Christine Standfest, member of theatercombinant, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>194</sup> Andre Turnheim, former curator for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 8 May 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

of Brut and Tanzquartier come from Germany and were once outside of the local political system, their rhetoric and practices have been highly consistent with *SPOe* party lines.<sup>195</sup>

Significantly, there are many similarities between the language used in the *SPOe*'s rhetoric and the words employed by Vienna's transnational fringe artists who came to prominence immediately before and shortly after the *SPOe*-initiated *Theaterreform*. In a *SPOe* statement on identity and critical openness in arts and media, the party clearly articulates its mission to promote cultural diversity in the fringe and established scenes.<sup>196</sup> The party proposes to generate this activity through developing global networks for creative dialogue and production and promoting international exchange programs among artists.<sup>197</sup> Furthermore, the *SPOe* affirms the EU and the

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<sup>195</sup> I will demonstrate this consistency in the following chapter. At present I will highlight some recent *SPOe* rhetoric, which gives credence to my overarching argument that Vienna's fringe scene has undergone a self-conscious internationalization as a result of politicians' desires to increase the city's cultural capital in the niche scene of European fringe performance.

<sup>196</sup> The German phrasing is,

*Wir Sozialdemokratinnen und Sozialdemokraten bekennen uns zum Grundsatz der Freiheit der Kunst und zu künstlerischer Vielfalt. Kunstpolitik hat sich nicht in künstlerisches Schaffen einzumischen, sie soll vielmehr Rahmenbedingungen und Möglichkeiten schaffen, damit sich die Künste frei entfalten können... Wir wollen eine künstlerische Landschaft, in der das Experimentelle neben dem bereits Akzeptierten Platz findet.*

I translate this as,

We Social democrats commit to the principle of the freedom of the arts and artistic diversity. Arts politics should not meddle in artistic work, instead they should create conditions and possibilities so that the artists can be free. We wish to create an acceptable place for experiments in the artistic landscape.

“Politische Perspektiven: Identität und kritische Öffentlichkeit,”

<http://www.spoe.at/page.php?P=104132> (accessed December 21, 2010).

<sup>197</sup> The German phrasing is,

*In einer durch Kommunikation und Mobilität der Menschen vernetzten Welt ist die Beschränkung von Kunst und Kultur auf den nationalen Raum überholt. Wir streben die produktive Förderung und Umsetzung eines grenzüberschreitenden künstlerischen und kulturellen Schaffens und Dialogs an. Diese Internationalität fördern wir auch im Bereich der Kulturpolitik. Deshalb unterstützen wir den beständigen Austausch von internationalen Erfahrungen sowie die Koordination von gemeinsamen Programmen, z.B. auf europäischer Ebene.*

I translate this as,

Through communication and mobility people are connected throughout the world, making the limited notions of art and culture in terms of national categories obsolete. We strive to create productive funding and artistic and cultural creations and dialogues. This international support is also in the field of cultural politics. Therefore we support the exchange of international experiences as well as the coordination of complete programs, for example at the European level. Ibid.

importance of fostering solidarity with non-Austrian EU citizens through the city's cultural projects.<sup>198</sup> These are especially relevant for projects that do not rely heavily on the geographically-bounded German language, but rather on more visual elements of the *mise en scene*. Similarly, the Vienna-based artists who drafted the *Manifesto of an European Performance Policy* articulate their practice of producing work that “develops partnerships, networks and collaborations, disregards national borders and actively contributes to the local, European and trans-national contexts.”<sup>199</sup> The similarity in tone and language between the *SPOe*'s rhetoric towards cultural openness and documents generated by the fringe community suggests that there is a level of solidarity between the government and the artists who are currently thriving with governmental support.<sup>200</sup>

Those within the *SPOe*'s political system who are in charge of administering funds to artists tend to concur that the government has a centralized role in determining the scene's characteristics; however, they argue that the control is soft and far less bureaucratic than in many other European cities. It is common for these administrators to focus on the *division of power* that is accomplished by the existence of the jurors, curators, and artistic directors of Vienna's fringe venues. Furthermore, it is common for them to focus on the *personal* nature of interactions between administrators and artists.

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<sup>198</sup> *Wir Sozialdemokratinnen und Sozialdemokraten stehen für eine Politik, die den Frieden als bestimmenden Wert einer Gesellschaft betrachtet. Daher ist für uns die Einigung Europas ein entscheidendes Friedensprojekt. Nur durch den schrittweisen Aufbau eines gemeinsamen Europa können die Voraussetzungen geschaffen werden, Konflikte zwischen Staaten, aber auch zwischen ethnischen Gruppen, friedlich zu regeln. Für uns ist die Europäische Union daher eine Gemeinschaft der Solidarität, der Chancengleichheit, der Toleranz und der Sicherheit, die all jenen Staaten Europas offenstehen muß, die diese Werte teilen und die gemeinsam festgelegten Voraussetzungen erfüllen.*

Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Jerome Bel, et al “Manifest: an die Europäische Kommission und deren Kulturpolitische Vertreter/innen,” *GIFT* (July, 2002), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61304&jahr=2002> (accessed December 13, 2010).

<sup>200</sup> Examined from one perspective, it appears that Rosenzweig's often-trumpeted criticism that the fringe scene's “centralized aesthetic comes from the Socialist party” appears to have a level of credence.

Warren Rosenzweig, director of the Jewish Theater of Austria, interview by author, 22 May 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

Andrea Amort, current curator of the city of Vienna, argues that she and her colleagues make themselves highly accessible to artists and that this helps “give politics a face.”<sup>201</sup> She argues that the curators should not be understood as people who block accessibility to government funds, but as co-collaborators with the artists themselves.<sup>202</sup> Although the curators may be generally well-intentioned and well-informed, they are still influenced by their own political leanings and are indebted to the highly bureaucratic processes that brought them to power. For this reason, despite their attention to maintain *personal* interactions, they are complicit in the institutionalization of Vienna’s fringe scene according to party lines and glocalised political agendas. Although this may be a necessary outcome of a democratic system of cultural politics, Vienna’s fringe artists are so indebted to party politics that they find themselves operating, not in an autonomous field where they are free to launch specific, unpopular critiques against prevailing government will, but in a highly structured and interconnected field where they must express solitary with government will or cease to produce their work. Opting out of the system is only possible in cases where the artists occupy even more specific niches within the city, like the Jewish Theatre of Austria does.

The *SPOe* appoints a member of their party to the highly influential role of *Kulturstadtrat*, whose policies necessarily follow party lines. The *Kulturstadtrat*’s power generally derives from his/her ability to directly appoint certain members of the team of curators and jurors and to initiate searches for the fringe venues’ artistic directors. Furthermore, the *Kulturstadtrat* has the power to approve and/or veto the committee-led

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<sup>201</sup> Andrea Amort, Angela Heide, and Juergen Weishaeupl, curators of the city of Vienna, interview by author, 19 August 2010, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>202</sup> The curators stress that “theatre is collaborative as a system” and they see themselves as co-collaborators along with the artists.

Ibid.

appointment of the other curators and jurors. He/she can also select to fund certain artists who were not recommended by the curators and jurors. In an interview with Marianne Vejtisek, former curator for the city of Vienna, she informed me that the group Tanz Atelier was not recommended for funding by the curators or jurors, but due to the leader's connections with the current city cultural minister, he was able to secure enough money to survive.<sup>203</sup> In an interview with Uwe Mattheiss, one of the co-authors of the *Theaterreform*, he informed me that the city cultural minister recently funded a "bad vaudeville actor" just because "he knows someone" internally.<sup>204</sup> Although the claims of Mattheiss, Vejtisek, and others amount to mere hearsay, they are evidence of a larger issue within the scene. Despite the widely held belief that the government should fund fringe performance, Vienna-based culture makers, even those originally appointed by their own *SPOe* party, hold a degree of suspicion towards the system. Furthermore, even those inside the "winner's circle" recognize the centralized control of the fringe scene and how, in the past decade, the *SPOe* party has been leading the scene's self-conscious internationalization. Of course, such winners of the *Theaterreform* are apt to argue that this self-conscious internationalism combats stagnant localism, a viewpoint with which many of the politicians responsible for the reform would agree. Nevertheless, the suspicion among the fringe scene's cultural agents is an integral aspect of their performance culture. A comprehensive understanding of their products requires an acknowledgement of this factor.

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<sup>203</sup> However, the *Kulturstadrat*'s power to extend financial favors to his close personal ties does not always mean that these artists will be accepted by the community at large. For example, despite Tanz Atelier's money, they did not appear at Tanzquartier, their former home venue during Sigrid Gareis' tenure.

<sup>204</sup> Uwe Mattheiss, co-author of the *Theaterreform*, interview by author, 29 April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

The *SPOe*'s control over the scene dominates the cultural agents' discourse and alters their practice accordingly, in favor of internationalization. In an interview with Bettina Jilek, who works for *MA-7*, the *Kulturstadtrat*'s research division, she informed me that all work that is supported should have "some relation to Austria and Vienna;" however, this relationship is not clearly specified and a myriad of products may be classified under this extremely broad category. For example, some projects are funded because the artists claim to want to "bring culture to Vienna that the city has not seen before." While other artists live in Vienna as foreigners and wish to show their work. Jilek animatedly states that being Austrian has never been a prerequisite for securing city funding, nor should it be. Juergen Weishaeupl, current curator of the city of Vienna, admits that as a result of the *SPOe*-led internationalization of Vienna's fringe scene, "competition became more difficult, so maybe it is true that native Austrians have more trouble" finding ways to achieve representation within the scene.<sup>205</sup> This statement seems to confirm the claim made by former city curator Marianne Vejtisek who argues that within the current system it is even helpful "not to be Austrian."<sup>206</sup> Transnational fringe artists wishing to enter into the system need only to move to Vienna and become a member of a *Verein*, which is an organization legitimated by the city of Vienna and approved for receiving funds.

The process of becoming a *Verein* is quite simple, and this factor has enabled the *SPOe*'s outward-looking initiatives. In order to form a *Verein* artists merely need to fill out paper work and register with the local district police in Vienna. Being a citizen of

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<sup>205</sup> Andrea Amort, Angela Heide, and Juergen Weishaeupl, curators of the city of Vienna, interview by author, 19 August 2010, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>206</sup> Marianne Vejtisek, former curator of the city of Vienna, interview by author, 3 June, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

Austria is not a prerequisite to forming a *Verein*, but being a citizen of the EU often is.<sup>207</sup> Many within Vienna's fringe scene argue that the *Theaterreform* abetted the task of internationalizing the scene by making the process whereby a *Verein* applies for funding even more user-friendly.<sup>208</sup> For example, before the *Theaterreform* fewer documents were written in English, which meant that success in Vienna was dependent upon a performer's knowledge of written German, or an artist's connection with someone who had such knowledge, oftentimes a native Austrian or a German. After the *Theaterreform*, English language became a more common method of discourse within the scene, and was incorporated into selected government documents and funding applications.<sup>209</sup> The 2008 report on artists' mobility states that the use of English for such purposes is still not a prevalent aspect of some European nations' cultural policy and that this severely limits the transnational mobility of artists throughout Europe.<sup>210</sup> The reality that Vienna's cultural policy seems to have a solution to the language barrier issue is further evidence for the prominent role that Vienna's government is attempting to play in Europe's transnational fringe scene. The ease with which non-Austrians can form a *Verein* and

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<sup>207</sup> Bettina Jilek, researcher for MA-7, interview by author, June 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>208</sup> The current curators of the city of Vienna informed me that the *Theaterreform* made it easier to make connections and assemble performance groups characterized by national diversity.

Andrea Amort, Angela Heide, and Juergen Weishaupl, curators of the city of Vienna, interview by author, 19 August 2010, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> The report states, "Many artists complain that they are not able to complete the application forms. Application procedures are complex and act as a deterrent for many cultural workers to apply for mobility funds. In some countries, *language barriers* are among the challenges they face, especially as regards schemes offered by other countries which are open to foreign artists or cultural professionals. This confirms the importance of strategies promoting multilingualism as well as the key role of *intermediaries* such as agencies or networks to help facilitate mobility processes."

Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Educationa dn Culture)*, (2008), [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

apply to the city for funding, coupled with the outward-looking initiatives of the *SPOe*-influenced office of the city cultural minister has created conditions where non-Austrians can thrive, sometimes, at the exclusion of native Austrians. Connecting this phenomenon with the complex notion of taste, which also seems to derive from the centralized control of the *SPOe* party, I suggest that the prevailing taste, or concept of quality, in Vienna's fringe scene is decisively non-local, anti-nationalistic, and transnational. This is having a profound impact on the aesthetic outcomes of the artists' work.

### **Vienna's New Transnational Fringe Aesthetic**

Many fringe artists that are outside of the scene, i.e. the "losers" of the *Theaterreform*, claim that artists within the system must pander to the prevailing notions of taste being imposed upon them from above. For example, Warren Rosenzweig of the Jewish Theater of Austria argues that the intense dependency on the government and institutions for funding leads to an atmosphere wherein artists are forced to self-censor their work. He states that when artists write applications, they ask themselves whether their concepts conform to the tastes of the curators, jurors, artistic directors, and the presiding city cultural minister. Rosenzweig claims "it's not about community and artistic passion, it's about the money."<sup>211</sup> Similarly, Sebastian Protl of Tanz Atelier claims that artists are constantly trying to discern the prevailing establishment's taste and that artists' conversations, even artists in the "winner's circle," consistently center on their money, or lack thereof, rather than on actual artistic experimentation.<sup>212</sup> Christine Standfest of theatercombinant argues that the system is currently structured in such a way

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<sup>211</sup> Warren Rosenzweig, director of the Jewish Theater of Austria, interview by author, 22 May 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>212</sup> Sebastian Protl, artistic director of Tanz Atelier, interview by author, 19 June 2010, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

that artists “arrange (themselves) within a concept of subventions and try to create according to this.”<sup>213</sup> Such claims have a degree of credence. While artists are theoretically free to produce non-commercial work without the sanctioning of the local government, the artists composing Vienna’s fringe scene are consistently overwhelmed with the scene’s discourse on economic and structural factors. These same artists find that the major pitfall of trying to exist outside of the system is the inability to find the spaces, resources, and manpower needed to produce quality work.

It appears that a level of self-editing among the consecrated and unconsecrated artists is a natural byproduct of the *SPOe*’s efforts to increase the symbolic capital of Vienna’s brand in the transnational social spaces of Europe’s interconnected cultural field. In the past decade, this self-editing has increased due to shifting policies at the local level, which were spawned by Europeanization and the rise of more neo-liberal policies in Europe’s cultural field as a whole. These various material factors have created a dominant aesthetic within Vienna’s transnational fringe scene, which is marked by its adherence to what is marketable in Europe’s elaborate system of co-production venues and festivals.<sup>214</sup>

There were major bi-products of Vienna’s *Theaterreform*, which are particularly visible on stage today. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the reality that a less

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<sup>213</sup> Christine Standfest, member of theatercombinant, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>214</sup> *IG Theater*, although its members are actively involved in Europe’s transnational social spaces, has always been advocating for the rights of local artists. This includes artists of mixed cultural backgrounds. Incidentally, *IG Theater* has often argued that lessening the amount of spoken theatre within the fringe performance scene threatened to lead to more cultural homogeneity rather than heterogeneity. This would be the case because the less linguistic forms of performance that were favored by the reformers were not “intercultural theatre” according to the traditional definition. But rather, they were closer to Rebellato’s “McTheater.” *IG Theater* lamented that the *Theaterreform* created conditions where actual intercultural theatre was still marginally supported while a more “Europeanized” and culturally homogeneous brand thrived.

democratic integral community of cultural agents were given the power to more readily impose their dominant notions of quality upon Vienna's fringe scene. This created a condition whereby spoken German language theatre suffers and more visual forms of performance and/or performances in English thrive. This is a factor highlighted by a 2004 article by *IG Theater* stating that in the wake of the reform spoken theatre in the fringe scene declined.<sup>215</sup> As a result of the decrease of spoken theatre, the fringe scene's more locally-oriented social and political commentary was significantly lessened. This occurred because the principle avenue of generating this commentary, i.e. the locally-bounded German language, was diminished while the more nationally transient English came to be a prominent method of communication. Artists began moving to Vienna and establishing networks within the city's transnational social spaces wherein they did not need to achieve German language fluency. For example, Yosi Wanunu of Toxic Dreams and the five French members of Superamas do not have a level of proficiency in German appropriate for use in performance. Superceding German as the scene's dominate mode of linguistic communication was a kind of international "pigeon English," which was also the working language of artists and administrators involved in Europe's transnational co-production venues and festivals.<sup>216</sup> Among the "winners" of the *Theaterreform*, a detachment to local concerns and an interest in issues related to transnational processes resulted from these changes. While, on the other side, the "losers" were left to fight the glocalized policies of the local scene while remaining on the outside of the government's

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<sup>215</sup> *Das Sprechtheater hat insgesamt verloren, auch wenn Showinisten, HIGHTHEA und toxic dreams neben den Häusern für eine Konzeptförderung vorgeschlagen werden.*

"Zur Konzeptentscheidung innerhalb der Wiener Theaterreform Konzeptentscheidung," *GIFT*, (2004), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=62257&jahr=2004> (accessed December 22, 2010).

<sup>216</sup> Christine Standfest, member of theatercombinant, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

graces. This fight was waged even as the “losers” clamored to find their way back into the system. The battle of the “losers” against the local policies is conspicuously absent from the stages of Vienna’s fringe venues, while the “winner’s” own acknowledgement of their complicity in the de-localization and commercialization of the city’s fringe scene is perhaps the most glaringly apparent aspect of their performances. Indeed, the ways that Vienna’s fringe artists take on the multi-faceted roles of artists, administrators, and cultural critics is one of the most striking bi-products of the *Theaterreform* and it has a profound impact on the scene’s emergent aesthetic, which I explore in far greater detail in chapters three, four, and five.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have used a Bourdieun analysis of Vienna’s funding policies to argue that Vienna’s fringe scene (including its administrators and artists) are involved in Vienna’s battle for cultural legitimacy in Europe’s cultural field. This battle has created local policies, most manifested in the *Theaterreform*, which led the local scene to develop a more outward-looking, transnational orientation. These locally instituted policies have been far more effective in developing transnational networks and feelings of Europeanness among fringe artists than EU policies have. However, the very factors that enabled the city to so quickly create a transnational fringe scene are partially responsible for a general discontent among artists. This feeling of discontentment probably resides in a number of factors and these include the following: one, internal battles for cultural legitimacy that pit the local “losers” of the *Theaterreform* against the de-localized “winners;” two, subtle feelings that, by partaking in the system, fringe artists are somehow participating in the reversal of their “winner loses logic;” three, increasing

needs to self-edit their concept presentations in order to cohere to the market demands associated with Europe's system of co-production venues and festivals; four, the reality that no matter how hard the artists try to focus on their internal artistic drives and neglect the politics of the local and non-local cultural field, they are fundamentally enmeshed in them and have difficulty subverting political will.

## CHAPTER 2

### TANZQUARTIER AND BRUT WIEN: THE NON-LIMINALITY OF VIENNA'S MAJOR TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL SPACES

Within Vienna, the development of a transnational fringe performance scene during the past decade was the direct result of the city's competition for a position of cultural prominence in Europe's cultural field. The *Theaterreform* was the tangible outcome of the struggle. It was also the impetus for the development of various venues within Vienna that had the potential to create a new ideological and/or aesthetic orientation among the city's fringe artists. Despite the intent of the *Theaterreform*, many of Vienna's cultural agents do not believe that the promise of artistic rejuvenation came to fruition within the city's fringe scene. Instead, artists and administrators alike expressed an overall feeling of discontentment with the scene's internal struggles and the quality of productions. While the last chapter suggested that Vienna's integral community of internationally-oriented fringe artists and administrators led to a system where artists must collaborate with top-down initiatives and, to a certain extent, abandon the "avant-garde impulse" and "winner loses logic" that define their fringe performance culture, some rationale for the artists' lack of fulfillment may stem from material realities associated with Vienna's transnational social spaces, mainly Tanzquartier and Brut. To a large extent, these venues serve as the ideological "center of the (fringe) scene" and it is the duty of the venues' artistic directors to "keep the scene flourishing."<sup>217</sup> In this chapter I identify factors that may limit the potential of these venues. These include market pressures, practical communication needs, and spatial dynamics. To a certain extent

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<sup>217</sup> Andre Turnheim, former curator for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 8 May 2009, Vienna, field notes.

these realities diminish the venues' abilities to serve as liminal spaces where unconventional ideologies and aesthetics (including new notions of fringe performance) can be realized.

Immediately before the *Theaterreform* went into effect Tanzquartier played a large role in Vienna's self-conscious effort to internationalize its performing arts scene. The development of this venue began the process of equating professionalism with internationalism and disenfranchising many local fringe artists. Six years later Brut, which was created as a direct result of the *Theaterreform*, entered into an informal partnership with Tanzquartier, which generated two major byproducts. One, Tanzquartier and Brut began to function as transnational social spaces where a subculture of European fringe performing artists could be constructed. This subculture was in many ways vaguely derivative of the classic "avant-garde" and also infused with an exorbitant dose of global mediated culture. Two, these venues led to a consistent, de-localized form of performance that is not as liminal as members of the subculture claim it is.

### **Tanzquartier's Pre-*Theaterreform* Role in the Self-Conscious Internationalization of Vienna's Fringe Scene**

Tanzquartier was created in 2001 as a result of a city-wide effort to improve the overall quality of contemporary artistic practice in Vienna. In this way, it may be understood as an "initiating structure" for the internationally-oriented *Theaterreform* that followed it.<sup>218</sup> In 2000, incidentally shortly after the Euro was introduced as the primary currency throughout the EU, a European-wide search was conducted to find a leader who would take the newly-invented venue into the twenty-first century and expand the horizons of Vienna's fringe scene in accord with the demands of an increasingly

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<sup>218</sup> Christine Standfest, member of theatercombinant, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

interconnected Europe. The task of leadership was laid upon Sigrid Gareis, an administrator from Austria's neighboring Bavaria, Germany, who had a resume that included work in Germany's already highly international contemporary experimental dance and performance scene, which was fostered by the existence of an elaborate European network of co-production venues and festivals. Tanzquartier was about to join this transnational network.

Co-production venues are spaces where artists, some local and some from diverse regions or nations, gather for the purpose of showcasing their performances. This often involves the process of sharing artists who hold objectified cultural capital, with other co-production venues in the network. During one season, a venue in Berlin might invite a performer from a venue in Munich and during the next season the situation might be reversed. According to the 2008 report on artist mobility, international co-productions often imply that the financial burden for the production of the specific performance is shared between the co-production venue itself and the artists who mostly get the other share of support from their region or nation of origin. However, oftentimes actual financial sharing between the artists' homegrown funds and the co-production venue is limited.<sup>219</sup> The co-production venues often place monetary amounts on the services that they offer the artists. These include rehearsal and performance space, technical support, and publicity. The venues then calculate the services rendered, which translate to economic sums. These venues are an intrinsic part of the phenomenon of international co-productions, which the report states, have been on the rise in Europe since the

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<sup>219</sup> Guy Cools, "International Co-Production and Touring," *International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts*, <http://on-the-move.org/library/article/13862/co-production-and-touring/> (accessed March 13, 2011)

1980s.<sup>220</sup> By the early part of the twenty-first century fringe venues and their operation policies had become widespread throughout much of Northern and Western Europe, particularly Germany and Belgium. With the establishment of Tanzquartier and Brut, Europe's network of co-production venues received a strong year-round anchoring in Vienna as well.<sup>221</sup>

Among Gareis' primary goals for Tanzquartier were to make it a professional showcase and laboratory for movements in international contemporary experimental dance and performance and a space where theory and practice were considered in equal measure. Gareis established an educational/training program featuring teaching artists from a variety of disciplines who were committed to spreading awareness of various international experimental techniques within, what Gareis understood as, a relatively young, local and provincial performance scene. In the last year of her tenure, this education program featured teaching artists from a range of methods and disciplines including Alexander Technique, yoga body awareness, "contemporary body work," rock-and-roll ballet, and more.<sup>222</sup> Gareis also created monthly dance labs, which were essentially academic conversations on "contemporary performance," resulting in a tangible archive of various performance styles and theoretical analysis of them.

According to Eva-Elisabeth Fischer of the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, by the end of Gareis' tenure this theory library had been "coveted in equal measure by the dance departments

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<sup>220</sup> As Guy Cools states, "Since the 1980s the performing arts have increasingly internationalized. The increased international touring has been accompanied by an active, international co-production policy in which the financial, organizational and artistic responsibilities of new creations and their subsequent touring have been shared by partners in different countries."

Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> This is in contrast to the already established month-long Wiener Festwochen.

<sup>222</sup> This information was collected from various emails, which I received via the Tanzquartier list serve.

of the Universities of Salzburg and Leipzig respectively.”<sup>223</sup> Along with its theory library, performance training aspects, and program of invited guest artists, Gareis had poised Tanzquartier to be a major player in the European cultural field. To some, this was an unwelcome imposition on the local scene.

In an interview with Gareis she proclaimed that before she arrived at Tanzquartier, “there was no internationality in the local scene” and that upon her appointment to the venue she began to reverse this.<sup>224</sup> Indeed, Gareis’ influence on the scene was so great that many artists argue it was she, and not the *Theaterreform* that actually internationalized the scene. These same artists often argue that the *Theaterreform* was a self-conscious attempt to internationalize a scene where many international networks already existed thanks to the pioneering efforts of Gareis at Tanzquartier.<sup>225</sup> Relying on her own extensive international connections Gareis recruited performers, academics, and teaching artists in order to intentionally create a program at Tanzquartier that included at least one half of international performers.<sup>226</sup>

From the outset of her leadership Gareis demonstrated an uncompromising character, arguing that invention and innovation within Vienna could not be achieved without also creating tensions among the fringe community.<sup>227</sup> These would inevitably

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<sup>223</sup> Eva-Elisabeth Fischer, “The Founding Director Sigrid Gareis Bids Farewell to the Tanzquartier Vienna,” trans. Heather Moers, *Goethe-Institut e. V., Online-Redaktion*, (July 2009), <http://www.goethe.de/kue/tut/iba/bue/en4889189.htm> (accessed December 30, 2010).

<sup>224</sup> Sigrid Gareis, former artistic director of Tanzquartier, interview by author, 15 April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>225</sup> Oleg Soulimenko, Vienna-based performing artist, interview by author, May 2010, Skype conversation.

<sup>226</sup> During the last season of Gareis’ tenure there were approximately 79 artists/groups that composed the principal performance program at Tanzquartier. Of these 79 only 16 groups had an Austrian majority and of these 16 groups, it is likely that those who composed the Austrian majority had culturally mixed backgrounds.

<http://tq000006.host.inode.at/Content.Node/en/stage/archive.php> (accessed December 30, 2010).

<sup>227</sup> Sigrid Gareis, “Zur Neugründung des Tanzquartier Wien - eine Zwischenbilanz,” *IG Kultur Oesterreich*, <http://igkultur.at/igkultur/kulturrisse/1024903066/1024906732> (accessed December 30, 2010).

result as Gareis made the self-proclaimed effort to free Vienna's fringe performance artists from an "island mentality" that dominated their practice and, to a certain extent, the practices of artists within other major European cities still reeling from the remnants of the twentieth century's nationalistic isolation.<sup>228</sup> According to Gareis, this "island mentality" was characterized by the regional artists' "local-entitlement" and desire for "self-governance" over "directorships." In other words, local artists believed that *they*, not their international counterparts, had the right to receive city funding. They also believed that *they*, not government-appointed artistic directors, had the right to determine how to use such funding for the development of their products and audiences.<sup>229</sup>

Several years after Tanzquartier was instituted tensions were still very much apparent within Vienna's fringe performance community. For example, Sebastian Protl of Tanz Atelier who, prior to Gareis' tenure, frequently performed in the free space now occupied by Tanzquartier argues that the institutionalization of the venue actually hampered artists' ability to experiment. He states that once Gareis came in and instituted her own "reforms" the venue was effectively closed to him and a number of artists who did not fit within her concept of quality.<sup>230</sup> He argues that Tanzquartier should have remained an open venue for the "artists to run themselves." This would have bred the kind of competition and diverse experimentation, which would have allowed the artists to learn and grow.<sup>231</sup> Similarly, Markus Kupferblum, another Vienna-base fringe artist who works a great deal internationally and who has until recently often been counted among

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Gareis refers to the tensions that arose during her tenure, among them "local entitlement versus internationalization" (*Lokalanspruch versus Internationalität*) and "artists' self-governance versus directorships" (*Künstlerselbstverwaltung versus Intendantprinzip*).

Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Sebastian Protl, artistic director of Tanz Atelier, interview by author, 19 June, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

the scene's "losers," argues that before Tanzquartier, the city had more unjuried fringe venues. These allowed for free expression and "variety," both of which diminished over the past decade.<sup>232</sup> Regarding variety, Nigar Hasib of the Vienna-based Lalish Theater argues that as a result of the various initiatives beginning with the creation of Tanzquartier, each performance appears aesthetically homogenous.<sup>233</sup> Furthermore, Protl also argues that Gareis' claim that Vienna did not have a worthwhile tradition of contemporary dance and performance was a result of her own disconnected position.<sup>234</sup> Similar views were registered by many of the so-called "losers," for example members of the Vienna-based group Theater Tanto.<sup>235</sup> These words seem to confirm that the "losers" in the scene view the "winning" arbiters' notions of quality as subjective while the "winners" understand that they are objective, a notion articulated in the first chapter of this present dissertation.

Gareis claims that the polarity of the scene is a result of the qualitatively positive changes that she instituted; therefore, it is the natural outgrowth of progress. Gareis had always been aware of the tensions between local and non-local artists. Although she consistently acknowledged her role in creating the stress, she articulated little concern for alleviating it. Instead, she seems to have created a qualitative distinction between a group of unenlightened local artists and enlightened non-local, or internationally-minded, artists. For example, in an interview with *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* dance critic Eva-Elisabeth Fischer, Gareis argued that "the *TQM* (Tanzquartier) was not meant to be a playback

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<sup>232</sup> Markus Kupferblum, Vienna-based fringe artist, interview by author, 14 August, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>233</sup> Nigar Hasib, artistic director of Lalish Theater, interview by author, 16 August, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>234</sup> Sebastian Protl, artistic director of Tanz Atelier, interview by author, 19 June, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>235</sup> Susanne Tabaka-Pillhofer and Jan Tabaka, artistic directors of Theater Tanto, interview by author, 23 May 2008, Vienna, field notes.

venue for the locals.”<sup>236</sup> Instead, the venue was intended to be a place where international movements in performance could be showcased, catalogued, and analyzed. Her statement relates to, what she refers to as, her initial task at Tanzquartier, “to professionalize the scene” because its quality was severely lacking.<sup>237</sup> Her statements may convey a bias against a local, Viennese-oriented style of performance in favor of a more global, European-oriented style of performance, which pervades Tanzquartier’s programming. Yet in another article Gareis also argues that a combination of local and global flavors is what is needed for Tanzquartier to thrive.<sup>238</sup> This suggests that her actual intent was not to simply displace local artists, but merely to increase the competition among them, ridding the scene of its amateurs and exposing what she deemed to be its more professional performers to global trends.

By the end of Gareis’ tenure in 2009, it was evident that Tanzquartier had made a monumental impact on the local scene. During her final season in charge of Tanzquartier, attendance at the venue was up 130% since the first year of its establishment.<sup>239</sup> (However, this still meant that the venue achieved a mere 80% audience occupancy throughout the year.) Furthermore, when the winning Vienna-based artists heard of Gareis’ forced retirement from the venue, they circulated a petition for an extension of her leadership, which was ultimately signed by 93 artists who were affiliated with the

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<sup>236</sup> Eva-Elisabeth Fischer, “The Founding Director – Sigrid Gareis bids farewell to the Tanzquartier Vienna,” (2009), <http://www.goethe.de/kue/tut/iba/bue/en4889189.htm> (accessed December 21, 2010).

<sup>237</sup> Sigrid Gareis, former artistic director of Tanzquartier, interview by author, 15 April 2009, Vienna, Austria, field notes.

<sup>238</sup> “Der Streit um das Tanzquartier,” <http://kurier.at/kultur/123910.php>. (accessed 14 March, 2011).

<sup>239</sup> “Sigrid Gareis hat ‘Lust, nicht mehr wichtig zu sein’ Die Gruendungsintendantin des Wiener Tanzquartiers nimmt Abscheid,” *Kleine Zeitung*, June 24, 2009, *Kultur & Medien*, Online edition, <http://www.kleinezeitung.at/nachrichten/kultur/2040525/index.do> (accessed December 22, 2010).

venue. Motivation for this was clear: with a new director, the face of Tanzquartier would change and so would the fate of the artists who enjoyed success under Gareis' leadership.

From its inception, Tanzquartier's mission, and Gareis' attitude, did not change because the atmosphere around them *did*. With sufficient government support vested in Gareis' vision and few alternative production houses for artists and audiences of contemporary experimental dance and performance, the high influence of the venue should be understood as an inevitable outcome. The foundation of Tanzquartier was rooted in an internationalization of the scene, which Gareis laid throughout her tenure. This established a precedent that the *Kulturstadtrat* deemed worthwhile and that he extended into the tenure of the new director, Walter Heun who took over leadership of the venue in 2009. In an article in *Die Presse* the *Kulturstadtrat* is quoted to have selected Heun based on his "international experience."<sup>240</sup> Therefore, despite an impending overhaul of the venue's publicity and a slight change in its programs, it was expected that the venue would continue to be a showcase for Vienna's outward-looking cultural initiative, as mandated by the ruling *SPOe* party. This has largely proven to be the case.

Although Tanzquartier under Gareis' leadership was mainly articulated as a venue for contemporary dance, the integration of forms within the realm of fringe performance is too great to omit this critical institution from my analysis of the scene. Indeed, some of the more theatre-like performance groups, i.e. Superamas, play exclusively within Tanzquartier while they are in Vienna. Toxic Dreams and its members continue to exhibit work in the venue. Gareis argues that her tenure helped Vienna's fringe scene evolve from a more traditional, theatrical model into a broader model of performance

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<sup>240</sup> "Tanzquartier Wien: Walter Heun wird neuer Intendant," *Die Presse*, September 11, 2008, *Kultur/Buehnen*, Online edition, <http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/news/413395/index.do> (accessed December 22, 2010).

experimentation. In addition, Tanzquartier's extreme international orientation is dubbed partially responsible for the character of Brut, which was inaugurated in 2007.

### **The Development of Brut Wien After Tanzquartier**

In 2003 when discourse about the impending *Theaterreform* was at its height, artists were already lamenting the dearth of fringe venues within the scene. The artists called for Vienna to release the city's empty real estate for the use of artistic development and presentation.<sup>241</sup> The motion stemmed from the reality that at this point the artists had two principle venues where they could showcase their work, Tanzquartier and a mid-sized black box construction located next to the Musik Verein (music association) on the *Ringstrasse* (the main avenue that circles Vienna's first district).<sup>242</sup> This venue was called Die Theater and it was operated in a more grassroots manner than Tanzquartier. Artists would rent the space for their productions and there was no systematic program overseen by an artistic director. Instead of releasing a large portion of vacant real estate for artistic use, the city of Vienna appeared to make a motion in the opposite direction. They took control of Die Theater by appointing artistic directors to oversee its operations, thus creating Brut.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Specifically, the artists demanded that all empty real estate in Vienna should be made available to the city's artists free of charge. These included the many empty rooms and vacant houses associated with the *SPOe* and its city planning office.

Daniel Aschwanden et al., "Re-form: Aussendung von im Tanz- und Performance-Bereich Tätigen," *GIFT*, (2003), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61333&jahr=2003> (accessed December 21, 2010).

<sup>242</sup> The *Ringstrasse* has immense importance within the context of Viennese society. Conceived of in 1857 and largely built along the contours of the series of walls and moats that once surrounded old Vienna, the *Ringstrasse* was a massive city-initiated undertaking dedicated to bringing Vienna into the modern industrialized era. As such, it took its cue from the construction of the grand Parisian boulevards. The placement of Die Theater, and afterwards Brut, along the highly populated *Ringstrasse* signals the potential for the venue's cultural impact in the city.

<sup>243</sup> Another, more alternative venue for the production of fringe performance does exist within Vienna. This is called WUK. The venue itself has two gallery/black box spaces and a central bar. The majority of the work featured at WUK is grassroots. At the time of my fieldwork in 2008-2010 most artists who produced here did so with little aid from the government and the projects generated in this venue had little

By many accounts, the leadership of Vienna's fringe scene has been understood to stem from an informal partnership between the *SPOe*-appointed artistic directors of Tanzquartier and Brut, who have articulated their joint desire to focus Vienna's scene towards Europe as a whole. Thomas Frank and Haiko Pfof, two Germans with a history of working within the co-production venues of Germany and Switzerland were appointed by the city to run the nascent venture. In Frank and Pfof's estimation, by the time they entered the scene it was already "well-educated" in the realm of performance.<sup>244</sup> The city was already a center where fringe artists from disparate places in Europe would converge; however, local artists were somehow being snubbed. At the very least, such artists were not being given the tools they needed to have their work shown abroad. As Pfof understood it, Vienna-based fringe artists were unable to establish international reputations. Making use of their connections in the co-production houses throughout the German speaking world, Frank and Pfof proposed to develop a system of cultural export to match what they understood to be a strong system of cultural import derived from Tanzquartier, ImPulsTanz, and the Wiener Festwochen.

Operating within the European co-production schema, Brut's system of cultural export was set to materialize in a number of specific ways. Frank and Pfof determined that, by soliciting concepts and working through personal connections within the local scene, they would locate Vienna-based fringe artists who would become the signature performers for a given time period (i.e. one month out of a nine month season). After a

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to no life outside of it. Although it is pertinent to note this venue's existence, WUK does not compete with Brut or Tanzquartier for audiences or artists. At present, the venue cannot be seen as a significant force of government control nor as a sufficient marker of fringe artists' independence from such control. However, if present plans to increase the venue's reach persist, it may eventually have the potential to diversify, and improve the local fringe scene.

<sup>244</sup> Haiko Pfof, artistic director of Brut Wien, interview by author, 12 May, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

series of meetings Frank and Pfof would begin to perceive recurrent themes (or “the common frame”), which would help them organize their program, locate visiting performing artists from abroad, and subsequently market these performances within the local scene.<sup>245</sup> Frank and Pfof would reach out to “sister venues” in Europe’s network of co-production houses. They would also network with the curators of major European fringe festivals. In the tradition of European co-production venues Frank and Pfof would attempt to send local Vienna-based artists to these venues while simultaneously importing talent from the same sister venues to Brut. The artistic directors also reached out to an international market by establishing artist-in-residencies, primarily attracting artists in former East Block nations such as Poland. The operative idea was for Frank and Pfof to “supply the infrastructure” (i.e. rehearsal and performance space, basic marketing, and some money) while allowing the local artists a degree of artistic freedom while they developed their performances.<sup>246</sup> In theory this new system would provide the artists with greater autonomy because Brut would essentially eliminate much of the administrative work for which the artists themselves, under the previous system, would be responsible.<sup>247</sup> In other words, the artists would be given money for their projects from Brut rather than being solely responsible for generating money for their performances.<sup>248</sup> In theory this would lessen the artists’ dependency on the jurors and

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Haiko Pfof, artistic director of Brut Wien, interview by author, 12 May, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> As I have argued, this notion is problematic because under the current system artists still need to be their own administrators and are still dependent upon finding support external of Brut.

curators because it would mean that Brut could fully fund a given project even if it had been rejected by the former system.<sup>249</sup>

The artistic directors of Brut would ultimately have a far greater influence than they admit. This power stemmed from, one, their intentional practice of suggesting transnational collaborators for local artists and, two, their ability to determine quality and establish a competitive selection process for their seasons. The new directors of Brut provided artistic support by way of overseeing the initial developmental phases of the work, subtly guiding the performers as they established a platform for their work, and observing the final phases of the developmental process. While observing the development of a performance by the fringe artist Thomas Kasebacher at Brut, I was able to chart the artistic directors' actual input from the beginning to the end of the process. Kasebacher began with a concept, which he gave to the curators of the city of Vienna and Brut. In a rare instance of disagreement between the curators and artistic directors of Brut, Kasebacher's concept was declined for funding at the city level, but allocated a space in Brut's production season. In the initial meeting between Kasebacher and the Brut team, which included the artistic directors, the performance scheduler, and the production manager, Kasebacher described his nascent concept in more detail. The artistic directors offered suggestions on how Kasebacher could improve his concept and tackle the production process during the ensuing rehearsals. After the meeting, Kasebacher was given rehearsal space in the form of a small basement black box, which had formerly been the home of underground Vienna-based performance artists during the

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<sup>249</sup> As articulated in chapter one, it is very rare for a project to be rejected by the former system and then to be funded by Brut. This stems partially from the "very close" relationship that Brut's artistic directors have with the curators, to quote from a 2008 interview with Frank.

Thomas Frank, artistic director of Brut, interview by author, 17 May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

more grassroots, and far less internationally visible, production period of the 1980s. After a period of several weeks, Kasebacher's piece was observed by the artistic staff, including the directors and resident designers, and Kasebacher was given additional notes. Upon completion of the production, Kasebacher met with other artists and administrators at Brut's bar to discuss how he could make further improvements and begin to market his piece on the international circuit of co-production venues and festivals. Kasebacher informed me that Brut would assist him in this process by sending a DVD recording to their network of contacts and recommending Kasebacher to them. Based on conversations I had with other Brut artists during my observation period in Vienna, Kasebacher's experience was fairly standard.

While operating according to their mission to be a "European" fringe venue Brut's artistic directors began their tenure by establishing meetings with local artists and connecting them with international collaborators. If a performer was in need of a visual artist or a musician for a given performance, then Frank and Pfof would "look within Europe for these connections," thus fostering the kind of creative exchange across the geographical boundaries that they initially proposed.<sup>250</sup> Kasebacher claims that Frank and Pfof's status as outsiders was "helpful" because Vienna was so "small" and, in some ways culturally isolated.<sup>251</sup> By the time that Kasebacher himself was performing at Brut, however, it was evident that the "cultural isolation" of Vienna had completely changed. For example, before meeting with Brut's artistic directors Kasebacher was already attached to a network of transnational fringe artists and he brought some suggestions regarding which international collaborators he would like to work with on his particular

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<sup>250</sup> Thomas Frank, artistic director of Brut, interview by author, 17 May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>251</sup> Thomas Kasebacher, artistic director of Not Found Yet Theater, interview by author, 10 April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

production. These included his Spanish girlfriend, and frequent co-collaborator, Laia Fabre and the Vienna-based Russian fringe artist Oleg Soulimenko (who would offer additional creative consultation). In Kasebacher's case, Frank and Haiko did not need to suggest foreign collaborators because Kasebacher himself had already been naturalized into the system of transnational contacts that were originally generated by Gareis, the *Theaterreform*, and the artistic directors of Brut themselves.

By 2009 when I began my extensive investigation into Vienna's fringe scene it had already become so infused with transnational artists and an international orientation that it was difficult to locate the "losers" of the scene who had been created as a result of the *SPOe*-initiated *Theaterreform*. To observe artists working at Tanzquartier and Brut meant to observe the "winners," i.e. those who enjoyed a great deal of success in the local fringe scene mainly due to their non-local orientations and backgrounds. In an interview with Markus Kupferblum, one of the "losing" artists of the reform who is also a personal friend of and mentor to Kasebacher, he stated that those who regularly perform at Brut and Tanzquartier possess a uniquely positive outlook regarding the state of the fringe scene because their work has been legitimized by the current regime. But he cautions that this success is rare and tenuous, because if political will shifts then the "winning" artists will suddenly find themselves disenfranchised just as he and others from his generation were when the *SPOe* established Gareis and an integral community of administrators as the arbiters of taste and the holders of the means of production.<sup>252</sup> Even Kasebacher and Fabre admit that their situation is rather precarious. They acknowledge that Brut's leadership will only be in place for a limited time before the government turns

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<sup>252</sup> Markus Kupferblum, Vienna-based fringe artist, interview by author, 14 August, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

the reigns of the venue over to other people. Furthermore, they recognize that their current ability to produce at Brut is based solely on their willingness to pander to the versions of quality established by its artistic directors. As Kasebacher states, his success “will last as long as they (at Brut) like what I do...that’s the danger.”<sup>253</sup> Underlying Kasebacher’s words is a subtle mistrust of the very institutional framework that he believes in and depends on for his subsistence and continued ability to create. This is made evident by his statement that, “you have to be careful of institutions,” even as he prepares to mount his production at Brut.<sup>254</sup>

Brut’s artistic directors’ primary influence stems from the competitive selection process. Like Gareis before them, Brut’s artistic directors have been vested with the authority to determine quality.<sup>255</sup> Also, like Gareis, this version of quality rests on Frank and Pfof’s own international orientations. Pfof demonstrates a certain antagonism to the array of local artists who were initially shut out due to the internationalization of the scene that began to occur in the years leading up to the establishment of Brut. He does so by employing the word “professional” to describe what happens at Brut and framing the “losers” of the *Theaterreform* and Tanzquartier as “non-professionals.” He argues that if Brut were the first to arrive in the scene, Frank and Pfof would have stifled the competition just as Gareis had done by excluding a number of local groups from its program.<sup>256</sup> Furthermore, Pfof affirms my earlier statement that those deemed unprofessional united under the umbrella of *IG Theater* where they continue to lobby for

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<sup>253</sup> Thomas Kasebacher, artistic director of Not Found Yet Theater, interview by author, 10 April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> As I will establish in chapter three, this version of quality had already been shaped by Tanzquartier and their project of establishing a new genre called “contemporary performance.”

<sup>256</sup> Haiko Pfof, artistic director of Brut Wien, interview by author, 12 May, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

government funding in a state of collective isolation from Vienna's exclusive fringe venues.

The creation of Tanzquartier and Brut limited the amount of artists and aesthetic variety in the scene by imposing a more rigid structure for fringe performance as opposed to the relative lack of structure when the city's fringe venues were merely open spaces for artists to display their work. At the outset of Brut the artistic directors intended for it to be "an international interdisciplinary program for local artists" where they themselves would assist the artists and not stifle them.<sup>257</sup> However, this mission is somewhat compromised by the mere fact that this venue now occupies one of the few spaces in Vienna that was once used for completely free expression, albeit still funded by the city. Prior to the development of Brut the venue, then called Die Theater, existed in a more nebulous form. It was used as a general space for Vienna's fringe scene and featured more traditional theatre productions as well as interdisciplinary work from Vienna's artists, both international and local. When Frank and Pfof assumed leadership of the space, the operative concepts "international" and "interdisciplinary" dictated their practice and the words themselves became primary means by which Brut's artistic directors would separate the "losers" from the "winners" or the "professionals" from the "non-professionals." Due to a dearth of performance space for artists in the fringe scene, these terms, once thought to be indicative of expansion and freedom essentially became internal limitations placed on the scene's artists by the venues' artistic directors.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Thomas Frank, artistic director of Brut, interview by author, 17 May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>258</sup> Sebastian Profl, a veteran of the fringe scene and vocal critic of its contemporary status, argues that many of the independent companies that thrived during the 1990s were "demolished by Tanzquartier" and later by Brut.

Sebastian Profl, artistic director of Tanz Atelier, interview by author, 19 June, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

Furthermore, despite the artistic directors' insistence that they were developing avenues for local artists to get international exposure, it was and continues to be unclear what the term "local" means.

The major issue with Brut's system of cultural export is that what was deemed local had become nebulous and contestable. Apparently, according to Frank and Pfost's reasoning, to be deemed a "local" fringe artist, one must merely be geographically based within the city of Vienna, recognized by the government as a member of a *Verein*, and have a certain amount of social capital within Vienna's system of curators and jurors as well as with the artistic directors of Tanzquartier and Brut. Although Frank argues that 65-70% of the artists who display their work at Brut are native Austrians, there are many artists within the scene who suggest that this percentage is inaccurate.<sup>259</sup> A survey of Brut's repertoire between May and June of 2009 reveals that seven out of the thirteen principal artists that Brut produced during those months came from outside Austria; however, all of Brut's own projects at that time incorporated at least one international collaborator.<sup>260</sup> In addition, during those months Brut hosted many other outside fringe companies from diverse European cities.<sup>261</sup> In light of the factor that foreign artists are labeled "Viennese" according to the criteria mentioned above, obtaining a clear reading of the artists' birth nationalities is not a simple task. For example, on Brut's May through June 2009 program, "Vienna" is written next to Spanish-born Laia Fabre's name, which

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<sup>259</sup> There are many divergent testimonies coming from the artists themselves on the scene's international make-up. For example Yosi Wanunu of Toxic Dreams argues that in 2007, when Brut was called Die Theater, 90% of the performers there were Austrian and that by 2008 70% were guest performers. Contrary to this hearsay, Brut's leadership insists that 65-75% of their artists are Austrian.

<sup>260</sup> Based on a reading of Brut's May through June 2009 schedule it is difficult to discern the nationality of the artists who display their work in the venue. Rationale for this is Brut's practice of linking the artists to the city they currently reside in, rather than their nation of origin. For example, Vienna is written next to Spanish-born Laia Fabre's name, signaling that she has been grafted into the local scene.

<sup>261</sup> Brut Program. May through June 2009.

signals that she has been grafted into the local scene. These factors give credence to Frank's claim that within Vienna's fringe scene there is a "great transference in (national) borders." To a large degree, it appears that this scene constitutes its own subculture within Vienna where the deeply-seated ideas of nationalism and cultural origin are overlooked in favor of emphasizing the artists' other major points of identification, i.e. fringe performance, transnational networks, and Europeanism. Through the export and import of artists Brut was able to market its own brand name within this subculture, which extended beyond the borders of Vienna and Austria.

To a certain extent the creation and implementation of Brut was met with the growing will of the artistic directors themselves to develop a specific brand for the co-production venue and to market this brand within Europe's fringe network, composed of festivals and other co-production venues. The 2008 report on artist's mobility states that co-production venues often make an effort to export and import artists due to the increased symbolic capital that they can bring to their nation and also due to the economic capital that they can bring to themselves. For this reason it is essential that, when traveling, the artists who developed work with the support (financial and otherwise) of co-production venues make a very visible proclamation of their sources of support on their promotional materials, i.e. programs, websites, and marketing pamphlets.<sup>262</sup> Furthermore, the report suggests that some co-producers are more desirable than others due to the international perception of their "pioneering role within their own community and landscape" and due to the sheer monetary amount they can provide the artists. By selecting an artist who promises success abroad, Brut is attempting to achieve a

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<sup>262</sup> Guy Cools, "International Co-Production and Touring," *International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts*, <http://on-the-move.org/library/article/13862/co-production-and-touring/> (accessed March 13, 2011)

significant return on its initial investment.<sup>263</sup> Thus, Brut's artistic directors have a vested economic interest in which artists they choose to support and share with other co-production venues in their network. By virtue of showcasing their work within Brut and its sister co-production venues, the artists themselves become extensions of Brut's market-related brand.

The operative goal to make Brut an "international" house alongside of the highly "international" Tanzquartier has created a polarity of perception among artists within Vienna. This polarity (with non-locally-oriented artists as the "winners" and locally-oriented artists as the "losers") is indicative of the high level of control that Brut and Tanzquartier as Vienna's major fringe venues had on the scene. This partnership has its own "performance culture" with a specific aesthetic orientation, rooted in the ideal of conceptuality in non-commercial performance.<sup>264</sup> The subculture's primary identifier as non-commercial is highly ironic considering the ways that the co-production venues and artists demonstrate their complicity within a transnational fringe market.

In an interview with Gareis she informed me that since the 1990s contemporary experimental dance and performance throughout Europe had been more conceptual in nature.<sup>265</sup> She employed this term in order to describe work characterized by theoretical exploration rather than virtuosity in performance. It was this style of work that Gareis claims she helped to bring to Vienna's fringe scene, and which was subsequently adopted by Brut's artistic directors. As Gareis claims, before she arrived the very locally-oriented performance was also "extremely traditional." By traditional she refers to text-driven

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Christine Standfest, member of theatercombinant, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>265</sup> Sigrid Gareis, former artistic director of Tanzquartier, interview by author, 15 April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

theatre of the type constructed in the city's established venues, albeit less heavily funded. Gareis decided to include more conceptual theatrical performance within Tanzquartier's programming because there was no openness for such forms elsewhere in the city.<sup>266</sup> Gareis' new conceptual approach depended upon theorists or performance "scientists" who would gather at Tanzquartier's regular performance laboratories and theorize the esoteric pieces that were delivered in the venue. The shift in style also infused the scene with more artist-theoreticians with degrees in *Theaterwissenschaft* (theatre science) or performance studies, rather than more traditional conservatory degrees. Following cues established by Tanzquartier, artists working in Vienna began advocating for European-wide reforms in the cultural field that would provide them with more funding for their long developmental periods, which the new theoretical and process-oriented approach required.<sup>267</sup> Furthermore, they advocated for a different way of performance, which does not distinguish "between so-called 'productive' and 'non-productive' periods."<sup>268</sup> With this new way of understanding process and product, it became important for artists to somehow demonstrate their process within their actual products. The scene's new emphasis meant that the appeal for the works on display at Tanzquartier and Brut would become limited to those audience members with the personal and academic backgrounds, i.e. the embodied and institutionalized cultural capital, to digest the more intellectual products. These audiences would be able to appreciate the full disclosure of the works' constructed natures. The shift in emphasis to more conceptual performance was another

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Jerome Bel, et al "Manifest: an die Europaeische Kommission und deren Kulturpolitische Vertreter/innen," *GIFT* (July, 2002), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61304&jahr=2002> (accessed December 13, 2010).

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

way of limiting the scene and establishing an aesthetic alliance between Brut and Tanzquartier, which was rooted in a non-commercial ideal.

Haiko Pfof of Brut equates professionalism with the tendency to eschew work that is easily digested by audiences. Of the character of Brut he states, “we are not commercial at all.” By this statement Pfof does not mean that they are not interested in generating work that is commercially viable within Europe’s transnational system of co-production venues and festivals, but that they are interested in catering to an integral audience of other producers rather than to a wider audience of producers and non-producers. In 2009, before Gareis had left Tanzquartier, Pfof argued that the biggest mistake the new leadership of Tanzquartier can make would be to develop productions for the sake of the audience’s entertainment. He argues that this is what the Vienna-based dance festival ImPulsTanz does on a regular basis; therefore, he establishes a dichotomy between art and entertainment that results in him legitimizing work being done for other producers over work being done for non-producers.<sup>269</sup> This dichotomy was a very popular aspect of the modernist avant-garde and Pfof’s use of it suggests somewhat of a departure from the discourse surrounding postmodernist or post-dramatic performance, which deemphasized the differences between cultural types, like commercial and non-commercial, art and non-art. The irony in this dichotomy is that Brut’s integral audience of other producers extends throughout Europe’s network of co-production venues and festivals. This audience constitutes its own niche market that is not immune to economic concerns.

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<sup>269</sup> Haiko Pfof, artistic director of Brut Wien, interview by author, 12 May, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

On a local level the focus on performing for other producers means that diplomacy on the part of the artists towards the administrators and their fellow artists is elevated to a higher level of importance. Gareis herself claims that the fringe scene's integral community means that within Vienna's fringe scene "everyone knows everyone" and one needs to maintain the appropriate connections in order to be successful.<sup>270</sup> The larger implication of this scene's orientation towards other producers is that if a fringe performer does not fit within the conceptual model and non-commercial ideal, or has difficulty relating to other artists within the integral scene, then the artist will not be economically viable either locally or within Europe's transnational fringe market and will not be able to sustain a consistent production schedule. This is a fact, which Gareis herself freely admits.<sup>271</sup> While conducting ethnographic research in Vienna's fringe scene, I noted that it was highly common for artists and administrators to comment on the integral audience at Brut and Tanzquartier.<sup>272</sup> This audience, mainly composed of other producers, constitutes a unique subculture within Vienna.

### **The Creation of a Subculture as a Result of Brut and Tanzquartier's Partnership**

Between the years 2007, when Brut was created, and 2009, many of the Vienna-based fringe artists who displayed work at Brut also appeared at Tanzquartier. Audiences at both venues also consisted of the same people, mostly from a younger demographic who expressed an orientation towards Europe, EU integration, and experimentation in

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<sup>270</sup> Sigrid Gareis, former artistic director of Tanzquartier, interview by author, 15 April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>271</sup> Gareis claims that if a fringe artist fails in Vienna, they have no choice but to establish their career outside of Austria because Vienna's integral community of fringe artists is the sole outlet for fringe performance within Austria. As she states, "It's Vienna or nothing."

Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> The word *Stammpublicum* is used by Marlene Leberer, administrator of Tanzquartier, to describe the common integral audience and artists of Brut and Tanzquartier.

Marlene Leberer, public relations operator for Tanzquartier, interview by author, 12 March 2009, Vienna, field notes.

performance. As Andre Turnheim argues, Tanzquartier and Brut served as venues around which a specific community of fringe artists may develop.<sup>273</sup> This community amounted to a unique subculture, which included extensive networks within Europe as a whole. As a result of these networks, the fate of Vienna's fringe scene became far more intertwined with the fates of other fringe scenes throughout the continent. Therefore, despite the scene's *SPOe*-led transformation of the scene, many cultural agents began to view the work itself as fundamentally European. As one cultural agent informed me, Vienna's fringe scene "isn't really Austrian," but rather "international."<sup>274</sup>

Transnational social spaces are defined as "configurations of social practices, artifacts and symbolic systems that span different geographical spaces in at least two nation-states without constituting a new 'deterritorialized' nation-state or being the prolongation of one of these nation-states."<sup>275</sup> Although Tanzquartier and Brut do not neatly fit within this definition, the venues do appear to demonstrate qualities that are consistent with transnational social spaces, therefore, I will define them as such. These venues, like other transnational social spaces, allow for the development of unique social identities among the people who inhabit them. According to Richard K. Herrmann and others, such social identities are constructed within the context of institutions that make up the transnational social spaces. These identities are formed in the following manner:

Individuals come to identify with an institution (and the group that it represents) to the extent that the institution is salient in their personal lives. As individuals interact with the institution or its representatives or feel its effects in their daily experience, they are more likely to perceive it as a "real" entity that provides

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<sup>273</sup> Andre Turnheim, former curator for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 8 May 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>274</sup> Florian Malzacher, freelance dramaturg for the Burgtheater and curator for Steirische Herbst, interview by author, July, 2009, New York, field notes.

<sup>275</sup> Ludger Pries, *New Transnational Social Spaces: International Migration and Transnational Companies in the Early Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2001), 18.

meaning and structure for their own lives. They may even come to believe it is part of the natural order and indispensable. Institutions, and their rules and regulations, also provide for shared experiences and shared social norms that enhance group identity and a sense of community.<sup>276</sup>

To a large degree, it appears that artists' interactions within Vienna's fringe performance venues, i.e. Brut and Tanzquartier, are their primary means of socialization. These artists tend to communicate in the venues using German and English in addition to various esoteric performance terminology derived from their educational and professional backgrounds. The artists spend the bulk of their time developing and producing performances and observing the work of their peers in these venues. On the occasion when the artists are given their own rehearsal space, independent of Brut and Tanzquartier, they still show the bulk of their work at these two venues, thus continuing to affirm the institutions' indispensable natures. When many of the artists venture away from the institutions and rehearsal spaces, they tend to establish themselves in local cafes, homes, or other spaces, where they continue to socialize with the contacts they know from the venues; thus, largely, and often unintentionally, avoiding contact with people outside of the transnational social spaces that they frequent as artists. It appears that many of Vienna's transnational fringe artists carve a niche out of the city for themselves. This niche is detached from the lives of the local citizenry but integrally related to a larger transnational community of fringe artists throughout Europe.

Cultural agents within Europe's transnational fringe scene at large have commented on the process of fringe artists and audiences integrating within Europe's transnational fringe spaces. Walter Heun of Joint Adventures, a fringe venue in Munich, Germany describes the process stating that,

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<sup>276</sup> Richard K. Herrmann, Thomas Risse, and Marilyn B. Brewer, eds., *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 14.

People who were initially strangers gradually become familiar acquaintances when one repeatedly attends performances alongside them, when one shares the experiences of the pleasures (or pains!) of being spectators at the same events, and when one exchanges views and opinions about events which we have witnessed together.<sup>277</sup>

Heun argues that this integral community is ripe for cross-cultural dialogue at the same time that its members are apt to embrace aspects of culture that they share. Overtime integral, often possessive, relationships also develop between the artists who carry the co-production venue's brand and the administrators of the venue. Farooq Chaudry of Akram Khan Company notes how these relationships are often like "marriages" in their intimacy and familiarity.<sup>278</sup>

The integral community of "winning" fringe artists who occupy Brut and Tanzquartier operates according to a shared European or cosmopolitan perspective. Its members do not believe that they are eroding the local culture because they claim to occupy spaces that transcend it. For example, in the *Manifesto for an European Performance Policy* the artists state their awareness of the "shared anxiety over the loss of "cultural identities" in the European context today" but argue that they have no fear of "the 'homogenization of cultures'" because they operate on a "trans-national level" where their "artistic practices dismantle such concepts or logics."<sup>279</sup> This statement is an articulation of the artists' difference, or set-apartness, from the local context and the mainstream, which they still believe to be dominated by national concerns. This statement is highly problematic because it neglects how the de-localized artists have

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<sup>277</sup> Quoted in Guy Cools, "International Co-Production and Touring," *International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts*, <http://on-the-move.org/library/article/13862/co-production-and-touring/> (accessed March 13, 2011)

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Jerome Bel, et al "Manifest: an die Europaeische Kommission und deren Kulturpolitische Vertreter/innen," *GIFT* (July, 2002), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61304&jahr=2002> (accessed December 13, 2010).

effectively thrust others outside of the “winner’s circle” by virtue of their participation in the *SPOe*-led initiatives to internationalize the scene. This community’s very creation has coincided with increased competition for local resources and the institutionalization of the fringe scene, which threatens to limit aesthetic variety and artistic innovation. The irony in this is that, at first glance, one may believe that the art developed within more seemingly liminal spaces, in terms of national identity, would also bear the mark of liminality.

I defined liminal as a state where old concepts are tested and innovations may arise. The concept of liminal performance is something that Susan Broadhurst discusses in her text *Liminal Acts*. She notes certain traits of such liminal performances, which include “hybridization” along with “cynicism, irony, playfulness and the celebration of the surface ‘depthlessness of culture.’” In Broadhurst’s definitions such performances include a “self-consciousness and reflectiveness, montage and collage, an exploration of the paradoxical, ambiguous and open-ended nature of reality, and a rejection of the notion of an integrated personality in favor of the destructured, dehumanized subject.”<sup>280</sup> To a large extent such traits are evident in the performances that happen within the context of Vienna’s fringe scene, but I argue that Broadhurst’s term for such performances derives from her failure to note the material realities of the social and political interactions that spawn the performances themselves. The fluid way that fringe artists view their identity, i.e. as non-nationalistic and transnational, influences the way that they view their performance practice. This practice manifests as a hybridization of various mixed media and cultural ideas, often derived from association with common

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<sup>280</sup> Susan Broadhurst, *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory* (London: Cassell, 1999), 12-13.

cultural artifacts that transcend geographic divides. Despite this, certain realities of the scene limit the liminality of the work in question.

Members of the subculture of fringe artists within Vienna's transnational social spaces tend to link their identities to a fluid concept of nationality and/or a nomadic lifestyle. As the authors of the *Manifesto for an European Performance Policy* state, "the borders between disciplines, categories *and* nations" are "fluid, dynamic and osmotic" (emphasis mine).<sup>281</sup> This statement reveals that the artists themselves tend to impose their ideas of fluidity (or liminality) between borders, national or otherwise, onto their discourse and practice regarding artistic forms and styles. In other words, there is an intrinsic link between the liminal state of the artists' national identities and the liminal quality, which the artists perceive in their own work. It appears that the artists' ideas of personal identity are being expanded as a result of their participation in the networks of the transnational social spaces. Furthermore, it seems that these permeable notions of identity are leading the artists to practice more fluid forms of performance. However, despite the artists' struggle to articulate the ideologically liminal quality of their performances, their work's actual liminality is hampered due to external, practical realities.

### **The Limits of Liminality in Vienna's Transnational Fringe Spaces**

The major factors hampering true experimentation within Vienna's fringe venues are related to the development of Europeanization and the glocalization of Vienna's performance culture. These include the following: one, the mobility-mandate that an

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<sup>281</sup> Jerome Bel, et al "Manifest: an die Europaeische Kommission und deren Kulturpolitische Vertreter/innen," *GIFT* (July, 2002), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61304&jahr=2002> (accessed December 13, 2010).

interconnected transnational fringe scene creates; two, the increased market demands on artists that require them to deal with aesthetics and ideologies that are derivative of a mixture of canonized avant-garde styles and global mass culture; three, the requirement for artists to be consistent with academic concepts or project proposals, which they must write in order to secure the initial trust of the local venues; four, the need to develop performances that are transportable and adaptable to Europe's transnational network of fringe venues.

In a European study on international co-productions in Europe Guy Cools stresses that "To work internationally is not an obligation but a choice."<sup>282</sup> Despite this statement, the study concludes that artists' mobility is currently "not due only to individual choice or ambition. It is the result of expanding international market demands in an enlarged EU."<sup>283</sup> Comments coming from many of Europe's transnational fringe artists confirm that mobility is actually a fundamental part of an artist's survival. This is especially the case with artists who are more associated with contemporary dance, which includes the majority of transnational fringe artists who are now thriving within Vienna, especially at Tanzquartier. For example, Lieven Thyron of Les Ballets C de la B in Belgium states that "since most of the existing funding schemes are insufficient, the financial co-production contributions are one of the essential pillars of our organization."<sup>284</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>282</sup> Guy Cools, "International Co-Production and Touring," *International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts*, <http://on-the-move.org/library/article/13862/co-production-and-touring/> (accessed March 13, 2011)

<sup>283</sup> Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Education and Culture)*, (2008), [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

<sup>284</sup> Quoted in Guy Cools, "International Co-Production and Touring," *International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts*, <http://on-the-move.org/library/article/13862/co-production-and-touring/> (accessed March 13, 2011)

Vitor Roriz, a European performing artist and choreographer, claims that “In general I don’t move because I want to move, I move because I have to move. If I don’t move, I don’t get funding, I can’t work.”<sup>285</sup> It appears that what was once optional is now largely obligatory and that Vienna, by virtue of instituting a self-conscious internationalization of its fringe scene and creating an integral subculture that functions under its precepts, has subjected its artists to this forced-nomadic way of life.<sup>286</sup>

In order for artists to sustain themselves many need to create productions that cater to the market demands of non-local transnational social spaces that are linked to the local ones. This need derives from several factors related to the local fringe scene. According to *IG Theater*’s 2006 country report on the state of Austria’s fringe scene, fringe venues are characterized by short performance periods.<sup>287</sup> Indeed most performers are only allocated two or three slots within a given season at Brut and Tanzquartier, where there are usually only enough audiences for a show to sustain itself for a total of six performances. Even with infrequent revivals of works done at Brut’s end-of-the-season *Alles Muss Raus! Festival* the amount of times a piece may be performed in

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<sup>285</sup> Amilhat Szary Anne-Laure, Louargant Sophie, Koop Kirsten, Saez Guy, *Artists Moving & Learning Project*, (Education and Culture DG: Lifelong Learning Program, 2010), 50, <http://www.enatc.org/moving-and-learning/files/European%20Report%20ARTISTS%20MOVING%20AND%20LEARNING.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2011).

<sup>286</sup> The necessity of mobility may not only be a reality in the fringe scene, but also in the current economic structure of Europe itself. According to project leader Norbert Schneider, "we can no longer verify the relationship between mobility and climbing higher on the social ladder. Mobility may simply serve to maintain the status quo or to prevent social decline."

Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report*, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Education and Culture), (2008), [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

<sup>287</sup> Barbara Stuewe-Essl, “Professional Independent Performing Arts: Financially Still on the Fringe,” *GIFT*, (2006), [http://www.freitheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country\\_report#22](http://www.freitheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country_report#22) (accessed December 30, 2010)

Vienna is very limited. As a result of the infrequent performance opportunities in Vienna, artists must tour productions in order to keep them alive. When I met with Kasebacher in 2009 he was preparing to go on a tour with the world-renowned Belgian dance artist Kate McIntosh. Kasebacher informed me that tours of this nature are essential to his longevity as an artist. In order to find continued success one must market one's work abroad.<sup>288</sup> In an interview with the current curators of the city of Vienna they echoed Kasebacher's statement, claiming it is "important that they (artists) tour so that they have the option of a future career." The curators stress that the money they offer is not sufficient to give the artists long-term sustainability. They further argue that their funding amounts to about 10% of the money required by artists to live and produce their work.<sup>289</sup> The artists must use the money that the curators provide in order to increase their visibility throughout Europe's network of co-production venues and fringe festivals.<sup>290</sup> This demonstrates the necessity of the curators to fund projects, which they believe have the potential to succeed within the international fringe performance market. Projects that they believe will only have a local impact are often not given equal consideration because they do not promise to yield international "visibility."<sup>291</sup> If this is true of the curators, it is even more so of the artistic directors of Tanzquartier and Brut who stand to receive greater international reputations based on the amount of transportable work generated in their home venues. Indeed, paying attention to the

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<sup>288</sup> Thomas Kasebacher, artistic director of Not Found Yet Theater, interview by author, 10 April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>289</sup> Andrea Amort, Angela Heide, and Juergen Weishaeupl, curators of the city of Vienna, interview by author, 19 August, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

prevailing market demands of the transnational fringe market has become essential for artists and administrators alike.<sup>292</sup>

The current curators of the city of Vienna prefer to use the word “visibility” rather than “marketability” in order to describe what artists should be generating using the seed money from the local government.<sup>293</sup> However, to a large degree, the term “visibility” is used as a decoy for the word “marketability,” which has many negative connotations within the fringe scene’s historical anti-market, anti-commercial rhetoric. To those who operate the co-production venues and festivals, artists’ works, and also their brands, become exchangeable commodities endowed with objectified cultural capital. The transnational social spaces themselves are markets where Europe’s prevailing fringe aesthetic and ideology can be consumed by other members of the integral subculture of other producers.

A second reason for the limitations on liminality in Vienna’s fringe venues is that the venues themselves maintain a certain uniform style of conceptual art in performance, which has shifted the focus away from those whose performances are more centered on virtuosity in choreography and acting. Proponents of this style are prone to their own biases, which are rooted in their educational experiences analyzing and working with

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<sup>292</sup> In her country report for the European Off Network Barbara Stuewe-Essl argues that fringe groups are not given sufficient government funds for traveling. This argument suggests that in order to effectively transform the curator’s seed money into travel money the artists must rely even more heavily on additional funding offered by Europe’s transnational co-production venues and festivals.

Barbara Stüwe-Eßl. “Austria Professional independent performing arts - financially still on the fringe,” *IG Freie Theaterarbeit Country Report*, (January, 2006),

[http://www.freitheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country\\_report#22](http://www.freitheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country_report#22)

<sup>293</sup> Andrea Amort resists the term “market” when discussing the sustainability of artists. She prefers to use the operative phrase “to create visibility.” Again, I question how the two terms differ. Perhaps their difference is a mere issue of semantics. In which case, in most conversations about increasing artists’ “visibility” this word must be converted into the term “marketability.” This alteration carries profound implications for artists and administrators within Vienna’s system.

Andrea Amort, Angela Heide, and Juergen Weishaeupl, curators for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 19 August, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

performances derived from the canonized historical avant-garde. These same artists tend to mix media within their work and re-code cultural artifacts from global mass culture, which is generally a common point of reference for the artists despite their national differences. To a large extent, a production can only be comprehended according to aesthetics familiar to its consumers, which is a factor highlighted by Marvin Carlson in *The Haunted Stage* when he states that, “We are able to ‘read’ new works...only because we recognize within them elements that have been recycled from other structures of experience that we have experienced earlier.”<sup>294</sup> If a production included truly revolutionary aesthetics and ideas, then it would be difficult for a community that had been educated in canonized and legitimized forms of avant-garde performance and exposed to a deluge of stimuli from mass culture to read the piece. It would be even more difficult for the piece to be marketed abroad where certain predetermined ideas regarding the horizons of audience expectations tend to dictate which artists will be invited to show their work. Horkheimer and Adorno’s criticism of mass culture that it appears to be “managed by special experts” who have “slim variety...specifically tailored to the office pigeonhole,” may initially seem to be something that Europe’s fringe scene, with its supposed adherence to liminality and risk taking, is inoculated against.<sup>295</sup> Despite this, the tendency of the venues to absorb what has already been tested and proven in sister venues may link the subculture with the ultimate critique that “The machine is rotating on the spot. While it already determines consumption, it rejects anything untried as a risk.”<sup>296</sup> This is a factor also highlighted by many artists in

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<sup>294</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>295</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, 99.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

Vienna's scene including Yosi Wanunu who claims that, "In Europe, if you look at a piece you may not know the country" it originates from. It is as if there is "one person deciding" which artists will be legitimized.<sup>297</sup>

The process where a production is approved by the artistic directors of the co-production venues begins with an artists' concept. Although the final product may alter, the advertising and market demands of the transnational fringe venues necessitate that artists' mostly cohere to their concept. Kasebacher (whose work is mentioned above) states that he has difficulty writing the required academic performance concepts. He is more comfortable discovering things within the context of the embodied rehearsal process and then, after a process of discovery, selecting what he will include in the piece and justifying its inclusion through theory. He finds the practice of beginning from a concrete concept to be limiting, although he recognizes how the market demands of Europe's transnational fringe venues require this.<sup>298</sup>

A third factor that restricts the liminality of Vienna's transnational fringe spaces are the material realities associated with the venues' basic black box construction and the need for scenic elements to be ready-made and transportable. The production halls of Tanzquartier and Brut have flexible seating arrangements and minimal capabilities for flying scenery in from above or masking performers' entrances and exits. The latter factor means that many costume changes are done on stage in full view of the audience, adding to the Brechtian alienation effect whereby people are fully aware of the works'

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<sup>297</sup> Yosi Wanunu and Kornelia Kilga, artistic director and producer of Toxic Dreams, interview by author, 20 May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>298</sup> Thomas Kasebacher, artistic director of Not Found Yet Theater, interview by author, 10 April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

constructed nature.<sup>299</sup> In such spaces, it is difficult to create a full or partial illusion of reality, therefore, lesser attempts to create mimetic theatre are made. As a result artists are more prone to focus on ironic meta-theatrical performance.<sup>300</sup> Although this form also has many interpretive possibilities, it is still a limitation. Furthermore, the need for performances to be transportable means that artists must divert attention away from heavy scenic elements. Instead, artists are now relying on mediated performance and bare-bones aural and visual effects in order to establish their *mise en scene* and to lend their works aesthetic complexity. This creates the tendency for artists to recycle global mass culture (i.e. from television, film, commercials, and popular music).<sup>301</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter provided a basic overview of some of the aspects restricting the actual liminal potential of transnational fringe artists who participate in Europe's network of co-production venues, of which Tanzquartier and Brut are part. In this network Vienna itself can be understood as a co-producer. Vienna relies on the transnational networks to keep its niche fringe market alive and the city's politicians hope that by virtue of its artists participating in the market, Vienna's brand will more fully be

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<sup>299</sup> Here I refer to the often-theorized Brechtian alienation effect, also called the *Verfremdungseffekt* or the *A-effect*. The twentieth century German playwright, director, and theorist, Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), coined this term in order to refer to his own practice of making the familiar strange. This often happened by distancing the audience from the emotional effects of the theatre and/or by having the actors distance themselves from their given circumstances by using asides and/or soliloquies that drew attention to the constructed nature of the theatrical event.

<sup>300</sup> I define metatheatrical performance as a form of theatrical performance where the performers, director, and/or playwright manufacture self-conscious discourse about the theatrical process within the piece. The most famous example of a playwright's use of metatheatrical performance is found in William Shakespeare's treatment of the Rude Mechanicals in his play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

<sup>301</sup> I define mediated culture as a form of performance that is derived from the use of recording devices, such as film. When the recording is played back to an audience the event signals distance between the original performer, whose image the audience now sees, and the audience. Mediated culture is contrasted with live culture, although the former has a profound influence on the ways that the latter is constructed and perceived. Walter Benjamin's influential scholarly piece *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and Philip Auslander's *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* provide excellent examples and theories of how and why this phenomenon occurs.

associated with the notion of a European cultural metropolis. These transnational networks include Tanzquartier and Brut, which are essential institutions in the creation of an integral community, or subculture, of fringe artists who ascribe to similar aesthetic and ideological notions. This community constitutes what Bourdieu would call a “taste culture.” It is this very taste, which enables the community that also threatens it from within. As the ensuing chapters will convey, the artists who are currently thriving under this system derive their aesthetics and ideologies from their participation in the material circumstances highlighted above, which appear to be self-contradicting. As a result of the artists’ awareness of this reality, they engage in self-criticism and parody as a way of disassociating themselves from their heretical practices, at least in terms of their “avant-garde impulses.”

### CHAPTER 3

## THE DUALITY BETWEEN VIENNA'S FRINGE AND ESTABLISHED SCENES: CONVERGING AESTHETICS AND DISPARATE SUBCULTURES

At the end of chapter two it was argued that artists in Vienna's transnational fringe scene define themselves according to fluid concepts of national identity. This fluidity towards national identity spills over into the artists' aesthetics. The artists' belief that they "transcend" the nation state is linked to their conviction that they can also "transcend" explicit categories of performance.<sup>302</sup> Initially, it may appear that the fringe scene has somewhat of a monopoly on this type of flexibility because the established scene is far more rooted in language and, therefore, more prone to be locally-bounded. Although this may have been the case in previous decades, at the present moment, even Vienna's established theatre scene appears to be more open to Europeanization and fluid production concepts. In this chapter I tell the story of how the ideological and aesthetic gap, or antagonism, between the established and fringe scenes in Vienna is narrowing, partially as a result of Europeanization and globalization. As the differences between the scenes diminish, fringe culture makers must find new ways to legitimate themselves or else fall prey to more budget cuts. In the recent decade this struggle has manifested as a bottom-up battle, which all fringe artists, regardless of their status as "winners" or "losers," must fight. It has also manifested as a top-down imposition of new outward-looking initiatives in the scene. The primary outcome of the bottom-up struggle and top-

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<sup>302</sup> Here I refer to the artists' comment that they "consider the borders between disciplines, categories and nations to be fluid, dynamic and osmotic." I also refer to their statement that they "are aware of shared anxiety over the loss of 'cultural identities' in the European context today but have no fear of the 'homogenisation of cultures': operating on a trans-national level, our artistic practices dismantle such concepts or logics."

Jerome Bel, et al "Manifest: an die Europaeische Kommission und deren Kulturpolitische Vertreter/innen," *GIFT* (July, 2002), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61304&jahr=2002> (accessed December 13, 2010).

down impositions has been the bold articulation of a new genre of performance, which resists explicit categorization, but which is often placed under the broad label “contemporary performance” (*zeitgenössische Performance* in German).<sup>303</sup> Although previous chapters hinted at some key aspects of this new genre, this chapter expands upon these features and lead into a descriptive analysis of specific products from the groups Toxic Dreams and Superamas. This chapter also offers a more useful English term, *conglomerate performance*, for identifying the genre that these two groups exemplify.

Within Vienna’s cultural field artists perceive a pronounced split between the consecrated transnational fringe performance scene and the mainstream theatres (hereafter referred to as the established theatre scene). Both scenes constitute their own unique subcultures and the performances generated by the diverse subcultures cater to different niche markets within the local context. Although Vienna’s fringe scene historically developed in opposition to the established theatre scene, the ideological and aesthetic gaps between the two scenes are narrowing, primarily as a result of both scenes’ exposure to canonized avant-garde styles, global mass culture, and local/transnational market concerns. But there are other reasons for the disintegration of the gulf between scenes. For example, fringe and established artists tend to favor the idea of Europeanization and adhere to a cosmopolitan outlook. Also the majority of Vienna’s culture makers in both scenes stress the value of difference, which has become a key way for them to establish their legitimacy in a market-driven globalized era characterized by a deluge of stimuli that competes for audience attention. Due to the narrowing gap

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<sup>303</sup> As I stated in the introduction, I include this label in quotation marks because it differs from the unquoted term contemporary performance, which merely means performance happening today, and carries a more specific meaning and other levels of cultural implications.

between the established and fringe scenes, fringe artists and administrators are seeking new ways to legitimize their work. They are doing this by: one, mixing genres, styles, and mediums; two, creating collaborations between artistic disciplines; three, expanding the domain of performance from the realm of venues to found spaces; and four, harkening back to the historical avant-garde's emphasis on the entanglement of art and life. These activities are being conducted in an atmosphere of perceived experimentation and being labeled "contemporary performance." Along with the fringe scene's internationalization, the development of a new genre that is intentionally set apart from the work being done in the city's established scene has effectively created conditions where fringe artist's work may be more legitimized. However, the new genre is still highly ambiguous, in its nascent stages, and prone to controversy.

### **The Split, or Duality, Between the Established and Fringe Scenes**

There are two distinct subcultures within Vienna's performing arts community. These are the text-based German language established theatre scene and the non-text-based, multi-lingual, transnational fringe scene. Although this dissertation has heretofore focused on artists' struggles for legitimacy within the macrocosm of Europe's cultural field and the microcosm of Vienna's fringe community, the city's transnational fringe scene is also influenced by its local struggle with the more hegemonic established scene. Thomas Frank of Brut, readily acknowledges the "duality of the fringe scene and the (established) theatre scene." This is his way of articulating that there is a separation between the fields and a general antagonism on the part of the fringe community, which is directed towards the established community.<sup>304</sup> In many ways this animosity is an

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<sup>304</sup> Thomas Frank, artistic director of Brut, interview by author, 17 May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

outgrowth of the seemingly disparate operations of the venues in both scenes.<sup>305</sup> Despite their growing ideological/aesthetic convergence, the following material aspects keep the two scenes divided: differences in funding, approaches (i.e. text-based verses ensemble creativity), and cultural/linguistic orientations.

Large rationale for the “duality” in the scenes is the great disparity in government funding allocated to the established and fringe venues. For example, according to the 2006 European Off Network country report on Austrian performance, in 2003 the Federal Republic of Austria dedicated approximately 173.3 million Euros of its arts budget to performing arts venues.<sup>306</sup> Of these 173.3 million Euros, approximately 77.3 percent (134 million Euros) went to the national theatre institutions, like the Burgtheater, the Vienna State Opera, and the Volksoper. Of the remaining funds 21.5 million went to the federal state and municipal theatres and 14.8 million went to 12 “big” and “midsize” theatres in the form of operating grants. This left a paltry 2.1 million Euros of federal funding to be shared among 86 “small” theatres and fringe artists.<sup>307</sup> The small sum allocated to fringe artists from the Federal Republic of Austria meant that such artists needed to rely more heavily upon local sources of funding controlled by the city of Vienna.<sup>308</sup> However, despite the disparate funding sources, i.e. the Federal Republic of

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<sup>305</sup> Although later in this chapter I argue that the margins between venues are diminishing, here it is important to highlight the major established venues and how their material circumstances separate them from their fringe counterparts and position them, in relation to the fringe scene, as the local hegemonic cultural forces.

<sup>306</sup> The European Off Network (EON) is a transnational network dedicated to increasing the awareness of fringe performing artists’ working conditions and helping them to increase their transnational mobility. For a further description of this network, go to the following website.

<http://www.freietheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork> (accessed March 11, 2011).

<sup>307</sup> Barbara Stüwe-Eßl. “Austria Professional independent performing arts - financially still on the fringe,” *IG Freie Theaterarbeit Country Report*, (January, 2006),

[http://www.freietheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country\\_report#22](http://www.freietheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country_report#22).

<sup>308</sup> Vienna also heavily weights their funding in favor of the major established local venues such as Theater in der Josef Stadt (14-15 million Euros per year).

Austria and Vienna, the city's fringe artists have consistently seen the Burgtheater as a source of competition.<sup>309</sup>

In Vienna the Burgtheater has a tendency to overshadow work being produced in the city's other theatrical venues. The Burgtheater itself is an expansive institution featuring a number of venues scattered throughout the city. These include the following: the Burgtheater's main venue, a grand neo-classical structure featuring frescos by Gustav Klimt located across from the *Rathaus Platz* (the city hall's major square); the Akademietheater, a smaller venue seating approximately 600 patrons and located in the same building as Vienna's academy of music; the Kasino am Schwarzenbergplatz, a late-nineteenth century imperial construction with a top floor converted into a flexible playing space; the Vestibuel, a small, versatile experimental venue built within the Burgtheater's main house.

Because they are affiliated with Austria's national theatre, and controlled by the Federal Republic of Austria, Burgtheater productions have far greater resources at their disposal than Vienna's city-run fringe venues. The Burgtheater has an annual operating budget of approximately 65 million Euros, which makes the annual operating budgets of Tanzquartier (approximately 3 million Euros) and Brut (approximately 1.5 million Euros) seem paltry in comparison. The greater operating sum means that the Burgtheater also has a far more expansive advertising campaign, even for its more experimental productions. The venue itself, with its central location and allure for tourists assures that its performances will perpetually meet their capacity quotas. In contrast, Vienna's fringe venues are slightly less centrally located and must rely more on advertisements to draw

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<sup>309</sup> Some of Vienna's major venues are funded by the city *and* the federal republic. The Volkstheater, with an operating budget of 11.3 million Euros per year, is a notable example.

audience attention. This process is complicated by Vienna's advertising board, called *Gewista*, which places restrictions on where performance groups and venues may hang posters and other advertising materials.<sup>310</sup> *Gewista* has been accused of having a near monopoly on the city's outdoor advertising spaces. One of the few locations where Brut is able to advertise is the subway terminal located in the immediate vicinity of the venue. Unless people know that Brut exists and have ventured to find its production schedule online, it is very difficult for them to be exposed to the venue's advertising campaign. Such circumstances, and more, make the Burgtheater Vienna's uncontested leader in the production of a vast array of theatrical pieces. In any given season audiences can view a play by Austrian playwrights (i.e. Franz Grillparzer and Thomas Bernhard), by classical European playwrights (i.e. William Shakespeare and Jean Racine), and by an assortment of contemporary playwrights from around the world (i.e. Yasmina Reza and Neil LaBute). In addition, a variety of more experimental German language playwrights produce plays in conjunction with younger and/or more experimental directors in the more fringe-oriented venues, i.e. the Kasino and Vestibuel. Some of these productions enjoy such success that they receive placement in the Akademietheater's repertoire and are shown to an even wider, more mainstream Burgtheater audience.

The major differences between the Burgtheater's more fringe-oriented work and the productions shown in Vienna's other fringe venues (i.e. Tanzquartier and Brut) are the tendencies for Burgtheater directors to work from established texts generated by playwrights and the Burgtheater's near-exclusive German language repertoire. However,

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<sup>310</sup>*Gewista* is the name of Vienna's advertising board, which was created in 1921 and is under the control of the municipal department of the city of Vienna, which itself has long been under the supervision of the *SPOe*. This organization places restrictions on the types and sizes of advertising that companies may utilize throughout the city.

although the Burgtheater is defined by its use of German language, the venue does not often showcase the regional Viennese or Austrian dialects. The majority of Burgtheater actors receive their training from a network of German language theatre schools, which emphasize a more northern-oriented form of German called *Hoch Deutsch* or *Buhndeutsche*.<sup>311</sup> Often, Austrians who are integrated into the training system must adapt to this way of speaking. By doing so they lessen their Austrian dialects, which have negative stigmas attached to them associated with rural life and regressive conservative outlooks. The training system leads to an established German language scene within Vienna that is already somewhat divorced from the local context.<sup>312</sup> Those actors who were not fully able to abandon their Austrian dialects may appear on the Burgtheater stage, but this is seldom. Primary rationale for this is the incongruous sound created by the intermixing of dialects on stage. As former Burgtheater actor David Oberkogler remarked in a May 2009 interview, “when you are the only Austrian on stage, you hear it.”<sup>313</sup> Furthermore, as Oberkogler highlighted, at the time of the interview, he was the only male native Austrian actor under the age of 40 to work at the Burgtheater and his contract was about to expire.<sup>314</sup>

Contrary to actors in Vienna’s established scene, the small amount of native Austrian fringe artists tend to avoid the negative stigma attached to their regional dialects because they often perform in English and/or a mixture of other European languages.

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<sup>311</sup> *Hoch Deutsch* is a German word that is literally translated as “high German;” however it is often considered “standard German” in the way that the North Eastern dialect of the United States is often considered standard American. Its name derives from its usage in the higher elevated areas of German speaking lands closer to Europe’s Alpine region. *Buehndeutsche* is a German word used to denote the type of inflection used by stage actors who tend to speak *Hoch Deutsch*.

<sup>312</sup> A primary exception to this is the Volkstheater, which emphasizes stage work written by Austrian playwrights and performed in the Austrian dialect.

<sup>313</sup> David Oberkogler, former Burgtheater actor, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

Rationale for this is both pragmatic and ideological. Pragmatically, doing productions in the locally-bounded German language “limits possibilities for exchange in...Europe.”<sup>315</sup> Utilizing English, even an unsophisticated trade version of English, means that groups will be more successful abroad. Even artists in the fringe scene, like those affiliated with Toxic Dreams, who rely more on language in performance claim that they need justification in order to produce something in German. For example, if the English is deemed too complex, then the Toxic Dreams team will either translate it into German or include German subtitles.<sup>316</sup> Toxic Dreams tends to operate in English primarily because it is the common language among the artists’ international group. Wanunu himself has, at best, a rudimentary knowledge of German. Furthermore, even though Irene Cotichio, one of Toxic Dream’s principal actresses, has a strong command of German, she states that it is easier for her to act in English.<sup>317</sup> Other groups, such as Superamas (primarily composed of five Frenchmen, many of whom have a limited command of German) produce their work in English for similar reasons. Of course, this carries implications regarding which audiences will be able to fully comprehend the performances.

In ideological terms, the artists have a desire to cohere to the dominant cosmopolitan model, where value is placed on English as a marker of the fringe scene’s transnational orientation. Austrian native and fringe performer Thomas Kasebacher argues that performing in English allows him to eschew the stereotypes associated with his Tyrolean Austrian dialect, which is highly apparent when he speaks German. As he

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<sup>315</sup> Christine Standfest, member of theatercombinant, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>316</sup> Yosi Wanunu, artistic director of Toxic Dreams, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

claims, “Doing it in English, it feels more universal.”<sup>318</sup> Having the ability to perform almost exclusively in English also allows Kasebacher to align himself with a specific type of cultural capital. Whether for pragmatic or ideological reasons, Vienna’s fringe scene is now dominated by English language. This factor automatically sets it apart from the Burgtheater, which is composed almost exclusively of German-language productions.

The Burgtheater’s practice of producing text-based theatre in the dominant German language means that the artists within the venue (i.e. actors, directors, designers, and more) are intrinsically part of a specific performance community, which has historically played in an extensive German language repertoire system composed of state theatres throughout German speaking lands. This system has its own complex organizational structure and also accounts for its own subculture. For example, large established German language theatres are part of the *Deutscher Buehnenverein* (the German theatre organization), which serves as an important center of communication for German language theatre practitioners and helps them lobby for better living and working conditions.<sup>319</sup> Actors who play within the system are part of a union called the *Betriebsrat*, the German equivalent to the American Actor’s Equity Association, which places limitations on how often actors can rehearse/play a show in a given time period. Many directors are also part of a union called a *Griemium*, although this is less official than the actor’s union.<sup>320</sup> Such organizations link the Burgtheater to its own transnational network, albeit one found exclusively in German speaking lands, and this network helps

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<sup>318</sup> Thomas Kasebacher, artistic director of Not Found Yet Theater, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>319</sup> <http://www.buehnenverein.de/de/theater-und-orchester/19.html> (accessed January 20, 2011).

<sup>320</sup> There are many more complexities to the system, but I will not include them in this study because they are not wholly relevant to my investigation of the fringe scene, which has its own complex organizational structure (see chapters one and two).

define the established theatre as its own subculture with a unique set of operations and orientations. Although the Burgtheater is a part of this system it is also its own entity, which consists of unprecedented power within the network.

Due to the Burgtheater's unparalleled resources it is often called the first theatre of the German language. Consequently, it acts as a magnet for the German language's most noteworthy celebrity actors, directors, and designers. When German language actors are employed at the Burgtheater they become a part of a unique, prestigious, and integral community. They are the established German language theatre's elite class. Being grafted into this prestigious institution is an indicator that one has achieved great success and being ousted from the network is often a severe point of hardship. In an interview with Patrick Beck, former Burgtheater actor, he lamented his release from the theatre claiming that it would be unlikely for him to get hired at other area theatres due to the elitist stigma that Burgtheater actors have in the larger established German language theatre community.<sup>321</sup> In an interview with Sylvia Haider, former Burgtheater actress and stage adaptor of the Burgtheater Kasino's version of Sandor Maria's novel *Wandlungen einer Eher*, she stated that when Matthais Hartmann was appointed leader of the theatre in 2009, she became one of casualties of the new arrangement. Haider expressed her extreme disappointment upon learning that she would not return for another season at the Burgtheater stating "why should I leave the Burg...this is my house."<sup>322</sup> Haider claims that the Viennese have a unique relationship to theatre, which does not exist in German cities, and that being a part of Vienna's most renowned theatre means that one is a part of

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<sup>321</sup> Patrick Beck, former Burgtheater actor, interview by author, 11 April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>322</sup> Sylvia Haider, author of *Wandlungen einer Eher*, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

a special community. Upon being grafted into the Burgtheater's own integral community Haider, an Austrian herself, began to perceive the Burgtheater as her home. Her position at the venue became a fundamental aspect of her identity rather than a mere career.

A subculture is usually defined as a smaller group of people within a larger cultural system with rules, norms, and methods of socialization that somehow divert from mainstream culture. The word subculture is sometimes used almost as a synonym for countercultural movements, where participants intentionally operate according to principles that counteract mainstream trends.<sup>323</sup> For the purpose of this dissertation, subcultures are defined as smaller, integral communities located within larger contexts of socialization. These subcultures may or may not be intentionally counter-cultural. In the case of the Burgtheater, which contains its own unique subculture of artists, the cultural agents who comprise it are decisively not counter-cultural, but rather through their work they help to define hegemonic conceptions of Viennese and Austrian culture.

While in Vienna and freely traveling between the established and fringe scenes I became aware of several aspects that lead me to label these two scenes as separate subcultures of performing artists. For example, artists at the Burgtheater are often kept busy with tight production schedules associated with the Burgtheater's extensive repertoire system. Vincent Mesnaritsch, a *Buehnenbilder* (designer) who often works at the Burgtheater informed me that during the production season a typical day consists of working 13 hours and then ending the evening with a drink in the Burgtheater's cantina along with his fellow Burgtheater artists.<sup>324</sup> There is literally no time for most active Burgtheater artists to see productions outside of the Burgtheater community, even if they

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<sup>323</sup> See the studies of Dick Hebdige for a more detailed treatment of these concepts.

<sup>324</sup> Vincent Mesnaritsch, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

had the desire. Furthermore, the long hours spent with fellow members of the German theatre's established companies means that it is common for these artists to have the majority of their professional *and personal* relationships within the network. The same holds true for the fringe scene. Although I found many fringe artists to be less active than their established counterparts, they often expressed disinterest or outright hostility towards Burgtheater productions. They also showed little attempt to forge professional friendships with people at the established venues. These aspects, and more, are reasons why one should understand the two scenes as separate, non-overlapping communities within the larger context of Viennese society.

The tendency of Vienna's fringe artists to eschew work being done at the Burgtheater often takes the appearance of a conflict of generations, with the fringe representing the young and "hip" and the Burgtheater representing the old and stilted, but this is a problematic perception. Although he acknowledges that fringe scenes are often populated with the young, Pierre Bourdieu suggests the possibility that there may be aging artists in the fringe scene.<sup>325</sup> He further claims that there may be a gap between the artist's chronological and generational age, which means that artists may be older but exhibit ideological and aesthetic leanings that are more commonly associated with younger generations, such as the fringe's general antagonism to established traditions. There are many aging artists within Vienna's fringe scene that are unable to cross into the established theatre's subculture and who, therefore, remain in the fringe scene's subculture. Indeed, according to the findings from the European Commission report

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<sup>325</sup> Bourdieu states, "it is true that the initiative of change falls almost by definition on the newcomers, i.e. the youngest, who are also those least endowed with specific capital: in a universe in which to exist is to differ, i.e. to occupy a distinct, distinctive position, they must assert their difference, get it known and recognized, get themselves known and recognized ('make a name for themselves')."

entitled *Artists' Moving and Learning Project*, the typical age where fringe artists come into success and demonstrate the greatest amount of mobility is between 30 and 40 years.<sup>326</sup> The separation between scenes is, therefore, not a matter of old verses young. Instead the division results from the linguistic distinction between the fringe and established scenes as well as from Austria's rigid social structure, with its resistance to vertical and horizontal mobility.<sup>327</sup>

Despite the differences between scenes' subcultures, there is still somewhat of a negative stigma attached to those who operate exclusively within the fringe community. As Christine Standfest of the Vienna-based fringe group theatercombinant argues, much of the Viennese public believes that an artist is not successful until he/she has performed at the Burgtheater. This creates a situation in the fringe scene where, "you feel you are condemned to being a never-ending juvenile."<sup>328</sup> The words of Toxic Dreams company member and Superamas actress Anna Mendelsohn appear to confirm Standfest's assertion. Despite her success within the fringe scene, Mendelsohn admits that she still has a dream to be an actress at the Burgtheater or Volkstheater. She laments that her grandmother, a playwright who had pieces staged at the Burgtheater, would not be particularly proud of her because she is not a *Burgactress*.<sup>329</sup> Even though the completely bi-lingual Mendelsohn is enjoying a solid career in the fringe scene and has

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<sup>326</sup> Amilhat Szary Anne-Laure, Louargant Sophie, Koop Kirsten, Saez Guy, *Artists Moving & Learning Project*, (Education and Culture DG: Lifelong Learning Program, 2010), 50, <http://www.encatc.org/moving-and-learning/files/European%20Report%20ARTISTS%20MOVING%20AND%20LEARNING.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2011).

<sup>327</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randall Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 58.

<sup>328</sup> Christine Standfest, member of theatercombinant, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>329</sup> Anna Mendelsohn, member of Toxic Dreams, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

the ability to perform in German as well as in English, she does not anticipate ever earning a position in an established theatre ensemble, even as she matures in her profession. Rationale for this is that she occupies a separate sphere of influence than her established counterparts and her work is not likely to be seen outside of her own subculture.

The seemingly impermeable nature of the two subcultures suggests that the supposed “duality of the fringe scene and the (established) theatre scene” is probably not, as many fringe artists claim, an explicit battle between fields.<sup>330</sup> To argue that there is a battle implies that there is outright antagonism on both ends of the spectrum (the fringe and established scenes) and that the possibility exists for the fringe scene to displace certain segments of the establish scene. In Vienna, no such factors exist. Instead, it appears that the antagonism is mainly the product of the fringe side alone and that this antagonism is, at most, superficial and stems from the artists’ jealousy over the Burgtheater artists’ resources. The artists who articulate their transnational orientation do so in part by demonstrating their disinterest in and dissociation with the Burgtheater. Conversely, Burgtheater artists exhibit little interest in their fringe performance counterparts while admitting to their intrinsic separation from them and superior position over them. Furthermore, fringe administrators attempt to combat the lack of public attention brought on by the Burgtheater’s hegemony over local audience’s attention to new work by calling for increased communication between artists, the public, and the media.<sup>331</sup> However, such programs aimed at getting more audiences to see fringe shows will never enable the fringe scene to displace the work at the Burgtheater because the

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<sup>330</sup> Thomas Frank, artistic director of Brut, interview by author, 17 May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

venue's reign over the scene and its historical, local importance to the people of Vienna is too great to ever be challenged. The above circumstances manufacture the need for the fringe scene to somehow articulate its legitimacy independently from the hegemonic Burgtheater. One of the ways that the scene does so is by highlighting its international qualities and its value of newness. However, as Europeanization exerts its profound influence over all subcultures within Vienna, especially subcultures within the cultural field, even these qualities are not exclusive to the fringe scene.

Although the Burgtheater's artists are entangled in a specific German-language community, which values text-based approaches to theatre and enjoys a large degree of support from the Austrian nation, there is evidence that the venue is being affected by the onslaught of globalization and Europeanization. Factors such as an increased use of English language, the incorporation of directors and designers from non-German language countries, and more attention to generating corporate support are evidence for such change. In general, these factors and others are leading to more of a correlation between Vienna's established and fringe venues. This correlation is abetted by the widespread, recent historical practice of the established venues co-opting the aesthetics of the fringe scene.

### **The Absorption of the Fringe Scene by the Established Scene**

To a large extent, fringe artists pioneered necessarily legitimizing work in the 1980s and 1990s, thus assuring that the fringe scene would remain a viable subculture within Vienna's performance scene and a community legitimized by governmental support. However, the support was granted with the expectation that the scene would become a viable tributary to the established scene. It was not initially offered with the

understanding that the fringe scene would develop independently of the established theatre scene, which it has over the past decade.

From the late 1800s to the collapse of the Austria-Hungarian Empire in 1918, Vienna was a hub of fringe (or avant-garde) art. What followed was a period characterized by growing conservatism and a tendency to focus on classical forms of theatre rather than on experimentation. Although Germany experienced significant social upheaval in the 1960s and 1970s, mainly spear-headed by the members of the *Nachgeboren*, those born after the Nazi period, which rebelled against their parents' practice of denying and/or keeping quiet regarding their complicity in the Holocaust, Austria witnessed far fewer social conflicts. However, up until Claus Peymann, a German, was appointed as the controversial leader of the Burgtheater, the revolutions that did occur in Vienna's artistic community were far more grassroots and esoteric than those to the North. For example, the Viennese answer to the German's neo-expressionist *Tanztheater* movement, which also began in the 1960s and 1970s, was the Viennese Actionists. The Actionists' performances were characterized by ritualized mutilation and carnal actions staged in found spaces and without government consent. The Actionists were one strand of a small number of experimental performance groups, which staged their work primarily in the abandoned basements and common rooms of Vienna's failed socialist apartment buildings and received a great deal of criticism and oppression from the local government. In the late 1980s a shift occurred, which brought fringe artists into the institutionalized mainstream of Austrian society. At this time Robert Harauer published the study called *Zur sozialen Lage der freien Theaterschaffenden* (translated as *Study on the Social Welfare Situation of Independent Artists*), which argued that Austria's

performing artists have poor living and working conditions and should be better supported by the local government. This study met with growing initiatives for transforming the fringe scene into a viable, governmentally-legitimized space for creating artistic innovation.<sup>332</sup> Barbara Stuewe-Essl argues that, as a result of these reforms, through the 1990s fringe artists were able to develop more work while subsisting on government funding.<sup>333</sup> In theory, with a more visible, governmentally-sanctioned fringe scene, the established venues would be able to gain new artistic insights by co-opting this scene's more experimental aesthetics. This happened more during the 1990s than in the ensuing decade when the fringe scene was transformed by the government into more of a space for legitimizing Vienna's brand in Europe's transnational fringe spaces. However, within Vienna the established scene is still accused of co-opting the fringe scene's aesthetics.

Vienna's major established theatres have been known to absorb and adapt avant-garde aesthetics, re-packaging them for mainstream audiences. For example, although the Viennese Actionists were frequently imprisoned during the 1970s and 1980s, in the late 1990s they had become absorbed into Austria's mainstream. Evidence for this was in 1995 when Herman Nitsch was invited to design the opera *Hériodade* by Jules Massenet for the established Vienna Opera and then later in 2001 when he designed the opera *Satyagraha* by Philip Glass at the Festspielhaus of St. Polten (an established venue

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<sup>332</sup> This study met with the development of *IGFT* (the Austrian Association of Independent Theatre) and "*IG-NET*," an organization that subsidized artists' social security contributions. These motions enhanced the legitimacy of work within the fringe scene.

<sup>333</sup> Barbara Stuewe-Essl, "Austria Professional independent performing arts - financially still on the fringe," *GIFT*, (January, 2006), [http://www.freitheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country\\_report#22](http://www.freitheater.at/?page=europeanoffnetwork&subpage=country_report#22) (accessed January 21, 2011).

located in a town on the outskirts of Vienna).<sup>334</sup> A similar event occurred a decade earlier as well when the avant-garde playwright Thomas Bernhard's work was produced at the Burgtheater under the leadership of Claus Peymann.<sup>335</sup> This resulted in copious studies generated within the scholarly community. Perhaps the most recent example of the established theatre's power to overtly purchase the fringe occurred with the Kasino's 2009/2010 season opener, a collaborative event between the New-York-based fringe group The Nature Theater of Oklahoma and Burgtheater actors.

The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma is an example of a grassroots, fringe performance group, which garnered a great deal of critical and audience attention within Vienna's fringe community. This happened when the New York-based company was discovered by Florian Malzacher, dramaturg of the Austrian contemporary performance festival Steirische Herbst, and subsequently given public funds to travel to Austria and perform at the international event.<sup>336</sup> As a result of the group's backing by Steirische Herbst, which provided them the necessary travel money to fly to Austria, they were able to subsequently perform at the less well-endowed transnational fringe venue Brut, where the group generated a great deal of attention among Vienna's fringe community.<sup>337</sup> Vienna's interest in the Nature Theater of Oklahoma culminated in a 2008 win for

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<sup>334</sup> <http://www.nitsch.org/index-en.html> (accessed March 11, 2011).

<sup>335</sup> General overviews of the controversies that Claus Peymann and Thomas Bernhard's legendary partnership are available in English language studies such as those mentioned below.

Gitta Honneger, *Thomas Bernhard: the Making of an Austrian*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

Linda C. Demeritt, Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger, eds., *Postwar Austrian Theatre and Performance*, (Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, 2002).

<sup>336</sup> For more information on the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma visit their website.

<http://www.oktheater.org/> (accessed March 11, 2011).

<sup>337</sup> Steirische Herbst is one of Austria's few international festivals to showcase transnational fringe artists who display "contemporary performance." This festival has a larger international audience than the niche co-production venues of Vienna. It may be compared to the Wiener Festwochen; consequently it attracts a great deal of private sponsors, who increase their visibility by funding the event. It is rare for the festival to showcase works generated within the context of Vienna.

<http://www.steirischerherbst.at/2011/deutsch/micro2011/> (accessed March 11, 2011).

Austria's Nestroy Prize for Best Off Production (Off is synonymous with fringe). As a result of the group's critical and audience praise, Malzacher who had himself become absorbed into Austria's established scene when the new director of the Burgtheater, Matthias Hartmann, appointed him as freelance dramaturg at the Burgtheater's Kasino, suggested the group as the venue's 2009/2010 season opener. In this instance the Burgtheater's co-optation of the fringe was fairly transparent, but it is often far more opaque and difficult to verify empirically. The opacity is increased due to the fringe and established scenes' division. Indeed, even though the scenes are converging, instances like the absorption of the Nature Theater of Oklahoma are extremely rare.

### **Rationale for the Disintegrating Gap between the Fringe and Established Scenes**

Although the fringe and established theatre scenes are separate, they are converging, and there are three primary reasons why the aesthetic and ideological gaps between the separate subcultures are narrowing. All of these seem to result from or relate to Europeanization and globalization and appear to have little to do with their close geographical proximity to each other. The first reason is that artists in both scenes tend to emphasize their identities as Europeans. The second rationale is that fringe and established artists follow the developments of global mediated mass culture. The final, and primary reason, is that artists in both scenes stress the value of difference, which has become a key way for them to establish their legitimacy in a market-driven, globalized era characterized by a deluge of stimuli competing for audience attention.

The EU attempts to establish and strengthen a unified European identity among its citizens, while still emphasizing the motto “unity in diversity.”<sup>338</sup> Although this unified identity would seem to be more prevalent within the transnational fringe scene than within the more localized established theatre scene, artists in both scenes appear to identify with Europe. A key pragmatic factor in creating a unified European identity is language. This central aspect of identity construction poses a large practical problem to monolingual EU citizens who find that linguistic limitations are barriers to forging connections with people in the EU who come from areas beyond their own nation’s borders. However, such mono-linguistic citizens are a rarity in Europe, especially among cultural agents.<sup>339</sup> Since 2007 the EU has recognized 23 so-called “official” languages, which correspond to the dominant languages of EU member nations.<sup>340</sup> Although German is actually one of the most common mother tongues of EU citizens, English is the language that is typically used for practical communication among EU citizens, especially within the highly mobile group of European artists.<sup>341</sup> Among members of Vienna’s established theatre subculture, German is the primary method of

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<sup>338</sup> This motto was adopted by the EU in 2000 to stress that, despite the union’s wishes to unite its people, politicians do not wish to alter the great cultural diversity that characterizes Europe. More information about this motto can be found in *The Bridge*, a quarterly report on European integration.

[http://www.bridge-mag.com/magazine/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=213&Itemid=74](http://www.bridge-mag.com/magazine/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=213&Itemid=74)

<sup>339</sup> According to *The New Federalist*, “56% of the citizens are capable of joining a conversation in another language than their mother tongue” and “Almost 50% of the citizens that know at least one language other than their mother tongue, use the foreign language almost every day.”

<http://www.thenewfederalist.eu/Viva-Europe-and-its-languages> (accessed March 11, 2011).

<sup>340</sup> For further information on how the EU categorizes languages as “official” visit the following website. <http://ec.europa.eu> (accessed March 11, 2011).

<sup>341</sup> *The New Federalist* states, “English is the most widely spread language in the world as a first foreign language and it is also the most spoken in Europe.” Furthermore 68% of Europeans claim that it is the most useful language to know.

<http://www.thenewfederalist.eu/Viva-Europe-and-its-languages> (accessed March 11, 2011).

communication and the dominate performance language. Consequently, the cultural agents in this community are far more fixed to their mother tongue than transnational fringe artists are. This pragmatic notion prompted one Burgtheater artist to argue that Europe, as a conglomerate culture, “does not exist in the theatre.”<sup>342</sup> Despite the apparent reality that the Burgtheater and the established German language community constitutes a subculture intrinsically connected through its use of the German language, many artists at the Burgtheater are gravitating towards the idea of Europe as a community united through common cultural reference points that exist outside the bounds of a shared language. Furthermore, these artists express a general interest in aligning their art with their European ideologies. Through my conversations with Burgtheater artists, the statement that “Europe does not exist in the theatre” was revealed to be an anomaly. Even though Haider, who made the statement, does not see the immediate benefit of the EU for her profession as actress, she exclaims that the “EU is wonderful.” To her the EU means freedom to travel in the continent without needing a passport, even if the institution does not often mean the ability for her to work across borders as an actress. Furthermore, she exclaims that the EU is allowing her fellow Austrians to reconnect with their Eastern European roots. As the primary voice behind the adaptation of a Hungarian novel, which tells the story of the breakdown of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during WWI, the connection between Austrians and Eastern Europeans was at the forefront of Haider’s mind when I spoke with her in 2009. Perhaps other rationale for Haider’s tendency to emphasize Austrians’ attachment to their Eastern neighbors was her romantic

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<sup>342</sup> Sylvia Haider, author of *Wandlungen einer Eher*, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

involvement, at the time, with a Slovakian man.<sup>343</sup> Such personal connections like these have a profound impact on artists' feelings of Europeanness.

Like artists in the fringe scene, many artists at the Burgtheater claim that they get inspiration by traveling and partaking of the cultural benefits associated with Europeanization. Former Burgtheater actor Christian Nickel proclaims "I don't want to be 20 years in Vienna...it's boring...if you are always in these rooms and thoughts...you get ill."<sup>344</sup> Like others I met while observing at the Burgtheater, Nickel claims to be "more European" than German or Austrian and laments that his limited command of English decreases his ability to work in Europe's more expansive performance community.<sup>345</sup> As Nickel states, "it's a pity... (that) I can only work in three different countries."<sup>346</sup> It appears that many Burgtheater actors express a desire to partake in the cultural capital that comes from aligning themselves with Europe and claiming a cosmopolitan outlook for themselves. For example, Alex Medem, assistant director at the Burgtheater, defines Europe as a place where cultures naturally meld and integrate. He argues that the mixture of German and Austrian artists at the Burgtheater is merely an extension of this "natural" process. Medem identifies himself as half Peruvian and half German. Although he now works at the German language Burgtheater, he trained as a director in London.<sup>347</sup> He expresses gratitude for the larger perspective he received having grown up in a multi-cultural family and having trained

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Christian Nickel, former Burgtheater actor, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Alexander Medem, Burgtheater assistant director, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>347</sup> Due to his mixed background and English language proficiency, Medem was selected to assist with the Burgtheater/Nature Theatre of Oklahoma collaboration.

in Britain.<sup>348</sup> Regarding Burgtheater artists' cosmopolitan, European outlook, in an interview with David Oeberkogler, former Burgtheater actor, he informed me that patriotism is a "silly" and outmoded notion. Oeberkogler ridicules the idea that one must be uniformly attached to one geographically-bounded political territory such as Austria or Germany. Furthermore, he lauds Europe for the increased educational opportunities and outlets for creative collaboration that it provides.<sup>349</sup> Burgtheater scenic designer Vincent Mesnaritsch states that "Vienna is like New York" before correcting himself and proclaiming "not like New York, but cosmopolitan."<sup>350</sup> Here Mesnaritsch refers to how the city's atmosphere is changing in favor of a more global-orientation. The Burgtheater artists' own words regarding their Europeanness are a reflection of this change. It appears that artists in Vienna's most prominent established German language theatre have an ideological, if not practical, orientation towards Europe and that this translates into a disinterest in creating products that follow a specific national line. As Britta Kampert, Burgtheater dramaturge argues, "it's about art, not about a nation."<sup>351</sup>

The ways that Burgtheater actors articulate their European identities are similar to the ways that Vienna's fringe artists stress their orientations towards Europe. The fringe scene's Europeanness is highly evident, and arguably the community's primary defining

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<sup>348</sup> Alexander Medem, Burgtheater assistant director, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>349</sup> David Oberkogler, former Burgtheater actor, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>350</sup> Vincent Mesnaritsch, Burgtheater designer, interview by author, 8 April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>351</sup> Britta Kampert, Burgtheater dramaturg, interview by author, March 2009, Vienna, field notes.

feature.<sup>352</sup> Former city curator Andre Turnheim claims to be “more European than Austrian.” This stems from his primary training in Germany and his interest in the transnational European festival scene.<sup>353</sup> Furthermore, he states that he “wouldn’t have anything against it if in 20 years (he) has an EU passport rather than an Austrian (one).”<sup>354</sup> Similarly, Uwe Mattheiss, one of the original authors of the *Theaterreform* argues that to live in Vienna is quite comfortable, but that it is important for people working in the cultural sector to extend their reach outside of the city. He claims that this will give them a good artistic “equilibrium.”<sup>355</sup> Valerie Oberleithner a performing artist in Vienna’s fringe scene states that she is fortunate to be involved in a network of performers that enables her to work freely in Belgium, Paris, and Vienna. Her friends and colleagues are in a similar situation. For example, her boyfriend at the time, Olivier Tirmarche from Superamas, traveled on a weekly basis. This allowed him and his colleagues opportunities to gain information on other fringe scenes and to incorporate new practices into their work.<sup>356</sup> Oberleithner and others in the scene credit the EU for their cosmopolitan orientations, which have also appeared in Vienna’s established theatre scene. For example, Christine Standfest claims that the EU “enables (artists) to think more than locally, which is great.”<sup>357</sup> Also, when Sigrid Gareis began her tenure at

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<sup>352</sup> Although until now I have merely been highlighting the material factors of the fringe scene’s non-local orientation, at present I focus on the words of the artists and administrators themselves who articulate their identification with the concept of Europe.

<sup>353</sup> In the same interview, Turnheim claims that 80% of Austrians outside of the fringe community would disapprove of this change. This is further evidence for the fact that fringe artists tend to accept the idea of Europe more than non-artists do.

<sup>354</sup> Andre Turnheim, former curator for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 8 May 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>355</sup> Uwe Mattheiss, co-author of the *Theaterreform*, interview by author, 29 April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>356</sup> Valerie Oberleithner, Vienna-based performing artist, interview by author, 25 June 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>357</sup> Christine Standfest, member of theatercombinant, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

Tanzquartier, she claimed that it was very important for her to “create a new model in Europe.”<sup>358</sup> Situating her venue within a larger European context is one way that Gareis articulates her own European identity and encourages artists who display their work at Tanzquartier to orient themselves towards Europe as well.

The tendency for agents in the cultural field to identify with Europe is by no means unique to Vienna. Artists’ mobility throughout Europe does not stem purely from economic motivations, but from their desires to somehow refresh their creative energy and increase their feelings of being connected to a larger network. According to the Artists’ Moving and Learning Project “Geographical mobility is essential to artists, since confrontation and exchange of ideas is essential to the creative process. Artists need to have the possibility of working away from their normal surroundings in order to refresh their creative drive.”<sup>359</sup> The report cites artists who confirm its findings. For example, Maarten Vanden Eynde a contemporary artist from the Netherlands states that he “gained confidence by exhibiting internationally.”<sup>360</sup> The combination of economic and ideological motivators mostly translate to periods of one to three months per year that artists spend in European nations outside their own, the majority of these appointments consist of displaying in co-production venues and festivals and/or being part of artist-in-residency programs.<sup>361</sup> Artists working in the established and fringe scenes express the

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<sup>358</sup> Sigrid Gareis, former artistic director of Tanzquartier, interview by author, 15 April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>359</sup> Amilhat Szary Anne-Laure, Louargant Sophie, Koop Kirsten, Saez Guy, *Artists Moving & Learning Project*, (Education and Culture DG: Lifelong Learning Program, 2010), 50, <http://www.enclac.org/moving-and-learning/files/European%20Report%20ARTISTS%20MOVING%20AND%20LEARNING.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2011).

<sup>360</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid, 33-34.

value of aligning themselves with the concept of a united Europe and the ways that they articulate this value reveals a great deal about their overall mentalities.

People typically belong to several groups, religious, familial, national, or other, which help define them as social beings. Oftentimes, people do not tend to see these identities as in conflict with one another. According to scholar Richard K Herrmann and others, identities may be understood as nested, concentric circles, one inside the other.<sup>362</sup> Following the “concentric circles model,” local identities are subsumed in national identities, which are encompassed under the more general idea of Europe. It appears that artists in both scenes understand that they are European as well as Austrian or German. However, artists in the fringe scene are slightly more aware of the European aspects of their identities because it is more a part of their daily socialization in Europe’s transnational fringe spaces. It follows that fringe artists place greater emphasis on a certain segment of the circle than their established counterparts do even though they are also in tune with their Europeanness. Furthermore Herrmann and others claim that “people identifying with their nation and with Europe are less nationalistic, less xenophobic, and hold more cosmopolitan values in general.”<sup>363</sup> I have found that cosmopolitan values define the “winners” in Vienna’s transnational fringe scene. Although it appears that fringe artists are more self-consciously aware of their Europeanness than established artists, both articulate their attachment to the concept when asked direct questions regarding it. My findings suggest that artists in both scenes have converged in regards to their desire to partake of the cultural capital associated with aligning their identities with the cosmopolitan notion of a united Europe.

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<sup>362</sup> Richard K. Herrmann, Thomas Risse, and Marilyn B. Brewer, eds., *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 251.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

Artists' verbal claims regarding their Europeanness have helped the established and fringe scenes converge ideologically and there is other, perhaps equally compelling, evidence for the scenes' aesthetic convergence. One of the most profound similarities between scenes is artists' widespread use of global mass culture, often found in mediated forms. For example, in 2007 it was Toxic Dreams' engagement with mass culture that caused them to mount a critique of globalization using characters and scenarios adapted from the King Kong films. Toxic Dreams' *Kongs, Blondes, and Tall Buildings* was followed by the Burgtheater's own treatment of the Kong icon in 2008, entitled *Ich habe King Kong zum Weinen gebracht* (roughly translated as *I Brought King Kong to Tears*). In a *Die Presse* review of the Burgtheater production, arts critic Barbara Petsch noted Toxic Dreams' earlier performance, drawing parallels between both scenes' strong indebtedness to mediated mass culture and the overall aesthetic and ideological convergence of the two scenes, despite their lack of communication.<sup>364</sup>

Icons from mediated mass culture, like Kong, often derive from America's culture industry, which according to Dutch scholar Rob Kroes, is a pervasive aspect of the culture of contemporary Europe. In his 1999 text entitled *If You've Seen One You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and Mass Culture*, Kroes claims that in the late twentieth century, "America has irresistably moved toward center stage, while Europe finds itself on the receiving end of a wave of American culture that washes across the globe."<sup>365</sup> His primary argument is that Europeans, like himself, have,

undergone an Americanization. We have acquire a set of cultural codes that

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<sup>364</sup> Barbara Petsch, Review of *Monster, Maedels, und viel Geschwaetz ueber einen Mythos*, by Johannes Schrettles (Burgtheater Kasino, Vienna), *Die Presse*, 4 July 2008, [http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/news/375049/Monster-Maedels-viel-Geschwaetz-ueber-einen-Mythos?\\_vl\\_backlink=/home/kultur/index.do](http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/news/375049/Monster-Maedels-viel-Geschwaetz-ueber-einen-Mythos?_vl_backlink=/home/kultur/index.do) (accessed January 22, 2011).

<sup>365</sup> Kroes, 171.

allow us to understand American cultural products, to appreciate them, and to consume them as if we were Americans. We have no more trouble deciphering American messages—be they commercials, television programs, or Hollywood movies—than does the average American.<sup>366</sup>

In Kroes' study he often equates the phrase "American culture" with the additional qualifier, "mass" to equal "American mass culture." In the context of contemporary Europe, Kroes argues that American cultural codes have acquired a European bent, adapting to the perspectives of people living on the continent. This claim is similar to those outlined by Lonergan and Dianna Taylor who state that when elements of one culture are transferred to another, often through mediated culture, they take on local characteristics; however, the intriguing aspect of Kroes study is that he readily relates American mass culture to an adapted form of it found in European mass culture at large. He spends little time discussing a distinctive method of adapting American mass culture to the local perspectives of his native Netherlands. The implication of Kroes' thesis is that Europe is producing its own mass culture, which is largely derived from mediated elements that rush through the continent from the deluge of stimuli stemming from America. Although this European form of mass culture is subject to a similar critique waged by Horkheimer and Adorno regarding the culture industry, it also serves as a vital contributor to the emergence of a unified European citizenry.

It is significant that conversations among Burgtheater artists often center on the surplus of American films and television series inundating European culture. For example, Burgtheater set designer Vincent Mesnaritsch informed me that he frequently watches the American television shows *Dexter* and *House*, and draws artistic inspiration

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<sup>366</sup> Kroes, 172.

from them.<sup>367</sup> Rudi Frey, who directed the Burgtheater's production of *Wandlungen einer Ehe* informed me that he attends the cinema at least two or three times per month and usually sees American or "international," rather than German-language films. In addition, he typically selects between two and three films for inspiration on a given theatre production.<sup>368</sup> While preparing actors to mimic the outward characteristics of servants during the early 1900s for *Wandlungen einer Ehe*, Frey had them examine the Robert Altman film *Gossford Park* for inspiration. When preparing to direct a recent adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (entitled *Nora*) for Salzburg's Schauspielhaus, Frey gave his set designer the American films *The Hours*, *Revolutionary Road*, and *Far from Heaven* as creative catalysts.<sup>369</sup> The frequency of conversations that center on such mediated mass culture and the impact that this has on the development of contemporary Viennese performance is staggering and this factor appears to catalyze a greater link between the disparate subcultures than other locally-bounded aspects of the performance cultures as a whole.<sup>370</sup>

Another key reason for the aesthetic and ideological convergence of scenes is that established and fringe artists alike stress the value of difference, which has become a key way for them to demonstrate their legitimacy in a market-driven globalized era, characterized by a deluge of stimuli competing for audience attention. To a large extent, the value of newness has been at the forefront of artists' dialogue since the early stages of the modernist avant-garde. As Pierre Bourdieu aptly states, "one could point to

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<sup>367</sup> Vincent Mesnartisch, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>368</sup> Rudi Frey, Burgtheater director, interview by author, March 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Further evidence for this is found in chapters four and five of this dissertation, when I discuss how Toxic Dreams and Superamas, two prominent groups within Vienna's transnational fringe scene, incorporate elements from American cinema and global mass culture into their work.

‘manifestos,’ which often have no other content than the aim of distinguishing themselves from what already exists.” Some of these “explicitly declare the aim of ‘doing something different.’”<sup>371</sup> Myriad critical movements in modernist performance traditions have been created as a result of this drive for artists to reject the old and usher in the new. As Artaud boldly proclaimed “things must break apart if they are to start anew and begin fresh.”<sup>372</sup> This modernist motto is still defining the dominant discourse of artists within the context of Vienna’s Burgtheater and fringe scene. “Difference” and “newness” are prominent buzz words. While observing the development of *Wandlungen einer Ehe* at the Burgtheater’s Kasino I frequently heard director Rudi Frey and his set designer Vincent Mesnaritsch articulate their desire to enhance the overall production by making it “different.”<sup>373</sup> “New” is perhaps the most commonly used word within the fringe scene’s discourse. For example, in the *Manifesto for an European Performing Arts Policy* the transnational fringe artists who drafted the document state that their “practices...offer *new* languages, articulate *new* forms of subjectivation and presentation to play with the cultural and social influences which inform us, to create *new* cultural landscapes” (emphasis added).<sup>374</sup> The artists’ supposed desire to make things new relates to their need to believe that they are participating in liminal, rather than *carnavalesque* activities.<sup>375</sup> This want persists despite many artists’ inherent recognition of their inability to achieve this.

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<sup>371</sup> Bourdieu, 58-59.

<sup>372</sup> Dukore, 760-761.

<sup>373</sup> Vincent Mesnaritsch, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>374</sup> Jerome Bel, et al., “Manifest: an die Europäische Kommission und deren Kulturpolitische Vertreter/innen,” *GIFT* (July, 2002), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61304&jahr=2002> (accessed December 13, 2010).

<sup>375</sup> Here I am creating a dichotomy between liminal acts, i.e. those that actually break existing structures and usher in new forms, and *carnavalesque* performances, i.e. those that mock the prevailing structures with the explicit sanctioning of the hegemonic forces without actually producing long-term structural change.

Within both scenes, so pervasive is the idea of “making something new” that many young, naïve artists tend to repackage older forms without knowing it. Andrea Amort, current curator of the city of Vienna, states that when she is determining the value of a given project, it is important for artists to articulate “an awareness of (their) position.” By this, Amort means that it is essential for artists to have a basic understanding of where their projects fit within the wide spectrum of historical performance forms. If artists do not demonstrate this knowledge, then Amort and her colleagues make an effort to educate them. She argues that this awareness of past forms helps artists avoid the practice of recapitulating older forms under the guise of “newness.” This also helps them develop a more sophisticated understanding of what may actually be “new” and contemporary.<sup>376</sup> However, as the curators are apt to highlight, what artists in the scene actually contribute is oftentimes a *bricolage*, or mixture, of past forms. Juergen Weishaeupl, also current curator of Vienna, argues that “almost everything has been done somehow.”<sup>377</sup> This factor, and the curators’ awareness of it, does breed a certain level of anxiety among them and the less naïve artists they fund. As a result of internal and external pressures, these administrators and artists are in the difficult position of trying to develop and market “newness,” which they recognize has become an elusive and, to a large degree, obsolete tag word.

To a certain extent, the administrators’ and artists’ understanding of their predicament leads the artists on a highly self-conscious venture to find his/her unique way to repackage the *bricolage* of past forms. By doing so, they hope to somehow articulate their *uniqueness*, if not their “difference.” Weishaeupl claims that the process

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<sup>376</sup> Andrea Amort, Angela Heide and Juergen Weishaeupl, curators of the city of Vienna, interview by author, August 19, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

by which, “everyone looks for his own way to do something,” has become essential for artists as they battle for legitimacy in an increasingly competitive scene.<sup>378</sup> The competition is related to market pressures and the realities of audiences who are daily enmeshed in a hyper-mediated context.

### **How the Struggle of the Fringe Scene Against the Converging Established Scene Creates the Need for a New Style/Genre**

Due to the narrowing gap between the established and fringe scenes, fringe cultural agents are seeking new ways to legitimize their work. They are doing this by: one, mixing styles/forms and creating collaborations between artists from a variety of disciplines; two, expanding the domain of performance from the realm of venues to found spaces; three, harkening back to the avant-garde’s emphasis on the entanglement of art and life; and four, even further shifting the focus away from language and onto elements of the *mise en scene*. Many of these “innovations” were called for amidst the transition of the fringe scene during the time of the *Theaterreform* and they continue to exert a profound influence.

Fringe artists are venturing further into the realm of mixed media performance and more effectively blurring the lines between disciplines than their established counterparts, to the point where rigid artistic borders have all but disappeared. In 2003 artists advocating change called for “interdisciplinary collaborations with artists of various arts (dance, theater, performance, academic, music, visual art, and more).”<sup>379</sup> The artists argued that their work could only be understood in terms of heterogeneous

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> The exact German phrasing is as follows: “interdisziplinäre Kooperationen mit KünstlerInnen der verschiedenen Künste (Tanz / Theater / Performance / Wissenschaft / Musik / Bildende Kunst).”

Daniel Aschwanden, et al, “Re-form: Aussendung von im Tanz- und Performance-Bereich Tätigen,” *GIFT*, (April 2003), <http://www.freitheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=61333&jahr=2003> (accessed January 23, 2011).

forms that involved a variety of approaches to performance. They state that their practice can be called,

“performance art,” “live art,” “happenings,” “events,” “body art,” “contemporary dance/ theatre,” “experimental dance,” “new dance,” “multimedia performance,” “site specific,” “body installation,” “physical theatre,” “laboratory,” “conceptual dance,” “independence,” “postcolonial dance/performance,” “street dance,” “urban dance,” “dance theatre,” “dance performance” - to name but a few . . . Such a list of terms not only represents the diversity of disciplines and approaches embraced within our practices, but is also symptomatic of the problematics of trying to define or prescribe such heterogeneous and evolving performance forms.<sup>380</sup>

Artists who were succeeding in the fringe scene rejected specific labels, hoping to lead the administrators and audiences into new ways of perceiving their work. Although these works actually appear to lack liminal qualities and the artists themselves have a level of awareness regarding this issue (see chapter two) the subculture is equally defined by their desire to link their products with such qualifiers.<sup>381</sup> In 2009, at the end of their tenure as curators for the city of Vienna, Angela Glechner, Andre Turnheim, and Marianne Vejtisek commented on how the fringe scene had sufficiently reformed since they began their work.<sup>382</sup> This was evident in the transition from internal conversations about “text-based verses movement-based performance” into conversations about fluidity within performances between “text, movement, music/sound, film/video, new media, and lectures.”<sup>383</sup> Vienna’s fringe scene seemed to have succeeded in legitimizing itself in part

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> The artists’ emphasis on “fluidity” or liminality partially stemmed from Sigrid Gareis’ practices at Tanzquartier. As she informed me in an interview, Gareis values artists who are “flexible, fluid, open.”

Sigrid Gareis, former artistic director of Tanzquartier, interview by author, 15 April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>382</sup> Their period of tenure was from February 2007 through May 2009.

<sup>383</sup> The exact German phrasing is as follows: “Das liegt vor allem an dem sich auflösenden Spartendenken vieler Künstler aus diesem Bereich: Text, Bewegung, Musik/Sound, Film/Video, neue Medien und Lectures sind gleichwertige Mittel, sodass nicht mehr von Text versus Bewegung, sondern von eher textorientierten oder mehr auf Bewegung basierenden Performances gesprochen werden kann.” I translate this as follows: “mainly due to the dissolving division, in the minds of many artists, between text,

by manufacturing a liminal discourse about its own “difference” and “fluidity.” This “fluidity” is consistent with the city’s trend towards internationalizing its fringe scene, which is mirrored in movements throughout Europe. For example, the 2008 report on artists’ mobility states that within Europe, “Over the past ten years, it has become clear that the traditional divisions between artistic disciplines are less relevant: artists are becoming increasingly multidisciplinary, multi-skilled and many work in an interdisciplinary framework.”<sup>384</sup> These transitions coexist with the overall demands of artist mobility programs throughout Europe to increase the permeability of national borders. Artists who are more adaptable to working in an interdisciplinary context can traverse such borders more freely.

Fringe artists are further legitimizing their work by expanding the domain of performance from the realm of venues to found spaces. This practice is unfounded in the city’s established venues where more conservative audiences choose not to abandon the convention of the traditional theatre space. In 2003, amidst the discourse on the impending *Theaterreform*, fringe artists proclaimed their desire to locate “other space concepts, site-specific approaches, and decentralized work in different architectures throughout the urban space.”<sup>385</sup> Perhaps the most prominent examples of site-specific

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movement, music/sound, film/video, new media, and lectures. There is no longer a conversation of text verses movement in performance, but a conversation of more text-oriented or more movement-based performance.”

Angela Gleichner, Andre Turnheim, and Marianne Vejtisek, *Zum Abschluss der KratorInnen* Angela Gleichner, Andre Turnheim, Marianne Vejtisek, (Vienna, Austria: Kuratoren Theater und Tanz, 30 May 2009, accessed 23 January, 2011); available from <http://www.kuratoren-theatertanz.at/presse12.html>.

<sup>384</sup> Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report*, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Education and Culture), (2008), [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

<sup>385</sup> The exact German phrasing is as follows: “andere raumkonzepte, site-spezifische ansätze, dezentrales arbeiten in wechselnden architekturen, im stadtraum, sowie in existierenden kunst- und

work are found in the performances of the fringe groups God's Entertainment and Theatercombinant; however, although artists call for more site-specific performances, these are far less frequent than many fringe artists emphasize. This is due to the necessity of the artists to be attached to a local venue such as Brut or Tanzquartier, which have more traditional black box constructions. Nevertheless, the genuine desire to expand local performances into found spaces throughout Vienna is a recent hallmark of the scene and a way for the fringe community to set itself apart from its established counterpart.

Fringe artists are also legitimizing their work by harkening back to the historical avant-garde's emphasis on the entanglement of art and life. Vienna's fringe scene is defined by an integral community of artists, administrators, and audiences. This community is rooted in intense interpersonal relationships and/or professional friendships, which are fostered within the fringe scene's transnational social spaces. While speaking with Jakob Brossman, a production assistant at the Burgtheater who also helped in the construction of Brut's bar, he referred to the mentality within the fringe scene as "bohemian," a word he associates with an overall artistic temperament rooted in a hyper integration of personal and professional ties and the tendency for artistic discourse to seep into even the most mundane conversations.<sup>386</sup> This mentality is made possible in part by the presence of a bar in Brut's two venues. Because the bars function as common spaces where artists and administrators mingle during work and social time they should not be understood as trivial factors within the scene. To a large degree these social spaces act in much the same way as Vienna's famous café culture, which, following the

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ausstellungsräumen." I translate this as, "Other spatial concepts, site-specific approaches, decentralized work in varying types of architecture, in the city space, as well as in existing art and performance spaces." Aschwanden.

<sup>386</sup> Jakob Brossman, Burgtheater Production Assistant, interview by author, Vienna, field notes, 22 April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

pattern of the Habermassian public sphere, is an open forum where ideas are discussed and debated by citizens thereby influencing public policy.<sup>387</sup> This structural feature allows for the flow of initiatives and the sustainability of connections among cultural agents. For example, Juergen Weishaeupl, current curator of Vienna, remarks that he often attends theatre performances and then afterwards interacts with the artists over drinks at the bar. This allows him the opportunity to learn of the artists' philosophies and approaches to their work and to help him better understand how to make funding decisions regarding the artists' future work.<sup>388</sup> After a performance at Brut by Thomas Kasebacher I stood at the bar for several hours while he discussed his show and his intended revisions with his fellow artist Thomas Brandstaedter. The bar is an excellent example of a seemingly quotidian structural feature, which actually allows Vienna's integral fringe community to flourish while blurring the boundaries between the artists' careers and social lives.<sup>389</sup>

The entanglement of art and life has even more profound implications, and distinguishing characteristics. For example, the integral nature of the fringe community means that many artists operate in a seemingly egalitarian manner. This is contrasted with the hierarchical organizational structure of the Burgtheater. Rather than discussing character psychology, as the actors and directors typically do at the Burgtheater, regardless of the "experimental" nature of their work, artists in the fringe scene are

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<sup>387</sup> Here I refer to the concept articulated by Jurgen Habermass of the Frankfurt school of sociologists. According to Habermass the public sphere is a common forum composed of citizens who debate issues of political and social relevance, thus influencing public policy through their discourse.

<sup>388</sup> Andrea Amort, Angela Heide, and Juergen Weishaeupl, curators for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 19 August, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>389</sup> The Burgtheater also has features, such as the *Cantina*, a backstage bar area for Burgtheater actors, workers, and friends; however, while observing at the Burgtheater and I found the *Cantina* to be mostly a space for after-show drinks and light conversation. It did not appear to have the same implications as Brut's bar.

consistently engaged in conversations about ideas and artistic movements. To a large extent, the artists in the fringe scene appear to demonstrate characteristics typically associated with intellectuals, in contrast to the characteristics associated with technical craftsmen, which I observed among the actors at the Burgtheater.<sup>390</sup> The fringe scenes' artist-intellectuals demonstrate a profound awareness of contemporary trends in literature, art, and politics. This awareness often manifests in their performances as a hyper self-conscious intellectual discourse.

The final result of the convergence of the established and fringe scenes is the latter's increased attention to elements of the *mise en scene* rather than language. An article published in *GIFT* in 2004 states that one of the initial outcomes of the efforts to reform Vienna's fringe scene seems to have been the waning importance of the scene's language-based fringe groups in favor of artists who were oriented more towards contemporary dance.<sup>391</sup> Although primary rationale for this is the latter's greater potential impact in the transnational co-production and festival venues, where the market demands non-language-based performance, secondary rationale may be the form's difference from the work that dominates the established venues. One of the reasons why post-*Theaterreform* Vienna-based fringe artists are more concerned with contemporary forms of dance performance appears to be that such forms are unlike the vast majority of work done in the city's language-based established venues.

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<sup>390</sup> Later I will discuss how this different approach is leading to the breakdown of the distinction between the artist and critic within the fringe scene.

<sup>391</sup> The exact German phrasing is as follows: "Das Sprechtheater hat insgesamt verloren, auch wenn Showinisten, HIGHTHEA und toxic dreams neben den Häusern für eine Konzeptförderung vorgeschlagen werden."

IG Freie Theaterarbeit, "Zur Konzeptentscheidung innerhalb der Wiener Theaterreform," *GIFT*, (19 November, 2004), <http://www.freietheater.at/?page=kulturpolitik&detail=62257&jahr=2004> (accessed January 23, 2011).

### **“Contemporary Performance” and the Ambiguity of the “New” Form**

Ultimately, within the context of Vienna’s transnational fringe scene, a new form is developing, which is supposedly contrasted with the more traditional forms of theatre being shown in the city’s established venues. The term “contemporary performance” is employed in a broad manner to describe forms that are developing within the context highlighted above. There is a certain degree of controversy surrounding this form’s creation due to its sheer breadth. It is typical for fringe artists to mix genres and styles. This means that, in theory, artists have a wide array of developmental processes. As the current curators of Vienna argue “there is no *Leitmotiv*,” or common aesthetic, within “contemporary performance” because “there are so many different working methods.”<sup>392</sup> These factors have led the current curators to the understanding that a more specific categorical term for what often falls under the label “contemporary performance” cannot yet be coined. As curator Andrea Amort states, we “don’t define it... (we) don’t go with book (definition).”<sup>393</sup> By articulating this, Amort is arguing that Vienna’s fringe community is at odds with academic definitions, which have often been placed on products associated with the historical, canonical avant-garde. Artists in Vienna’s fringe scene tend to share a rejection of labels and categories. To a certain degree, the artists’ typical rejection of categories can be understood as one of the remaining vestiges of the fringe scene’s more radical avant-garde impulse; however, the pressure to distinguish itself from the converging established theatre has increased the tendency among the fringe community to declare that the work they produce is decisively *not* theatre and part

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<sup>392</sup> Andrea Amort, Angela Heide, and Juergen Weishaeupl, curators for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 19 August, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

of a new form that cannot be further categorized outside of the ambiguous label of “contemporary performance.”

The material realities of Vienna’s transnational fringe scene, i.e. market, political, and social pressures, limits the liminal potential of its performances; however, it does appear that there is still a certain amount of ambiguity attached to the scene’s academic nomenclature. Perhaps the liminal nature of the term “contemporary performance” merely derives from the form’s infancy and from the reality that it is difficult to articulate the characteristics of a form while it is still in its nascent stages of development.

Nevertheless, in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the fringe scene’s new genre, developing in the early part of the twenty-first century in Vienna, I will at this point venture to formulate some concrete characteristics of the products associated with the term “contemporary performance.” I will do this by highlighting the words of the scene’s own cultural makers and articulating my own stance regarding the work, which I will develop in chapters four and five by providing specific examples from the work of some of the scene’s more successful and most transnational groups. At the root of my analysis is my observation that there *are* certain *Leitmotifs* within “contemporary performance” that can best be perceived by examining the scene’s structure in tandem with its performances.

Vienna’s fringe culture makers pronounce an intentional categorical division between “contemporary performance” and postdramatic theatre, a term aptly described by scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann.<sup>394</sup> For example, Andrea Amort argues that, although what is happening within Vienna’s fringe scene now can be called “contemporary performance,” what happened in the past decade could be defined loosely as

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<sup>394</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, (London: Routledge, 2006).

“postdramatic.” This genre often includes a de-emphasis on plot-driven narratives and character psychology with more focus placed on the audience-actor relationship. The major technique employed in this genre is deconstruction, where texts are rearranged in order to form new, often obscured meanings that are more subjective or perspectival in their resonance. In general I concur with Amort and others that neither “postdramatic theatre” nor “postmodern performance” are particularly useful terms to describe what is currently happening within Vienna, and Europe’s, fringe scene. My own position stems from my belief that the postmodern condition may be nothing more than a mere extension of late modernity. The persistence of qualities consistent with McDonaldization in Europe’s fringe scene is evidence for my argument that much of the work being generated is largely the product of modernist globalization processes and has more in common with a derivative, albeit conceptual form of global mass culture than it does with the past decades’ postdramatic theatre. The performances generated within the context of Vienna’s transnational fringe scene do have a subjective bent, but this subjectivity often stems from the work’s tendency to provide a maximum amount of stimuli within the performance so that the audience can select from it, and take what they wish, while discarding the rest. Despite the artists’ anti-commercial rhetoric, their work thrives on a consumer-driven model.

Vienna’s fringe cultural agents are also apt to proclaim that “contemporary performance” is different from the genres observable on the established theatres’ stages because it is decisively conceptual in nature, meaning that it does not tell a specific and accessible narrative and the actors often do not play straight-forward characters that are consistent with Aristotelian dramatic structures. Because of this it is possible that

Burgtheater audiences could not handle the more conceptual variety of contemporary performance, which is shown in Vienna's transnational fringe spaces. Due to the fringe scene's current trend to focus on such conceptual "contemporary performance," it is unlikely that infrequent collaborations between the Burgtheater and fringe groups will successfully integrate audiences from the established and fringe scenes. My findings suggest that the fringe scene will remain a viable alternative to the established scene as long as it continues to emphasize its difference by employing a form of performance where the actors frequently switch between playing characters in the traditional Aristotelian sense and playing versions of themselves who frequently comment on the action as it occurs. This common practice in the transnational fringe scene is an extreme, festivalized version of the Brechtian alienation effect. It manifests a highly ironic quoting of the material realities (including economic and ideological factors) of the fringe scene itself and the artists' participation in it. Thus, the form of acting typically employed by fringe actors within the context of their fragmented, metatheatrical narratives is decisively producer-driven and meant for other producers.

The value of crafting pieces of this nature, i.e. works that are non-commercial, yet intrinsically related to commerce, and that are esoteric and yet open to variety of interpretative possibilities, is related to a specific type of embodied and institutionalized cultural capital that is held by a select segment of Europe's overall population. As early as 1925 Jose Ortega y Gasset made the observation that modernist art is unpopular not because people dislike it, but because they do not understand it and that this "implies that one group possess an organ of comprehension denied to the other—that they are two

different varieties of the human species.”<sup>395</sup> The hyper-modernist art of Europe’s transnational fringe will only be consumed by the minority of artists who frequent Europe’s transnational social spaces and will never effectively be local because the context in which it is understood is decisively non-local. Gasset also asserts that the defining feature of modernist art, i.e. that it “divides the public into two classes, those who understand it and those who do not understand it,” means that it is often consumed by artists as opposed to non-artists. As he states, “the new art is an artistic art.”<sup>396</sup> The producers who consume Vienna’s transnational fringe performances are able to boast about their access to a different type of cultural capital. They believe that they are in an elevated intellectual caste, in comparison the those who consume the Burgtheater’s more “popular” entertainments. By virtue of funding such projects the city of Vienna is also counted as an institution affiliated with the artist-intellectual class. So long as Vienna’s fringe scene maintains a level of esotericism, it remains a viable counterpoint to the Burgtheater.

The type of performance that I am describing cannot be divorced from the unique subculture of transnational European fringe performing artists who operate according to distinct cosmopolitan ideologies. These artists’ nebulous concepts of European cultural borders translate into a belief that the borders between various artistic disciplines are also fluid and that various forms and genres may coexist. In this type of performance the ontological difference between live and mediated forms of performance has ceased to be apparent. Similarly, the ontological difference between the actors’ offstage personas and onstage performances have somehow dissipated as the artists’ individual identities have

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<sup>395</sup> Bernard F. Dukore, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism from the Greeks to Grotowsky*, (Orlando: Harcourt, 1974), 756-757.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid*, 759.

become intertwined with their group's corporate-like brand name. Hereafter I refer to these tendencies as the artists' "polyphonic approach" to performance.

I generally concur with Vienna's cultural agents that it is problematic to coin one specific term that encapsulates the diverse array of work that happens in Vienna's transnational fringe scene. However, some of the more international and most successful artists within the fringe scene produce work that has enough similarities to constitute a distinct genre, which demands a more descriptive term than the catch-all phrase "contemporary performance." Hybrid theatre, which is sometimes used by these artists to describe what they do, does not fully take into account the material realities of the scene itself, which have a profound impact on the work's aesthetic and ideological qualities. In order to take into account the performances' semi-fluid, stimuli-laden, market-driven, and polyphonic qualities I offer the term *conglomerate performance*. I coin this term because it best encapsulates the hyper-modernist tendency to provide the maximum amount of stimuli within a product that contains a representational style where the ontological differences between live and mediated performance have been abolished.

### **Conclusion**

The development of Vienna's fringe performance scene seems to be characterized by a series of dialectical struggles at the city, national, and global levels. Such struggles give rise to the need for fringe artists and venues to articulate their "difference" or "newness" by creating new genres or new ways of coining their *conglomerate* productions. Such genres are then co-opted by the mainstream through a number of overt and covert operations, which give rise to the need for fringe culture makers to generate even more opposition to the established scene. Within the past decade it appears that the

struggle of the fringe scene against its established counterpart has created the need for fringe culture makers at the top and bottom of Vienna's hierarchical system to articulate even greater difference. This need has given rise to the practice of placing works generated in the transnational fringe scene under the catch-all phrase "contemporary performance." At this point I have offered a more descriptive term, *conglomerate performance*, to describe some specific types of work that are being generated by the scene's more successful and most cosmopolitan practitioners. I will dedicate the ensuing chapters to a detailed analysis of products that fit within this genre.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**NAME BRANDING AND LOCAL DETACHMENT IN *CONGLOMERATE***  
***PERFORMANCE*: AN ANALYSIS OF TWO “WINNING” TRANSNATIONAL**  
**FRINGE GROUPS IN VIENNA**

In this chapter I tell the story of two Vienna-based fringe groups, Toxic Dreams and Superamas, which perform in the city’s transnational social spaces and exhibit qualities that align with the genre that I call *conglomerate performance*. I have selected these groups because, having both been formed in the late 1990s as precursors to the development of Tanzquartier and the *Theaterreform*, they are among the first wave of transnational fringe groups to enter into Vienna’s scene. I have also selected them because the subsequent movements in Vienna’s cultural field allowed Toxic Dreams and Superamas to thrive and influence other artists who emerged as “winners” of the scene’s dialectical struggles. Evidence for the groups’ combined influence includes a 2002 document that called for a restructured funding system, drafted by members of Superamas and Toxic Dreams in collaboration with a small group of their transnational fringe colleagues.<sup>397</sup> Although they possess certain aesthetic and material similarities, both fitting into the genre of *conglomerate performance*, Toxic Dreams and Superamas must be understood as differing extremes among the transnational fringe scene’s “winners.” The extremes are manifest in the groups’ contrasting claims regarding their audience orientations and postures towards the apparent “problem of locality,” defined as the disconnection between the ideologies and intentions of the transnational artists and those of the citizens from the local governments that fund them. Considering speech acts

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<sup>397</sup>Daniel Aschwanden, et al, “Reform. Ein Papier zur Reform der Wiener Theaterförderung,” *IG Kultur Oesterreich*, <http://igkultur.at/igkultur/kulturrisse/1055175664/1056040772> (accessed February 19, 2011).

alone, Toxic Dreams is a group that claims to honor a local audience, often referred to by group members as “the New Vienna.” In so doing they attempt to *disidentify*, or enact counter-cultural change within their circumstances, with their transnational fringe colleagues.<sup>398</sup> On the other side of the spectrum, the artists of Superamas explicitly and provocatively disassociate themselves from local audiences by verbally constructing their identity around the group’s European orientation. Even as they place themselves within a more European and global cultural framework, Superamas, like Toxic Dreams, may have the potential to enact counter-cultural change from within the system of the increasingly market-driven and de-localized transnational fringe scene. In this chapter I argue that both groups can be understood as complicit in the processes of Europeanization and globalization and in the imposition of the problematic qualities of mass culture on Europe’s fringe scene. Their knowledge of this complicity defines their work and, in some instances, discredits their discourse. The artists’ contradictory practices occur through the problematic, yet essential, process of constructing and maintaining their unique brands in Vienna and Europe.

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<sup>398</sup> Here I refer to the concept of *disidentification* defined by Jose Esteban Munoz as a way that, in his examples, minority subjects distance themselves from dominate patterns and articulate their non-conformity. In his text, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Munoz cites the Pecheux Paradigm as a means of elucidating his concept of *disidentification*. According to Pecheux, there are three modes by which a subject is constructed by ideological practices. One, the good subject chooses the path of identification. Two, the bad subject rejects identification, rebels, and counteridentifies with the dominate system. Three, which is associated with *disidentification*, “instead of buckling under the pressures of dominate ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism)” one attempts to “work on and against” by transforming “a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance.” Although Europe’s historical avant-garde largely appears to have adapted to second mode, that of counteridentification, Toxic Dreams’ artists seem to adopt the third mode, i.e. *disidentification*. For example, Toxic Dreams’ artists conform to Vienna’s regulations and are counted among the “winners” of the *Theaterreform* even as they problematize the existing structures and critique their own complicity in the system. Further evidence for Vienna fringe artists’ *disidentification* will be provided in this and the subsequent chapter.

Jose Esteban Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

The practice of branding a group and performance as a commodity has become important for the city of Vienna and for all of its supported performing artists. This helps the artists establish themselves as they compete for legitimacy within Europe's competitive and increasingly commercialized transnational fringe scene. The practice of manufacturing and maintaining specific brand names belies the claim that Europe's transnational fringe artists operate according to a traditional avant-garde "winner loses logic," defined as an artists' belief that lack of economic success is a marker of greater cultural capital. Furthermore, the artists' proclivity to brand themselves in a commercial manner integrally connects them to the global capitalistic system that they claim to critique. Superamas and Toxic Dreams forge their own identities through establishing their commercial brands. These contrasting groups' inceptions and operations dictate how they manufacture their brands and exert their importance, or will to power, in Vienna's transnational fringe spaces. Their brands are explicit methods used by the groups in their ongoing efforts to emerge as victors of the local and non-local struggles within Vienna and Europe's transnational fringe scene, brought on by its self-conscious internationalization. Furthermore, these brands, which were created through top-down and bottom-up processes and are maintained through the use of social networking sites and other elements of the groups' performance frames, endanger the groups' ultimate effectiveness in their proclaimed effort to wage war against the destructive forces of globalization.

Europeanization and globalization are complimentary forces that lead many Europeans to fear the breakdown of the traditional concept of the nation state and old

ways of life, for example, local traditions of public funding in the cultural field.<sup>399</sup> In light of this it is ironic that although transnational fringe artists appear to embrace the one, i.e. Europeanization, they are hyper critical of the other; however, the artists somehow recognize the inconsistencies in their practices and realize that by embracing Europeanization they are also becoming willing participants in globalization. Their participation stems from their tendency to pioneer in the area of workers' mobility, enabled by an extreme attention to the realities of global consumerist culture and to the phenomena that keep this culture alive, such as global mass culture and the internet. This recognition is a source of unease, which translates into an overwhelmingly ironic posture in their work.

### **Branding in Vienna's Fringe Scene**

Vienna's current curators have made statements regarding the importance of artists establishing their unique identities in order to be competitive in a transnational fringe scene, which is marked by internal and external struggles for legitimacy and a constant deluge of new culture makers vying for positions in the field. As the team of Vienna's curators claimed in a 2010 interview, it is essential that fringe artists make their "own language" and that audiences begin to recognize their unique aesthetic.<sup>400</sup> The practice of creating one's own performance language amounts to articulating "newness" and "difference." The danger of doing so is that an artists' "unique" performance language can easily become commodified as material circumstances related to

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<sup>399</sup> Sophie Meunier, "Globalization and Europeanization: A Challenge to French Politics," *French Politics* 2 (2004): 125-150, 10, <https://www.princeton.edu/~smeunier/Meunier%20Globalization%20Europeanization%20French%20Politics.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2011).

<sup>400</sup> Andrea Amort, Angela Heide, and Juergen Weishaeupl, curators for the city of Vienna, interview by author, 19 August, 2010, Vienna, field notes.

globalization drive the artists to continually reproduce their own style within the parameters of a specific, commercial brand name.<sup>401</sup>

A brand name is often used in the market economy to stimulate product recognition and to signify quality, which leads to financial gain.<sup>402</sup> The *OED* locates the entomology of branding in the language of commodity exchange. Its first appearance was in the 2 October 1909 issue of *The Times*, which reads, “The Government has introduced the ‘Rune’ brand for Swedish butter...Only the really best butter would be branded.” Therefore, the act of branding is first mentioned in relation to a foreign product that is given a stamp of quality approval in order to make it a desirable object in domestic and international markets.<sup>403</sup> As Europe’s transnational fringe artists compete within the niche market, which often transcends traditional borders, they use their sign, or brand name, as a means of ensuring their commodity’s profitability. The action of branding occurs with a great deal of frequency as cultural agents compete for symbolic and economic capital. This action betrays the transnational fringe artists’ supposed rejection of market concerns.

According to the 2008 EICCR report on artists’ mobility, “Historically the national cultural diplomacy objectives of foreign and cultural ministries in EU Member States to promote an image or brand of their country, its culture or language abroad, has

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<sup>401</sup> I define commodification as the process whereby a good, service, or activity thought to be free of market concerns is transformed into something with economic consequences. Inherent in my definition is the neo-Marxist understanding that a degree of personal agency is lost during the process of commodification.

<sup>402</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines a brand name as “the impression of a product in the minds of potential users or consumers.” Furthermore, it defines branding as the act of marking “as a proof of ownership” or as “a sign of quality.”

<sup>403</sup> The second written entry that features branding stems from similar circumstances. A 1912 publication states, “The textile manufacturers who are beginning to brand their goods...seek...to increase their sales by building up a demand for their product as against the product of other manufacturers.”

led to competition between them.”<sup>404</sup> This competition persists despite recent trends in Europe that have led to a predominant language of cultural cooperation between locations, which act as co-funders of artistic projects. In light of this continued competition within a niche market, the city of Vienna (*Stadt Wien*) is not only a location, but also a brand-name, which is positioned on the websites, promotional materials, and programs of all fringe groups and venues funded by the city. The city’s brand name is used to demonstrate the local government’s endorsement of a high-quality fringe product and to announce the city’s presence in Europe’s cultural field, composed of transnational fringe spaces. Often accompanying the establishment of a specific brand name is the desire to standardize; this is no less common within fringe venues that bear the Vienna brand name. Standardization was an early goal of Sigrid Gareis of Tanzquartier who published comments regarding the need to categorize and market a new brand of Vienna-based “contemporary performance” throughout Europe. This standardization has the tendency to subsume the identities of cultural agents (in this case individual artists and groups of artists) under the Vienna brand. The risk associated with this tendency is that local diversity will decrease as agents conform to notions of quality articulated by those with the ability to stamp the artists with the Vienna brand. As I argued in previous chapters, Vienna is able to maintain a consistent image of their brand by controlling how much money they give to artists and how they select artistic directors for their major venues. Through their elaborate systems of cultural funding, city politicians assure a certain

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<sup>404</sup> European Institute for Comparative Cultural research gGmbH  
Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report*, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Education and Culture), (2008), [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

amount of standardization and predictability. These are two prominent aspects of McDonaldization, a term used by sociologist George Ritzer to refer to the ways that the global economic system has created conditions where organizations are increasingly conforming to the patterns of the American fastfood restaurant, which places an emphasis on efficiency, calculability, predictability/standardization, and control. Examined in this context the brand name McDonalds may be analogous to the brand name *Stadt Wien* (the city of Vienna) and also to the brand names of individual groups within Vienna, i.e. Superamas and Toxic Dreams.

On a microcosmic level artists and groups who carry the Vienna brand name must also formulate their own brands and maintain consistency/predictability, according to them. These brands are not arbitrarily manufactured and maintained by the artists. Instead they naturally arise from the artists' material circumstances and they are maintained through a carefully regulated performance frame. Circumstances that give rise to the artists' brands include the self-conscious internationalization of the fringe scene. They also include the artists' more independent processes of socialization. There is a degree of agency in the artists' articulation of their brands; however, as the groups involve themselves progressively in the competitive field of European fringe performance and garner critical praise and audience following, they often become slavish adherents to the brand that they themselves helped manufacture.

### **The Superamas Brand Name: Anonymity and Dissociation with Local and Global Contexts**

The Vienna-based fringe group Superamas maintains a specific brand, which conveys a central message that it is highly international in terms of its aesthetic and ideological leanings and frequency of travel. The prominent placement of Superamas'

brand name within its performance frame and the tendency of its group members to remain anonymous is at once a conscious tool used to increase the group's economic capital and an ironic nod to the process of McDonaldization. Superamas' use of their brand creates conditions where the individual identities of artists are subsumed under the brand name. Furthermore, this brand name necessitates that the artists continue to manufacture products that conform to certain aesthetic and ideological qualities, predetermined by themselves with the influence of externals like the group's local and transnational funding agents. An analysis of Superamas' performances and performance frame reveals these realities.

Superamas was formed in 1999 as a result of the collaboration of five Frenchmen and an Austrian woman, Caroline Madl, who acts as the group's producer.<sup>405</sup> A group that identifies itself as a "performance collective," the anonymity of Superamas' individual artists is so intact that one is unlikely to find the identities of the group members mentioned in any other publications on the group, aside from this dissertation. The artists' efforts to keep their performance personas enmeshed in the group context even translate to the artists' personal interactions with the press. For example, a July 2008 publication on Superamas' performance of *Empire: Art and Politics* for the Avignon Festival simply listed the interviewees as "two members of Superamas." This statement was followed by quotations with no names attached to them. In an email correspondence between myself and Madl she stated "be aware that we never give our personal names in any text about Superamas. I am the producer part...and the other 5 people share the creative process."<sup>406</sup> Superamas never explicitly provides rationale for

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<sup>405</sup> The company's first theatrical production was entitled *Building* (1999).

<sup>406</sup> Caroline Madl, email message to author, May 7, 2010.

its members' anonymity, although critics and audience members are apt to reach their own conclusions. For example, in her performance review of Superamas' *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode (Show/Business)*, Helen Richardson of *Theatre Journal* claims that the anonymity of the group members stems from Superamas' understanding that "a trademark name" such as Sony, "provides greater commercial possibilities."<sup>407</sup> Another potential theory regarding why Superamas' artists may choose to identify with a collective relates to the concept of alienation, described below. In his 1978 study on alienation Ignance Feuerlicht states that, "the submersion of an individual in a group or in the mass may be attacked as a loss of self or alienation from self; but it also often means a loss of doubts, fears, and inhibitions and, therefore, is experienced as a desirable and enjoyable state."<sup>408</sup> A potential rationale for the tendency of Superamas' artists to identify exclusively with their brand is the freedom it gives them to criticize their own processes as they knowingly engage in self-commodification and objectification. Regardless, the artists' practice of allowing their individuality to be subsumed under the Superamas brand name is a direct result of the members' fixation on the market pressures wrought by globalization. However, although the members of Superamas may superficially admit to their own complicity in the process where Europe's fringe scene becomes globalized and commodified, they simultaneously *disidentify* with this process.

The group's practice of identifying themselves explicitly with the language of global, market-driven corporations is intended to be a statement of truth and irony. It is truthful because the artists who compose Superamas admit that they themselves are active

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<sup>407</sup> Helen Richardson, review of *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode: Show/Business*, by Superamas, *Theatre Journal* 58: 4, (December 2006).

<sup>408</sup> Ignance Feuerlicht, *Alienation: From the Past to the Future*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 44.

participants in a generic, superficial transnational fringe scene that is heavily influenced by global mediated culture and that requires them to articulate their difference in order to be commercially viable. It is ironic because of Superamas' own claim to separate and dismantle "that which in its original state presented a unit or entity," thereby questioning "visible facts." In this instance, the "visible facts" in question are related to the group's apparent complicity in the commercialization of Europe's transnational fringe.<sup>409</sup> On the surface, Superamas' members express no remorse regarding their economic opportunism and lack of a local orientation; however, the artists maintain an overarching ironic posture regarding all the complex issues that they address in their performances and performance frame.

Superamas disassociates itself with Viennese and Austrian culture while reaping the economic benefits of the local system. A 2008 European Commission-instituted report, composed of a variety of quantitative data such as questionnaires delivered to various transnational European cultural agents, on the mobility of European artists, identifies a byproduct of being funded by specific national, regional, or city governments. The authors of this report concluded that, "when cultural professionals are sent abroad by e.g. national cultural institutes to participate in events or programmes, they are often regarded as ambassadors of a particular country."<sup>410</sup> All groups that are funded by the city of Vienna must carry the Vienna brand name as they perform in Europe's transnational fringe spaces. In effect, this brand name makes the artists cultural

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<sup>409</sup> <http://superamas.com/nsuperamas.html> (accessed February 19, 2011)

<sup>410</sup> Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report*, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Education and Culture), (2008), [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

ambassadors for the local city government and carries the implication that artists have certain civic responsibilities. In a 2008 interview with Superamas' founding member Phillippe Riera I asked him if he feels that Superamas' funding source stimulates him to feel a certain loyalty towards Vienna. To this he replied, in an un-ironic and matter-of-fact way, "a studio is a studio, I don't give a fuck."<sup>411</sup> Although I was initially shocked by the apparent callousness of Riera's statement, I quickly discovered that Vienna's funding programs do not tend to breed loyalty and that most transnational fringe artists who receive the city's economic benefits do not perceive a problem with the non-local orientation of their own products or with those of other fringe artists.

Studies on European artists note the importance of them developing entrepreneurial attitudes in order to survive.<sup>412</sup> In many instances this shift in thinking involves developing economically opportunistic views towards local funding structures. The 2008 report on artists' mobility states that in the past decades the artists who have proven to be the most successful internationally are "those who developed a strong home base and were able to convince their local decision-makers of the importance of their work."<sup>413</sup> In the context of Superamas and Toxic Dreams the "local decision-makers" are Vienna's curators, jurors, and the city's co-production venues' artistic directors who, despite the rising market concerns that are affecting the local funding structures, still

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<sup>411</sup> Phillippe Riera, ensemble member of Superamas, interview by author, 20 May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>412</sup> One report on the status of artists in Europe states, "artists and their activities are increasingly seen as entrepreneurs/entrepreneurial which contribute to economic development."

Directorate General Internal Policies of the Union, *The Status of Artists in Europe*, (Brussels: European Parliament, 2006), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/studies/download.do?file=13248> (accessed March 13, 2011).

<sup>413</sup> Guy Cools, "International Co-Production and Touring," *International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts*, <http://on-the-move.org/library/article/13862/co-production-and-touring/> (accessed March 13, 2011)

offer a greater amount of funding overall than neighboring nations do. This gives the artists many more opportunities of which to take advantage. For example, according to *Compendium: Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe* as of 2005 the total government expenditure on culture in Austria per capita was 254.78 Euros.<sup>414</sup> This was 57.58 Euros higher than the per capital spending on culture in France and, even more significantly, 153.78 Euros higher than Germany's per capital spending on culture.<sup>415</sup> These numbers continue to make Vienna an attractive location for opportunistic artists seeking the economic advantages of a specific location in Europe's transnational cultural field.<sup>416</sup>

Superamas' economic opportunism regarding Vienna's cultural funding programs and its own globally-oriented brand are generally perceived as natural outgrowths of Vienna's self-consciously internationalized fringe scene. Other transnational fringe artists based in Vienna either indulge in similar behavior, adopting a detached stance towards the Viennese public, or do not fault Superamas for doing so themselves. For example in 2009, while observing the development of original works at Brut, I spent significant time in the rehearsal process of the relatively new and successful company Not Found Yet Theater. This company resulted from collaboration between Austrian-born and London-educated Thomas Kasebacher and Spanish-born Laia Fabre whom Kasebacher met while working at a cooperative European educational program for children of mixed cultural backgrounds in Norway. The couple decided to forge an artistic partnership in Vienna, not because of personal ties that they had to the city but

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<sup>414</sup> Austria's total expenditure on culture is still slightly lower than the per capital support for culture that the government of Denmark offers, which at 351.99 Euros represented the highest number in this category. This figure was taken in 2006.

<sup>415</sup> <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/countries.php?pcid=1040>

<sup>416</sup> The figure for France was taken in 2002 and the figure for Germany was taken in 2007; however, the report suggests that these figures do not fluctuate to a great degree from year to year.

Ibid.

because of the financial opportunities that the city's funding structures afforded them. Along with many other artists I interviewed throughout my time in Vienna, Kasebacher and Fabre stated that they could have elected to move to any number of English, German, or Spanish speaking areas, but that in other cities they could never hope to reach a standard of living comparable to their current one in Vienna.<sup>417</sup> The pair cited Superamas as an example of a group of artists who were intelligently taking advantage of Vienna's current funding structure while explicitly proclaiming their independence from Viennese culture and performing in venues mostly outside of Austria. Fabre herself admitted to having no moral misgivings related to Superamas' practice.<sup>418</sup> The financial opportunism of Superamas is by no means unique among artists based in Vienna. Nor is the practice of taking advantage of the financial opportunities of a given location, while neglecting other aspects of the locale, frowned upon by most artists in Vienna's transnational fringe scene.<sup>419</sup> The lack of concern that other artists in Vienna display towards Superamas' economic opportunism signals their own complicity in similar processes. Based on these findings, the city's commercialized brand name is revealed to be an impersonal force that may bring greater symbolic capital to the city, but does not seem to stimulate feelings of loyalty among the artists who are associated with it. Nor do artists who are marked with the city's brand seem to feel a need to reflect a univocal version of Viennese culture in their own brands. This phenomenon does not appear to be linked exclusively with the transnational fringe scene in Vienna.

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<sup>417</sup> Thomas Kasebacher and Laia Fabre, interview by author, April, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> I find this phenomenon curious, which is one of the many reasons why I situate my study in Vienna as opposed to other cities, which one may more readily associate with fringe art.

The 2008 European Commission-instituted report on the mobility of European artists revealed that the majority of such cultural agents from smaller European nations believe that emigration yields greater long term economic capital than short term visits to outside nations. In addition, the report suggests that mobility for many European artists may not merely be a way for them to accrue cultural capital. Increasingly, mobility is the only way for artists to forge sustainable careers. For this reason, many fringe artists are selecting to relocate to “hotspot” cities such as London, Barcelona, or Paris, in order to establish themselves; however, due to the ever-rising cost of living in such locations, some artists are selecting to move to cities that still have active cultural lives and heavy traditions of cultural support, but that are less costly.<sup>420</sup> The artists’ selection process is often a financially-motivated investment. Selecting Vienna as a place of emigration has less to do with the artists’ attachment to the city’s local culture and more to do with the healthy amount of money that the city is currently investing in the performing arts and the relatively low cost of living in comparison to other European metropolises. Ultimately, the 2008 report appears to confirm my assertion that financial opportunism is a defining feature of Europe’s transnational fringe artists located within and outside of Vienna.<sup>421</sup>

To a large extent the economic opportunism of Europe’s transnational fringe artists mirrors what is found in workers from transnational corporations outside the cultural realm. Such workers “are assumed to be willing and able to choose the most

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<sup>420</sup> Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Educationa dn Culture)*, (2008), 45, [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

advantageous work conditions, wage scales and systems of social security by transferring productive functions to locations which are seen as ‘favourable’: i.e. cheaper and less regulated.”<sup>422</sup> On a microcosmic level Superamas, a group that explicitly identifies itself according to corporate terms, is indulging in the very practices that the large conglomerate corporations and transnational workers of the global era do. Yet Superamas’ explicit identification with such economically motivated agents does not disinherit Superamas of its cultural capital within Vienna and Europe’s transnational fringe spaces. In effect, quite the contrary seems to occur.

The cultural capital of Superamas’ brand name is tied to the group’s success outside of Vienna and stems from its tendency to treat the local culture that funds them in a superficial and opportunistic manner. In a 2008 interview with Sabine Kock of *IG Theater* she referred to Superamas as an “an exceptional model” within Vienna’s transnational fringe scene due to their sheer frequency of travel throughout Europe.<sup>423</sup> Christine Standfest of the Vienna-based fringe group Theatercombinant argues that Vienna’s entire rationale for funding Superamas is rooted in the group’s international members and success abroad. Without these factors, the group would probably not be stamped with the Vienna brand.<sup>424</sup> While speaking with Florian Malzacher, former dramaturg for the Austrian fringe festival Steirische Herbst and current dramaturg for the Burgtheater, about Superamas’ place within Vienna’s scene he informed me that he does not even think of Superamas as an Austrian group, despite the funding that the city gives

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<sup>422</sup> Ludger Pries, editor, *New Transnational Social Spaces: International Migration and Transnational Companies in the Early Twenty-First Century*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 145.

<sup>423</sup> Sabine Kock, Director of IG Freie Theaterarbeit, interview by author, May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>424</sup> Similarly, Christine Standfest also freely admits that her own funding probably had more to do with her background in Berlin than anything else.

Christine Standfest, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

them. Malzacher admits that, to a large degree, Superamas' brand is dependent on the group's disassociation with the very city that funds them and that this disassociation with the local context increases their cultural capital, and power, in Vienna and abroad.<sup>425</sup> Publicity ads manufactured for the group in local contexts capitalize on Superamas' internationalism. For example, a recent advertisement produced by Tanzquartier referred to Superamas as "a cult shooting star of the international theatre, dance and media scene."<sup>426</sup> Due to their frequency of travel, their international make-up, and the widespread appeal of their work within Europe's transnational festival scene, Superamas is largely understood as the quintessential "European group."<sup>427</sup> This label is an important marker of prestige, which is currently attached to Superamas' brand-name and which allows them to maintain their cultural and economic capital within the local scene.

In the broad European context artists generally feel that traveling increases their cultural capital and, in turn, their economic potential, and that this alone is rationale for their practice. For example a study on artists' mobility states that, "this feeling of economic gains is very strong in most interviews, to the point that some artists express the fact that mobility itself can sometimes appear as an investment."<sup>428</sup> As one artist interviewed for the study stated, "the moment you add this experience to your CV this already becomes very important for many people. It's a quality standard." It is possible that the artists' lofty goals of traveling to improve their art by increasing their inspiration

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<sup>425</sup> Florian Malzacher, interview by author, July, 2009, New York, field notes.

<sup>426</sup> <http://www.tqw.at/en/archive-show-day?date=20.10.2006> (accessed 20 February 2011).

<sup>427</sup> Yosi Wanunu and Kornelia Kilga, artistic director and producer of Toxic Dreams, interview by author, 20 May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>428</sup> Amilhat Szary Anne-Laure, Louargant Sophie, Koop Kirsten, Saez Guy, *Artists Moving & Learning Project*, (Education and Culture DG: Lifelong Learning Program, 2010), <http://www.encatc.org/moving-and-learning/files/European%20Report%20ARTISTS%20MOVING%20AND%20LEARNING.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2011).

may actually be nothing more than masks for their economic rationale. This is a culture of fringe artists who are defined by their ability to increase their brand's symbolic capital through travel. This places the artists fully within the trend towards McDonaldization, where economic motivations reign supreme. The artists are fully aware of this, even as they critique it.

Superamas flaunts their internationalism and their detachment to a specific local context; these aspects define the group. Their branding as a highly international, cosmopolitan, European group manifests in Superamas' performances as well as in the discourse that they manufacture as part of their performance frame.<sup>429</sup> A prevalent example of the group's tendency to flaunt their international brand is found in their 2008 production *Empire Art and Politics*, an investigation of mediated representations of international conflicts and the alienation caused by global mass spectacle.<sup>430</sup> During an early sequence in *Empire*, the live performance is momentarily halted by a film presentation featuring Superamas at a party for the Avignon Festival where they are brainstorming their next project. Being invited to perform at the internationally renowned showcase of performance is an important marker of prestige in Europe's transnational fringe scene. By highlighting their participation in the festival through the

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<sup>429</sup> When I mention performance frames, I am referring to all that occurs within the performance itself and within the larger framework of the performance event, i.e. what leads up to the performance and what follows it. To formulate this concept I draw from the works of Erving Goffman, Gregory Bateson, and Richard Bauman. I also borrow from Richard Schechner, in particular, who considers all aspects of the performance frame as essential to developing a full understanding of the theatrical process and the cultural product's impact.

<sup>430</sup> Superamas, *Empire: Art and Politics*, DVD, Akademie Theater, ImPulsTanz: Vienna International Dance Festival (Vienna, Austria: Superamas, 2008).

film, a prevalent example of the group's extensive use of metatheatre, Superamas is effectively maintaining their brand image.<sup>431</sup>

Other examples of Superamas' use of metatheatre in the construction of its international brand are found in their *Big Episode Trilogy*, which features several vignettes in the form of three hour-long performances on commercialization and mass culture.<sup>432</sup> The finale of the *Big Episode Trilogy*, entitled *Big Third Episode: Happy/End* begins with a montage of a scene, repeated several times with minor variations, that involves the members of Superamas pretending to be a 1990s American grunge band. This sequence concludes with a full rendition of Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* and features all the French members speaking with crisp standard American accents. Another central sequence in *Big Third Episode*, also repeated with minor variations, involves a trio of young women in the green room of a dance hall discussing matters of sexuality in a candid manner. Superamas themselves stress that the inspiration for these scenes stemmed from their exposure to the HBO series *Sex in the City* set in the highly cosmopolitan metropolis New York City. One particular montage exemplifies the group's New York connections in a more direct manner. This sequence begins after a moment of live choreographed dance. The dancers momentarily freeze on stage and a large projection of a completely filmed sequence begins to play on a screen located over

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<sup>431</sup> Throughout my dissertation I refer to metatheatre as a means of self-referential discourse within performances, whether live or mediated. Oftentimes this discourse takes the shape of explicit commentary on the creative process. Any explicit commentary on the international art market within performances is metatheatrical.

<sup>432</sup> Throughout this dissertation I primarily refer to recorded productions of Superamas' *Big Episode Trilogy*. Each of these was recorded in the Vooruit Arts Center in Ghent, Belgium, significantly, outside of Vienna.

Superamas, *Big 1st Episode*, DVD, Vooruit Arts Center, (Ghent, Belgium: Superamas, 2002).  
Superamas, *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode*, DVD, Vooruit Arts Center, (Ghent, Belgium: Superamas, 2004).  
Superamas, *Big 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode*, DVD, Vooruit Arts Center, (Ghent, Belgium: Superamas, 2006).

the acting space. The film begins with clips from Superamas' rehearsal process at Tanzquartier. The members are trying new dance movements in the space and achieving varying degrees of success. At a specific moment, one of the member's cell phones rings. The camera flashes to a scene in New York City with the group's producer (he is actually a Superamas actor playing a character) on the other line, telling Superamas that they have been invited to perform *Big Third Episode* in New York City's fringe space The Kitchen. The scene flashes back to Tanzquartier and the group reacts to the news with elation. This is followed by several frames of film dedicated to chronicling the group's travel to the United States for the New York City premiere of their work. The next moments of the film feature several more scenes of Superamas' members in famous New York City locations, like Times Square. The film sequence ends with Superamas' male members auditioning several female dancers for roles in their upcoming production. The female dancers are cast and then appear with Superamas performing at The Kitchen.

This entire New York City sequence carries with it an implicit critique of the commercialization of Europe's fringe scene and the *newyorkfringeaphilia* that is prevalent among Europe's transnational fringe culture makers. Simultaneously it capitalizes on Superamas' international, cosmopolitan, European brand. Audiences are meant to be aware that the filmed sequence is a fictionalized reconstruction of Superamas' (grossly overemphasized) success in New York City. The film's fictional nature becomes apparent at two moments: one, when Superamas celebrates the success of *Big 3rd Episode* (a production that the audience is now witnessing for the first time) in a New York City venue; two, when the after party ends with a blatant advertisement for the German beer Trumer Pils. However, the use of real New York City locations in the film

allows Superamas to emphasize their mobility and *actual* international connections. Even as the film's final scene materializes and the commercial nature of the piece is revealed, the image of the group's specific type of international cultural capital has already been branded into the minds of the spectators. Through the use of explicit imagery, the group's mobility and transnational connections have been rendered more real than their ironic critique of them.

Throughout each of Superamas' performances there is little to no mention of Vienna or Austria. The one notable exception to this is found in *Empire: Art and Politics*; however, even in this work, which features a brief fictionalized retelling of the battle of Aspern-Essling (1809) between French and Austrian forces, Vienna is treated in a surface-level manner. For example, at an early moment during the production a member of Superamas appears onstage as himself and speaks to a guest at an after party for the stage play of the Napoleonic battle. The Superamas member tells the other actor that he is a member of a performance collective based in Vienna. This elicits the following response from another cast member: "Vienna, how lovely." In the DVD version of the live performance, which I am using for my performance analysis of *Empire*, this comment elicited a laugh from the audience. Following this minor reference, the topic of Vienna is dismissed and not mentioned for the remainder of the production. Superamas' disassociation with the local context is not unique to their relationship with Vienna. It persists even as Superamas mentions the trials and tribulations faced by local residents in other nations and regions.

Even though *Empire* is filled with references to non-local events, the members of Superamas are quick to articulate their own detachment from them as well. For example,

a revision to the *Empire* performance was made when the group members learned that many audience members assumed that they had actually traveled to Afghanistan to interview Samira Makhmalbaf, a female Iranian filmmaker who creates politically-charged anti-war films in the Middle East. The revision was intended to clarify that the group had not actually visited the conflict area and had instead constructed a fictional account of an actual interview conducted in the comfort of a European outdoor film set.<sup>433</sup> The group's intentional efforts to make the encounter with Makhmalbaf appear to be fictionalized mirrors their attempts to make their New York City experiences appear unreal. Chris Jones of the *Chicago Tribune* commented on this superficial treatment of non-local issues when he argued that Superamas' production offers "a window into how European creative types view Americans — which here, as is so often the case, strikes me as disappointingly reductive — and the way the historians struggle to be fair mirrors the way artists struggle to be true."<sup>434</sup> Although this criticism of Superamas' product is probably an undesirable response to the group's work, as a whole Superamas' lack of commitment to specific locales and their superficial treatment of international problems is intentional. In most matters of local or international importance, Superamas wishes audiences to perceive their commentary as ironic and self-critical; however, Superamas' ironic treatment of real issues serves a dual function. The group cannot have a consciously superficial attitude towards international issues unless they also had at least

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<sup>433</sup> Superamas' articulated intent behind the change was to "make sure people wouldn't think (they were) duplicating capitalistic strategies," i.e. creating false representations of cross-cultural dialogue, "usually used to abuse people's naiveté."

Review of *Empire: Art and Politics* by Superamas, (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago), *New City Stage: Theatre, Dance, Comedy, and Performance in Chicago*, 28 September 2010, <http://newcitystage.com/2010/09/28/deconstructing-war-superamas-brings-their-metatheater-to-themca-stage/> (accessed 20 February, 2011).

<sup>434</sup> Review of *Empire: Art and Politics* by Superamas, (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago), *Chicago Tribune*, 4 October 2010, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-10-04/entertainment/ct-live-1004-empire-review-20101004\\_1\\_war-danube-river-iraq-and-afghanistan](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-10-04/entertainment/ct-live-1004-empire-review-20101004_1_war-danube-river-iraq-and-afghanistan) (accessed 20 February, 2011).

minor exposure to them; therefore, by critiquing the superficiality of international connections, Superamas is adding credence to their self-branding as Vienna's most international group.

Superamas also further enhances their international brand by formulating highly self-referential discourse (i.e. metatheatre) regarding their funding sources. For example, *Empire* features a segment meant to resemble an after party for a production based on the battle of Aspern-Essling when a French ambassador casually praises the French government for supporting cultural events, such as the one just presented in the live opening portion of Superamas' stage play. *Chicago Tribune* reviewer Chris Jones comments on the irony implicit in this segment given that a joint grant from the Belgian and French governments was responsible for Superamas' appearance at the city's Museum of Contemporary Art, which features a season showcasing traveling performances.<sup>435</sup> Such self-referential discourse related to the international fringe market is highly prevalent within many productions created by transnational fringe artists. In part, this discourse is generated to showcase the artists' implicit critique of the very processes that allow them to function at the international level.

Instances of metatheatre such as the ones highlighted above are examples of Superamas' prevalent tendency to demonstrate their international performance frame in their products. Indeed, the connection of process to product is one of the most evident aspects of Superamas' work. The group's use of metatheatre, or self-critical discourse,

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<sup>435</sup> As Chris Jones of the *Chicago Tribune* states, "A French ambassador shows up and yaks self-servingly about his support of culture, which is especially delicious because Superamas' visit to the MCA is supported, in part, by the French and Belgian governments."

Ibid.

enables Superamas to articulate and maintain their international, cosmopolitan, European brand.

As demonstrated by Superamas' own words and the comments of other cultural agents within Vienna's transnational fringe scene, the group is very intentional about articulating their disassociation with Vienna and their attachment to a cosmopolitan performance culture. This local detachment, which is common among workers who frequent transnational social spaces, has been flaunted by Superamas and used to establish their unique brand, or signature, within the local scene. Toxic Dreams, also a highly international Vienna-based fringe group, tends to take a vastly different approach to its funding source and to the local community of the "New Vienna," which it claims to serve.

### **The Toxic Dreams Brand: *Disidentification* with Vienna's Transnational Fringe Scene**

Regarding Vienna's transnational fringe groups' tendencies to manufacture distance from the local context, Toxic Dreams occupies a different position within the spectrum than Superamas. Although artists in the group adhere to Toxic Dreams' unique brand name and signature style, their identities tend to be showcased in a more overt manner than the identities of Superamas' artists are. Dominating the Toxic Dreams brand is the personality of the group's gregarious and informed founding artistic director Yosi Wanunu. At the prodding of Wanunu, instead of disassociating with Vienna's transnational fringe scene, as the artists of Superamas do, the members of Toxic Dreams *disidentify* with it. They do this by setting themselves apart from their fellow transnational fringe artists, and positioning themselves as the scene's resident artist critics, while still maintaining their international makeup and orientation towards global mass

culture. Unlike many of their transnational fringe counterparts, the members of Toxic Dreams explicitly acknowledge their debt to the city of Vienna's funding system and articulate their interest in creating products for audiences that are part of the "New Vienna," a title that Wanunu uses to identify the increasingly cosmopolitan makeup of the city's residents, in particular its artists.<sup>436</sup> Furthermore, Toxic Dreams creates their cultural capital and displays their integral function in Vienna's transnational fringe scene by linking their brand to their function as the city's resident artist critics.

In the late 1990s Wanunu was among the first influx of transnational fringe artists to enter into Vienna's scene. He came to the city because of his romantic involvement with Kornelia Kilga, an Austrian fringe producer whom he met at an international performing arts conference. Wanunu decided to settle in the capital because it offered him the possibility to establish an artistic career.<sup>437</sup> His initial motives for selecting Vienna as his home base do not seem to be very different from the motivations of the members of Superamas, Not Found Yet Theater, or myriad other Vienna-based fringe artists who are now referred to as the "winners" of the *Theaterreform*. As Wanunu himself told me in a 2009 interview, he "was tired of not being able to make a living as an artist in New York," and he found that Vienna afforded him more potential for artistic success.<sup>438</sup> Wanunu describes his advantageous situation in the following words: "I think I was a breath of fresh air for them" because they had no real "alternative performance" at the time.<sup>439</sup> In 1997, as a result of these advantageous circumstances, Wanunu and

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<sup>436</sup> Yosi Wanunu and Kornelia Kilga, artistic director and producer of Toxic Dreams, interview by author, 20 May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>437</sup> Yosi and Kornelia state that it is rare to have an Austrian couple in the art world because so many couples meet in the transnational contexts in which they work.

Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> Yosi Wanunu, director of Toxic Dreams, interview by author, April 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

Kilga founded Toxic Dreams. With the self-consciously internationalizing efforts of the *Theaterreform*, Wanunu's economic situation improved. For example, from 2005 until 2009 he and his company were given 150,000 Euros in city funding to develop and produce new work.<sup>440</sup> At the end of this term, their funding was renewed for an additional four years, thus making Toxic Dreams one of the few groups within Vienna to have the luxury of sustaining themselves almost solely on public city money. Despite the group's international makeup and orientation towards global mass culture, Vienna's decision to fund Toxic Dreams was not based on the added cultural capital that the city would gain as Toxic Dreams traveled throughout Europe's transnational fringe spaces because the group generally neglected to do so. Unlike the highly international Superamas, Toxic Dreams rarely appears on the program rosters for co-production venues and festivals and it has little to no notoriety outside of Vienna's own fringe scene.

Wanunu claims that his lack of travel is intentional and that it is motivated by his desire to combat the "problem of locality," where artists do not serve the communities that fund them and, thus, willingly participate in the erosion of cultural diversity and artistic variety. As a consequence of his philosophy, despite admitting to settling in Vienna for economic reasons, Wanunu is quick to highlight the personal circumstances that brought him to the city. He is also swift to argue that the international makeup of his group did not materialize in order for him to accrue economic or cultural capital in Vienna's self-consciously international scene.<sup>441</sup> Instead he claims that the international

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<sup>440</sup> Yosi Wanunu and Kornelia Kilga, artistic director and producer of Toxic Dreams, interview by author, 20 May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>441</sup> With the exception of Israeli-born Wanunu, Toxic Dreams is composed of performers and designers from a variety of European nations. Anne Mendelsohn is the product of a multi-cultural couple, an English father and an Austrian mother. Raised bi-lingual and educated in England, Mendelsohn claims that approximately six years ago she came to work for Toxic Dreams due to a series of "fortunate accidents," which stemmed from loose connections between her mother and Wanunu, both of whom were Jewish,

membership of Toxic Dreams mirrors the changes in the city as a whole, which is becoming more culturally heterogeneous due to (among other things) the breakdown of national borders caused by the expansion of the EU.

According to the explicit spoken logic of Wanunu and members of Toxic Dreams, to bear an imprint of the local context means, not to be homogenously native Viennese or Austrian, but to attribute one's identity to a geographically-bounded space and to the daily struggles inherent in the process of adapting to the new environment. As I argued in chapters two and three, many Vienna-based fringe artists confine their activity to the city's transnational social spaces, just as international business travelers tend to confine their activities to the airport terminals and large corporate structures that connect them to locations abroad. Wanunu fancies himself as one whose social activities are broader than this and whose work is owing to experiences outside of Vienna's transnational social spaces and within the city's local public sphere. It is unclear to what extent the members of Toxic Dreams actually do socialize outside of these transnational social spaces; however, it is significant that the group articulates its brand according to its attachment to the culture of the "New Vienna" and uses this to vie for economic and symbolic capital in Vienna's competitive transnational fringe scene. It does, however, appear that Toxic

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performers living in Vienna. When I first met Mendelsohn while working on the Toxic Dreams production *Ich Sterbe*, she had recently performed with Superamas in Spain and Germany. Furthermore, during the work on Toxic Dreams' production she was traveling back and forth between Vienna and Linz in order to rehearse a production, which was being directed by the former Vienna city curator Andre Turnheim. Italian-born Irene Coticchio is another of Toxic Dreams' core actors. Coticchio received her performance training in a variety of locations throughout Europe. For example, she studied with a Lecoque instructor in Paris and toured the continent as a contemporary dancer and singer before settling in Vienna with Toxic Dreams approximately a decade ago.<sup>441</sup> When we began working on *Ich Sterbe*, she had just come from a personal vacation, which she had spent with her partner, Otmar Wagner, also a member of Toxic Dreams and a native of Germany, in Sicily, Italy. The Polish-born Cezary Tomaszewski is another one of Toxic Dreams' core actors. In addition to playing leading roles for the company, Tomaszewski has his own production company and a record of fringe successes including productions at Brut. Although this is a mere sampling of Toxic Dreams' core members' biographies, it provides an accurate picture of the group's international character.

Dreams' international makeup is far more than accidental. Furthermore, the group's international membership has a large impact on their productions, which seem to belie the groups' verbalized local orientation.

The international makeup of Toxic Dreams means that ideas from various cultural perspectives tend to flow and amalgamate, forming culturally nebulous and non-locally-oriented finished products. This phenomenon is even more pronounced given Wanunu's generous tendency to incorporate the talents and ideas of those that are attracted to his group into Toxic Dream's products. While observing Toxic Dream's rehearsal processes in 2009, I noticed that, even though Wanunu created the concept for the group's productions, the company's core actors had significant creative input. It was highly common for the actors to make joking remarks to Wanunu about the lack of direction that he was offering them. Furthermore, the performers exerted their own agency in the process by offering additions and subtractions to the script and improvising sections through movement and words. Even when Anna Mendelsohn, one of the group's main actresses, was not called to perform, she was assisting the production by operating the sound. The actors appear invested in the entire creative process. They are far more co-collaborators than they are mere actors who take direction from an authoritative figurehead. A personal example of the shared creative power among internationals within Toxic Dreams is how Wanunu recruited me as an actor in their 2009 production entitled *Ich Sterbe/I'm Dying* after I had already singled out his group as a prominent staple of Vienna's transnational fringe scene.<sup>442</sup> As someone in Toxic Dreams ironically claimed, "this is what happens in Toxic Dreams, whoever comes (to observe) gets sucked into performing or doing something." Wanunu operates according to a certain aesthetic

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<sup>442</sup> Toxic Dreams, *Ich Sterbe/I'm Dying*, DVD, Brut Kunstlerhaus, (Vienna, Austria, 2009).

and ideological orientation to which other transnational artists are attracted. This orientation naturally breeds transnational co-operations and it risks further detaching Toxic Dreams from people outside of Vienna's integral transnational fringe community.

As I demonstrated in chapter one, Wanunu is a harsh critic of EU-funded projects in particular, which involve artists from at least three member nations who often come together based on economic opportunism and cater to the mainstream tastes of Europe's transnational fringe venues. Wanunu argues that what often results from this are products that lack specific, local orientations. Wanunu calls this a "problem of locality," and he refers to products that are created in these circumstances as part of the "McDonalds avant-garde." He argues that the fringe artists' economic opportunism, evident in their migration patterns and coupled with their desire to market their products to an expansive fringe venue circuit, is responsible for the tapering out of diversity from Europe's fringe scene.<sup>443</sup> Such statements are clear attempts by Wanunu and his company members to *disidentify* with the very transnational fringe community that they are part of and even helped to create. Although Toxic Dreams' *disidentification* can be understood as rationale for the group's tendency to perform strictly in local venues, many of Vienna's transnational fringe culture makers are critical of the group's lack of mobility.

Toxic Dreams' infrequent travel is often cited by their colleagues as a problematic aspect of the groups' function. For example, in interviews with two former curators for the city of Vienna, they criticized Toxic Dreams' tendency to remain local. One former curator, Marianne Vejtisek, accused Toxic Dreams of fabricating the notion of their

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<sup>443</sup> According to Wanunu and Kilga, many fringe products bear no recognizable imprint of the locale where they originated.

Yosi Wanunu and Kornelia Kilga, artistic director and producer of Toxic Dreams, interview by author, 20 May, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

“local orientation” because it was merely more “comfortable” to remain in the city rather than to travel.<sup>444</sup> In addition, other Vienna-based transnational fringe artists I spoke with on an informal basis informed me that, while they were fond of Toxic Dreams’ work, the group’s brand does not possess the cultural capital that it could if Toxic Dreams frequented Europe’s network of festivals and co-production houses. The group’s practices are often contrasted with Superamas’ extreme frequency of travel and an explicit lack of a local orientation. Such comments from Vienna’s fringe cultural agents suggest that Toxic Dreams, at least in their production scheme, is somehow local and that this aspect of a local orientation is unfavorably perceived by their colleagues. Despite the ways that Wanunu and the Toxic Dreams core members attempt to *disidentify* with their Vienna-based transnational fringe colleagues, an analysis of their products reveals the irony inherent in the company members’ statements of condemnation in reference to other fringe culture makers’ “problem of locality.”

Toxic Dreams’ aesthetic orientation is rooted in Yosi Wanunu’s own experiences with New York’s experimental scene in the 1990s. For example, Wanunu’s theatre credits include doctoral course work with Richard Schechner at NYU and an assistant directorship with Richard Foreman, where Wanunu consciously adapted Foreman’s practice of creating conceptual art in performance. This aesthetic connection is something that the groups’ members make an intentional effort to articulate. For example, in an email correspondence with Toxic Dreams’ producer Kornelia Kilga, she stressed that “from the standpoint of (a) European fringe producer...Toxic Dreams is very

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<sup>444</sup> Marianne Vejtisek, former curator of the city of Vienna, interview by author, 3 June, 2008, Vienna, field notes.

"unviennese", also uneuropean and much more newyorkish."<sup>445</sup> Kilga's comment is significant because it suggests the group's overall articulation of difference within the Viennese and European scene at large. Furthermore, it allows Toxic Dreams to place their work within an identifiable and (arguably) academic performance tradition. Because the New York genres are more established and more widely theorized than the performance genres of some Vienna-based groups, Toxic Dreams' members attempt to use their allegiance to the New York genres as evidence for their non-participation in the more nascent genres originating from what Wanunu refers to as the "McDonalds avant-garde." However, New York-based fringe work is often understood by European fringe culture makers as the epitome of the cosmopolitan extreme towards which they gravitate. To this end, it is highly common for other fringe groups to associate with New York artists and to emulate their styles. As I highlighted above, Superamas' productions also include a portion of this *newyorkfringeaphilia* and this attraction to New York is not only something that is evident in the work of these groups, but also in some discourse generated by Austria's cultural leaders. For example, Austria has a cultural center in New York City and Michael Spindelegger, Austria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated the importance of this center claiming that, "New York is still one of the most important showcases in the world. It's a place where new ideas are created and discussed. So we have to raise our flag there and be present with creative concepts."<sup>446</sup> Toxic Dreams' practice of articulating their connection to New York's fringe scene appears to be, not

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<sup>445</sup> Kornelia Kilga, email message to author, February 4, 2010.

<sup>446</sup> Manfred Keller, *Interview with Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Michael Spindelegger*, <http://www.acfny.org/about/the-austrian-foreign-ministry/michael-spindelegger-on-the-acfny/> (accessed March 13, 2011).

only an odd way to *disidentify* with the group's transnational fringe counterparts, but also perhaps one of the Vienna fringe scene's defining features. The Toxic Dreams brand accrues no additional symbolic capital by identifying with New York's fringe scene. Furthermore, Toxic Dreams' symbolic capital is limited due to its lack of travel. Despite these factors, Toxic Dreams is still considered a viable entity in Vienna's fringe community. This stems from the groups' tendency to brand themselves as the scene's resident artist critics.

The most prominent example of Toxic Dreams' critical brand is found in its Theatre Cycle, which is a series of performances designed to critique past and current theatrical conventions. *Ich Sterbe/I Die*, one of the more recent performances to emerge from the Theatre Cycle, features a largely academic critique of the process of recreating history through the theatrical genre of realism. The performance begins with a filmed sequence featuring the voices of several scholars familiar with the life and works of Anton Chekhov debating the nature of the playwright's death. The film sequence also includes a group of Toxic Dreams actors, who take their cues from the character of an authoritative scholar and reenact the various interpretations of the playwright's last moments on earth as they are chronicled in biographies and historical texts. Each moment of the death narrative is told in a slightly varied manner by the different authors. The actors' portrayal of the event makes the inconsistencies highly evident. As the film plays, a small four-walled house-like structure is built on stage in full view of the live audience, which is watching the film. During the second half of the performance, the final moments of Chekhov's life are enacted in real time within the confines of the house. The only way for the audience to see the live performance is to view it through the lenses

of several cameras, which are located inside the four-walled structure and which project images of the live performance onto a screen above the acting space.

The production offers a critique of the possibility of representation in an era dominated by various forms of mediated culture that obscure the real rather than showcase it. The implication of the critique is that there is no one way to interpret data and that the ways that we interpret data are further altered through the medium in which the data is presented to us, i.e. mediated culture. Toxic Dreams' critique is de-localized because it deals with the problem of representation and interpretation, broadly conceived. These problems relate equally to performances in New York and Vienna. The non-local contexts are read into the performance event and there is nothing particularly local about either the explicit theme, i.e. the life and death of the Russia author Anton Chekhov, or the implicit theme, i.e. the impossibility of showcasing the real using live or mediated performance in an era dominated by subjectivity and accounts of reality that are many times removed from the actual events themselves. Even though Toxic Dreams' brand as the scene's resident artist critics is maintained through the critical posture of the whole *Ich Sterbe/I Die* production, the critique itself appears to belie the local orientation that the group claims to possess. For example, the established theatre, with its emphasis on *mise en scene* derived from the canonical avant-garde and global mass culture, has long since abandoned the notion that live theatre is somehow a representation of the real. Furthermore, the critique itself is recycled from past criticisms of realism that dominated segments of the avant-garde since the advent of film was seen as a threat to live performance.

To a large extent Toxic Dreams' performance frame helps them maintain their brand despite the inconsistencies and lack of nuances in their actual products. Understanding the claim that Toxic Dream remains a culturally and economically viable commodity by branding itself as Vienna's resident artist critics necessitates an analysis of Toxic Dreams' performance frame, composed of the material circumstances that accompany the production of a performance and the various tangible materials that result from it. Such an examination takes into account the ways that Vienna-based fringe groups' performance frames help them to manufacture and maintain their brands. Although groups' performance frames are composed of a myriad of elements, the major aspects of these, under the direct influence and control of the artists themselves, are their programs, merchandise, publications, and company websites. An analysis of Toxic Dreams' and Superamas' performance frames demonstrates how essential various forms of social media, in particular, have become in the construction and reception of fringe products.

### **Using Performance Frames to Manufacture and Maintain Brands**

Toxic Dreams' products have an academic, unadorned, and discursive quality that differentiates them from the popular, glossy, and discursive works of Superamas. Toxic Dreams' qualities are indicative of how the group markets themselves and articulates their legitimacy, i.e. through mounting a conscious critique against the theatrical conventions of established theatre and fringe performance. Thus, they brand themselves as the local scene's resident artist-critics, establishing a predictable irony within their productions that audiences will anticipate despite formalist variations in their work. Toxic Dreams' brand is largely constructed through the interplay of their performances

and their performance frame. Superamas utilizes its performance frame in order to construct and maintain its brand as Vienna's most international group. The use of performance frames to construct and maintain their brand names is a necessary step in the groups' efforts to secure their symbolic capital and, in turn, their economic viability in Vienna's transnational fringe scene. Although they construct their performance frames in contrasting ways, the two groups demonstrate a remarkably similar acknowledgement of the need to capitalize on aspects of their performance frames.

Toxic Dreams has a greater tendency to utilize its performance frame to establish its brand than Superamas, which is more apt to allow its works to be the major conduit of its messages. Primary evidence for this is Toxic Dreams' tendency to distribute pamphlets with extensive commentaries on their products to audience members. For example, Toxic Dreams' series of productions on the familiar Chekhov play *Uncle Vanya* gave rise to a 60 page hard cover graphic novel featuring images of Toxic Dreams' staple actors enacting scenes from the play.<sup>447</sup> Toxic Dreams' performance of *Kongs, Blondes, and Tall Buildings*, discussed in chapter five, featured a pamphlet with quotes from the New York City avant-garde artist Richard Foreman as well as *tableau vivants* of Toxic Dreams' actors, original color art work featuring King Kong, and explanations of key themes in the performance.<sup>448</sup> Adding to the group's performance frame was the 2010 publication of a text by Toxic Dreams entitled *Some Suggestions for the Theatre of the New Millennium (Minus the Last Ten Years)*, featuring a diatribe on contemporary theatre traditions by Yosi Wanunu. Although these are prominent aspects of Toxic Dreams'

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<sup>447</sup> Yosi Wanunu and Timotheus Tomicek, *Toxic Dreams: Uncle Vanya Scenes from Country Life*, (Salzburg: Fotohof, 2009).

<sup>448</sup> Toxic Dreams, *Kongs, Blondes, and Tall Buildings*, DVD, Brut Kunstlerhaus (Vienna, Austria, 2008).

performance frame, they are not the most essential. Knowledge of all these products' existence often stems from visiting the group's more visible website.

The internet is the primary aspect of their performance frames that allows Toxic Dreams and Superamas to augment their brands. Toxic Dreams in particular uses this tool in order to manufacture critical discourse on their own creative processes and on the state of the transnational fringe scene as a whole. For example, the Toxic Dreams' website was conceived as a cyberspace where the group's creative process could be leaked to their fan base in anticipation of their coming works and as a sort of retrospective for their past productions. The "notes" section of their website states that the text was assembled from a variety of collected thoughts written for programs and utilized in preparation for rehearsals or during the rehearsal process itself. The site has links to each of Toxic Dreams' past "cycles," or collections of performances grouped according to themes. Two recent cycles explicitly tackled the medium of live theatre through maintaining a critical stance towards its conventions. These cycles were entitled the "Realism or Vanya Cycle" and the "Theatre Cycle." As the title suggests, the first cycle consisted of several works that included characters from the Chekhov play of the same name. The latter cycle involved a more widespread critique of the conventions of performance in general, with no explicit focus on one theatrical genre. Toxic Dreams' website enables the cycle approach by serving as a space for the group to collect its critical thoughts regarding its own creative process and to highlight the common themes in their works, thus justifying their inclusion in the various cycles. The website also justifies the group's brand as Vienna's resident artist critics by serving as a space where Toxic Dreams' critical discourse can be manufactured, displayed, and consumed before

and after the performances are presented to the public. The website essentially serves as an extension of the performance itself. It deepens the live theatrical experience as it also solidifies Toxic Dreams' brand.

Superamas uses their website much less as an avenue for critical discourse and more explicitly as an advertising space. The homepage is arranged in an orderly fashion and it features full color production/publicity photographs. At the top of the site (in the following order) are links to descriptions of past productions, positive press for the group, production photographs, objects, and riders. The "objects" section of the website features consumable memorabilia for the group such as clip-on pins with logos of the group's *Big Episode Trilogy* and T-shirts that read, "Superamas Looking Good!" The "rider" section of the website is designed in order to provide interested producers and/or festival curators the technical specifics required for each of Superamas' traveling productions.<sup>449</sup> This section helps Superamas recreate their performances in a variety of environments with minimal technical adjustments. Conspicuously absent from the Superamas website is the group's own signature ironic stance towards the commercialization of the fringe scene and global mass culture. Instead, the website appears to be a space that is used by the group for no other purpose than to increase their international visibility and to rally an international fan base. However, the group's extensive press coverage, accumulated as a

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<sup>449</sup> In the contract and its accompanying documents (e.g. the technical rider) the invited artist or company can define their requirements and the conditions of how they want to be received (accommodation, travel, *per diems*, technical requirements, etc.) But once these are negotiated and defined, the invited artist or company should be flexible enough to adapt or integrate their work within the conditions offered by the venue; since it is the latter's responsibility to receive well, to present and promote the work, the host venue should also be given the freedom to do this since they know how best to function within their own specific context.

Guy Cools, "International Co-Production and Touring," *International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts*, <http://on-the-move.org/library/article/13862/co-production-and-touring/> (accessed March 13, 2011)

result of their frequent international travel, is highlighted as if to further its brand as Vienna's most international fringe group.

The differences between the Toxic Dreams and Superamas websites reveal how their brands are manufactured and maintained through their use of the internet, which links the transnational agents through cyber space. Neither brand could be as extensively articulated or maintained in the absence of the internet, a vital aspect of the groups' performance frames.<sup>450</sup> The internet, particularly company websites and social networking sites, is central to Vienna's transnational fringe artists. It helps the artists market their products as it also aids them in increasing the presence and cultural capital of their brand across geographical divides.

The role of the internet has become pivotal in the construction and maintenance of the artists' transnational community in the same way that it has become an essential element of its continued marketability. According to the Artists' Moving and Learning Project, "the Internet and professional contacts were the most important sources used by the artists to gather information about (opportunities for mobility)."<sup>451</sup> The European Commission's European Job Mobility Portal states that this electronic tool, featuring sites like myspace and You Tube, has also allowed for a *virtual mobility* where videos of performances may be distributed, thereby further increasing the artists' international

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<sup>450</sup> These sites are also vital aspects that help the transnational communities, which compose Vienna's transnational fringe scene, remain intact. For example, many scholars of transnationalism emphasize the role of social networking media in establishing transnational communities. Although face-to-face communication is still an essential element of community building, the internet allows the artists to lessen the barriers historically associated with geographical distance or at least to compress their own culturally constructed notions of space.

Ludger Pries, *New Transnational Social Spaces: International Migration and Transnational Companies in the Early Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2001), 18.

<sup>451</sup> Amilhat Szary Anne-Laure, Louargant Sophie, Koop Kirsten, Saez Guy, *Artists Moving & Learning Project*, (Education and Culture DG: Lifelong Learning Program, 2010), 35, <http://www.encatc.org/moving-and-learning/files/European%20Report%20ARTISTS%20MOVING%20AND%20LEARNING.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2011).

exposure and potential for economic success.<sup>452</sup> Mark Poster claims that, “if there is to be a global (or cosmopolitan) culture, it will surely engage the Internet in crucial ways...For global culture can only be global media culture” where “Every cultural object now exists in a (potentially) global context.”<sup>453</sup> Such claims, common among scholars who examine the effects of globalization on performance culture, confirm the internet’s primary role in artists’ lives, even those who do not fully embrace the idea of internationalization.

Following the influential work on identity building featured in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, Arjun Appadurai argues that the internet compresses transnational communities’ notions of socially constructed space by rendering the imagined community more present in daily interactions.<sup>454</sup> This mediated construction effectively renders notions of space less expansive than what was previously accomplished through the advent of highways, airways, and railways.<sup>455</sup> Performance studies scholar Bonnie Marranca aptly highlights this notion when she states that through electronic tools such as the internet, “the concepts of live, real, and virtual have changed the way we relate to time, which, like space and the text, has collapsed in the digital

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<sup>452</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?lang=en&catId=9190&myCatId=9190&parentId=20&acro=news&function=newsOnPortal>

<sup>453</sup> Mark Poster, “Global Media and Culture,” *New Literary History* 39, no. 3 (2008): 689-698.

<sup>454</sup> According to Appadurai, “media transform the field of mass mediation because they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds.”

Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>455</sup> According to the 2008 report on the mobility of European artists, “Many artists/cultural professionals argue that breaking into international markets remains difficult and is mainly achieved through personal contracts and connections to Diaspora communities.”

Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report*, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Education and Culture), (2008), 52 [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

world.”<sup>456</sup> Furthermore, the internet effectively creates dispersed communities that are maintained through factors located outside the explicit domain of the traditional nation state and also outside of the context of actual human interface.<sup>457</sup> Thus, the internet enables the existence of the transnational fringe community. However, it also threatens to strip the community of its sentiment by divorcing artists from their human characteristics and by leading them to give way to the dominating pressures of the modern economic system. The internet itself can quickly transform the artists’ own artistic and intellectual discourse into nothing more than economic opportunism in the form of electronic communication masked by a desire to reach out and form connections across borders.

An anecdotal, and yet highly relevant, example of the link between economics and social construction brought about by transnational artists’ use of the internet occurred when I, a member of the European Off Network (EON), sent an email through the EON list serve requesting information on contemporary experimental performance groups in Europe that resist global mass culture through the use of multi-media performances. I received over a dozen emails from professionals who appeared to understand the communication as a solicitation of advertisement for their own work. A number of the email respondents sent me information on their recent productions and asked if I would be willing to sponsor a performance by them in my own country. Although it is common for communication that I receive through the EON list serve to feature emails written with the intention of raising awareness among the transnational artist community

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<sup>456</sup> Bonnie Marranca, “Performance: A Personal History,” *PAJ* 28.1 (2005): 3-19, 14.

<sup>457</sup> Appadurai, 4.

regarding events of international importance, the frequency of such social concerns are equaled by petitions for better artist wages and the self-promotion of artists' brands.<sup>458</sup>

According to various Vienna-based transnational fringe artists, the spatial compression that results from the internet also has its pros and cons. For example, Sebastian Protl of the Vienna-based Tanz Atelier argues that social networking sites like facebook, twitter, performing arts chat rooms, and company websites "equalize" the artists by raising their awareness of how art is created in different geographically-bounded contexts. In this context artists are apt to mimic each other, even on a surface-level and, therefore, what appears to distinguish artistic practice across borders is diminished. Yet Protl also acknowledges that such sites provide an excellent method of retaining professional relationships, which may lead to a deeper understanding of difference.<sup>459</sup> Valerie Oberleithner another artist within Vienna's fringe scene claims that sites like facebook and Skype help her to regularly converse with her artist friends, including her boyfriend from Superamas, who are scattered throughout Europe.<sup>460</sup> Although I recognize the pros of such sites, my observation of the ways that they are used by a majority of fringe artists leads me to believe that they are places where differences are "flattened" rather than explored. This occurs because websites are often used by the groups as mediated supermarkets where they may further establish their brands, increasing their symbolic capital and potential for profit. Although Superamas' website is more overtly commercial than Toxic Dreams', a factor that appears to belie

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<sup>458</sup> A primary example of the EON list serve being used to raise awareness occurred in December 2010 when it was used to circulate a petition to help arrange the freedom of the director of the Belarus Free Theatre after his imprisonment following the nation's political unrest and his role as a dissident.

<sup>459</sup> Sebastian Protl, artistic director of Tanz Atelier, interview by author, 19 June, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

<sup>460</sup> Valerie Oberleithner, Vienna-based performing artist, interview by author, 25 June, 2009, Vienna, field notes.

Superamas' claim that their criticism of their own complicity in the global commercial system somehow absolves them of their guilt, Toxic Dreams' critical use of the internet is no less commercial. This is the case because the internet is an essential component of Toxic Dreams' brand, which they must maintain in order to remain a financially viable commodity within Vienna's competitive transnational fringe scene. As the 2008 European Commission report on the mobility of European artists suggests, among transnational artists there is a pronounced calling to establish a community.<sup>461</sup> However, despite this call, the human element in artistic circles may be diminished as a result of the funding mechanisms that keep the transnational connections alive.

Another problematic aspect of transnational fringe groups using the internet to construct and maintain their brands is found in Toxic Dreams' use of their website and their critical discourse generated online. At the outset of this chapter I argued that Toxic Dreams claims to be oriented towards a local audience of transnationals within the "New Vienna." I also argued that one of the primary ways that Toxic Dreams claims to engage with this audience is through their cycle approach to theatre making. This cycle approach is largely constructed and maintained through the use of their website and this factor problematizes the group's claim that they are locally engaged. According to Danah Boyd the internet is a vast cyber space, which "may enable many to broadcast content and create publics, but...does not guarantee an audience."<sup>462</sup> In order for a group's website to be effectively used for the purposes of audience development, audiences must first possess the desire to search for the group online. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that

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<sup>461</sup> Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, 7.

<sup>462</sup> Danah Boyd, "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications," in *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, ed. Zizi Papacharissi (New York: Routledge, 2011), 48.

audiences will perceive this need and there is no way for Toxic Dreams to accurately gauge which audiences are visiting their site on a regular basis. Boyd refers to the users of sites, like the company website of Toxic Dreams, as an “invisible audience,” an audience that are not and cannot be fully perceived by the creators of the websites themselves.<sup>463</sup> Toxic Dreams’ performance frame is a critical component in their strategy of local audience engagement. If this frame is largely kept intact by Toxic Dreams’ use of the internet, then the groups’ actual ability to target the local audience is again thrown into question. The groups’ audiences are more imagined constructs than actual physical entities. This is further evidence for the groups’ actual inability to resist the delocalizing forces of Europe’s contemporary fringe scene.

### **Conclusion**

Despite claiming to have a local orientation, Toxic Dreams is revealed to be somewhat de-localized. This de-localization stems from elements of their performances and performance frames. Toxic Dreams’ lack of a true local orientation seeps through their superficial efforts to *disidentify* with other members of Vienna’s transnational fringe community, which Wanunu links with the “McDonalds avant-garde.” On a different side of the spectrum is Superamas, which embraces their own practice of flagrantly participating in the de-localization and McDonaldization of the fringe scene even as they claim to be critical of globalization’s hegemonic forces. Both groups are revealed to be simultaneously non-local and also critical of the realities of globalization that force them to be non-local. Furthermore, the groups’ practices of manufacturing and maintaining their brands through their performances and performance frames reveal a consistent proclivity towards self-criticism. In the final two chapters I explore this self-critical

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid, 49.

posture, which mainly manifests in the form of metatheatre, by examining key productions of both groups. Furthermore, I examine how this posture may be leading to a degree of self-alienation among the artists.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**TOXIC DREAMS AND SUPERAMAS: MOUNTING CRITICAL DISTANCE  
FROM WITHIN THE HEGEMONIC SYSTEM OF GLOBAL MASS CULTURE**

Both Toxic Dreams and Superamas' products fit within the confines of the genre that I call *conglomerate performance*, which is a more specific term for what often falls under the catch-all phrase "contemporary performance." The purpose of this chapter is to more fully identify the qualities of this genre, which are pervasive in the work of these two transnational fringe groups and, in the process, to account for approaches to performance making that may be leading to the artists' alienation from their own work and to the overall lack of artistic fulfillment among Vienna's fringe artists. Toxic Dreams and Superamas' works are primarily marked by a self-critical posture, which reflects their ownership of the role that they play in the commodification of the transnational fringe scene. Yet even as the groups adopt this self-criticism, they also craft performances that have a superficial quality, which may be influenced by their ownership of their role in the aesthetic crisis that they currently face. The artists' extreme values of self-criticism and superficiality may have the effect of increasing their alienation and perpetuating a cycle of self-referential discourse where problems are highlighted rather than solutions formed.

**Toxic Dreams**

The 2007 production *Kongs, Blondes, and Tall Buildings* (hereafter *Kongs*), first performed in Brut Wien's Künstlerhaus, is a staple repertoire performance in Toxic Dream's Theatre Cycle.<sup>464</sup> *Kongs* consists of a live making-of-documentary for a

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<sup>464</sup> For the purposes of my analysis I am referring to a live performance I witnessed at Brut Wien's *Alles muss raus* festival in May 2009, my field notes from Toxic Dreams' rehearsal of this performance, and a

mediated documentary, or mockumentary, on the life and career of a real-life King Kong.<sup>465</sup> The first half of the performance is live while the second half is a straightforward film with no additional live elements. Despite the very different modes of presentation, the live show is always presented alongside of the mediated portion and the two pieces should be understood as one coherent performance. According to Toxic Dreams' audience-as-editor paradigm, described below, the performance may be received in several ways. For example, according to the explicit intent of Toxic Dreams, the Theatre Cycle is designed to provoke commentary on the theatrical event through the use of highly critical metatheatrical conventions in their performances, bolstered by a deluge of stimuli produced by the group as part of its performance frame. Consequently, *Kongs* may be understood as a criticism of the ways that theatrical conventions and characters are recycled over the course of successive generations, thus disabling the field to fully innovate over time. However, the use of King Kong, an icon of global mass culture, helps to frame the work as a critique of the process of globalization, including the complexities of artists giving in to a shallow, mass produced, and commodified cultural field, and being alienated from their own work. Both of these interpretations are valid. Together they form a complete picture of how the artists of Toxic Dreams are involved in a battle to maintain their own legitimacy in the face of the processes of globalization and the increasing commodification of Europe's transnational fringe scene.

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2007 DVD version of the hybrid performance. During the rehearsal process for Toxic Dreams' June 2009 showing of the piece, I took extensive field notes, which include many remarks made by Wanunu's collaborators, where they struggled with him to make the connections between the character of King Kong, the process of name branding, and the mediums of cinema and theatre, more explicit to the audience.

*Kongs, Blondes, and Tall Buildings* by Toxic Dreams, DVD recording, Brut Wien Kuenstlerhaus, Vienna, Austria, 12 December 2007.

*Kongs, Blondes, and Tall Buildings* by Toxic Dreams, *Alles muss raus* festival, Brut Wien Kuenstlerhaus, Vienna, Austria, 17 June 2009.

<sup>465</sup> The original King Kong film was the primary impetus for Toxic Dreams' performance.

*King Kong*, dirs. Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 100 min., MGM, 1933, film.

*Kongs, Blondes, and Tall Buildings* is a hybrid of live and mediated forms that presents an explicit critique of cultural production in the age of globalization. In the live portion of the show, which precedes the mediated mockumentary on King Kong, Toxic Dreams' artistic director Yosi Wanunu appears onstage as himself and briefly describes the impetus for selecting Kong as an avenue for mounting his critique. Wanunu claims that he imagined Kong as an outsider who moved to New York and, thanks to a brief encounter with thousands of audience members in an upscale-theatre establishment, began to envision himself as a character with endless reinterpetive and reconstitutive possibilities. As Wanunu states, Kong is "just like a Big Mac...you put in the possibilities like *Hamlet Kong*, *King Kong Lear*, *Streetcar Named Kong*, *Waiting for Kong*...and it's endless." Here Kong is conceived as a branded commodity whose character and narrative can be utilized in a variety of contexts with maximum predictability and profitability potential. In this instance the Kong brand is treated similarly to how the Toxic Dreams brand is treated within the context of Vienna's fringe scene, as something that must be endowed with specific capital in order to continually remain competitive and resonate with an intended audience. The mediated mockumentary further delves into the power of Kong as a commodity. The critiques of prominent intellectuals are featured within the mockumentary, which also includes interviews with actors (played by Toxic Dreams' staple acting ensemble) from a myriad of (make-believe) Kong spin-off films. The mockumentary is framed with an overarching story-line of a news crew on the hunt for a real-life massive predatory gorilla who is wandering through the wooded surroundings of an unspecified American town. The news telecast helps to maintain the focus on the search for the real quality of Kong, a

character who has been bastardized through several incarnations on film; for example the 1968 multi-cultural comedy *Kong and his Eight Brides*, the 1977 country-boy-meets-big-city romance *King in the City*, and even the 1989 porn film *King Kong Cometh*. Over the course of the documentary the real-live Kong appears and laments the loneliness and isolation caused by his foray into mediated culture. In real life, he embraced the glitz of commodity culture only to become fetishized himself. On film, he catered to the expectations of his audiences only to become a caricature of himself and “a universally recognizable commodity.” In the end Kong was banished from the screen, replaced by a human actor wearing a gorilla suit. His essence was robbed from him and all that remained on film was a simulated copy of the true Kong.

The irony in Toxic Dreams’ criticism of globalization and mediation (embodied in Kong’s attempt to achieve global recognition through the media, followed by his transition into a recognizable commodity, and ultimately his alienation from himself) is that Toxic Dreams consciously engages in these very processes. They do so by branding themselves as the fringe scene’s resident artist-critics, establishing a predictable irony within their productions that audiences will anticipate regardless of the formalist variations in their work. Despite moving freely from documentary-style video productions to pieces that superficially resemble traditional theatre and performance installations, Toxic Dreams is constantly critiquing its own forms of representation and engaging in an extreme form of meta-theatrical practice that (at times) borders on didactic cautionary lectures. All of these activities result from Toxic Dreams’ team adapting to a specific brand that the team has used to compete in the local scene.

An example of how Toxic Dreams' artists maintain their critical distance while embracing their brand is found in an early frame of the Kong documentary film. A blank screen with white letters announces "The following interviews and/or commentaries are for entertainment only. The views and opinions expressed therein are those of the individual speakers and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of Toxic Dreams Home Entertainment or any of its respective affiliates or employees." Although this statement may be understood merely as a clever "wink" towards statements at the beginning of other mediated documentaries that absolve production companies of liability, the irony of this statement is that Toxic Dreams as a company does not exist outside of the integral community of artists that Wanunu assembles for any given production. The illusion of Toxic Dreams as a corporate structure is kept intact by Wanunu's consistent use of the same actors, but in a very early frame of the mockumentary, the identity of the artists who have contributed through creative sessions of improvisations, discussions, and physical embodiment of ideas is subsumed under a brand name. The use of the disclaimer at the beginning of the mockumentary is the artists' ironic way of highlighting how their own identities have been absorbed under a brand name and become commodified just as the identity of the real King Kong has been, as the mockumentary that follows shows. The presence of the ironic nod to other mediated documentaries is more than a trivial matter. It is an early indicator in the performance that shapes audience perceptions of the entire event. This instance in the mockumentary evokes a detached, intellectual posture in the audience members who perceive the *Kongs* performance as a tongue-in-cheek and, mostly superficial, treatment of the commodification of artist's personas in the age of globalization. Presenting ideas of this nature with such

superficiality appears to be one of the only possible recourses that Toxic Dreams has because adopting a morally superior attitude towards such issues would open the group to criticisms from their peers who are aware of the commercial demands placed on all artists in the transnational fringe scene, which is marked by a series of dialectical struggles for artists' legitimacy.

Throughout *Kongs* Toxic Dreams' tongue-in-cheek posture is solidified through the juxtaposition of a variety of acting styles, which mostly serve to heighten the metatheatrical nature of the performance and Toxic Dreams' overall theatrical experience. A full understanding of how the metatheatricality is created requires an analysis of Michael Kirby's acting scale, utilized by scholar Philip Auslander in order to describe how the live theatrical event is being defined by mediated performance. Kirby's acting scale is highlighted in his 1972 essay entitled *On Acting and Not-Acting*. At one end of the scale is not-acting (what Kirby calls non-matrixed performance) "where the performer does nothing to feign, simulate, impersonate and so forth" and at the other end of the scale is acting (what he calls highly matrixed performance). Between not-acting and acting are "non-matrixed representation" (where the performer does things that, within a specific context can be construed as having a specific meaning, but which merely involve the actor going through various motions as himself), "received acting" (where, despite the performers' intention or emotional involvement, audiences perceive characters because the context of the performance is so filled with symbols), and "simple acting" (when the actor begins to develop an "inner creative attitude" and starts to indicate that "I am doing this thing" rather than "I am doing these movements").<sup>466</sup> Kirby argues that as a result of avant-garde Happenings, i.e. mostly spontaneous performances that involve specific

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<sup>466</sup> Michael Kirby, "On Acting and Not Acting," 1972: 3-15.

actions done by performers outside the confines of traditional stages, experimental performances began to include more non-matrixed performance. In such Happenings actors began using their own names and personas in performances that lacked coherent narratives and the need for actors to take on characters separate from themselves. Philip Auslander argues that mediated forms contain more non-matrixed performance because actors often go through a series of motions that the director and editor construct into a coherent narrative using the film medium. Audiences then determine the meaning of the performers' actions through the matrices provided by the medium. The directors and editors have a large degree of agency because they can edit the film in order to craft a performance never fully intended by the actor by juxtaposing the actor's performance with frames of action, thereby allowing the audience to perceive a correlation between the actor's facial gestures and the activity represented in the other film clips.<sup>467</sup> The use of performance that is closer to the non-matrixed variety is employed by contemporary fringe performers, including those in Toxic Dreams, as a way of developing and maintaining a critical stance towards their products. Furthermore, by alternating between non-matrixed performance and matrixed performance, the actors are able to create a dominant perception of superficiality.<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> Auslander also claims that because the stylistic gaps between mediated and live performance are narrowing, non-matrixed performance tends to characterize the work of actors in experimental performance.

Philip Auslander. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>468</sup> Wanunu himself claims to be critical of the tendency of many contemporary fringe artists to engage in non-matrixed acting, which is particularly ironic considering that his actors often do this. As he states in notes found on Toxic Dreams' website, "I was and still am dissatisfied with the direction experimental theatre took in the last decade or two. I have a certain dislike of minimalist theatre, the empty stage, the poor theatre and so on and so on; those ideas are old hats by now. In addition, "new" tendencies in "contemporary performance" became as dangerous and as tedious as the old ones. For example, nowadays on every second stage there is a performer who declares "I am not acting I'm just here" etc. etc. but this not-acting became as bad and as boring as the worst method acting one can still see around."

Yosi Wanunu, comment on "Or I've Got the Blues," Toxic Dreams website, <http://toxicdreams.at/theatrecycle/> (accessed March 1, 2011).

In *Kongs*, the Toxic Dreams team allows their critical, ironic stance to take hold and subsume their creative energies. They begin the piece with a live show, where the actors appear on stage as themselves and discuss how they personally began to relate to the Kong narrative. This performance also shows the actors engaging in reenactments of moments from the mediated mockumentary that follows the live portion of the performance. All of the live and many of the mediated moments contain self-referential and non-matrixed qualities and often involve the actors enacting a form of self-parody.

A key element in the mockumentary is the use of field “experts,” mainly university professors, who comment on the various media representations of Kong. The experts function in an ironic manner, appearing as themselves and providing analysis that is evidently a mixture of parody and genuineness. For example in an early frame of the mockumentary a University of Vienna-based psychoanalyst appears as himself and discusses the apparent coincidence that the three main characters’ names in the 1933 Kong film all begin with “D,” as if this is an artistic choice evoking feelings from the original film’s Depression-era context. In a later frame of the mockumentary a professor of architecture discusses how Kong is meant to be understood as a metaphor for mankind’s troubled relationship with the infrastructure of the modern city. As the professor states, both the image of Kong at the beginning standing atop his mountain lair surveying the forests’ natural environs and the final image of Kong standing atop the Empire State Building surveying the architectural environs are meant to conjure the sublime and frame mankind, for all of its advancements, as a mere creature lost in the wilderness of its own creation. The ironic intention of the expert commentary is made evident by the hodgepodge of such experts, whose specialties range from the tenuously

related fields of film, psychology, architecture, and gender studies. At the core of each mock commentary is an emptiness or detachment from the actual subject matter. Each commentator is participating in a form of non-matrixed performance where they act as parodies of themselves. These instances call attention to the overall ironic posture of the performance.

The self-parody of Toxic Dreams' core actors is particularly evident in the live portion of the *Kongs* performance, which functions as a making-of-documentary on the mediated "mockumentary" that follows. According to Wanunu, the live portion of the show was meant to evoke feelings of watching a "DVD extra," albeit in a live setting and before the viewers even witnessed the DVD's main content. The live show features the creators of *Kongs* including Irene Coticchio, Anna Mendelsohn, and Yosi Wanunu as themselves, discussing their own thoughts on Kong as a media icon and their experiences constructing the piece. For example, actress Anna Mendelsohn relays the story of a game that she and her childhood friend Robert played when they were younger. In it Robert would pretend to eat her. In turn, Mendelsohn would revel in the fear that stemmed from this encounter, laughing and asking Robert to play the role of the monster with more ferocity. Such memories are what allowed Mendelsohn to relate to the character of Ann Darrow and to the global interest generated in the Darrow-Kong screen romance. Mendelsohn makes this connection when she claims, in an ironic manner, that her elation caused by the prospect of her childhood friend eating her is similar to the attraction that we, as consumers of the Kong spectacle, have when witnessing the characters of Darrow and Kong. As she states, we all wish to be eaten and this wish is reflected in our cultural fascination with the relationship between the major characters. In another scene from the

live show actress Irene Coticchio appears on stage wearing black face makeup and dreadlocks. She comments on the ridiculous appearance of her Jimmy Hendricks-like costume. Later the audience will learn that Coticchio's appearance is meant to mirror one of the native "virgins" that the tribe expects Kong to devour in the jungle, but at this moment the audience has no definitive way to read Coticchio's appearance. They are only made aware of the actresses' own non-matrixed performance style as she lambastes her own costume and makeup choice, setting an ironic tone that will color the remainder of the piece. In another live moment Wanunu himself appears on stage and explains how his boyhood obsession with the giant gorilla prompted the piece. As a boy he wished to grow up to be like Kong himself, "hairy" and "assertive," a true alpha male (a characteristic belied by Wanunu's impromptu and collaborative style of directing and generous way of relating to his colleagues). Even as the actors make no effort to hide their own identities as performers, their live presence is not the primary focus of these moments. Instead, the focus appears to be on offering fake testimonials as a way of establishing the work's overarching ironic tone and representing the idea that in an era dominated by commodification, even personal testimonials given by creative types convey superficiality and cannot be told with unabashed sincerity.

Each of these personal, and yet also superficial, anecdotes is followed by a re-representation of a moment from the mediated mockumentary that follows the live performance. For example, immediately following her personal story actress Mendelsohn, donning a blonde wig and white dress, moves center stage and intentionally wraps her arms around two large ropes that span the acting area. A voice is projected over a loud speaker coaching the character Ann Darrow (played in the original 1938 King

Kong film by the actress Fay Wray) through her first encounter with the mammoth Kong. Mendelsohn slowly moves from the more non-matrixed approach to acting (where the audience perceived Mendelsohn as herself) to a more matrixed approach as the actress begins to fully assume the persona of Fay Wray who is playing Ann Darrow. Once the screaming ends and the voice-over ceases, Mendelsohn quickly breaks character as if the climatic moment was dispassionate and common-place. The effect created by the juxtaposition of non-matrixed and matrixed performance is made even more ironic by the fact that the live performance is a re-representation of a moment in the mediated mockumentary that follows the live show. By the time the audience witnesses the moment in the film production that the actress portrayed in the live show, they are made fully aware that the entire context of the performance was not intended to make sense until the moment when the re-represented action on stage is enacted again by Mendelsohn on screen.

There is a degree of irony in Toxic Dreams' very choice to produce a piece that so completely separates the live and mediated portions of the performance into two distinctive wholes. Although there is no definitive act break, the live portion of the show functions as Act I while the film that follows functions as Act II. The mockumentary appears to have all the qualities of a reel intended for mass production and distribution in fringe film festivals. For example, it contains a credit sequence that follows the action, it is timed at approximately 50 minutes, and the story that it tells is self-contained, i.e. it does not depend on the live show that precedes it. Despite these factors the mediated portion of *Kongs* is never presented without the accompanying live show. Conversely, following the pattern of a DVD extra, the live show is entirely dependent on the mediated

mockumentary that follows it. The self-referential commentary of the live portion only makes logical sense after the mediated show has been revealed. For example, a scene in the live show features Anne Mendelsohn acting as Anne Darrow being tossed about in a large, plush puppet made to resemble the hand of a life-size Kong. On one side of the hand is a Toxic Dreams actor pretending to be a member of the *Kongs* stage crew who manipulates the hand with large jerky motions and at the other side of the puppet hand is another member of the *Kongs* stage crew who holds a reflector board designed to cast the optimal light on the actress. In the mockumentary the audience watches a mediated image of Anne Mendelsohn engaged in the same activity although visual effects show a jungle scene behind the puppet hand and the camera angles effectively remove the stage crew from the image. Even though it is shown to the audience prior to the mediated portion, the live show appears to be constructed as an afterthought and it seems to exist only to augment the experience of watching the mockumentary. The entire live event is completely subordinate to the mediated event and this factor seems to strip the live actors of a degree of agency. The liveness of the first part of the *Kongs* performance is rendered less immediate than the mediated event that follows. With the subordination of the live event to the mediated event and the ironic, superficial, and non-matrixed performances of the live actors, the artists' presence is twice diminished. This is fully intentional, which suggests that the artists themselves are fully aware of the diminished cultural capital of live events in favor of mediated events, which are far easier to disperse among a wired transnational network.

Another commentary on the live actor's diminished presence is explicitly revealed within the intentional framework of the mockumentary itself. Towards the middle of it

the “real-life” Kong laments that his persona was taken over by a “classically trained actor” named Randy Serkis, played by Anne Mendelsohn in an ironic nod to the actor Andy Serkis who provided the voice and motion capture imagery for the popular *Lord of the Rings* film franchise. Serkis discusses her methodical approach to playing Kong, including how she examined actual primates in order to formulate the compendium of vocalizations for her portrayal of the gorilla. This commentary is interspersed with footage of a man in a sound booth looping Serkis’ dialogue with pre-recorded sound bites from actual gorillas. Even though Serkis has taken over the Kong brand and seemingly has more agency than the actual “real-life” primate, she too is stripped of her presence by the mechanisms of mediated culture.<sup>469</sup>

*Kongs’* hybrid nature contains the crux of the performance’s metatheatrical critique. The implication of the live actor’s diminished presence is that liveness has less cultural and economic capital in the contemporary global system, including Vienna’s transnational fringe scene. Furthermore, live performance does not constitute a separate sphere, free from the trappings of global mass culture and market concerns. It is not an autonomous field, as Bourdieu would describe it, but a field that is dependent on externals for its continued existence. In this instance, the realities that inspired the scene to engage in an aesthetic agitation are no longer merely phenomena associated with a threatening other; they are also the scene’s progenitors. The realities of global mass culture, most evident in mediated cultural artifacts like American films and commercial-laden television, have trickled into the transnational fringe scene itself. This is not understood by the artists to be a tragedy, but merely a reality that the artists adapt to their

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<sup>469</sup> It is standard for films to loop dialogue. In the case of *The Lord of the Rings* a cast of hundreds of actors had their voices digitally altered or enhanced.

own circumstances and expound upon for the purposes of furthering their own symbolic and economic capital.

There is an apparent discontinuity between the live and mediated sections of the performance that adds to actors' absence of live presence. This fragmentation is reconciled in part by the audience editors who must make the intellectual links between the live and mediated event as they are watching the mockumentary. As I argued in the previous chapter, the Toxic Dreams brand is mainly constructed and maintained through a deluge of information including internet blogs, speeches, programs, and (in one instance) a comic book that center around their productions and are used to expose Toxic Dreams' process. I call this approach, which relies heavily on the artists' entire performance frame in order to convey their entire message, the "audience-as-editor paradigm." This paradigmatic structure is rooted in the belief that the most effective way to engage an audience is to inundate them with stimuli, forcing them to select from what they have been given and to formulate their own overall interpretation of the theatrical event. Wanunu describes the genesis of this approach by referring to an encounter he had with a cultural attaché from a New York mission who, after seeing one of his performances complained, "my head is exploding...I am bombarded with information...you are the artist and you are supposed to do the selection for me." Wanunu responded to the cultural attaché's comments by stating, "I realized that I was 35 and I don't know about life anymore than anyone in the audience... (so) I decided to fight it...I would put everything that comes in the process and bombard people with a lot of information and force them to start to make their own decisions...to read the shows via

their own eye.”<sup>470</sup> This quote, taken from one of Wanunu’s speeches in the Austrian region of Vorarlberg, is consistent with the mission articulated on his website to: create works that allow the audience to “accept confusion as part of the experience of sitting in the theatre” and to “make up their own mind.” For Toxic Dreams the audience-as-editor paradigm coexists with their brand as the scene’s resident artist critics because their performances’ inherently critical nature allows them to point the proverbial finger at a myriad of sources, at once calling attention to the external forces that threaten to disenfranchise contemporary working artists like themselves and to their own complicity in the process of disenfranchisement.

Toxic Dreams’ audience-as-editor paradigm relies on the work’s fragmentation, which is itself derivative of festivalized, or de-localized and de-contextualized, Brechtian performance techniques. Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was an animate opponent of Richard Wagner’s theories of unification in the performance event. He argued that,

So long as the expression “*Gesamtkunstwerk*” (or “integrated work of art”) means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be “fused” together, the various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere “feed” to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has got to be given up.<sup>471</sup>

Brecht’s statement reveals his belief that the unified art work threatened to disenfranchise audiences of their agency by anesthetizing them, or deadening their critical faculties, and he sought to remedy this chronic issue by separating the component parts of the performance, crafting an overall sense of discord, which he labeled the

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<sup>470</sup> Yosi Wanunu, *Vorarlberg Online* (Vorarlberg, Austria, 2008) <http://video.vol.at/video/11511/toxic-dreams-3---yosi-wanunu> (accessed March 2011)

<sup>471</sup> Dukore, 848

*Verfremdungseffekt* (often translated as the alienation effect). This separation was accomplished by employing film projections and musical compositions, each independent works of art in themselves, which had a connection to the live event in so far as the live event would “unreel” the happenings that were “fixed on the screen.”<sup>472</sup> There was a dialogical element to the interplay of the works of art used in Brechtian performance, heightening the audience’s participation of the theatrical experience; however, by separating the component parts of the performance Brecht’s theatre was to evolve, or de-evolve, into what Theodor W. Adorno deemed the shallow variety show. In the performances of Toxic Dreams, and also Superamas (highlighted below), the dialogical elements in Brechtian performances have become unraveled and the performances’ fragmentation have been rendered more extreme. This process may have diminished the overarching ability for the artist to objectify a social problem in favor of transforming the overall work into a series of fragmented critiques and statements, which may be picked up and dissected at the audience’s will and according their personal tastes. In such circumstances criticism is not the principal outcome of the actual performance, instead a self-referential laughter and an overarching feeling of entertainment, or boredom depending on audience tastes, ensues.

Toxic Dreams’ audience editors may perceive the link between the group’s use of the Kong icon and the group’s own brand. The group’s very use of the Kong narrative automatically places the group within the global consumer culture that they lambaste. This audience perception is established at the outset of the live performance when

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<sup>472</sup> Dukore, 848-849.

Wanunu himself states that he selected the character of Kong because “It was a universally recognizable commodity.”<sup>473</sup> Richard Foreman states that,

one’s primary experience (the aesthetic experience) is to realize that the subject itself doesn’t matter-but is always in fact the trivial aspect of the art event. That trivial aspect (the ‘subject’) is what we focus on when we choose NOT to be deeply engaged with what art is deeply about-the full, multi-dimensional ‘presence’ of whatever subject is being obliterated by the power of ‘presentness.’<sup>474</sup>

This is a factor highlighted by the Toxic Dreams team in the critical brochure that accompanies the *Kongs* performance. Presumably this quote is intended to frame the character of Kong as a device used to explore themes related to globalization and theatrical conventions. In this context Foreman’s quote can also be read as a nod to the ways that the mediated mockumentary counteracts the live presence of the flesh and blood actors in favor of an immersive experience that derides liveness as it alienates the artists themselves from the performance that they created. In any event, Toxic Dreams’ audience editors are not likely to accept Kong fully as an arbitrary subject; instead they are likely to perceive the artists’ choice of subject as the result of the groups’ own integral connection to a superficial mass culture, dominated by the activity of consuming prefabricated entertainment. The implicit irony in this is that the audiences themselves are constantly inundated by the superficial culture industry, which threatens to diminish their agency. This is the case even when they enter spaces like Brut and view performances like those of Toxic Dreams, which they may believe to be free of such influences.

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<sup>473</sup> A variety of other theatrical icons could have been used instead of Kong. Again, this reality makes it difficult for Toxic Dreams’ audience editors to place the groups’ critique in a strictly local context.

<sup>474</sup> Yosi Wanunu, *Kongs, Blondes, and Tall Buildings* Program Notes, (Toxic Dreams: Vienna, Austria, 2007).

Through their highly critical posture (achieved through non-matrixed performance) and their tendency to place the burden of definitive interpretation on the audience (through their use of the audience-as-editor paradigm), Toxic Dreams appears to be suggesting that there is no way for artists to maintain a serious posture or to contribute a definitive vision or original work that is wholly their own uncompromised vision. These qualities in Toxic Dreams' work likely stem from the very structure of Vienna's transnational fringe scene itself. Along with the performer's critical distance comes their tendency to parody not only the mainstream practices that they agitate against but also themselves as artists. By simultaneously parodying the mediated culture that they are critiquing and themselves as artists, Toxic Dreams' performers are remaining consistent to their predictable value of criticism. Yet at the same time, despite revealing information about themselves as individuals, they are manufacturing distance from their respective work as artists. In other words, even their own artistic personas are subsumed under the value of criticism that rules over the Toxic Dreams brand. According to the confines of the current transnational fringe scene, this predictable value must remain constant and Toxic Dreams is somehow victimized by its own success. This is specifically referenced in the Kongs performance by Wanunu himself who states, "[King Kong] sits on his rock maybe the loneliest creature in the history of cinema" and thinks (with exasperation) "I have to go and eat another black virgin." He further thinks "maybe it would have been great if they had given me some great text...Shakespeare...I could do it, but no luck."<sup>475</sup> Kong is unable to free himself from the persona that has brought him

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<sup>475</sup> Toxic Dreams, *Kongs, Blondes, and Tall Buildings*, DVD, Brut Kunstlerhaus (Vienna, Austria, 2008).

success, just as Toxic Dreams must remain true to their brand. Toxic Dreams is fully aware of this irony and this awareness dominates their aesthetic.

### **Superamas**

Superamas has many things in common with Toxic Dreams. It is an international collective of artists that operates according to funding from the city of Vienna, it produces hybrid performances (i.e. a mixture of live and mediated forms), it places a large portion of the burden of interpretation on its audience, and it consistently recycles mediated forms of mass culture as its actors engage in highly ironic acting that stays closer to the non-matrixed side of the acting scale. Yet Superamas takes the practices of engaging with global mass culture and showcasing ironic non-matrixed performances to an entirely new level, demonstrating the groups' hyper-ironic condition. As performance critic Rudi Laermans states, Superamas treats reality (liveness) and hyper-reality (mediated representations of the self) in such a congruous and continuous manner that the differences between the two have "simply imploded."<sup>476</sup> This is at once evident in the artists' full adoption of their corporate brand name, i.e. Superamas, which appears on all of the groups' products, instead of the individual artists' names. This condition becomes further apparent when examining Superamas' performances.

Superamas' *Big Episode Trilogy* represents the most complete embodiment of Superamas' critique, or showcase, of global mass culture and their awareness of their own complicity within it. The "big" in the title may refer to the audacity of the group itself. Each of the three performances includes shameless self-promotion of the

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<sup>476</sup> Rudi Laermans, "Art versus mass culture, episode 4579945 (a [culture sociological] fragment on the work of Superamas) (1)," <http://www.superamas.com/pagesTexts/texts.html> (accessed March 1, 2011)

Superamas brand name as if to proclaim that the group is the “next big thing” in Europe’s transnational festival circuit. The “big” in the title may also refer to the omnipresent consumerist qualities of the contemporary art market and the ubiquity of commodities that degrade people into, at best, consumers or choosers rather than individuals with actual agency or originality. The “big” in the title may also refer to the daunting prospect of resisting the forces of the consumer-driven globalized society. Indeed the “big” in the title may refer to all, one, or none of these things as Superamas’ audience-as-editor paradigm (similar to Toxic Dream’s mode of operation) allows for the possibility for all these interpretations to coexist in a superficial melee of stimuli vying for audience attention but never amounting to a coherent call to action or a real in-depth socio-cultural critique.

As the members of Superamas themselves have stated, mounting a critique against the dominant forces of global mass culture has never been their explicit intent, even though audiences are welcome to perceive this. Rather than mounting a conscious critique, against the mainstream other, Superamas members fix their critical gaze upon themselves, admitting that they are unable to offer solutions. They do not believe that they can actively play the role of critic of society because they are very much a part of the society that they would critique.<sup>477</sup> The artists themselves are stuck in a feedback loop where all they can do is recreate the mediated cultural artifacts that surround them and they fully expect that their integral audiences, after having been exposed to their work,

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<sup>477</sup> The following is an excerpt from an interview that Belgian contemporary performance critic Pieter T’Jonck conducted with members of Superamas: “We just use the theatre conventions to ask questions. Not to come up with answers. There are enough theatre companies who formulate critical questions, and immediately provide you with the right answers. It is almost compulsive to position yourself as a critic of contemporary society. And people love it. They get reprimanded for their compulsive consumption drive and they applaud it. That’s strange, isn’t it?”

Pieter T’Jonck, “Montage and Research Versus Faith and Demagogy,” *De Tijd*, (18 June 2004), <http://www.superamas.com/pagesTexts/texts10.html> (accessed March 1, 2011).

will participate in this same feedback loop by recapitulating Superamas' aesthetics within the context of their own daily lives and artistic products. In this manner Superamas' audience-as-editor paradigm functions in a different way than Toxic Dreams' does. Superamas sees their audiences as extensions of themselves, humans who are incapable of generating originality within the context of a structure that is dominated by ideas that constantly recycle themselves.

The *Big Episode* performances themselves are marked by sequences of live action, which are acted by living actors who mouth words to a pre-recorded sound track fed through an electronic sound system.<sup>478</sup> These live segments are broken up by fragments from films and/or music videos (mostly of American origin, America representing the height of consumer-driven mass culture) and then repeated, sometimes verbatim but mostly with slight variations. The variations materialize after the group shows the given scene several times using conventions borrowed from mediated culture such as pause, rewind, and playback. The scenes themselves do not include particularly witty dialogue or in-depth ideas. Instead they take the form of American soap operas with their surface-level dialogue and lack of nuanced subtext. In some instances when the scenes are played back the dialogue and characters morph into something else entirely than what they had portrayed before, further revealing the superficial nature of the dramatic event unfolding in front of the audience editors. The implicit superficiality of these pieces have led some art critics to label Superamas' work "bad theatre," but this label is belied by the

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<sup>478</sup> Superamas, *Big 1st Episode*, DVD, Vooruit Arts Center, (Ghent, Belgium: Superamas, 2002).  
Superamas, *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode*, DVD, Vooruit Arts Center, (Ghent, Belgium: Superamas, 2004).  
Superamas, *Big 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode*, DVD, Vooruit Arts Center, (Ghent, Belgium: Superamas, 2006).

whole-hearted way that Vienna has embraced Superamas and attached its own highly valued brand to this foreign artists' collective.<sup>479</sup>

*Empire: Art and Politics* (hereafter *Empire*), Superamas' conglomerate meditation on global politics and historical representations of war, and Europeans' responses to it, uses slightly different techniques, also borrowed from mediated culture.<sup>480</sup> The piece begins with a live performance of a signature battle between Napoleonic forces and the Austrian Empire, in which both sides claimed victory over the other. This is followed by a staged post-performance cocktail party for the live show. This post-show celebration is also shown live, but it features a mock camera crew pretending to film the live event. Documentary-style films dealing with the nature of war and mediated representations of it punctuate the live action and yet even these films are treated in a superficial manner. For example, a documentary-style interview of a female Iranian filmmaker conducted by the Superamas crew ends with a staged gun fight between Superamas and Afghani terrorists. The remainder of *Empire* consists of fragments of mediated and live performance that roughly follow the patterns highlighted below.

Throughout their work Superamas eschews genuineness while adopting a self-critical posture and overall superficiality regarding themselves as individuals. This coexists with their practice of idolizing, or fetishizing, sources external to themselves, such as mainstream media.<sup>481</sup> Ignance Feuerlicht describes the complicated Marxist concept of "thingification" and fetishism, common in Superamas' works by stating,

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<sup>479</sup> Pieter T'Jonck, "Montage and Research Versus Faith and Demagogy," *De Tijd* (June 2004), <http://www.superamas.com/pagesTexts/texts10.html> (accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>480</sup> Superamas, *Empire: Art and Politics*, DVD, Parc de la Villette dans le cadre des Residences d'Artistes, Paris, France, 2008.

<sup>481</sup> I include an analysis of *Empire* along with the *Big Episode Trilogy* because I understand the piece as a continuation of several themes, especially the superficiality of the current global system, which are established in the *Big Episodes*.

While ‘thingification,’ the conscious or unconscious transformation of human beings and human potentialities into things or the viewing of human values as things, is often symptomatic of alienation or conducive to it, so is the parallel phenomenon, the deification or idolization of things or, as Marx put it, the ‘fetishism of commodities.’<sup>482</sup>

In Superamas’ *Big Episode Trilogy* and *Empire* the artists self-identify with “thingification” as they produce commentary on the “fetishism of commodities” produced in the context of global mass culture. The performances differ in that the *Big Episode Trilogy* specifically references the fetishization of consumer-oriented products, human bodies, and corporate brands while *Empire* mostly addresses the fetishization of war imagery and cultural activism spawned by the international news media coverage of global crisis. Despite the slightly different thematic approaches adopted for each of their performances, the group maintains its signature performance aesthetic by relying on the use of metatheatrical references mixed with highly self-critical irony. In each instance, Superamas’ members negotiate the rocky terrain between fringe performance, which has historically thrived on the presence of the living actor, and mass culture, which is now primarily associated with mediatization. This business would theoretically place the artists at risk of diminishing their own individuality and their derivative avant-garde impulse, if the artists themselves believed that either sincere posture was possible.

The hybridized nature of Superamas’ performances is revealed through the slippage of mediated mass culture into the live performance event. Unlike *Toxic Dreams*, Superamas appears to have stopped caring whether or not embracing such hybrid performance results in the live actors’ diminished presence. One of the most evident examples of Superamas’ hybridized nature is their use of pre-recorded voiceovers in the *Big Episode Trilogy*, which are projected over the living actors’ own physical activities

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<sup>482</sup> Feuerlicht, 45.

on stage. These sound tracks are an intentional nod to the way that the actors' living voices, and indeed their very agency as wordsmiths, are lessened by the use of mechanized projections. The liveness of Superamas' performances is further diminished by the fact that in many instances the voice-over artists are different from the artists who actually appear onstage and mouth the words. This is apparent in the opening credits for each *Big Episode* where the voiceover artists are listed separately from the live cast. The process by which the live actors are robbed of their presence through the pre-recorded voice track is made further evident by a specific sequence in *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode* involving an actor from Superamas who plays a caricature of himself, another actor who plays John "from the Rolls Royce Company," and an Air France stewardess who plays a rendition of her professional persona. In this scene the actor from Superamas asks John several questions about the Rolls Royce company and then shifts the conversation by discussing the ways that the Superamas "corporation" mirrors the Rolls Royce company. Like many other scenes in the *Big Episode Trilogy*, this sequence is played several times with minor variations using the mediated conventions described above, including voiceovers that the living actors mime through their physical, non-vocal actions. When this scene is played through a second time, a film projection appears above the live-acting area, revealing other Superamas actors who are providing the voiceovers for the live action below. The voices and words of the live actors on stage are not their own, but rather their live bodies are being used in order to create a living context for the mediated voices of the other actors. Juxtaposing this film footage with the live action, which features the actor from Superamas essentially trying to sell his company to a potential donor from the Rolls Royce Company, reveals how the actor's individuality has been stripped from him as a

result of participating in the commodification of Superamas' brand name. The live actor himself is merely a puppet used by the corporate entity, i.e. Superamas, to help it to flourish economically and culturally. The *Big Episode Trilogy*'s voiceovers conjure thoughts of Toxic Dreams' *Kongs* performance where the actor Randy Serkis' gorilla vocalizations are replaced by those manufactured in a sound laboratory. This knowingly ironic use of performance conventions is an integral aspect of Superamas' work, and the group's consistent use of it signals their belief that they are similarly trapped in a structure where their individual voices are replaced by the voice of the collective commodified brand name, i.e. Superamas. Yet throughout the *Big Episode Trilogy*, Superamas so fully utilizes the voiceover convention as if to suggest to its audiences that the artists themselves have ceased fighting against the forces of mediated consumer-driven mass culture and have instead fully embraced their complicit role in the system.

The slippage between the actors' liveness and mediated representations of themselves is further apparent as the entire live event conforms aesthetically to global mass culture. The effect of watching the various scenes in the *Big Episode Trilogy* conjures the phenomena of pause, rewind, and playback, products of the VCR, DVD, and other formats of home entertainment. The use of such conventions creates a distance between audience and performers by imposing a mediated frame on the playing space of the theatre featuring Superamas' live actors. This mediated frame materializes to a greater degree through the set pieces and props that appear within the performing space itself. In each *Big Episode* and also in *Empire*, several acting areas are made to resemble different locations on a film studio set. Each stage area consists of a large projection screen where films are played at intermittent times during the live action. The lit areas

are mostly made to look like facades of shops, bars, or living quarters, which when framed by the camera lens could resemble actual locations. In between the lit areas of the stage are dark spaces filled with loose wires and various mechanisms for crafting films such as cameras, boom microphones, and cranes. At certain moments in the *Big Episode Trilogy* and *Empire* the film camera and boom microphone are manipulated by actors, conveying the sense that the audience is witnessing the recording of a film, rather than merely witnessing a live show. This type of scenery is common in Toxic Dreams' *conglomerate performances* as well, particularly *Ich Sterbe/I Die* and *Kongs*, and it suggests that the live performance event is merely a precursor or an after-thought to something mediated. This implies that the Superamas members themselves recognize the impossibility of manufacturing a live event that can be consumed by its audience as something divorced from mediated mass culture. The live and the mediated coexist in the same playback loop and have ceased to function as separate cultural spheres.

In Superamas' *conglomerate performances* the actors' live presence is not ontologically separate from the presence of the mediated actor that the audience only knows on a superficial level. This is highlighted by the Superamas team as the live actors frequently recapitulate and reframe scenes from films with international commercial appeal. For example, *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode* features full scenes from the 1999 Ben Stiller-directed film *Zoolander*, a comedy about a male model trying to dedicate himself to philanthropy while simultaneously searching for a rogue assassin and the perfect commercial look, which he calls "magnum." Scenes from the film are played on the large projection screen overhead of the live action; and portions of the scenes are then replayed by the live actors themselves, who use their own bodies to mime the action as

they mouth the words from voiceovers taken from *Zoolander*'s Hollywood cast. *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode* also features voiceover dialogue from the 1999 Paul Thomas Anderson-directed film *Magnolia*, an epic existential drama starring Tom Cruise and Julianne Moore about several interrelated characters in California. Throughout *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode* these films not only punctuate and disrupt the action, they also *become* the action as the live actors, when faced with moments of heightened emotion, lapse into enacting scenes from the films. Such moments are obvious nods to the theory that humans' major modes of operation have been forever altered by their interaction with global media. Furthermore, the live actors' practice of enacting these moments conveys the idea that the actors themselves are somehow unable to relate to each other on a human level apart from these mediated cultural artifacts. The mediated has become the real and vice versa.

The very interactions of Superamas' live actors allow the group to play with the notion that in an era dominated by consumer-driven mediated mass culture, the possibilities for unadulterated human connectivity and individual agency have become mute points. The neo-Marxist concept of self-alienation appears to be a dominant principle found in this critique. This notion is defined by Nicholas Churchich as, "an ontological fact characterizing man's limitations and the dislocation of his inner life." It is "expressed in his powerlessness and helplessness, his lack of control over his own life activity, the feeling of isolation, or in the loss of personal identity, autonomy, and meaningful striving."<sup>483</sup> Indeed, Superamas' performances present a compelling case that the pervasive noise of the culture industry has rendered void all attempts to forge an

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<sup>483</sup> Nicholas Churchich, *Marxism and Alienation*, (London: Associated University Press, 1990), 307.

original idea and all efforts to maintain human connections. The most compelling aspect of their pervasive critique is their own inability to free themselves from it.

In many of Superamas' performances there appears to be a thin, superficial veil of social conventions that is tenuously maintained in order to create the illusion of live presence and true human connectivity, even if other factors annul this notion. For example, *Big 3rd Episode* opens with a segment that features Superamas' male members pretending to be in a Nirvana-esque 1990s grunge band. In between rehearsing Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, the male band members discuss their heterosexual exploits. One of the band members discusses a conundrum of his involving a female band member named Grace. He reveals that he got Grace pregnant and that he dreads his wife discovering this. The men console him stating that if his wife discovers this, then they will all claim to have slept with Grace. This will damage her credibility but absolve the male band member of his responsibility if Grace decides to keep the baby. This scene, which is virtually a soap opera cliché, is repeated several times with minor variations using the mediated conventions of pause, rewind, and playback. During one of the last playback sequences, the actress playing Grace appears in a paused tableau immediately outside the pool of light that keeps the male band members in focus. At this moment Superamas is playing with audience expectations. The audience is aware that Grace will soon enter the room and shift the focus of the conversation from pensive and worrisome to light and cheerful. As the audience hears the gossip about Grace they project the image of the actress onto the interactions of the male band members. By placing the actual actress who plays Grace immediately outside of the lit scene, Superamas is revealing Grace's lack of agency. She is kept in suspended animation just outside of the

live acting area due to forces external to herself, mainly the ability of the director and audience to keep her in freeze frame until the men finish gossiping about issues that have a direct bearing on Grace's personal life. The implication of juxtaposing the moving actors with the freeze frame image of the actress is that the character of Grace does not have the ability to convey her actual presence to the male members onstage. Grace will remain a superficial object throughout the men's interactions and she will never be able to exert her own agency in the male-dominated world of the band. A similar lack of agency is revealed in Superamas' *Big 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode*, which features several scenes that evoke the popular HBO series *Sex in the City*. These scenes begin with two women in a dancer's greenroom discussing another character, Esther, and lambasting her dancing skills and overall social graces. In one of the many repeated segments during this sequence, Esther, just like the character of Grace before her, stands just outside of the lit portion of the stage in suspended animation as though her live image has been placed on pause. Although Esther is not in the room and unable to hear the gossip about her character, the other characters, through their dialogue, perceive a superficial and objectified image of her. Throughout these interactions and others in the *Big Episode Trilogy* there appears to be an impossibility of a true human connection that goes beyond superficiality.

These instances of disconnection between the characters on stage mirrors the detachment that the actors of Superamas themselves claim to have towards actual global events that occur outside of their immediate circumstances. For example, in *Empire* scenes of war and rape are delivered by actors in a highly melodramatic fashion. The actors would risk tripping over into extremely matrixed performance during these

moments, and yet their ironic delivery, where they are effectually quoting their own behavior, actually places their acting closer to the non-matrixed side of the acting scale, which allows them to maintain their superficial, detached personas. Adding to the superficiality of the opening sequence depicting the historical French/Austrian battle is the pop sound track, punctuated by segments from Michael Jackson's *Beat It*. The lyrics, "it doesn't matter who's wrong or right, just beat it," may evoke the feeling that war is often marked by struggle with no clear good or evil force. However, these scenes of war cannot be fully understood as a serious critique of war because they are played with exorbitant melodrama and provided in a context where high and low culture are each given free reign to compete for the audience's attention. Indeed the distinction between the two forms of culture has disappeared. In another section of *Empire* an American filmmaker talks about war while at an after-show cocktail party as though such conflict is nothing more than a sensationalist spectacle. To this a Somalian man, who incongruously appears in the party scenes, responds with indignation stating, "the killing goes on...We're losing a hundred people a day. A hundred people a day." This brief interruption in the party's inconsequential banter is followed by a pause and then swiftly by another sudden eruption of elation as champagne is brought to the guests and dancing ensues. Superamas makes no attempt to reconcile the disparate elements in *Empire's* cocktail party scenes. This avoidance of reconciliation suggests that there may not even be a solution to our complicity in the superficial treatment of issues of global importance, for example war.

Superficiality is a common thread that runs through Superamas' *conglomerate performances*. This results from the artists' self-critical posture and detached stance

towards their own products. Like the actors of Toxic Dreams, Superamas artists use varying degrees of non-matrixed and matrixed performance in order to help them maintain and justify their signature superficiality; but unlike Toxic Dreams, Superamas appears to have adopted a “hyper-superficiality” throughout the course of their non-matrixed performances, which makes it impossible for them to disassociate themselves from the forces that their work initially appears to critique. In *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode* the recreation of the fictionalized scene between a Superamas member and “John from the Rolls Royce Company” reveals the group’s hyper superficiality and non-matrixed approach. Using the voiceover track from another Superamas member, a Superamas actor portraying a caricature of himself, attempts to lead John Rosse into investing in the Superamas brand by highlighting the commonalities between Rolls Royce and his fringe company. For example, both companies are based in Europe, and each has expanded its reach to the United States. The actor also claims that, like the Rolls Royce Company, which is noted for its automobiles and airplane parts, Superamas is “known for its extreme diversified activities...performances, installations, films.” This instance in *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode* is one of the many specific comments on Superamas’ process that are built into their performances, and it may even be read as a commercial for the Superamas brand-name. Yet the superficiality of the entire moment is highlighted and quoted by the Superamas team when, after having the scene repeated several times, the quotidian interaction between the actor from Superamas, John, and a female Air France flight attendant is disrupted by the sudden, incongruous eruption of machine gun fire in the comfortable quarters where the interaction took place. The actors flee the live playing space; the lights and sounds of war engulf the acting area; and the stage becomes dark

and calm. This sequence is followed by repeating the scene again with no reference to the war that previously disrupted the action. Another superficial scene involving a similar form of non-matrixed performance occurs during the post-show cocktail party in *Empire*. One of the actors, a member of Superamas, states “I’m with Superamas. We are a collective...I also directed the little performance you just saw. I do hope you enjoyed it.” This moment is followed by an immediate pause as if to allow the work’s constructed nature and Superamas’ brand name to be further engraved into the minds of the spectators. These scenes are two of the many instances that reveal Superamas’ tongue-in-cheek commentary regarding their own process. They reveal the groups’ overwhelmingly superficial stance towards everything, including its own interactions with fellow members of its integral fringe community. Furthermore, these scenes reveal a hyper-awareness of artistic processes and the ways that artists must pander to a hierarchical cultural and economic structure while crafting their work.

Superamas’ posture results from its exposure to what its group members understand to be a culture of superficiality, dominated by consumer-driven mass culture. Yet unlike other groups that attempt to criticize this superficiality through their use of methods found within the dominant culture, Superamas is so intensely aware of its own place within the dominate culture’s framework that its membership believes its only recourse is to embrace it. Because Superamas frequently references its own brand within its performances, the performances themselves may be understood as extended commercials for its own corporate-like entity. Furthermore, the group’s extended commercial-like performances often have actual commercials and/or product placement built within them. For example, in *Big 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode* the Trumer Pils (a German beer)

trademark materializes at the end of the filmed sequence chronicling Superamas' trip to New York. Also, in *Big 2<sup>nd</sup> Episode* a female actress appears in a Cat Woman suit and holds a can of Coca Cola between her legs. Furthermore, in *Big 1<sup>st</sup> Episode* one of Superamas' actors sits in a Suzuki and has a sudden idea to market his car to the live audience. This is followed by two females who enter the acting area clad in bikinis, strike various sexual poses around the car, and even simulate oral sex with the car's windshield wipers as if to titillate the audience into consuming the commodity. This instance reveals an intrinsic link between Superamas' explicit commentary on sexuality and their use of product placement and commercials. Throughout its performances Superamas consistently exploits this link.

Superamas' commentary on sexuality throughout its *Big Episode Trilogy* and *Empire* has an intrinsic relationship to its commentary on the commercial nature of the globalized era and the group's own complicit participation in it. This is apparent in the connection between sexual titillation and the superficial pleasure derived from product consumption. Globalization scholar Arjun Appadurai refers to scopophilia, the love of gazing, in order to describe the surface-level and temporary pleasure one derives from viewing a sensual image in the context of a television commercial, which promises titillation but never long-term fulfillment.<sup>484</sup> In the context of consumerist society, what Appadurai calls, the "aesthetic of ephemerality" reigns supreme and constitutes "a radically new relationship among wanting, remembering, being, and buying," where the

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<sup>484</sup> Arjun Appadurai borrows the term scopophilia from Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay on the love of gazing in the context of consumer-driven culture. This concept relates to Adorno and Horkheimer's argument in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that the culture industry is at once whorish and prudish.

“ephemerality of goods” is linked with the “pleasures of the senses.”<sup>485</sup> In this context ephemeral pleasure, not long term satisfaction or fulfillment, reigns supreme.

Superamas is aware of the allure of this fleeting pleasure because the protagonists themselves experience it by virtue of their temporal election within the context of a transnational fringe scene that is defined by the rise and subsequent fall of artists who are successful for a time but also prone to burnout when the consumers and politicians decide that it is time for a new trend to be brought into the limelight. By frequently producing titillating pictures of the female body and juxtaposing these with images of mass consumerism, Superamas is drawing attention to the integral links among short-term sexual pleasure, consumerism, and the very transnational art market in which its members participate.

*Big 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode* features many mock sexual encounters between the male members of Superamas, who play themselves, and the female actresses. One filmed sequence takes place in a home and involves sensual communal touching. The irony implicit in these scenes is that actual human tenderness and sensual pleasure can only be embodied in scenes that are viewed through the lens of the film camera. No such scenes that involve sensual pleasure and tenderness between members of the opposite sex occur onstage. The sensuality and nudity that does occur live appears exploitative and serves to alienate the actors from each other rather than to bring them together. Superamas claims that one extended segment of *Big 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode*, involving three female dancers in a greenroom, developed from the group’s “intense” fascination with the popular HBO series *Sex in the City*. Superamas subverts the series, which was originally conceived as

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<sup>485</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 84.

a popular cultural embodiment of female sexual liberation and empowerment, by transforming it into a showcase of male exploitation of female sexual situations. The exploitation occurs through a number of instances that involve robbing agency from the live female actresses. For example, each time Superamas member Phillippe Riera enters the stage, he does so as himself, and his performance, closer to the non-matrixed section of the acting scale, always manages to upstage the female actresses whose acting is closer to the matrixed side of the acting scale. To a certain extent, instead of empowering female sexuality, the *Sex in the City* scenes somehow make female sexuality an object of detached male interest. Even the female sexuality that is discussed within these scenes appears flippant, shallow, and disconnected. As the women discuss their sexual escapades, there is no mention of the more lofty human aspirations of love or long-term companionship. During one section the women discuss the pleasurable effects of a vibrator, and this mechanical sexual device appears to give them far greater pleasure than the male-female cooperative sexual act itself. Almost as the live performance event has been eclipsed by the presence of the media, so too has the intensity of the actual sexual act been diminished by the presence of a machine. A further example of how *Big 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode's Sex in the City* scenes may be read as remarks on the superficial nature of human sexuality in the global era occurs in the middle of the sequence, when a woman from the group of three females stands stage right with a microphone in her hand and sings. During this song, another woman from the group moves in a line toward stage left, pausing along the way to remove parts of her clothing. She strikes various poses during the pauses as if to accentuate the sensual nature of her newly-revealed flesh. This moment is slightly incongruous because the female's pained facial expressions rob the

audience of their ability to be fully titillated. The female body is here revealed to be an object of male desire and yet somehow the living actress herself has been alienated from her own beauty and her own power to titillate the male audience members.

Throughout *Big 3<sup>rd</sup> Episode's Sex in the City* scenes and many others, the actual intent of human sexuality, i.e. to reproduce and to create feelings of intimacy, has been somehow replaced by a clamoring for personal, ephemeral pleasure. These scenes convey Superamas' dominant idea that personal connection among humans in an age of mechanization and globalized consumerist culture is relegated to superficial dealings and to an overall personal drive to be titillated rather than deeply fulfilled. The type of sexuality, i.e. male scopophilia, that is linked to consumerist culture is perhaps the most pervasive and apparent aspect of Superamas' performances. In nearly all instances of this type of sexuality, sensual activity is void of the possibility of true human connection. When scenes of sexuality do appear onstage they are not allowed to develop. Instead they are fractured by a number of mechanisms, ranging from the *Big Episode Trilogy's* frequent pauses, rewinds, and playbacks to *Empire's* sudden bursts of kinetic energy from actors uninvolved and un-invested in the sexual activity. This is partial rationale for performance critic Rudi Laermans' statement that anyone accusing Superamas of "masculinism" is void of humor and "living on the planet Mars."<sup>486</sup>

There is an intrinsic link between Superamas' superficial treatment of war, sexuality, the consequences of the market economy, and their treatment of the local scene of Vienna. Riera's lackadaisical attitude regarding whether he produces with Vienna's money or the money of another local government is a marker of his own opportunism and

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<sup>486</sup> Rudi Laermans, "Art versus mass culture, episode 4579945 (a [culture sociological] fragment on the work of Superamas) (1)," <http://www.superamas.com/pagesTexts/texts.html> (accessed March 1, 2011)

of how his performance-based treatment of contemporary phenomena influences his entire worldview and mode of operation regarding the transnational fringe scene. Like the mediated and live events in Superamas' *conglomerate performances*, the treatment of phenomena within the performance and performance frame of this transnational fringe group cannot be fully separated from the treatment of similar phenomena within the context of the scene itself. This linkage occurs because the artists' economic and cultural awareness, creative processes, and performances are intrinsically related. The artists' transnational connections bear a degree of superficiality that hinders nuanced, textured cross-cultural dialogue within the context of Europe's transnational fringe scene. In this context, more superficial concerns, related to the construction of generic *mise en scene* rooted in global mass culture, dominate. This *mise en scene* is used in order to increase the symbolic and economic capital of transnational fringe groups that must do all within their power to stay afloat in a scene marked by a deluge of artists competing for an integral audience's waning attention. In Vienna's transnational fringe scene, there is a cross contamination of opinions and postures. On stage Superamas treats the live and mediated events in the same way. This egalitarian treatment of phenomena in Superamas' performances influences the postures of the group's artists as they deal with circumstances in the transnational fringe scene, and *vice versa*. In the end, Superamas' pervasive use of mediated forms is an essential element for their continued symbolic and economic capital. Yet this factor somehow entraps Superamas' artists within certain parameters.

**The Similarities between Toxic Dreams and Superamas' *Conglomerate Performances* and What these Reveal about the Aesthetic Crisis in Vienna's Transnational Fringe Scene**

I have referred to the works of Superamas and Toxic Dreams as *conglomerate performances*. I use this term to highlight the complete dependency that these works have on the transnational system of European fringe venues and the mass culture industry at large. I further use this term because it goes beyond the classifier *hybrid performance*, which is often used to describe the cross-breeding of live and mediated forms (such as film) in the works of Toxic Dreams and Superamas. *Conglomerate performance* refers to the myriad of influences that pervades fringe products, which are developed within the context of hyper-modernity. These performances are a synthesis of all that occurs on stage between the live actors and their mediated counterparts, which are ontologically similar, and all that derives from the artists' highly visible performance frame (i.e. internet sites, chat rooms, promotional materials, and more). The works are characterized by non-matrixed performance styles and constant self-referential commentary regarding the artists' inescapable complicity in a niche fringe market that is inseparable from global mass culture, despite claims to the contrary.

Chris Jones of the *Chicago Tribune* writes of Superamas' *Empire* that, "unlike a lot of this type of work, Superamas puts its own insecurities and vulnerabilities on full display."<sup>487</sup> As my combined analysis of Toxic Dreams and Superamas reveals, the artists' practice of exposing their own vulnerabilities is actually highly pronounced in the context of Vienna's transnational fringe scene. Indeed infusing *conglomerate performances* with a large degree of self-criticism, explicit irony, and superficiality may be one of the fringe scene's most defining features.

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<sup>487</sup> Chris Jones, "For Superamas Art Means War," *Chicago Tribune* (4 October 2010), [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-10-04/entertainment/ct-live-1004-empire-review-20101004\\_1\\_war-danube-river-iraq-and-afghanistan](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2010-10-04/entertainment/ct-live-1004-empire-review-20101004_1_war-danube-river-iraq-and-afghanistan) (accessed 1 March, 2011).

Toxic Dreams and Superamas' artists maintain a critical stance towards their work by embracing non-matrixed forms of performance. While Toxic Dreams' artists intentionally diminish the presence of themselves as live actors by infusing their live performances with mediated performance, Superamas' artists abandon the distinction between the two forms of performance and craft hyper-mediated versions of themselves. Both groups' critical distance means that nearly all actions of the performers can be taken as disingenuous, or "tongue-in-cheek" (to use the colloquial phrase), even if the actions are done in earnest. Pierre Bourdieu notes the tendency for culture makers to engage in such parody as a way of distancing themselves and even emancipating themselves from works of the past.<sup>488</sup> These cultural agents engage in the practice of "repeating and reproducing" dominant ideologies/aesthetics in a "sociologically non-congruent" context, thereby rendering these incongruent or arbitrary.<sup>489</sup> This theory is consistent with Philip Auslander's own belief that many performers in what he calls the postmodern tradition manufacture an absence of presence in their work and that by so doing the performer manages to undermine the culture's dominant structures of representation. Auslander cites the Wooster Group, a popular influence on many of Vienna's *conglomerate performances*, as a prominent example of this trend.<sup>490</sup> In the case of many of Toxic Dreams and Superamas' performances, the identities of the artists, even when they seem to be portraying themselves through more non-matrixed styles of performance, are diminished. However, in both instances the performers' presence has been diminished through a combination of factors, and not all of these are fully intentional. These include

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<sup>488</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, trans. Randal Johnson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 13.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>490</sup> Philip Auslander. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 42-43.

a conscious attempt to critique the dominate modes of representation, while acknowledging their inability to break free of them. They also entail being subsumed under a brand name for the purposes of remaining economically and cultural viable. Although the performers' ironic detachments theoretically allow them to mount critical resistance from within dominate modes of representation, Toxic Dreams and Superamas are not effectually criticizing hegemonic cultural forces. Instead both groups appear to be caught in a feedback loop wherein they are consciously recycling dominant conventions and manufacturing their own alienation from the work that they are creating.

Based on personal interviews with members of Toxic Dreams and Superamas, coupled with my analysis of their products, it appears that the superficial posture that the performers take is intentional and that they somehow believe that this stance is the only truthful option available to them in light of the McDonaldization of the transnational fringe scene and their own complicity in it.<sup>491</sup> It appears that these artists are self-consciously caught in a system that robs them of personal agency and individual presence, and that their identity as artists and their overall aesthetics are rooted in this awareness.

Perhaps Toxic Dreams and Superamas' extensive commentary on process, which often is manifested as explicit self-criticism, stems from the necessity of them playing an active role in the cultural and economic politics of a tumultuous transnational fringe scene. Because these groups' artists are forced to play multiple roles, for instance publicist, producer, critic, and artist, a natural slippage of these positions occurs. This may indeed point to an aspect I highlighted earlier: the blurring of many divergent performance trends mirrors the amalgamation of cultural perspectives within the

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<sup>491</sup> This is even the case with Toxic Dreams, which although it attempts to disidentify with the majority of Vienna's transnational fringe, is far too self-aware to be able to fully accept its own rhetorical stance against their fringe counterparts.

transnational fringe scene. It is possible that the works of Toxic Dreams and Superamas can, almost always, be understood as metatheatrical commentary on, not only the act of performance, but also on the very actions that give rise to the performance event, i.e. the structure of Vienna's transnational fringe scene itself.

In the case of Toxic Dreams and Superamas, the performers' diminished presence stems from a general feeling among the artists themselves that the possibility of creating actual living presence in this global era has been greatly diminished by the sensory overload of mediated forms of representation and rampant commercialization. The performers' presence has been further reduced by their willingness to be absorbed into a corporate brand name as a way of articulating their groups' legitimacy and agency within the deluge of transnational fringe groups that battle for attention and resources within the scene. The latter two of these factors appears to be less a matter of conscious choice and more a matter of necessity due to the tenuous nature of cultural and economic capital within a transnational fringe scene that is in the midst of a cultural and economic crisis. Furthermore, the reality that the artists must now rely so heavily on mediated elements of their performance frame, i.e. the internet, in order to construct and maintain their brands means that the immediacy of their live personas are further eclipsed. Already, before an audience witnesses a new performance by either Toxic Dreams or Superamas a plurality of them will have formulated notions of the group's brand through the digitized representation of it on the internet. Performance scholar Bonnie Marranca aptly addresses this issue in a 2005 issue of *Performing Arts Journal* when, recognizing the artists' prolific use of the internet and other mediated forms even in the context of so-called live performance, she asks "What does 'live' mean any longer, in relation to the

physical body of the performer, instant feedback, and types of manipulated presence?” and she states that “In the intermingling of the ontological, the social, and the digital, we are now asked to consider our lives as ‘post-human.’”<sup>492</sup> In the case of Toxic Dreams and Superamas, it appears that their highly self-critical posture is evidence for their own belief that they are somehow complicit in the breakdown of the resistant powers of the historical fringe shouldered by the living presence of artists acting upon a strong, individualistic avant-garde impulse that defied the mainstream by actually existing outside of it. Neither group can effectively stand outside of mass culture even as they desire to critique it. This is their tragic reality and also the fuel for their highly ironic performances.

What Marranca has referred to as the hyper-mediated “post-human” nature of live performers has also been highlighted by performance scholars such as Mark Poster who refers to a “cyborg experience.” This “cyborg experience” is meant to refer to the ways that “Peer-to-peer media technologies (file sharing, Wikipedia, MySpace, YouTube, massively multiple online gaming, and the rest) partially detach the body from its location in space, loosening the binds to the local, and connect the writer with global culture.”<sup>493</sup> The effects of the internet, the major aspect of the transnational fringe artists’ performance frame, on the artists’ living presence cannot be ignored nor can they be downplayed. The internet itself enables the groups to thrive in Europe’s transnational fringe spaces as it allows the performers to fill simultaneously the roles of artists and critics. The use of the internet also effectively places the performers’ dual role of artist and critic within a non-local framework. Any online contributions that the artists make

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<sup>492</sup> Bonnie Marranca, “Performance: a Personal History,” *Performing Arts Journal* 28, no. 1 (2005): 3-19.

<sup>493</sup> Mark Poster, “Global Media and Culture,” *New Literary History* 39, no. 3 (2008): 700.

are enabled by funds from the local context of Vienna. These contributions are placed into a de-localized domain, as are the artists themselves who somehow become part of the mediated global icon that enables the transnational fringe scene to stay linked and the artists to continue integrating with their colleagues throughout the continent and beyond. Yet even as this occurs, the artists' "liveness" is compromised by the very thing, i.e. the internet, which allows the groups to flourish in this increasingly globalized network of transnational fringe artists. The performers of Toxic Dreams and Superamas are willing participants in this "cyborg experience." They do so because their continued economic and cultural capital demands it, and also because the internet itself has become a completely naturalized extension of their own personas as artist critics. As a result, even before the performers stand on stage to deliver a live performance, their identities have already been defined by the presence of mediated culture; therefore, the sublimation of their live selves to the mediated, or their attention to the ontological sameness of both, is merely a logical extension of their everyday mode of operation. Furthermore, the artists' practice of sublimating their live selves to mediated culture, or viewing the two synonymously, is made complete by the reality that it is far simpler to craft performances in their subculture of transnational artists by using cultural fragments from familiar artifacts.

Both groups tend to stimulate their audiences using elements from global mediated performance, e.g. King Kong in Toxic Dreams' work and a myriad of American films in Superamas' work. In addition to stemming from the artists' common experiences in global mediated culture, their use of these mediated artifacts also comes from the artists' belief that ultimately there is only so much new information that

audiences can process. In *The Haunted Stage* Marvin Carlson acknowledges Roland Barthes' contribution to theories of the theatre, particularly his understanding that performances include words and actions drawn from various sources and placed together in a unique package that (although perhaps trying to state something specific) is open to a multitude of interpretations by the audience.<sup>494</sup> To a large degree, new information must be accompanied by the reframing of old information. Also, the old information, when reframed in a different stylistic package, is able to be interpreted by the audience in a new manner. Acknowledging these factors, *Toxic Dreams* mounts criticisms on methods of representation using familiar characters and scenarios, but does so at such a breakneck pace and with so much stimuli (delivered through its performances and performance frames) that the ultimate act of interpretation lies with the viewer and not the artists themselves. *Superamas* slightly differs because the groups performances are often so heavily weighted with representations of familiar characters and scenarios that any true criticism is stunted or halted by an overwhelming superficiality. Neither group suffers under the delusion that it can actually create something entirely new in this globalized era characterized by hyper-stimulated audiences. This acknowledgement of their inability to craft something new is a marker of both groups' maturity even as it is a somewhat contrarian position in a scene where the call "to make it new" reigns supreme. Yet there does seem to be something problematic about the apparent conflict between both groups' articulated desires to create innovation while acknowledging their inability to break free of a tendency to recycle and reframe dominant conventions from global mediated mass culture.

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<sup>494</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2003), 4.

Both Toxic Dreams and Superamas operate according to the audience-as-editor paradigm. This paradigm is a defining feature in the *conglomerate performances* of Vienna's transnational fringe scene. Auslander highlights how some postmodernist theorists are pessimistic about an "information glut" that "overwhelms social subjects, depriving them of the ability to make important discriminations and decisions." It appears that Toxic Dreams and Superamas are aware of the "information glut" that their products provide and yet they do not believe that there is a suitable alternative to it. There is something about the state of the contemporary globalized world that necessitates the mode of operation wherein a maximum amount of stimuli are given in each performance and a variety of audience interpretations are possible. The audience-as-editor paradigm is the antithesis of the artist-as-editor paradigm, which tended to dominate modernist performance. However, this approach has something in common with the economically-motivated tendency to provide a maximum amount of stimuli in order to increase entertainment value and broaden an esoteric work's general appeal. To a certain extent what Toxic Dreams and Superamas are creating with their performances is a large virtual menu of ideas, which audience members may select to examine further or to discard according to their tastes. To make an intentional link between the artists' process and that which they aptly criticize as the "McDonald's avant-garde," I call their ideas "nuggets" and suggest that audience members may select whichever nuggets they wish as they piece together their own theatrical meal from the works being produced in the context of Vienna's transnational fringe. As this occurs, Vienna itself becomes less a benefactor of high art and more a peddler of prefabricated fringe meals, or desserts, defined by their ability to generate nothing more than ephemeral pleasure and ruled over

by artists who are aware of their own inability to craft anything beyond superficial entertainments.

**Conclusion**  
**Past and Present: Localization and Internationalization in Vienna's Fringe Scene  
and Some Cross-Cultural Applications**

Throughout Europe nations are currently in the throes of adapting to Europeanization and globalization. The trials and tribulations associated with this complex process of adaptation are felt by cultural agents in the cultural field. This is especially the case with artists who are experiencing a Europe-wide push towards increasing their mobility. These artists are also being required to find new ways to cope with the reality that globalization creates more competition for local resources and necessitates that they integrate themselves within transnational networks such as co-production venues and festivals. My findings are consistent with other European-wide case studies on European artists including the 2008 report on artists' mobility, which states that,

Europe's changing political landscape, the enlargement of the European Union, the radical development of communication technology applications, the growth of new emerging economies and new market conditions, are among the factors that have created an environment more conducive to international work than was the case some 20 years ago.<sup>495</sup>

But these reports are often created by cultural agents themselves, whether official employees of groups connected to the EU or transnational networks, who have a great deal to gain by keeping the transnational networks alive and by advocating increased artist mobility. Perhaps there is a surplus of this type of transnational work, or if there is

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<sup>495</sup> Directorate-General for Education and Culture, European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research, *Mobility Matters: Programmes and Schemes to Support the Mobility of Artists and Cultural Professionals Final Report*, An ERICarts Institute Study for the European Commission (DG Education and Culture), (2008), [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final\\_report\\_ERICarts.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/key-documents/doc/ericarts/final_report_ERICarts.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2011).

not a surplus of it, there is at least an excess of artists who feel that their only way to create compelling, fundable art is to submerge themselves in a system that feeds off of the non-local market. This factor is perpetuated by the local governments of many European cities, Vienna included, that are crafting policies to improve their cities' image within the increasingly interconnected European cultural field. Thus, there is nothing particularly unique about the movements occurring within Vienna's fringe scene. Vienna is merely one city that in the past decade has created highly visible policies that brought about a swift shift in the orientation of its fringe scene. This change created a new subculture within the city that is more self-consciously transnational and also self-consciously critical of its own practices.

### **The Problem with Internationalization**

In 1995 a majority of Austrians voted to enter the EU. This was followed by a number of polarized uprisings that manifested in the nation's cultural field, followed by more movements towards internationalizing the scene. Incidentally ten years after Austria's vote to enter the union the same majority concurred that joining the union brought more disadvantages than advantages.<sup>496</sup> When I was in Vienna in 2009 I witnessed the city squares being covered with *FPOe* slogans *Abendland in Christen Hand* (roughly translated as "the West in the hands of Christians"), a specific slam against a future EU that welcomed cultural outsiders including Muslims from Turkey. It was clear that a true internationalization in Austria was still meeting with its polar opposite, i.e. xenophobic nationalism. It was also evident that the city's reforms towards internationalism in the cultural sector had given rise to a division between locally-

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<sup>496</sup> Michael Wimmer, "Reflections on a Special Case: What Makes Cultural Policy Truly Austrian?," *Journal of Arts, Management, Law and Society*, (2006): 13.

oriented fringe artists and a subculture of transnational performers who were somehow defined by their disassociation with the local culture and, simultaneously, their disassociation with those responsible for the erosion of the cultural diversity in the EU. The trend of Vienna's transnational cultural agents to, at once, recognize the dangers of eschewing localism while stating that they are not really part of the problem is a consistent trait that the "winners" of the *Theaterreform* share with their colleagues scattered throughout Europe's transnational social spaces. For example, the 2008 report on artists' mobility claims that, "The most universal artistic statements are often those which are most deeply rooted in their own, local culture."<sup>497</sup> This statement is made even as reports of this nature are aimed at improving the overall status of the transnational network, which more often than not creates a certain level of cultural homogenization. If there is a degree of truth in the statement that the most universal artistic expression is rooted in a specific local context, then it follows that internationalizing a scene, while it may increase the symbolic capital of the city's brand name, does not equate to infusing a scene with more creative vigor, nor does it equal creating conditions where common assumptions of fringe performance may be truly tested and new forms created.

Cultural agents throughout Europe should more readily acknowledge this and find ways to allow a new type of cross-cultural, mobile product to thrive. Perhaps this could take the shape of a performance where the artists fully explore their deep-seated cultural differences instead of glossing over them in favor of crafting performances that will be more readily understood by their transnational network. Or perhaps cultural agents should more readily recognize that they are actually participating in the construction of a

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<sup>497</sup> Guy Cools, "International Co-Production and Touring," *International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts*, <http://on-the-move.org/library/article/13862/co-production-and-touring/> (accessed March 13, 2011)

unique subculture of transnational fringe artists throughout Europe and that their mobility programs do not support the EU's "unity in diversity" model. Recognizing this might allow for greater transparency regarding what projects are tailored towards this unique subculture, which is here to stay, and what projects are tailored towards fostering actual cross-cultural dialogue, which in light of the persistent xenophobia in Europe is still a much needed conversation.

It may be that the most universal projects are somehow indebted to art that is created within a specific local context, but the ways that the so-called local contexts are understood should shift. In Vienna, the most transnational fringe artists' local contexts are the transnational social spaces scattered throughout Europe. These are the places that this growing group of artists calls home. To the other fringe artists in Vienna's scene, i.e. those who are more locally-oriented, Vienna is their home. These are not the artists who have thrived in the past decade, but they may thrive once again.

Transnational social spaces are kept intact by webs of contacts and power relations that transcend geographic boundaries; however, in geographical terms these spaces are bounded within nation states and are, therefore, subject to national processes. The Vienna fringe's transnational social spaces operate on two levels, the local and the non-local. In local terms, they are funded by the Viennese government for the purpose of advancing a local and national agenda. In non-local terms, the artists who display at these venues are only able to sustain themselves based on their rooted-ness in Europe's transnational fringe performing arts market. To a large extent this market supercedes the will of the local context with its high capitalist demands and subjects all aspects of the artists' work to its stipulations. In this regard, it has become nearly impossible to speak

of an “island mentality” in Europe’s fringe venues. Furthermore, it has become difficult to determine the specific local character of any given fringe scene. This is because there are many artists within one local context who have very different relationships to it and who call disparate spaces within it home.

It remains to be seen whether Vienna shifts its policies in the fringe scene in favor of fringe artists with have more explicit local orientations. Perhaps the experiments of Brut and Tanzquartier are not to last. But to shift the orientation of Vienna’s scene back to the so-called “island mentality” that Sigrid Gareis at Tanzquartier and the artistic directors at Brut, along with the prevailing will of the *SPOe* political party fought so hard to eliminate, would disenfranchise the transnational artists who are now based in Vienna. This would create a whole new set of struggles within the scene. It would not be so easy for these artists to relocate to another city because to do so would require familiarizing themselves with an entirely new system of funding protocols. Reversing the trend towards internationalizing the scene is not a likely future step of the local government because the forces of globalization are too great to fight. Furthermore, the practice of fostering transnational mobility among artists is so in vogue in Europe right now, to suddenly shift policies in the opposite direction is unrealistic given Vienna’s will to continually improve its standing within Europe’s cultural field. Once the internationalism of the scene becomes a self-conscious movement it is very difficult to reverse these actions, at least at the government level. Any true movement towards reorienting the fringe scene to a more local context will need to come from the grassroots efforts of the artists themselves; it will not come in top-down initiatives unless Austria’s conservative parties gain greater numbers and are able to effectively vote out the *SPOe*

from Vienna. The historical power of the *SPOe* over the city of Vienna shows this movement to be highly unlikely.

### **The Increasing Role of the Market in Europe's Transnational Fringe Scene**

Throughout much of this dissertation I have been concerned with examining the alienation of fringe artists from their products. In the previous chapters I argued that the theatrical outcomes of globalization, highlighted by Lonergan and others, are intensified within Europe's fringe scene to the extent that they are beginning to undermine the artists themselves by alienating them from their work. For example, in Vienna's fringe scene a limited number of artists, i.e. the "winners" of the *Theaterreform*, are being more directly exposed to globalization processes while the so-called "losers" of the reform are also being exposed to these realities. Such processes are interconnected. For example the "winners" of Vienna's fringe scene are now able to travel more freely across national borders. This increases their awareness of the social changes wrought by globalization as it also increases their desire to create products, which contain globally-recognized brands and which have a less integral connection to geographically-bounded forms of culture, such as language. In order to become further entrenched in such globalization processes, artists must first be counted among the "winners." This happens by adopting a shrewd and self-conscious awareness of the prevailing tastes of the local politicians who are also highly aware of globalization and the necessity of funding art that will be competitive, in terms of cultural and economic capital, in the global market. As a result of these processes, the non-local "winners" are becoming more entrenched in globalization while the local "losers" are attempting to adjust their work in order to be counted among the

“winners.” In this situation there appears to be no escape from the changes wrought by globalization.

The most intelligent and informed artists within Vienna’s fringe scene, such as those of Superamas and Toxic Dreams, are aware that there is no escape from being complicit in the forces of globalization, but their awareness has somehow usurped their ownership of their work. Perhaps artists should not attempt to escape the realities of globalization through adopting highly ironic postures towards their complicity within it, but should instead more readily understand that their complicity in globalization is something that can be fought by using different methods than they are accustomed to. I cannot offer examples of these methods, but I can suggest that they differ from those currently being employed by the artists. In other words, such methods do not involve the practice of constantly recycling and recoding elements from the canonical avant-garde and global mediated mass culture. Instead they involve creating from a more abstract, internal drive.

Perhaps the shift in perception and move towards becoming part of the solution to the inherent realities of globalization will come as fringe artists begin to more readily abandon their historical “winner loses” mentality. Studies on the state of fringe artists in Europe point to the reality that they must cater to market concerns in order to survive in the current globalizing market.<sup>498</sup> Artists who are more adaptable to shifts in the market and more able to orient themselves as entrepreneurs will succeed and those who are unable to effectively operate their companies in this manner, i.e. as international

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<sup>498</sup>Directorate General Internal Policies of the Union, *The Status of Artists in Europe*, (Brussels: European Parliament, 2006), 11, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/committees/studies/download.do?file=13248> (accessed March 13, 2011).

businesses, will fail. Perhaps the takeover of the market is not entirely negative. One need only examine the great lasting success of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre in England to note how poignant theatre can flourish under stiff market competition and, interestingly, among extremely nationalistic sentiments. Artists who recognize that there is no longer a fringe scene that exists outside the bounds of market concerns may learn to better adapt to the tightening control over the means of production wrought by reduced resources allocated by the government. If fringe artists allow themselves to come to terms with these realities and own them rather than adopting an extremely ironic posture towards their complicity in these processes, then they may be able to more fully focus on making effective artistic contributions to the cultural field. It is fine to utilize irony but when irony becomes the primary mode of operation, as appears to be happening, something is lost and not a great deal is gained.

### **Vienna's Transnational Fringe Scene as an Extension of Hyper-Modernity**

Prominent globalization scholar Arjun Appadurai firmly places globalization in the modernist context, arguing that the usurpation of the nation state by “electronic mass mediation and transnational mobilization” grows out of modernity.<sup>499</sup> Yet, Appadurai does not link globalization with cultural homogenization, stating that this view of the process is far too simplistic and that it ignores several factors:

that diversity of languages persists and new languages (global English) arise; that “foreign” cultures are integrated with local cultures in inventive hybrids; that new local cultures arise among subgroups, increasing diversity not homogeneity; that the homogeneity thesis ignores problems of translation and transcoding; that the mixtures of cultures at the global level are infinitely varied.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid*, 694.

Indeed, based on the polarity that is occurring in Austria, it is evident that Appadurai's theory is correct. Furthermore, my conclusion that the transnational network of fringe artists is creating a new subculture is further evidence that supports his thesis. But this new subculture does not necessarily mean that diversity within fringe art is actually increasing. On the contrary the art that is being produced within this new subculture is becoming increasingly homogenized.

One of the ways that this art is becoming homogenized is through the dominant presence of the commodified English language, which is largely helping to define how transnational fringe artists' products are being constructed and received. Audiences and artists are inundated with a stripped down version of English divorced from the "notion of collective memory, of an identity that is somehow constituted through a common language and a shared history."<sup>501</sup> A common history is developing among these artists, but it is still in its nascent stages and still fundamentally more shallow than the common history that exists among EU citizens who come from the same nation and region. The commodification of the English language by transnational fringe artists leads to a new cultural context that is still very much prone to misinterpretation. In this context differences are not highlighted but glossed over in favor of a shallow sameness that does not lead to fully nuanced art.

Although EU rhetoric attempts to appeal to post-modernist discourse by proclaiming the mantra "unity in diversity," at the operational level of European projects designed to increase artists' mobility is the modernist tendency to negate difference and create uniformity. Similarly, Europe's new transnational fringe scene appears to be

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<sup>501</sup> Rainer Ganahl, "Free Markets: Language, Commodification, and Art in Public Culture," *Public Culture*, vol. 13, no. 1, (Winter 2001): 23-38.

characterized by a self-identification with post-modernist philosophy while owing much of its ontology to a kind of hyper-modernism and to modernity's trends towards homogenization through an assembly-line, McDonaldized, and consumer-driven mentality. The consumption processes have become an important aspect of the transnational social spaces, such as Viennese co-production venues, where one is rewarded for consuming quantitative sums of artistic products and for producing work that allows audiences to pick and choose from an deluge of stimuli. These factors are at the heart of the artists' general feeling of dissatisfaction, or lack of fulfillment, with the work that is generated in Europe's transnational fringe scene.

There is an inherent irony in the scene that appears to be reflected in the very performances it produces, characterized by the fact that the scene itself is kept intact largely by the presence of transnational contacts that span the entire continent of Europe, and beyond. Yet these very contacts are dominated by a superficial quality. Toxic Dreams and Superamas are sometimes engaged in legitimate forms of critique against this even as they produce works that are indebted to it. Yet even as the groups recognize the surface-level nature of their artistic partnerships, and indeed the superficiality that characterizes the entire globalized system, the artists themselves are somehow incapable of actually breaking out of the system. Their critique is, therefore, highly tragic. However, despite this dissertation's overarching critique, in the conclusion I must admit that it may be possible to perceive the nascent stages of a more entrenched, nuanced European identity within the subculture of transnational artists that Vienna has crafted.

### **New Ways of Consuming Regional/European Identity**

Globalization breeds the notion of reflectivity, a concept associated with the ways that regional identities are constituted, portrayed, and the consumed by others. By stamping their brand on a given product in the fringe scene, Vienna is able to constitute a new way of consuming Austrianness within the context of Europe's cultural field. Even though there may be a dearth of native Austrian representation within Vienna's contemporary fringe scene, the notion of reflectivity has not become an obsolete concept. Instead Austrianness is conveyed through a brand of *conglomerate performance*, which manufactures visual and textual signs that are intended to be nebulous, international, and liminal. Despite the intention, these signs have a forced quality, which masks the series of dialectical struggles that constituted the brand. Furthermore, the signs are manufactured in specifically local ways, as only the contemporary context of Vienna with its self-consciously internationalizing processes could produce.

A contemporary manifestation of a "united" Europe is still in its infancy and it is possible that the representative artists in this dissertation will be among those responsible for constituting a new imagined community. This may happen as they develop more mature, textured signs that can be understood as fundamentally Europe. At present it is difficult to know what shape these may take, but it is likely that the kernels of these signs exist within the works of the artists represented in this dissertation. The development of these signs, and an imagined community of united Europeans, will also be facilitated as transnational European fringe artists forge ahead through the superficiality of their networks and establish deep working relationships. This outcome is only possible in geographically-bounded spaces where such artists are allowed to permanently reside and thrive. Vienna is currently such a place.

### **Closing Thoughts on the Liminality of Transnational Fringe Artists**

This dissertation's overarching critique frames the representative Vienna-based fringe groups as *carnavalesque* players within a problematic structure. Yet there is nuance to this critique. Despite being bound within a cultural feedback loop, the artists of Toxic Dreams, Superamas, and other groups within Vienna's consecrated fringe scene, are, to a degree, able to stand outside of the prevailing trends of the more rigid forms of nationalism that once gripped the European continent. The artists are *beginning* to forging a new conglomerate identity, or imagined community, of Europeans. It is highly unlikely that such a conglomerate European identity will ever come close to eclipsing the more deeply rooted identities tied to nationalism or regionalism; however, the constitution of this identity within the context of the subculture of Europe's transnational fringe spaces is one of the most profound contributions of the European fringe scene to contemporary European culture as a whole.

It is likely that the *conglomerate performance* that I mention in this dissertation represents a passing phase in the long, complicated, and innovative tradition of European fringe performance. Perhaps the very artists that I mention in this dissertation will tire of their ways of producing and develop the next innovative artistic genre that does not dwell on the past, but looks to the future with a clear notion of what has come before. Europe's new integral subculture of transnational fringe performers is still in its infancy and one can only hope that the next decade will bring about a true maturity. Perhaps this maturity will result in ceasing to look to New York and global mediated mass culture for inspiration. It may result in the artists adopting a new practice of looking inside

themselves and stripping down the artifice of the mediated mass culture that surrounds them.

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