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## Habsburg's Last War in Austrian films, 1918 to the present

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# HABSBURG'S LAST WAR IN AUSTRIAN FILMS, 1918 TO THE PRESENT

*Hannes Leidinger*

## *Introduction*

This article is devoted to a key issue, a question, which was formulated in an exemplary manner by the editor of the Viennese specialist journal, *Meteor*, and publisher of several books on film and media, Franz Marksteiner. In a 1999 omnibus volume, *The First World War and Popular Cinema*, Marksteiner asked: “Where is the war in all of these films? These films have such titles as *Kaiserball* (*The Emperor’s Prom*), *Kaiserwalzer* (*The Emperor’s Waltz*), *Kaisermanoever* (*The Emperor’s Maneuver*), *Der Kaiser und das Waeschermaedel* (*The Emperor and the Washergirl*), *Die Deutschmeister* (*The German Masters*), *Hoch Klingt der Radetzky marsch* (*Lofty Sounds: the Radetzky March*). The heroes of these movies are decorated officers and dashing soldiers, all able to win the hearts of the ladies. Established comedians and the figure of the Emperor were given much artistic freedom in their appearances. The Emperor enters the scene mainly when it is necessary to disentangle misunderstandings and give the plot a direction, a function that his authority and narrative role allows. But where is the war?”<sup>1</sup>

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1 Franz Marksteiner, “Where is the War? Some Aspects of the Effects of World War One on Austrian Cinema,” in *The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present*, ed. Michael Paris (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 247–260, here: 254.

*Desirable Pictures*

As a matter of fact, the existence of so many *Kaiserfilms*<sup>2</sup> refers to the importance of the Habsburg monarchy and even of the Habsburg myth for the construction of a national Austrian identity, particularly after 1945. Robert von Dassanowsky, professor for German language, literature and film, as well as director of the film faculty at the University of Colorado, made conclusions similar to those of Marksteiner in his landmark studies. He included more movies than Marksteiner, stressing the fact that in particular the rival directors Ernst Marischka and Franz Antel followed an international trend, namely the strong desire of the whole Western world to take refuge “from the Cold War in royal romance, through works on Iran’s Queen Soraya and Britain’s Princess Margaret, and that ultimate overlap between cinema fantasy and monarchical pomp, the wedding of Hollywood star Grace Kelly to Prince Rainier III of Monaco.”<sup>3</sup>

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2 Another early example of this genre is Jakob and Louise Fleck’s *Unser Kaiser (Our Emperor, 1933)*. Against the backdrop of Hitler’s assumption of power in Germany, the movie brought the icon of the lost empire, “his majesty Franz Joseph,” to sound film. This “romanticized biopic” was an “obvious attempt to define sovereign Austrian identity along nostalgia for a benevolent symbol of a great polyglot empire.” It “positioned itself against the pan-Germans of the past and the newsreel image of the Austrian who had become German chancellor of a ‘new empire’ (the ‘Third Reich’) in the present”; Robert von Dassanowsky, *Austrian Cinema: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2005), 49.

3 Robert Dassanowsky, “Finis Austriae, vivat Austria: The Re/Vision of 1918 in Austrian Film,” in *Österreich 1918 und die Folgen. Geschichte, Literatur, Theater und Film: Austria 1918 and the Aftermath. History, Literature, Theatre, and Film*, ed. Karl Müller and Hans Wagener (Vienna: Böhlau, 2009), 179–196, here: 189.

Austria's filmmakers helped to satisfy some of this "global craving for escapism," more specifically the escape into the world of the rich, powerful, and famous, all the more so since they found the perfect preconditions to do so. The Viennese cliché—waltz, wine, and operetta—was significant for cinematic entertainment not only under Nationalist Socialist rule, but even before, in the interwar period. Apart from that, directors at this time capitalized on a measured wave of nostalgia for the imperial past. Some of the last silent films took a bittersweet look back at the Habsburg's epochs in the manner of fanciful Cinderella-like romances such as *Erzherzog Johann* (Archduke Johann) and *Erzherzog Otto und das Wäscherhädel* (Archduke Otto and the Washergirl). Images of the *Biedermeier* era and the Congress of Vienna, like the 1931 Universum Film (UFA) production "*Congress Dances*" strengthened the filmic impression of the better "world of yesterday," as defined by Stefan Zweig. Not accidentally, Franz Antel decided to release a color remake of "*Congress Dances*" in 1955, thirteen years after the Goebbels's propaganda approached the congress theme with its own Viennese comedy *Wiener Blut*, starring Theo Lingen and Hans Moser, the latter in his famous curmudgeon manner. But whatever Antel achieved with his contribution to the filmic image making of the Second Republic, it was Ernst Marischka who took the cake with his *Sissi* trilogy about the young imperial couple Franz Joseph and Elisabeth, "Sisi," the latter up to the present taking the form of Romy Schneider in the minds of many viewers. By incorporating most of the popular film formulas of the 1950s, Marischka's royal melodrama became "one accomplished package": It utilized Austrian and Bavarian landscapes for *Heimatfilm* images, presented two romantic figures of Habsburg history and recalled the "elegant orchestration of the Viennese Film," thereby creating a visually pleasurable pseudohistory that also served

Austrian public images after a decade of Allied occupation in many ways.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, it is not a surprise that even at the beginning of the twenty-first century Austrian politicians “are committed to conveying such an image of the country. Some of them mention the imperial past, particularly, as Franz Marksteiner wrote in 1999, “when topics involving the European Union’s eastern expansion are on the agenda. The potential rejoining of countries which ‘once had belonged together’”, Marksteiner noted, “repeatedly brings the former Austro-Hungarian Empire onto the floor for consideration as a model for a united Europe.”<sup>5</sup>

Dassanowsky, on the other hand, emphasizes most of all that film images and in particular *Kaiserfilms* were crucial for the Austrian search for identity. The pre-1914 Habsburg world, with its intellectual/creative energies “was a safe and positive image to evoke” and, parallel to that, a convenient opportunity to supersede the German nationalist tendencies and the Anschluss movement as well as the (Austrian) responsibility for totalitarian rule, terror, and holocaust.<sup>6</sup>

### *Preconditions*

But the war did not only disappear due to the republic’s peculiarities of commemoration and self-representation; it even inherited difficult contemporary footage of the First World War itself. Apart from censorship and the reluctance of military commands of the Habsburg army to permit access of (private and civilian) cameramen to the combat zones, the “total and industrialized war” of “masses,” of millions of mobilized subjects, in huge

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4 Ibid., 188 and 189.

5 Marksteiner, “Where is the War?,” 248.

6 Dassanowsky, “Finis Austriae, vivat Austria,” 187 and 188.

“front regions” could hardly be captured by motion pictures. The real fighting scenes were rare, according to the specialist magazine *Der Kinematograph*, which stated as early as August 1914: “The modern battlefield presents communities living in the near vicinity with hardly anything that one could call recognisable. The distances are immense, the gunners along the front lines barely visible.”<sup>7</sup> Doubting the value of depictions showing “storming troops” shot from “safe distance” and confronted with the risks of filming in the course of bloody hostilities, cameramen orientated themselves by the slogan “To be seen is to be dead” and resorted to re-enactments of “heroic fighting” beyond the trenches, in communications zones or “in the comfort of a prepared studio.”<sup>8</sup> The results, however, were hardly impressive. Spectators expressed their “indescribable disappointment” and ridiculed newsreels and other nonfiction movies with “faked combat scenes.”<sup>9</sup>

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7 Quoted in: Thomas Ballhausen, “Between Virgo and Virago: Spatial Perceptions and Gender Politics in Austrian Film Production, 1914–1918,” in *Gendered Memories: Transgressions in German and Israeli Film and Theater*, ed. Vera Apfelthaler and Julia B. Köhne (Wien: Turia + Kant, 2007), 147–159, here: 150.

8 Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 28–29.

9 Among others: Hannes Leidinger, “Visualisierung des Krieges: Die Ostfront in österreichisch-ungarischen Fotografien und Filmproduktionen,” in *Jenseits des Schützengrabens: Der Erste Weltkrieg im Osten. Erfahrung - Wahrnehmung - Kontext*, ed. Bernhard Bachinger and Wolfram Dornik (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2013), 451–465, here: 457; Rainer Rother, “The Experience of the First World War and the German Film,” in *The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present*, ed. Michael Paris (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 217–246, here: 222.

With the continuance of the bloodshed and a growing war-weariness, the short bloom of moving images of military operations came almost to a complete halt anyway. Professionalized propaganda organizations focused on the “home front,” as well as on the supply and relief activities for suffering compatriots, wounded or disabled soldiers, war orphans and widows in particular. In the end, even these themes were replaced by the overwhelming majority of pure entertainment films. In this respect, the Habsburg Empire followed international trends. Only a small part of the British and French productions depicted the ongoing fighting,<sup>10</sup> and the tendencies were apparent: Between August and December 1914, 50 of 106 Russian films dealt with the armed conflict and its consequences, but in 1916, the subject amounted only to 13 of 500 productions at all.<sup>11</sup> The Western, Austrian part of the Dual Monarchy came up with the following figures: 26 and 17 percent of the domestic movies could be characterized as more or less “war related” in 1915 and 1916, while within the last two years of the European “seminal catastrophe,” only about ten percent of 142 movies referred to current developments on the front lines or at least in the hinterland.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Gerhard Paul, “Krieg und Film im 20. Jahrhundert: Historische Skizzen und methodologische Überlegungen,” in *Krieg und Militär im Film des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Bernhard Chiari, Matthias Rogg, and Wolfgang Schmidt (München: Oldenbourg, 2003), 3–78, here: 8.

11 Hannes Leidinger, “‘Die vaterländische Pflicht an der visuellen Front’: Bildberichterstattung und Bildpropaganda in Österreich-Ungarn unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der ‘östlichen Kampfschauplätze’ 1914–1918,” in *Erster Weltkrieg: Globaler Konflikt - lokale Folgen. Neue Perspektiven*, ed. Stefan Karner and Philipp Lesiak (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2014), 321–332, here: 324.

12 Quantitative analysis of: *Österreichische Spielfilme. Band 1: Spielfilme 1906–1918*, ed. Anton Thaller (Vienna: filmarchiv austria, 2010), 514–517.

The war itself receded into the background until 1918. This applies especially to the Habsburg Empire and the battlefields of its army. And, even more than before the armistice(s), the Balkan and the Russian fronts were marginalized, in retrospect, by the effective presentations of the “trench-war in the West.” The fighting of imperial and royal troops against the Italian forces in the Alps and at the Isonzo river was—surprisingly enough—no exception. Though much more important for the Austrian historical memory, it was not the film industry of the smaller Alpine Republic that broached the topic of the armed confrontation with the “arch-enemy in the south” more intensively. For many decades, nothing changed in this respect.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Embarrassments and Provocations*

Apart from this kind of a “double suppression” of the “Habsburg’s last war” in filmic representations before and after 1918, the Second World War figures as a “third wave of supersession.” After 1945, the positive image-making with a more or less sentimental pseudohistory led to the neglect of many topics. Amongst them was above all the cleansing of National Socialist taint in traditional genres of Austrian film. But according particularly to the importance of cinematic constructions of the national identity in the Second Republic, the respective focus resulted also—for instance—in the avoidance of 1918, along with 1938–1945, in many movies. To create too many links between the endeavors toward a unification with Germany, with the so-called “Great Brother” in the aftermath of WWI and the incorporation of the Austrian “corporate state” into the Third Reich in 1938, was considered too “embarrassing” and too “compromising.” And not even this: From 1918 onwards, any other (even ephemeral) hint

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13 Leidinger, “Visualisierung des Krieges,” 464–465.

to the traumatic loss of the Empire, the preceding bloodshed and the role of the Viennese court and government in the process of unleashing the First World War seemed to be an unacceptable provocation, at least for the conservative elites (particularly) of the (First) Republic, being still loyal to the imperial dynasty or tending toward a Habsburg nostalgia in the form of a “backward reason of state.”<sup>14</sup>

Film projects dealing with tragic moments at the eve of World War One, like the death of Rudolf, the heir to the throne, and Mary Vetsera in *Mayerling*, or the case of Alfred Redl, the high-ranking Austro-Hungarian army officer spying (above all) for the Russians, led to protests. Not only monarchists, but also many former imperial soldiers and civil officials, did not want to face this dark chapter of history. In this connection, the Austrian memory of World War I was obviously a factor interfering with their labile identity. After 1918, to most Austrians, the events of 1914 to 1918 “were reminders of a latent multiculturalism in a republic attempting to solidify national identity as ‘*Deutschoesterreich*,’” Dassanowsky writes. And he continues: “Moreover, a cinematic treatment of the Austrian war experience” could not be sold abroad. “German audiences were uninterested in re-experiencing the disaster of its ally, and other Central European nations were suspicious of any film from Austria dealing with the war as being revanchist or Habsburg-restoration propaganda.”<sup>15</sup>

And even the fact that National Socialists demonized the *Casa d’Austria* did not really change the situation, due to the ambiguity

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14 Hannes Leidinger, “Verzerrung und Ausblendung,” in *Habsburgs schmutziger Krieg: Ermittlungen zur österreichisch-ungarischen Kriegsführung 1914–1918*, ed. Hannes Leidinger, Verena Moritz, and Karin Moser (St. Pölten: Residenz, 2014), 223–234, here: 225.

15 Dassanowsky, “Finis Austriae, vivat Austria,” 180.

of some co-productions overshadowed by Berlin's interests and the following post-1938 *Tendenzfilme*, (films with clear political orientations), like *Wien 1910*, or the mainstream productions of the Goebbels entertainment industry, with its inclination for the well-established stereotypes of the "Waltzing Vienna." It goes without saying that the hostilities and mass killings of the more than four years up to 1918 were not in harmony with the post-1945 concept of an intact world long gone with a good old "Kaiser" in a historical fairyland.<sup>16</sup>

### *Metaphorical Narratives*

Notwithstanding the mentioned and basically convincing arguments being presented by several scholars, it is, however, useful—and even indispensable—to trace some different interpretations, simply because significant details do not fit with the general narrative, aspects which are revealing from different point of views.

According to Anton Kaes and his influential study about the so-called "Shell Shock Cinema," the hostilities of 1914 to 1918 and the traumatic experiences in the combat zones could hardly be expressed with words or presentations, especially in a more or less "realistic" form. Therefore, as Kaes put it, "prominent examples" of post-1918 movies articulated "an indirect, but more poignant understanding of trauma than many traditional war movies. German Films for instance, like *Nosferatu*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Die Nibelungen*, and *Metropolis*, translated military aggression and defeat into domestic tableaux of crime and horror," melodrama, myth, or science fiction.<sup>17</sup> Apart from the tendency to reflect the First World War in other periods and

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16 Ibid., 184–186.

17 Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema*, 3; Philipp Stiasny, *Das Kino und der Krieg: Deutschland 1914–1929* (München: edition text + kritik, 2009), 15.

through suggestion, symbolized, for instance, also by Michael Kertész's (later Hollywood's Michael Curtiz) cinematic treatment of Arthur Schnitzler's play *Der junge Medardus* (1923), presenting a war-torn Vienna during Napoleon's occupation,<sup>18</sup> this trend was particularly mirrored by the Austrian horror movie *Orlac's Hände* (*The Hands of Orlac*) of 1924. The film centers around a piano player losing his hands due to a train accident and getting transplanted new hands from a murderer and robber. Henceforth dominated by a strange, criminal spirit, Orlac literally becomes the embodiment of bodies dismembered by the industrial war and its destructive potential, resulting in injury and wide-spread dying-off.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Controversies and Patriotic Objects*

Interpretations insinuating a loss of individual coherence or control and by the way focusing on a key issue of the long Fin de Siècle from about 1870 to at least 1930,<sup>20</sup> namely the dissolution of the self, prevailed particularly in German and Austrian post-1918 productions. Contrary to that, "naturalist" approaches to the events on the battlefields up to 1918 existed only in foreign productions and led to many controversies. Against the backdrop of an intensified remembrance of WWI around 1930, the Vienna premiere and subsequent screenings of the US-adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's "*All Quiet on the Western Front*" caused

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18 Dassenowsky, "Finis Austriae, vivat Austria," 179.

19 Elisabeth Büttner and Christian Dewald, *Das tägliche Brennen: Eine Geschichte des österreichischen Films von den Anfängen bis 1945* (Salzburg: Residenz 2002), 355–356. Cf.: *Gothic Crime: Essays und Materialien zu Orlac's Hände*, ed. Armin Loacker and Thomas Ballhausen (Wien: filmarchiv austria, 2013). See also Thomas Ballhausen's article in this volume.

20 Büttner and Dewald, *Das tägliche Brennen*, 355–356.

protest and violent disturbances by conservative, right-wing circles, and National Socialists. The Hollywood sound film, based on Remarque's novel and directed by Lewis Milestone, was even banned in Austria in the beginning 1930s because of ongoing conflicts and the government's aim to limit the influence of the movie to the audience.<sup>21</sup>

While members of the Christian Social and the Pan German parties criticized the sobering effect of Milestone's movie, and while the oppositional Social Democrats organized trips to the neighbouring Czechoslovakian cities to see the film, another movie, directed by Luis Trenker and Karl Hartl, met with a much more positive response among anti-Marxist groups: The German and French production *Berge in Flammen* (*Mountains on Fire*) from 1931, presenting the war in the Alps fought by Austrians and Italians from 1915 onwards and thus turning away from the frequently depicted Western front to the combat zones of the Habsburg army, was a heroic, patriotic answer to Remarque and was well received by the National Socialists and later on in the Third Reich.<sup>22</sup>

Though aiming at the same "positive meaning" of the war being a necessary "sacrifice for the fatherland" and an individual test of strength and courage, comparable movies of the rival "Austrofascist" or Austrian corporative state were rare.<sup>23</sup> Only Major Karl Wratschko offered a message to the veterans of the

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21 Dassanowsky, "Finis Austriae, vivat Austria," 181.

22 Verena Moritz, "Krieg," in *Kampfzone Kino: Film in Österreich 1918–1938*, ed. Verena Moritz, Karin Moser and Hannes Leidinger (Wien: filmarchiv austria, 2008), 255–277, here: 271.

23 Just like *Mountains in Flames*, the German movies *Drei Kaiserjäger* (1933) and *Standeschütze Bruggler* (1936) praised patriotism and camaraderie at the Italian or Alpine front.

Habsburg army, praising the troops of the Kaiser for the “glorious” fighting in Galicia, Serbia, Tyrol, and elsewhere in his film *Schulter an Schulter* (*Shoulder to shoulder*).<sup>24</sup> Lasting roughly an hour and integrating some non-fiction, contemporary footage of the war, *Schulter an Schulter* was significant for the authoritarian Viennese government of the 1930s to reconcile the country with its own (Habsburg) past, while at the same time stressing the importance of the German character of Austria. Correspondingly, Wratschko’s work did not question the German-Austrian brotherhood in arms, (from 1914 to 1918), notwithstanding the difficult relationship between Vienna and Berlin in the eve of the Anschluss.<sup>25</sup>

#### *Sideshow and Marginal Notes*

However, *Schulter an Schulter* was an exception in the long run, and World War I was destined to figure as a marginal note in the Austrian film productions. Unlike in Germany— with its UFA trend—a kind of a mental (re-)armament did not take place in

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24 Another approach to the theme dated back to 1930, when Franz Pollack presented *Der letzte Kampf der Donaumonarchie* (alternative titles: *Unter den Bannern Alt-Österreichs* or *Licht über Österreich*). Yet film viewers of the Austrian government reacted cautiously and were divided: Some critics reproved clichés and kitschy scenes. Others complained about the arbitrary assignment of documentary footage. Definitely, Pollak’s film was not able to shape Austria’s visual memory of the last war of the Habsburg monarchy and its fighting force; Cf. Verena Moritz, “Krieg,” 259.

25 Karin Moser, “Visuelles Erinnern: Der Erste Weltkrieg im österreichischen Film- und Fernsehaffen,” in *Habsburgs schmutziger Krieg: Ermittlungen zur österreichisch-ungarischen Kriegsführung 1914–1918*, ed. Hannes Leidinger, Verena Moritz, and Karin Moser (St. Pölten: Residenz, 2014), 235–253, here: 240 and 241.

Austrian film studios.<sup>26</sup> By 1928, Hans Otto Löwenstein, former head of the film department of the Austro-Hungarian War Press Office in 1917–18, and also responsible for the first Alfred-Redl feature in 1925, remade cinematography pioneers Louise and Anton Kolm's 1915 *Der Traum eines österreichischen Reservisten* (*The dream of an Austria reservist*). But Löwenstein's attempt to "launch a Great War genre in film analogous to the popular war and imperial collapse novels of the era"<sup>27</sup> remained an exception. In turn, the Austrian movie *Die große Liebe* (*The great love*), being Otto Preminger's first directorial effort and starring Attila Hörbiger, stressed the fate of those returning from Russian captivity, but the misery of war and its consequences are not connected with political messages, social critics, or martial gestures. Rather, "virtues of Christianity" turn out to be the "true answers" to the manifold loss of home and family.<sup>28</sup>

In the following decades, the filmic depiction of "Habsburg's final war" continued to be a sideshow of the national movie industry, especially after 1945, for example as the background for military slapstick comedies and—close to that—the Austrian "humorous" version of Jaroslav Hasek's *The Good Soldier Svejk*.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from that, the First World War was just one chapter of TV family stories such as *Der Engel mit der Posaune* (1948) or the serial *Ringstraßenpalais* deploring the "pity of war" but at the

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26 Cf. Dassanowsky, "Finis Austriae, vivat Austria," 180.

27 Dassanowsky, *Austrian Cinema*, 37.

28 Moser, "Visuelles Erinnern," 239; Dassanowsky, *Austrian Cinema*, 44–45. Returnees figured prominently also in the German movies *Der Mann aus dem Jenseits - Feldgrau* (1926) and *Heimkehr* (1928).

29 Moser, "Visuelles Erinnern," 242. Cf. Václav Smidrkal's article in this volume, as well as the interwar production *Schwejk in Zivil* (1928) or the German-Russian cooperation *Mikosch rückt ein*.

same time keeping an extensively positive image of the Danube monarchy. This applies also to Fritz Kortners's movie *Sarajewo/Um Liebe und Tod*, evoking compassion for the heir to the throne and—more than that—for his wife, the warm-hearted (future) mother of the empire.<sup>30</sup>

### *Turning Points*

Nevertheless, in the 1960s there were first signs that things might change: Michael Kehlmann deconstructed the epic nostalgia of the *Kaiserfilms* in his 1964 black and white television treatment of Joseph Roth's *Radetzky* *marsch*. His focus was “on the role of the static patriarchy, the unyielding social order” and an empty military code of honour as well as “his cinematic visions on the corruption and fall of the monarchy.” Nearly at the same time, Edwin Zbonek worked on his film adaptation of Franz Theodor Csokor's 1936 play *3. November 1918*. This production turned out to be an intimate and neo-realistically tinged demolition of the fairytales promoted by the grand costume epics of the 1950s. Zbonek's movie, released in 1965, portrayed the growing nationalist divergences of a group of Austro-Hungarian soldiers in a convalescent home at the end of the Great War. It failed, however, to inspire a new wave, a *nouveau vague*, of Austrian movies “to span the wide cleft between the dead commercial cinema and the isolated Actionist” experimental film of the 1960s. In many ways, Csokor's play “was far more attuned to the imperial mourning of the Austrofascist period in which it was written, than to reception at the height of the Cold War.”<sup>31</sup>

Besides, apart from their readiness to present more problematic facets of the Danube monarchy, not only Csokor, but also Roth, failed

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30 Dassanowsky, “Finis Austriae, vivat Austria,” 189.

31 *Ibid.*, 190 and 191.

to question many of the Habsburg myths. Therefore, it was not the filmic treatment of this literature, but a new perspective on Austria-Hungary and World War I as a consequence of a changing culture of recollection in the 1970s and 1980s, that led to more critical narratives. Thus, the TV serial *Alpensaga* (1976–1980) offered an unvarnished interpretation of the Austrian province as a homefront full of troubles and populated by poor peasant families, run and managed by women after their men were drafted into the army and oppressed by the same forces in times of destitution and requisitions.<sup>32</sup>

Notwithstanding TV productions like that, it was above all the re-assessment of the role of Austrians during the Second World War and the Third Reich, as well as the debate about the responsibility of Austrians for terror, war crimes, and genocide under National Socialist rule, that brought about a more fundamental change in the way Austrian history was presented in movies.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, younger filmmakers concentrated on the “deceptive splendour” of the remote imperial past as well. More than anyone else, Austrian director Peter Patzak tried to establish a sort of a contrast with his 1990 movie *Himmel unter Steinen*. This work is probably the most remarkable attempt of an Austrian artist to present the Serbian assassin of the Habsburg crown prince Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Gavre Princip, not as an instrument of “dark powers” and impersonal social structures, but as an individual in a special milieu beyond the traditional national stereotypes and clichés surrounding the so-called “gravedigger(s) of the Dual Monarchy.”<sup>34</sup> Yet the

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32 Moser, “Visuelles Erinnern,” 248–249.

33 Cf. *Österreich und der Große Krieg: Die andere Seite der Geschichte*, ed. Klaus Amann and Hubert Lengauer (Wien: Brandstätter, 1989), Klappentext 1.

34 *Gavre Princip - Himmel unter Steinen* (1990). Regarding Patzak's Film, see also Karin Moser's contribution to this omnibus volume.

reactions of the audience, as well as the reviewers, to Patzak's perspective were mixed. This reflected the polarized debate about the Habsburgs and their "final war" in the different political and ideological camps.<sup>35</sup> Controversial approaches to Austria-Hungary and its role in the First World War also particularly characterized Austrian TV documentations relevant to theme in 2014, albeit with a dwindling intensity of emotions. Yet the vast majority of the productions offered a more detailed and balanced interpretation of the four years of bloodshed.<sup>36</sup>

### *Conclusion*

From this point of view, dealing with the dark chapters of two World Wars—at least after the death of the contemporaries, eye-witnesses, victims, and perpetrators—signals a kind of normalization of the relationship between the Austrians and their past. This process started in the 1960s and continued during the "Kreisky years," with the chancellors' will to rapprochement between the church, the conservatives, the former ruling dynasty, and the "leftist camp" in the Alpine republic. It was eventually accelerated in the context of the "Waldheim case" and the commemoration of the Anschluss in 1988.

Above all before that period, as long as critical analyses of Austria-Hungary were generally precarious, "Habsburg's final war"

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35 *Die Presse*, Oct. 8, 1990; cf. *Die Furche*, Oct. 18, 1990, and *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, Oct. 24, 1990, 26.

36 Cf. *Das Attentat - Sarajewo 1914* (2014), and above all: *Kaiser Franz Joseph* (2006), *Menschen & Mächte: Kaiser Franz Joseph und der Erste Weltkrieg* (2008); *Der stille Berg* (2014); *Die Macht der Bilder: Lüge und Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg* (2014). See also the critical review of Kurt Mündl's production *Sarajewo - Das Attentat* (2014) in: Moser, "Visuelles Erinnern," 247.

was hardly ever mentioned or only grazed by referring particularly to the beginning and the end of the hostilities in 1914 and 1918.<sup>37</sup> Even this, however, could mostly only happen when the beginning and the end of the First World War was integrated in interpretations and depictions of a Habsburg myth, of the mourning with regard to the downfall of the “world of yesterday.”

In any other case filmmakers anticipated troubles. The trauma of 1914–18, Robert von Dassanowsky stated, “would hardly be a topic that would fit” into “formulaic structures aimed at international box-office successes. Even the official state film, *1. April 2000* (1952), an all-star historical-musical-comedy pageant film framed by a futuristic science fiction plot that attempts to plead an end to Austria’s Allied occupation to the world, halts its review

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37 Moser, “Visuelles Erinnern,” 245. As an early example see also *Die Brandstifter Europas* (*The Arsonists of Europe*, 1926). Besides—and apart from Fritz Kortner’s *Sarajewo/Um Liebe und Tod*—the continuing occupation with a more or less fictional Redl-genre should not be disregarded in this connection. Cf. Karl Anton’s Czech production *Der Fall des Generalsstabs-Oberst Redl* (1931), Erich Engel’s *Hotel Sacher* (1939), as well as Franz Antel’s *Spionage* (*Espionage*, 1955), and István Szabó’s *Oberst Redl* (1985).

Apart from Edwin Zbonek’s film adaptation of Franz Theodor Csokor’s *3. November 1918*, the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy and the birth of the republic is—among other examples—also depicted in the anti-revolutionary production *Kampf der Gewalten* (*Battle of Powers*) of 1919 or—to give a recent, more metaphoric example—Stefan Ruzowitzky’s *Die Siebtelbauern* (1998). Ruzowitzky’s work obliterates “the symbolic imperial father or grandfather figure of Emperor Franz Joseph as idolized by Habsburg Myth literature.” Therefore, the film deals with the idea of a fatherless society in the years of rupture, upheaval and disorientation; Dassanowsky, “Finis Austriae, vivat Austria,” 193–195.

of Austria's benevolent nature through history" with Emperor Franz Joseph and Empress Elisabeth: The "twentieth century is ignored and neither world war is evoked."<sup>38</sup>

For one or another group of spectators, the last war of the Austro-Hungarian army seemed to be an embarrassment or a provocation. This was due to the intransigent attitudes of the political camps, the conservative "backward reason of state" and the weakness of the Social Democrats to influence the Austrian historiography for many decades. Furthermore—as Dassanowsky put it—the Austrian republic's difficult and problematic search for its own homogeneous national identity played an essential role.

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38 Dassanowsky, "Finis Austriae, vivat Austria," 187; Dassanowsky, *Austrian Cinema*, 149. Contrary to Franz Joseph and significant for the role of the First World War in Austrian films, the Emperor Charles was not able to reappear on stage. According to contemporary spectators, the 1921 movie *Kaiser Karl* was presented too early: A few years after the collapse of the Monarchy and faced with Habsburg's restoration trials in Hungary, Austrian reviewers considered themselves incapable of making "objective judgments." The situation did not change for many decades. The beatified emperor remains controversial even to this day; Verena Moritz, "Vergangenheitsbewältigung," in *Kampfzone Kino: Film in Österreich 1918–1938*, ed. Verena Moritz, Karin Moser and Hannes Leidinger (Wien: filmarchiv austria, 2008), 141–172, 144.