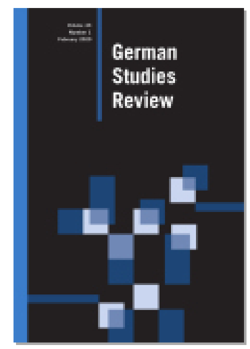
Constructing the Viennese Modern Body: Art, Hysteria, and the Puppet by Nathan J. Timpano (review)



Margareta Ingrid Christian

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Constructing the Viennese Modern Body: Art, Hysteria, and the Puppet. By Nathan J. Timpano. New York: Routledge, 2017. Pp. vi + 209. Cloth $124.00. ISBN 978-1138220188.

Nathan Timpano's book explores the fin-de-siècle Viennese body in visual culture by drawing on medical literature (Charcot, Freud, Krafft-Ebing), painting (Klimt, Kokoschka, Schiele), and theater (opera, cabaret, puppetry). What makes the Viennese body modern? Timpano argues that, unlike Parisian or Munich-based modernism, which turns on abstraction, Viennese modernism depends on a new figuration of the body: a pathological figuration that Timpano coins "hystero-theatrical." Instead of abstracting the body, Viennese visual culture rethought corporeality in terms of the iconology and gestural language of hysteria. Timpano's project is, thus, a revisionist one: he wants to show that Viennese art was no less modern for not having embarked on the road to abstraction; he wants to demonstrate that psychoanalytic theories were not the only facilitators of Vienna's hysterical bodies in visual culture; and, by focusing on depictions of pathological bodies, and the importance of optical sight implied by them, he wants to complicate the idea of "inner vision," so central to expressionism and abstraction. In a sense, Timpano's project is to show that Viennese visual culture was different (in its insistence on the nonabstracted body) and yet the same (that is, "modern").

As Timpano himself notes, the study of pathological corporealities in fin-de-siècle Vienna is not new. However, Timpano expands this line of scholarship by including the new framework of the theater broadly understood. He works with archival materials, such as production photographs and reviews of performances ranging from opera to avant-garde theater and puppet shows, to widen the sense of "visual culture" in the period. He examines Charcot's stagings of hysteria to establish the connection between the pathological and the theatrical body. For Timpano, it is this particular combination—the simultaneously ill and performative body—that was an essence of Viennese modernism's visual language. One line of argument that could have been strengthened further is the connection between the pathological body and the puppet-body. The book's last two chapters trace the motif of the marionette in literature, theater, and art (from Hoffmann's, Kleist's, and Schnitzler's writings, among those of others, to Richard Teschner's New Viennese Puppet Theater and Schiele's portraits); yet this review of the puppet's privileged language of the body in times of fin-de-siècle *Sprachkrise* loses sight occasionally of the connection with clinical pathology and hysteria. In other words, is puppetry another instance of the Viennese reception of Charcot's hysterical body or an alternative to it, namely, "another opening through which expressive gestures entered Viennese visual culture" (153)? Timpano's reading of the marionette as a "signifier of modern man's desire to control, or be controlled by external forces" (183) could also be pushed further in order to understand why the puppet's body language becomes a privileged trope.

Timpano's study raises the important question: Why is the modern body a pathological one? The body that is "anti-academic," "anti-classical" "unnatural," "unhealthy" (epithets that need to be interrogated critically in themselves) was perceived to be particularly timely around 1900. Why did artists in Vienna feel that it was, above all, the "hystero-theatrical" body that was most appropriate for their epoch's style of figuration? We may think, in Umberto Eco's words, of "the avant-garde and the triumph of ugliness," but, as Eco showed, ugly, deformed, and grotesque bodies have a long history in aesthetics. Timpano argues that it is the reference to clinical pathology that makes these bodies particularly modern. He emphasizes that "Parisian, rather than Viennese, notions of hysteria provided the basis for the earliest articulations of hystero-theatrical gestures" (44). It was Charcot's hysteria as a "disorder *of the body*" rather than Freud's as a "psychological disturbance *of the mind*" (44) that was formative for Vienna's pathological corporealities. Timpano shows how the gestural choreography of Charcot's patients was reenacted in Parisian theaters and cabarets and was exported, via Germany, to Viennese avant-garde theater. This focus on the theater is one of Timpano's important contributions, for scholarship on the influence of Charcotian hysteria in turn-of-the-century Vienna tends to focus on painting. Timpano not only remediates this focus but also that on Freudian psychoanalysis—though, at times, he perhaps overstates the aim of going beyond Freud, since his book, in its study of psychophysiopathology as a privileged interlocutor for Viennese visual culture, repeatedly finds itself returning to Freud.

Constructing the Viennese Modern Body is impressive in the breadth of its objects of study as well as in Timpano's ability to weave together close readings of various texts and a wide gamut of visual analyses while presenting an overarching cultural problem in the period. In chapter 1, he offers context for the rise of the Viennese modern body by exploring the tension between inner vision and optical sight as this tension plays itself out dialectically in Kokoschka's 1912 lecture "On the Nature of Visions" and in some of Schiele's correspondence and poems. After reviewing theories of hysteria, chapter 2 introduces a gender component, namely, the significance of the female hysteric for Viennese visions of body language. Chapter 3 traces how the female hysteric, in her many guises ranging from the woman-child to the femme fatale, returns in the performances of Sarah Bernhardt and Jane Avril or in Max Reinhardt's staging of Wilde's *Salome*, Wedekind's *Earth Spirit*, and Hofmannsthal's *Elektra*. The theme of hysteria as "modern theatrics" (66) continues in chapter 4, which examines hysterotheatrical gestures enacted on Vienna's theater and opera stages by the figures of Elektra, Klytaemnestra, and Isolde. Their corporeal language had a direct impact on the paintings of Klimt, Schiele, or von Stuck. The last two chapters on puppets and their ability to communicate at a time when language, in the wake of the *Sprachkrise*, has failed to do so, further broaden the book's interdisciplinary scope. They also show the need to further broaden the horizons of European modernism beyond literature and the visual arts to include lesser-studied disciplines and media, such as avant-garde puppet theater—a need that Timpano's book suggestively fulfills.

Margareta Ingrid Christian, *The University of Chicago*

Love at Last Sight: Dating, Intimacy, and Risk in Turn-of-the-Century Berlin. By Tyler Carrington. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xi + 248. Cloth $35.00. ISBN 978-0190917760.

How might we understand the evolution of romance in the modern city? *Love at Last Sight* attempts to answer this question by investigating the changing norms around dating, love, and marriage in Berlin at the turn of the twentieth century. The book's central case study is the 1914 killing of thirty-nine-year-old seamstress Frieda Kliem, whom Carrington seeks to position as an archetypal modern Berliner. He discusses the pitfalls of looking for love in the frequent collision of hegemonic *Bürgerlichkeit* (middle class-ness) with new paths to intimacy emerging in early twentieth-century Berlin. This is not, however, the thrilling world of Berlin's Weimar-era nightlife and decadent sexual subcultures, which would not appear until the early 1920s. Instead, Carrington sets his sights on the earlier transitional years, when traditional notions of social propriety were forced to reckon with a rapidly transformed urban landscape.

The book situates itself at the intersection of literary and social history, at first seeming primarily descriptive, drawing on a variety of archival documents such as newspapers, letters, diaries, scientific and sociological articles, short stories, plays, and novels. Carrington argues that the rapidly modernizing metropolis afforded individuals more agency in finding a match than they'd had even a few decades earlier in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, he declares that an analysis of gay and lesbian Berliners' lives should be integrated with those of their heterosexual counterparts, in the interest of acknowledging the commonalities between these groups. But he only mentions gay and lesbian Berliners in two of the five chapters, and he spends considerably less time describing their experiences than those of the city's heterosexual inhabitants. This makes some sense, considering the fact that gays and lesbians had to seek out intimacy covertly, but it seems a shame to learn so much about the intricate ways that heterosexual Berliners thought about love and dating without a fuller picture of the emerging queer social scene. Carrington briefly mentions Robert Beachy's book *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (2014) in an endnote, but *Love at Last Sight* would benefit from a deeper engagement with such scholarship, particularly because Beachy's book examines the fraught (but rapidly evolving) understanding of homosexuality from the mid-nineteenth century