Siting Futurity

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“Ich mag Wien, besonders an den Rändern” [“I like Vienna, especially at the edges”]
— Unger (2015, 6)

“Wo Häuser brennen, brennen auch Menschen” [“Where houses burn, so too do people”]
— Affenzeller (2018)

Visitors to Vienna consulting the Lonely Planet guide to the city are told that “[a]part from a few well-trodden routes, tourists rarely venture into the mostly residential outskirts […] but if you want to experience the real heartbeat of Vienna” (Bedford 2004, 97), that is where it is to be found — outside the Gürtel, the outer ring road which separates the inner districts from the ones that the working classes streamed into in the nineteenth century and continue to do so.¹ The outer district with the highest name-

¹ This chapter builds on material from Ingram (2018a), in which Planet Ottakring is read through the dual lens of precarity and Heimatlosigkeit, the
recognition factor is probably Ottakring, home to both the city’s one and only brewery and the city’s longest street market, which is the Brunnenmarkt, named for the fountain that enlightened monarch Joseph II had connected to the Hernalser water pipe in 1786, so that people outside the city walls had access to the fresh drinking water that flowed down from the Wienerwald to the Hofburg palace in the center of town. The district’s socio-cultural conditions came to be shaped by “an above average share of a migrant population, which started to become apparent mostly in a transforming local economy in the 1990s, and which was recurrently problematized in public discourse” (Suitner 2015, 36). That, together with the area’s low quality housing stock, led to a thorough-going revitalization between 2005 and 2010, sparking considerable culturally led gentrification in the surrounding Brunnenviertel (ibid., 36). Developments in the area can be gauged in a section of a report on the district entitled “Vom gründerzeitlichen Arbeiterviertel zum ethnisch geprägten Quartier zur urbanen Trendzone” [“From nineteenth-century working-class quarter to a neighborhood known for its ethnicities to urban hipsterdom”] (Antalovsky et al. 2008).

The tensions wrought by these developments have made Ottakring a favored location for contemporary screen culture interested in tackling issues related to multiculturalism and gentrification. Kebab mit Alles! [Kebab with Everything!] (2011, dir. Wolfgang Murnberger), Die Freischwimmerin [A Female Swimming without Supports] (2014, dir. Holger Barthel), Planet Ottakring (2015, dir. Michael Riebl), Kebab extra scharf! [Kebab Extra Spicy!] (2017, dir. Wolfgang Murnberger), and CopStories (since 2013 on oRF) all extrapolate the district’s demographics into thoughtfully trenchant, solution-oriented meditations on living together. Yet they differ considerably in focus, with the only local director, Michael Riebl, not representing the district in terms of an identitarian culture clash. In choosing to empha-

theme of that special issue.

2 Riebl describes his childhood as spent between the Ottakring Cemetery and the Brunnenmarkt (“meine Kindheit hat sich zwischen Ottakringer
size another aspect of the district’s history, namely, its history of revolt, Riebl makes a distinctive film debut with *Planet Ottakring*, after many years of working in television as a cameraman and director of police procedurals such as *Kommissar Rex* [*Commissioner Rex*], *Tatort* [*Crime Scene*], *Schnell ermittelt* [*Fast Forward*], and *CopStories*. In the first part of the chapter, I examine Murnberger’s and Barthel’s films before turning to Riebl’s.

**Culture-Clash Comedies**

Both of Wolfgang Murnberger’s *Kebab* films and Holger Barthel’s *Die Freischwimmerin* focus on the problems characters of Turkish heritage encounter fitting into everyday life in Ottakring. In the *Kebab* films, two small businessmen — one a bigoted but supposedly likeable Austrian coffeeshop owner, played by the well-known Viennese cabaretist, Andreas Vitásek, the other an upstanding restauranteur, played by Turkish-German Tim Seyfi, whose film appearances include *Gegen die Wand* [*Against the Wall*] (2004, dir. Fatih Akin) — find that they have been cheated in the purchase of the same property and need to find a way to coexist in relative peace for the prosperity of both. For its part *Die Freischwimmerin* brings two fatherless, headstrong yet troubled young women together through their love of swimming and sees the Austrian teacher, played by Viennese-born Emily Cox, win over the Turkish student, played by Berlin-born Selen Savas (Brier 2014), for the school swim team by first convincing her to wear a burkini and then giving her the choice to wear a competitive swimsuit to help out the school’s relay team in the big annual competition. The *Kebab* films and *Die Freischwimmerin* belong to the category of film called “culture-clash Komödien” in German and “multicultural comedies” in English.\(^3\) In

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\(^3\) I prefer to use a translation of the already anglicized German term as it captures the clashing dynamic of the genre, which my analysis in this sec-
these films religious difference is depicted as unbridgeable and fundamentally cultural. It is understood as naturalized, something one imbibes with one’s mother’s milk and language and is to be played for laughs. Their generic status as comedies comes not so much from the humor of their content, which is based on laughing at rather than laughing with. As Peter Verstraten points out of the Dutch versions of the genre, “[t]he primary function of the coarse humour in these films is to test the limits of ‘bad taste’” (Verstraten 2016, 83). In actor and theater founder Alexander Pschill’s astute analysis,

[In my opinion, comedy is the best form to convey content and bring it closer to an audience, an audience that has the choice to deal with context in a conformist way or not. Comedy isn’t extortive. In its nature comedy communicates the “kind human message.” Ideally, its functioning is free of trends and traditions and in that way nimbly escapes both the thumbnail screw of dusty expectations, that is, of the conservatives, but also the prescribed views of the well-meaning followers of fashion.] (Affenzeller 2019).

Because their idealistic liberalism is so bothered by talk of homogeneous cultures with “proper” locations that they cannot help but desire to show up their shortcomings, culture-clash comedies find themselves locked into the populist positions of
that discourse. The conflict in culture-clash films is brought about by a “foreign” culture’s presence in the “home” culture, where it does not belong, is clearly not welcome and causes problems. While what leads to the specific conflict is overcome by the end of each film and there is a “happy end,” which for the filmmakers is a means of demonstrating how to overcome the clashes they see happening around them, the reconciliations their films reach can only ever be temporary because the ongoing presence of the culture whose fundamental differences are blamed for causing conflicts is never accepted as being part of the mix of the “home” culture. The plot of each Kebab film revolves around a conflict symbolized by an animal gift to the Turkish family (a lamb and a donkey to be ritually slaughtered), and the weakness of the second film comes to the fore in the disappearance of the donkey from the plot. This type of construction has practical advantages in that it leads to the possibility of serial development. While no sequel has yet been made of Die Freischwimmerin, the reconciliation of its ending — a successful swim meet in which the team wins a silver — could as easily be disturbed by a new conflict or threat as was introduced in Kebab extra scharf! with the arrival of the Turkish patriarch insisting on his grandson’s circumcision.

The genre of culture-clash comedy is neither new nor restricted to Austria. Rather, it tends to feature in countries when minority populations achieve mainstream success that is experienced by locals as threatening, a dynamic masterfully given expression in the character of Kebab mit Alles’s coffeeshop owner. The purpose of such films is, as Reika Ebert and Ann Beck point out in their reading of Kebab Connection (2004, dir. Anno Saul), to offer “social pathways that promote multiculturalism in contemporary” society (Ebert and Beck 2007, 87).4

4 In Britain one saw this with films such as East Is East (1999, dir. Damien O’Donnell) and Bend It Like Beckham (2002, dir. Gurinder Chadha), while in the recent Green Book (2018, dir. Peter Farrelly), there is an attempt to promote racial tolerance in contemporary America by locating race problems in the past. Its portrayal of a growing friendship between an African-American classical and jazz pianist and his Italian-American
With the rise of anti-immigrant populism in Europe, the popularity of these films seems to be increasing there. “Welcome to” titles such as *Bienvenue à Marly-Gomont* (2016, dir. Julien Rambaldi), translated into English as *The African Doctor* and German as *Ein Dorf sieht schwarz*, and *Willkommen bei den Hartmanns* (2016, dir. Simon Verhoeven), translated into English as *Welcome to Germany* and left untranslated in French, evoke with their titles the immensely successful *Bienvenue chez les Ch’tis* (2008, dir. Dany Boon) and depict the difficulties well-off locals have when confronted with African immigrants. In Austria, these films have a precursor in *I Love Vienna* (1991, dir. Houchang Allahyari). An important difference of this story of an Iranian German teacher and Sisi fan, who must come to terms with a Vienna that does not conform to the myths he is expecting when he leaves Iran with his younger sister and son, so that the son does not have to do military service, is that it is told from the perspective of the migrant and does not play how awful Austrians are for laughs but rather shames them. The protagonist does remain a “foreigner,” however, with all of the problems that brings with it. As Christina Kraenzle reminds us, such an approach “does little to escape national paradigms of analysis and — at its worst — falls back on troubling notions of a national Leitkultur ‘enriched’ by importing new voices and ‘foreign’ influences” (Kraenzle 2009, 91). Drawing on the work of Hito Steyerl, Kraenzle specifies that “[s]ubsuming transnational cultural production within national rubrics can also be a way avoiding larger political questions regarding civil inequalities, migration policies and minority rights” (ibid.). As we should remember from the theoretical debates around Michael Walzer’s 1997 *On Toleration*, attempts to create tolerance are doomed to fail because even if the intolerant in the audience are made somewhat more tolerant, neither they nor the already tolerant

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5 For more on this film see Ingram and Reisenleitner (2013, 88–93).
liberals will be moved to reject the racialization of identity that led to the conflict in the first place. Moreover, the debate will provide fodder that continues to stoke the flames.

Just as the new arrivals in contemporary German culture-clash films such as Willkommen bei den Hartmanns are no longer Turkish but African, the protagonists in contemporary Viennese culture-clash comedies are no longer Iranian but Turkish, and culturally Turkish but not particularly pious. Indeed, they are no more religious than their Austrian counterparts. When the daughter takes to wearing a hijab in the second Kebab film, she does so not out of religious conviction but rather to upset her parents, and even her Turkish grandfather, who insists on his grandson’s circumcision and strongly encourages his grandchildren to speak Turkish, finds her wardrobe ridiculous. Similarly, in Die Freischwimmerin the swimmer’s decision to don religious apparel is motivated by her father’s death and is not a sign of religious conviction but of mourning.

Despite their secularism and fluent German, the characters in Austrian culture-clash films are nevertheless presented as Turkish and not Turkish-Austrian, something that would in any case be difficult in terms of accent as the protagonists are played by Turkish-German actors. The Turkish presence in Germany is substantially different than in its Catholic neighbor and not only for religious reasons. As the Kebab films underscore by naming the Viennese coffeeshop Prinz Eugen after Eugene von Savoy, the Habsburg leader famed for his decisive victories in the early seventeenth century over the Ottoman Turks during the second Turkish siege of Vienna, Turks were historically Austria’s greatest threat. The portrait of the Prince even comes to life in Kebab mit Alles and offers the Austrian coffeeshop owner strategic counsel in his campaign against “the Turk” before being dismissed on what for the coffeeshop owner is a humorous note—as a “französischer Poof” (“French fag”), while in the follow-up Kebab extra scharf!, he remains in the portrait and is unceremoniously covered up with a portrait of Atatürk for the plot-driving visit of the Turkish wife’s father.
That said, one cannot discount the influence of religion in Viennese culture-clash films. Another reason the Turkish protagonists are presented as Turkish and not Turkish-Austrian is because Austrians are presumed to be Christian, something one sees by turning to *Herrgott für Anfänger* [*Learning to Pray for Beginners*] (2017, dir. Sascha Biglar), in which a secular Muslim taxi-driver with a Turkish background is given the opportunity to inherit a Heuriger (a restaurant-type establishment associated with a vineyard) in Grinzing from one of his devoted customers if he converts to Christianity and has himself baptized, something his lack of faith in any religion ends up preventing. Rather, after many convoluted plot twists, he is “saved” by the discovery of jewels in the back of his taxi, which allows him to buy the Heuriger anyway. The film ends with a “comedic” flourish and the now former taxi-driver discovering Buddhism from some of the Heuriger’s customers.

What becomes evident in this discussion is how replaceable Ottakring is as a location in the *Kebab* films. Just as the Catholic presence that drives *Herrgott für Anfänger* is not specific to Grinzing, the *Kebab* films could just as easily be set in Vienna’s fifth or tenth districts, where coffeeshops coexist uneasily with Döner shops on many street-corners and squares. Similarly the Viktor Adler Market in the tenth district could as easily serve as the backdrop for the fictitious Viktor Frankl Gymnasium in *Die Freischwimmerin* as the Brunnenmarkt. There actually is a Prinz Eugen Hotel in Vienna — not in Ottakring but rather where it makes historical sense, that is, a few blocks down the Gürtel from the Belvedere, Eugene’s palace. Indeed, the nickname for the Ottakringer Strasse, the *Balkanmeile* [Balkan Mile], points to the fact that the migrants who come to Ottakring tend to come from not Turkey but rather the Balkans, something that statistics show is a long-standing tendency. Moreover, as of

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6 “Durch eine Extrapolation der für ganz Wien ausgewerteten Daten zur Umgangssprache ergibt sich, dass die ex-jugoslawischen Communities in Neulerchenfeld 2001 etwa 21,8% und die türkischen bzw. kurdischen Communities etwa 14,8% der Bevölkerung gestellt haben dürften” [“ex-
2018, this tendency was also true for the entire city. Turkey appears neither on the accompanying chart of the main countries from which migrants come to Vienna nor is it mentioned in the article as a country from which migrants come to Vienna.

That Turks provide the *Leitkultur* in culture-clash comedies for the “problem” “foreigners” are depicted as posing to German-language society has both historical and contemporary causes. Not only has the Muslim served as the traditional enemy of the Christian West since the *Song of Roland*, but, as we have seen, Vienna’s *cultural* achievements are perceived as being very much bound up in its having beat back the Ottoman Turks, not once but twice. Moreover, the films discussed in this section were all made for television, with *Die Freischwimmerin* achieving a market share of 14.4% with over four million viewers. Films that resonate with the Turkish-German experience of interculturality rather than the Austrian experience of Balkan refugees tend to have greater appeal for the larger German-language market.

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trapolating from data on slang spoken for all of Vienna, the result [of the census] in 2001 is that approximately 21.8% of Neulerchenfeld consists of ex-Yugoslav communities and approximately 14.8% is Turkish and Kurdish communities” (Antalovsky et al 2008, 42). One sees in this quote a typical tendency to conflate groups that are hostile to each other and would not themselves want to be seen as part of the same community, such as Turks and Kurds, and the “ex-Yugoslavia.” Only a profound disinterest in history allows them to be lumped together and their internal conflicts to be ignored.

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“2018 stellte Serbien das Hauptherkunftsland: Diese Bevölkerungsgruppe wuchs um 1.739 Personen, gefolgt von Rumänien, Deutschland und Bulgarien. Die wichtigsten Herkunftsländer von Zuwanderern liegen damit wieder in Europa. Erst dahinter folgen Syrien und Afghanistan” [“In 2018 Serbia placed at the top of the list of countries migrants came from. This part of the population grew 1,739, followed by Romania, Germany, and Bulgaria. The most important countries that migrants come from are once again in Europe. Behind them are Syria and Afghanistan”] (Krutzler 2019).
Planet Ottakring

By contrast, *Planet Ottakring*, which saw its Austrian cinematic release on August 14, 2015, tackles not only the Balkan presence in the city but also the German one, and offers a pedagogically savvy introduction into the workings of local economies worthy of its Ottakring setting. Described in the screenplay as a “sozialromantische Gaunerkomödie” [“a socially aware romantic comedy about small-time criminals”], *Planet Ottakring* opens in the Ottakring cemetery with the burial of the district’s godfather, Disko. Not only does this enable “Disko ist tot” [“Disko is dead”] graffiti, it also hearkens back to “likely the largest and most impressive mass demonstration Vienna had ever known” (Maderthaner and Musner 2008, 125): the funeral on February 16, 1913 of Franz Schuhmeier. Schuhmeier was

the most popular Viennese Social Democrat at the turn of the century, a mass politician of a new style, talented both as a populist agitator and as persuasive public speaker, a child of the suburb who had risen from the poorest conditions to the highest political functions. He had succeeded like no one before him in leading the politically and socially deprived of the suburbs from their isolation into an organized and politically conscious mass movement that gave them a new identity. (ibid., 127)

Setting the scene by reminding viewers of a key event in the making of Viennese proletarian suburban culture, the film thus issues a clarion call to think of how Ottakring had once served as both site of and “screen for the display of a political counter-culture” that, after the First World War, with the achievement of suffrage, resulted in Red Vienna (ibid.).

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8 The same is also true of the TV series *CopStories*, and particularly the “Schmähstad” episode directed by Riebl and shown on ORF1 on August 28, 2018.

9 One notes that the film’s playful postmodern approach to comedy further differentiates it from the culture-clash comedies.
Disko’s heir is the film’s protagonist, Sammy, a local tough played by Michael Steinocher who suddenly finds himself in possession of Disko’s little black book, whose intricate book-keeping system, much of which is in Cyrillic as Disko was from an unspecified part of the former Yugoslavia, he has difficulty deciphering. He gets help in this task both from his grandfather, a retired accountant, played by Lukas Resitarits, whom he helps out with grocery deliveries and who tutors him in the basics of finance capitalization, and from the German business student, Valerie, played by Cornelia Gröschel, whose research on the “Schwarzmarkt des europäischen Subproletariat” [“black market of the European subproletariat”] has taken her to the Brunnenmarkt, where she is immediately hassled by local youth and Sammy comes to her rescue. After the local loan shark, Frau Jahn, played by Susi Stach who was nominated for the 2016 Austrian Film Prize’s best supporting actress for the role, agrees to give her an unpaid internship, Valerie and Sammy again cross paths and become romantically involved. Together, they figure out that Disko’s ledger corresponds with Frau Jahn’s customers, meaning that Disko had been laundering his ill-gotten gains by covering the neighborhood’s debts. Disko’s death had brought about an imbalance in the system, and when locals could no longer meet their debt payments, it also meant extra work for Frau Jahn’s goons. Putting the education he has received from his grandfather to good use, Sammy comes to the neighborhood’s rescue with an alternative currency called “Kommunisten,” or red Schillings. The circulation of “Kommunisten” helps the locals not only get their businesses back on their feet but also pay their debts, which threatens Frau Jahn’s business as

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10 The Schilling was Austria’s currency between 1925 and 1938 and from the end of World War II until the Euro was introduced in 1999. While Schillings have been officially out of circulation since 2002, billions still exist: “Altbestände von rund sieben Milliarden Schilling (507 Millionen Euro) hornten die Österreicher noch oder liegen verborgen in Verstecken” [Schilling in the amount of about seven billion (507 million Euro) remain either hoarded by Austrians or otherwise hidden] (“Kik akzeptiert wieder den Schilling als Zahlungsmittel”).
her customers are suddenly able to pay off, and not just down, their debts. Her goons first attempt intimidation, leading to another burial, that of Sammy and his friends’ cat. It is the collective neighborhood response that is of interest. When Frau Jahn’s goons come to inflict on Sammy and his trusty sidekick, Ticket, the same type of treatment that had been inflicted on the poor cat, the goons prove no match for the locals, who appear like a cavalry in a local show of force. The film ends with Valerie back in Germany, detailing to her class the benefits of local alternative currencies and announcing that she will be returning to Vienna to help run Planet Ottakring, an establishment specializing in “Coffee and Credit,” as is advertised in English on the sign above the door.

Not only does Riebl’s film depict how a small-scale alternative currency works in practice, but the press kit that accompanied the film and was referenced in reviews also explicitly mentions the historical and contemporary models on which the “Kommunisten” in his film are based. Indeed, the press-kit offers a veritable history lesson in the workings of alternative currencies. So as not to create the impression that they are a thing of the past, Riebl mentions the Sardinian Sardex. As he details, “[d]ie Sardinier haben den ‘Sardex’ erfunden, eine Internetwährung, die genau auf dem gleichen Prinzip basiert. Kredite waren viel zu teuer, also haben sie sich eine Währung erfunden, mit der sie sich ihre Leistungen bezahlen” [“The Sardinians invented the ‘Sardex,’ an internet currency based on exactly the same principle. Loans were too expensive, so they came up with a currency with which they could pay for their activities”] (“Presseheft” 2015). Interestingly, far from being economists, these Sardinians were a small group of “[a]rts and humanities graduates with little financial experience” (Posnett 2015) but superior research skills. By 2009 the core team of Gabriele Littera, Piero Sanna, Carlo Mancuso, Giuseppe Littera, and Franco Contu had become convinced that, as Giuseppe Littera states,

something “had to be done” as no existing institution was ready to tackle the economic depression that was on its way.
As correctly forecast by Crenos, in the years 2009–2014 credit conditions deteriorated 4 years in a row. Repossession rates soared, credit to SME decreased 3.5% and credit to households decreased 2.2% from 2013 to 2014, while [in 2014] non-performing loans stand at 12.6% of the total. At the same time, we were reading many studies—such as those by Ufficio Studi CGIA Mestre—on the banking sector reducing on lending for two consecutive years, cutting as much as 100b Euro previously lent to businesses and families. (Littera, cited in Sartori n.d., 4)

The failure of existing banking structures in the face of dire economic conditions led these young Sardinians in 2010 to establish a system that complemented the official one. They set up an online mechanism whereby companies that passed a vetting for creditworthiness were extended a line of credit in return for agreeing to accept a certain number of credits. As Sartori explains, “Sardex does not charge transaction fees and negative (or positive) balances do not incur any interest charge (or growth); however, they need to be recovered through the sale of products or services within twelve months or they will need to be repaid in Euro,” which “motivates the holders of positive balances to spend them, stimulating the local economy” (ibid., 5). The Sardex’s success has been substantial: “[b]y December 2014, Sardex had 2500 members, businesses and employees, that conducted 66,000 transactions since January 2012” with an annual turnaround of thirty-nine million Euros (Iosifidis et al. 2015). Sartori’s figures for the following year are somewhat higher—“as of the end of 2015, the mass of credits in circulation was four-million Euro, while the total value of products and services backing this money over a twelve-month period was eighty-million Euro” (Sartori n.d., 5)—and by no means call the Sardex’s success into question, on the contrary.

For their part the Sardinians were inspired by the Swiss WIR. The WIR, which stands for “‘Wirtschaftsring,’ German for ‘economic circle,’ but also means ‘we’ in German, emphasizing the community and solidarity aspects of the currency” (Sartori n.d.,
316), was founded to counteract the effects of the interwar depression. Unlike the Tyrolian case to be discussed below, the WIR was not shut down but, on the contrary, granted a banking license in 1936, two years after its founding. It continues to exist as an electronic complementary currency, and the private currency it manages, the WIR franc, is mobilized to help the Swiss franc and stabilize the Swiss economy during periods of financial downturns and turmoil (Stodder 2000). The WIR is referenced in the award-winning Demain [Tomorrow] (2015, dirs. Cyril Lion and Mélanie Laurent), a documentary in the positive spirit of Planet Ottakring, which identifies concrete initiatives that have proven to be successful responses to the economic, political, and social challenges of the twenty-first century.

Riegls interest in and knowledge of alternative currencies reaches into the Austrian countryside as well as into the past:

[a]uch im Waldviertel gibt’s jetzt irgendwas, glaube ich, wo sie sich mit Arbeitseinheiten bezahlen. Wo der eine seine Marmelade macht und der andere sein Schweinevieh schlachtet, der andere wo putzen geht oder dem Kind Gesangsunterricht gibt. So etwas gibt es immer wieder, um sich unabhängig zu machen von den Banken und der großen Konsumindustrie.

[In the Waldviertel as well I think there is now something where they pay with work units. Where one makes jam and the other slaughters pigs, another cleans or gives children singing lessons. There keep being these things that help people from being dependent on banks and the whole consumer industry.] (“Presseheft” 2015)

Other references he could have mentioned include the open-access International Journal of Community Currency Research and the Independent Money Alliance, created in 2014 by Bristol Pound CIC to lend others looking to set up their own currencies the benefit of their experience. As it is, Riegls comments, which were made for the express purpose of being circulated
in the press, direct attention towards the fact that “[a]round the world, alternative local currencies are becoming more common” (Gowling 2014), if not necessarily better known. Given the difficulty of discussing *Planet Ottakring* without referring to alternative currencies, the film’s pedagogical purpose in encouraging interest in them can be considered an important part of its politics, akin to the proletarian film and theater clubs of the interwar period for which discussion of works’ themes was an integral part of their programs.\(^\text{11}\)

That *Planet Ottakring* has indeed had an impact in this regard can be seen in the fact that the most important historical model Riebl refers to in the press kit, the “Wunder von Wörgl” [“Miracle of Wörgl”], was made into a feature film in 2018, starring one of Austria’s best-known actor-directors, Karl Markovics, who plays the protagonist mayor of Wörgl. *Das Wunder von Wörgl* (dir. Urs Egger) follows the historical plot as outlined by Riebl in the press-kit:


[During the interwar period in Austria there was the “Miracle of Wörgl.” The economy was in the pits, no one had any money to invest. A creative mayor came up with the idea of

\(^\text{11}\) My thanks to the highly engaging seminar at the 2017 ACLA in Utrecht on “Rethinking Political Cinema” that Christina Gerhardt co-organized, which in providing a genealogy of political film helped me to recognize this connection.
printing time-limited money. He said, we’re printing money that will lose its value very quickly and must be invested. That inspired people to invest very quickly, to expand their positions, their pensions. It worked so well that the government threatened to call in the army, because one can’t let another currency exist in a country.] (“Presseheft” 2015)

Before *Planet Ottakring*, Wörgl’s experiment was only mentioned in the occasional article in the press, for example on its seventy-fifth (Broer 2007) and eightieth anniversaries (Dunst 2012). It will be interesting to see whether this renewed interest in alternative currencies translates into more knowledge about them and more in actual circulation.

In trumpeting alternative currencies and explaining in detail the way they work on the ground, *Planet Ottakring* takes precisely the opposite tack of more mainstream financial films, which tend to focus on extremely complicated, algorithmically driven virtual financial instruments invented for the specific purpose of making self-styled “masters of the universe” very wealthy very quickly. While films such as *Inside Job* (2010, dir. Charles Ferguson), *Margin Call* (2011, dir. J.C. Chandor), *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013, dir. Martin Scorsese), *Master of the Universe* (2013, dir. Marc Bauder), *The Big Short* (2015, dir. Adam McCay), *Equity* (2016, dir. Meera Menon), and *Banking on Bitcoin* (2016, dir. Christopher Cannucciari), deal with complex trading practices of dubious legality and tend to garner comments such as “[w]atch the film without any economics or basic banking/trading knowledge could be hard at times” (helloamazon), Riebl’s film provides precisely such basic knowledge. It makes clear that just as water is necessary for a human body’s circulation, the circulation of currency is equally important to the healthy functioning of local shops and services. When this circulation is disrupted by processes of accumulation, local economies, which provide for the livelihood of local citizens, suffer. It is not bor-

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12 My thanks to Carrie Smith-Prei for helping me to nuance this analogy so that its economic import was clearer.
rowing or debt per se that is depicted as causing hardship, nor the presence of foreigners, but rather the fact that no new currency is making its way into the neighborhood. The loan shark Frau Jahn only becomes a problem when the crime boss Disko is no longer around to offset her accumulation. As the relation between Frau Jahn and Disko demonstrates, banks only become a problem when governments refuse to inject new money into the system, as they do in adopting neoliberal austerity measures.

Riebl could easily have made a morality tale that blamed the human greed of bankers, something Austrians are all too familiar with on account of the BAWAG banking scandal. Three years before the American banking crisis, Austrians received a terrible lesson in the realities of “banks too big to fail,” when what had traditionally been the bank of their workers, the BAWAG (Bank für Arbeit und Wirtschaft AG [Bank for Labor and Commerce]) with its close ties to Austria’s Social-Democratic Party (spö) and the trade unions, was discovered to have made bad loans to the CEO of Refco, an American commodities brokerage company that had been involved in risky derivative investments held in off-balance-sheet vehicles. Refco’s creditors came after the BAWAG, and its owners, the Österreichische Gewerkschaftsbund (ÖGB), the trade unions’ national representative body, saw itself forced to divest itself of the bank, which was sold to an American consortium called Cerberus, which has in the meantime been trying to make it profitable through the type of layoff-based restructuring with which Up in the Air (2009, dir. Jason Reitman) has become synonymous.

Instead of a film about the sophisticated dealings of amoral bankers, Riebl preferred to make a romantic comedy that draws attention to banking’s basic structures and how intimately they are imbricated in everyday life, that is, the lives of everyday people and not a few white male masters of the universe. As he put it, “[e]s geht um Leute, die gerade irgendwie durchs Leben durchschlüpfen und es gerade irgendwie schaffen” [“It’s about people who somehow barely manage to find a way and somehow barely manage to make it”] (“Presseheft” 2015). And those people are in Ottakring, where historically “the people” experi-
enced the violence of the state in the form of its police force, and where more recently they have been experiencing the violence of global finance capital in the form of the real estate market.

In the “Anarchy in Ottakring” chapter of Die Anarchie der Vorstadt: Das andere Wien um 1900 [Unruly Masses: The Other Side of Fin-de-siècle Vienna], Maderthaner and Musner detail, in addition to the funeral of Franz Schuhmeier, the “wretched” living conditions in the district (2008, 19) and the fabled riot that took place there on September 17, 1911 — the first time since the revolutionary struggles of 1848 that the army fired on the people of Vienna, “[s]omething that had not happened even during the most violent storms of the struggle for universal suffrage” (ibid., 7). Their account builds on Otto Bauer’s, whose name has become synonymous with Austro-Marxism. For Bauer, “it was the ‘global calamity’ of inflation, intensified in Austria by a series of particular circumstances, that had driven the mass of Viennese working people to ‘desperation’ and inflamed an ‘ordinary street demonstration’ into the (apparently) ‘aimless revolt’ of the suburbs” (ibid.). For Maderthaner and Musner, “this uprising represented more than what Otto Bauer so brilliantly analyzed in terms of economics and politics” (ibid., 19). More was at stake, namely, a form of inscription in which the district was clearly positioned as “a world outside of bourgeois rationality and urban order” (ibid., 20). This “instrumental narrative” created the conditions for “the ‘colonization’ of the suburbs and their comprehensive reordering, when necessary deploying police and military means” (ibid., 21). In the twenty-first-century, colonization has taken on a new form, namely, property development, which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, has resulted in violence as squatters desperate for a roof over their heads have sought shelter in buildings left empty and been forcibly evicted.13

13 An example at the time of writing was those forcibly evicted from Neularchenfelderstrasse 35 as soon as their story hit the headlines (“Polizei räumte besetztes Haus in Wien” 2018). One can understand how galling they must find it that the authorities prefer to let buildings stay empty and fall into disrepair, rather than allow people to inhabit and care for them at no cost.
As a *gebürtiger* [born-] Ottakringer, Riebl is very familiar with the district’s history, so much so that he confessed that his depiction of the district was closer to its historical reputation than its current reality:

Ursprünglich war Ottakring ja ein Arbeiterbezirk, aber heute ist das ja auch ein hipper Bezirk und gleichzeitig, noch mehr als damals, ein Einwandererbezirk. Aber mein Ottakring im Film ist natürlich ein poetischer Blick darauf, fast ein bisschen historischer.

[Ottakring was originally a working-class district, but today it is also hip, and at the same time, even more than it was back then, a district of immigrants. But my Ottakring in the film naturally looks at it with a poetic gaze that’s almost a bit historical.] (“Presseheft” 2015).

This condensation of Ottakring’s past and present has the effect of making an important political point.

In choosing to title his film *Planet Ottakring* and to set it in the Brunnenviertel-Yppenviertel vicinity, Riebl very cannily claims the politics of the district’s proletarian heritage for an area known for residents of immigrant heritage. While not yet a majority, the percentage of immigrants in the district is considerable:

[n]icht weniger als 37,5% der Bevölkerung des Zählbezirks hatten einen Geburtsort, der nicht in Österreich liegt. Der Anteil der nicht-österreichischen StaatsbürgerInnen lag zu diesem Zeitpunkt bei 32,1%. Entsprechend der Wiener Zuwanderungsgeschichte der letzten Jahrzehnte dominieren die ex-jugoslawischen und türkischen Herkunftsräume: So wurden 17,4 % der Wohnbevölkerung im ehemaligen Jugoslawien geboren (10,3% in Serbien und Montenegro) bzw. hatten 16,8% die Staatsbürgerschaft einer der jugoslawischen Nachfolgestaaten. 8,0% der EinwohnerInnen wurden in der
Türkei geboren, ebenso viele verfügten 2001 über die türkische Staatsangehörigkeit.

[Not less than 37.5% of the population in the district had a birthplace outside of Austria. At the time the percentage of non-Austrian citizens was at 32.1%. In keeping with Vienna’s immigration history of the last decades groups with ex-Yugoslav and Turkish backgrounds dominated: 17.4% of the population living there had been born in the former Yugoslavia (10.3% in Serbia and Montenegro) while 16.8% were citizens of states resulting from the breakup of Yugoslavia. 8.0% of inhabitants had been born in Turkey, and as many were Turkish citizens in 2001.] (Antalovsky et al. 2008, 42)

Unlike culture-clash comedies, Riebl’s film does not play up the unsettling, “uncivilized” habits of non-Christian groups for laughs (they slaughter lambs and donkeys! They circumcise their sons!). Rather, Planet Ottakring depicts a community whose members all face the same debilitating financial forces, which serves to draw attention to the working-class status of the majority of immigrants and to question why racialized groups are denied access to working-class identities in the Austrian mainstream. While neither Sammy nor Valerie has a “migrational” background, many of their friends and neighbors do, such as Sammy’s girlfriend at the beginning of the film and the bartender in his establishment. Sammy and Valerie serve as a linchpin around which an alternative community emerges, in Gibson-Graham and the Community Economies Collective’s sense of “not a fixed identity nor a bounded locality, but […] a never-ending process of being together, of struggling over the boundaries and substance of togetherness, and of coproducing this togetherness in complex relations of power” (Gibson-Graham et al 2018, 5). That Christian marriage is not a necessary foundation for this community is made clear in the fact that Sammy’s grandparents are divorced and his parents completely absent, while Valerie’s landlady, Frau Jahn, and Disko are both
depicted as single or without known partners. Moreover, non-
human elements subject to violence and requiring care, such as
the cat and Disko’s vintage vehicle, are important members of
the community.

Strikingly, none of the characters in *Planet Ottakring* are pic-
tured in inadequate abodes, although many are immigrants in-
debted to a local loan shark, something that contrasts with the
culture-clash comedies, which tend to work in references to how
inadequate the housing of immigrants is. The swimmer in *Die
Freischwimmerin* is introduced to us as she trips over a skate-
board on her way out of the ill-lit hallway of the dingy building
her fatherless family lives in, while the Turkish restauranteur in
the *Kebab* films has bought the entire building together with the
restaurant space on the main floor and in the first film is repeat-
edly called upon by his immigrant tenants to fix problems with
the plumbing. What *Planet Ottakring* emphasizes is the differ-
ence in the size and opulence of dwellings, for example between
Sammy’s grandfather’s modest cottage and Frau Jahn’s luxuri-
ous villa, underscoring the heterogeneity of the neighborhood’s
housing stock.

Gentrification, however, is for the most part a non-topic in
*Planet Ottakring*, something that fits a larger pattern of denial
that both New York and Berlin also experienced, in the 1970s
and 1990s respectively (Kadi 2016). While Vienna’s much vaunt-
ed reputation for social housing is commonly seen as buttressing
the city against gentrification, the gentrification debate in Vien-
na is shrouded in myth, as Justin Kadi has shown, particularly
“Mythos 1: Der soziale Wohnbau in Wien hat Gentrifizierung
weitgehend verhindert” [“Myth 1: social housing in Vienna has
to a great extent prevented gentrification”]; Ottakring may have
a “vergleichsweise größeres Angebot an Sozialwohnungen” [“a
comparatively large offering of social housing”] (Kadi), but at
35% there are still considerable private rentals and ownership,
something one also sees when one considers the regeneration
of the housing stock that Ottakring has undergone: “72% of the
renovated houses since 2000 were subsidised which means a set
of strict rules apply to them. However, 28% of the projects were completely privately financed” (Riegler 2012).

In reminding viewers of what Ottakring stands for locally — its historical status as Vienna’s prototypical working-class district, home to its brewery, a famous uprising, and the cemetery in which Franz Schuhmeier “was enshrined as a political icon of a proletarian suburban culture” (Maderthaner and Musner 2008, 127) — Riebl’s film champions the alternative the district stands for: a place of neighbors with built-in checks and balances, where foreigners, whether from the Balkans or Germany, are accepted and given both lodgings and work, and criminals who do harm, such as by selling hard, as opposed to recreational, drugs, are swiftly made aware of the errors of their ways. Roughing foreigners up a little is a form of acclimatization, and it is only if they do not respond by becoming good neighbors that they are treated more harshly.

The film’s overarching argument is about internal self-regulation and the district’s ability to provide itself with its own capital. In fact, it is due to the City of Vienna’s careful regulating of its housing stock over the course of the twentieth century that the district has taken the form it has. As scholars of gentrification such as Johannes Riegler have pointed out, the current phase of gentrification is merely the latest in a long history of urban planning: “gentrification, although disguised by terms as urban renewal and revalorisation, is a governmental strategy for creating social balance in Brunnenviertel,” seen as necessary given “the downward trend” in the district and its reputation as a place of small-time criminals. Riegler finds that “[t]he governmental strategy chosen was appropriate to do so as it brought important impulses and improvements.” However, the effects of this strategy now need to be reined in as “the different social groups do not intermingle and mix in public space since both ethnic groups and the newly arriving people have different places and corners to meet. The next step has to be to connect the groups and to foster integration” and prevent “a development towards an island of middle and upper classes” typical of gentrification processes.
As no other district in Vienna could, Ottakring distils the social implications of “successful” gentrification in an ironically economical manner, something Riebl expertly channels in *Plan- et Ottakring*. The problem of the property market is depicted as the distance between Frau Jahn and her extortionist practices, which are depicted in visual terms as sado-masochistic, and Disko’s more humane, hedonistic ethos. The solution that Sammy and Valerie represent is that of a next generation, which needs to overcome national (German versus Austrian) divides while at the same time standing up to the onslaught of what one might call, paraphrasing Sharon Zukin, “gentrification by cappuccino.” While the culture-clash comedies also demonstrate an awareness of intergenerational renewal, the cultural solutions they offer in terms of either accepting or rejecting gendered bodily markers such as head scarves or foreskin pale in comparison to Riebl’s film’s advice to become informed about the workings of finance capitalism so as to steel oneself against the negative effects its seductive workings can have on the everyday life in one’s neighborhood. Serving up coffee with credit in English is not only a way of translating the global into the local but also a way of protecting the local by mobilizing the communal politics that have long been at home in Ottakring rather than the harmful identitarian politics that characterize culture clashes. It is also a way of helping the district transcend its reputation as a logical place for culture-clash comedies. Riebl’s film demonstrates an awareness that Ottakring has gone global:

[i]m Wechselspiel zwischen demographischer und sozioökonomischer Entwicklung des Brunnenviertels, top down- und bottom up-Interventionen sowie dem politischen bzw. öffentlichen Diskurs konnte eine sich gegenseitig verstärkende Dynamik entstehen. Diese Entwicklung führt zu einem Imagewandel des Viertels, wodurch Zuwandererkulturen als positiver Aspekt urbaner Entwicklung wahrgenommen werden und das Brunnenviertel eine Neupositionierung im gesamtstädtischen Gefüge erfährt sowie als identitätsverändernder Faktor wirkt.
[In the play between demographic and socio-economic development of the Brunnenviertel, top-down and bottom-up interventions as well as political and public discourse have been able to help a mutually strengthening dynamic to develop. This development leads to a change in the area’s image, whereby migrational cultures are perceived as a positive aspect of urban development and an identity-changing factor, and the Brunnenviertel experiences a new positioning in, as well as serves as a factor in changing the identity of, the overall urban fabric.] (Antalovsky and et al 2008, 39).

To match the district’s new positioning, *Planet Ottakring* deserves recognition for the way it re-enlivens the district’s proletarian past and offers an important counterbalance to the identity-producing discourses of the culture-clash comedies. A particularly vibrant strand of the city’s “feel good” cultural production, it shows how history continues to resonate, to matter, in Vienna.