Reading Music Criticism beyond the Fin-de-siècle Vienna Paradigm

Benjamin M. Korstvedt

A remarkable advertisement for Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony appeared in the Neue Freie Presse of Vienna on 1 April 1886, ten days after the work’s belated Viennese premiere. The advertisement, in the form of a flyer, was produced by the publisher of the symphony, Albert J. Gutmann, and featured a series of brief quotations from reviews of performances, including the recent Viennese performance and concerts in Leipzig, Frankfurt, Munich, and Berlin (see Figure 1). The divergent views expressed in the quotations Gutmann selected, which highlight the disagreements between the combative responses of leading Viennese critics and the generally more positive reception of the symphony in Germany, reflect the divided state of opinion concerning the merits of Bruckner’s music at the time. The contrast between the praise, which is fine but generally reasonable, and the sharply dismissive negative criticism is striking, as are Eduard Hanslick’s statement that he found the work “unnaturally inflated, morbid, and pernicious” (“unnatürlich aufgeblasen, krankhaft und verderblich”) and Gustav Dömpke’s declaration that “Bruckner composes like a drunkard” (“Bruckner componirt wie ein Betrunkenener”).

These may seem odd choices for inclusion in a promotional flyer, but this was no April Fools joke. Gutmann clearly regarded them as an effective means of generating publicity for one of his products. He apparently succeeded in creating a succès de scandale; in Ernst Decsey’s melodramatic reminiscence, the advertisement “had the effect of a cymbal crash.” Recalling the event in his memoirs, Gutmann seemed pleased to have provoked an “enormous sensation” that provided “the occasion for further polemics” (see Table 1 for this and the following quotations). Other comments about Gutmann’s advertisement indicate that it was understood as part of a larger argument about Bruckner. Max Kalbeck, one of the composer’s strongest critics, responded two days later in Die Presse, dismissing Gutmann’s effort as a ploy. The promptness of
Kalbeck’s rejoinder suggests that Gutmann had succeeded in stirring up some excitement. Decades later, Theodor Helm, whose favorable review had been quoted by Gutmann in 1886, and Bruckner’s partisan biographers, August Göllerich and Max Auer, were still reminiscing about Gutmann’s maneuver, which Helm described as a canny move to “paralyze” Bruckner’s Viennese critics.

Figure 1. An advertisement for Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony published in the Neue Freie Presse, Vienna, 1 April 1886. From Hans-Hubert Schönzeler, Bruckner (New York: Vienna House, n.d. [1970]), 172.
If Gutmann hoped to work the situation to his advantage, Bruckner himself was trepidatious. When he learned of plans for this performance of his Seventh Symphony in Vienna, he wrote a remarkable letter, dated 13 October 1885, requesting that the Philharmonic desist because he could not countenance the negative criticism he knew the symphony would receive in what he called “the woeful local situation” (“die traurige lokale Situation”). The work had recently enjoyed success in Germany, notably Arthur Nikisch’s world-premiere performance in Leipzig on 30 December 1884 and especially Hermann Levi’s performance in Munich on 10 March 1885, which was Bruckner’s first real public triumph as a symphonist. Bruckner feared, quite correctly as

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<th>Table 1. Responses to Gutmann’s Flyer</th>
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<td>As the publisher of the two most popular of his symphonies, the Fourth (“Romantic”) and the Seventh (with the funeral music for Wagner’s death), immediately after the performance of the latter, I prepared a collection of key phrases from foreign and domestic reviews, which I arranged to have appear as an insert in the <em>Neue Freie Presse</em>. It caused an enormous sensation, and even provided the occasion for further polemics. The Philharmonic pasted the newspaper clipping into their score, where it is still to be seen as an emblem.</td>
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<td>—Albert J. Gutmann, <em>Aus dem Wiener Musikleben: Künstler-Erinnerungen, 1873–1908</em></td>
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<td>The confusion that this more than problematical work, which exists only by the grace of its great predecessors, is said to cause in otherwise entirely rational people results <em>inter alia</em> from the fact that the music publisher, Mr. Albert Gutmann, has considered the highly unfavorable response of the famous critic, Eduard Hanslick, to be a recommendation of his most recent product and has added a report of the same as an advertisement.</td>
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<td>—Max Kalbeck, <em>Die Presse</em>, 3 April 1886</td>
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<td>For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that Bruckner again came out badly with the leading Viennese critics. In order to paralyze them, Bruckner’s publisher Albert Gutmann had the inspiration to have an insert appear on 1 April 1886 in the <em>Neue Freie Presse</em>, which first noted the splendid success of the work in six musical cities before the performance in Vienna and then added nine key phrases from the critical response, seven of which, including mine from the <em>Deutsche Zeitung</em>, were decidedly favorable, some downright enthusiastic, and only the last two totally negative.</td>
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<td>—Theodor Helm, <em>Fünfzig Jahre Wiener Musikleben (1866–1916): Erinnerungen eines Musikkritikers</em></td>
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Table 1. continued

It is significant that the even the publisher of the symphony, Albert Gutmann, no longer took the unfavorable verdicts as tragic, but rather used [the] particularly sharp phrases for a promotional flyer in which enthusiastic judgments, especially those from German papers, were juxtaposed with the shameless statements of the “authoritative Viennese critics.” Even the Neue Freie Presse had to publish this big paid announcement. That made a formidable impression.1d

—Göllerich und Auer, Anton Bruckner: Ein Lebens- und Schaffens-Bild


it turned out, that this success would only feed the resentment of Hanslick and his circle.

Many writers, and not only Bruckner hagiographers (for whom it was long a cause célèbre), have regarded the negative criticism of the Viennese premiere in very personal terms. Constantin Floros, for example, recently described Bruckner’s October 1885 letter to the
Vienna Philharmonic as “one of the most shocking documents in music history” that reveals how great “Bruckner’s fear of Hanslick’s savaging” (“Bruckners Angst vor Hanslicks Verrissen”) had become. A slightly different tack was taken by Karl Kraus, who in 1907 published the text of Bruckner’s letter to the Philharmonic under the heading “Anton Bruckners Bittschrift” (“Anton Bruckner’s Plea”) in *Die Fackel*. Kraus treated the letter not only as a poignant reflection of Bruckner’s personal situation (melodramatically calling it “a tortured man’s declaration of will during torture . . . a final appeal for mercy”), but also as a testament to the sorry state of culture in an age in which “malicious dwarves ruled over good-natured giants.” Alongside the letter, Kraus reprinted a lengthy excerpt from a poem of his own invention he had published in 1903 that opens with the line “Ist die Folter in Oesterreich abgeschafft?” (“Has Torture Been Abolished in Austria?”) and paints an absurd scene in which Bruckner, Hugo Wolf, and Bedřich Smetana are zealously tortured with medieval implements by Hanslick, Kalbeck, and Dömpke, thus vividly illustrating Kraus’s feeling that there was something repugnant in seeing the tools of mockery wielded by the journalistic establishment not to satirize the powerful but to ridicule these relatively marginal figures of Viennese cultural life.

Taken as a whole, the entire nexus—including the extremely critical reactions to the symphony and counter-reactions from other critics, as well as the social context of Viennese concert life at that time—embodied by Gutmann’s advertisement crystallizes a fascinating moment in which concert music was the object of intense cultural energy, much of which, as I will argue, focused on crucial, closely held points of difference central to the self-identity of the Viennese bourgeoisie in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Gutmann’s strategy of publishing a very mixed selection of critical opinion in the *Neue Freie Presse*, which was Hanslick’s paper and the all-but-official journal of the Viennese liberal establishment, strongly suggests that he was aware that a diversity of cultural opinion existed within this segment of society. This article considers how critical resistance to Bruckner’s music was part of a debate then swirling about the proper definition of Austrian *bürgerlich* identity. It explores the circumstances of this criticism, moving beyond the texts with which it begins, establishing—and rejecting—some possible paths of approach, reviewing how musical politics in late-nineteenth-century Vienna has been constructed in English-language scholarship, identifying some salient aspects of the social circumstances of Viennese music criticism at that time, and finally, returning to consider more closely how some critics verbally represented the music of Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony. This is, then, an exercise in reading in the fullest sense of the
term; it hopes to build a deeper, clearer picture of a place, a time, a musical culture—a culture of hearing, discussing, and understanding music—that differs markedly from our current one. So, rather than trying quickly to bridge the awkward gaps that appear between our current interpretive presuppositions and what nineteenth-century critics wrote, it is important, at least initially, to hold these spaces open: the fascination and the critical opportunity offered by seemingly strange critical responses subsist precisely in the spaces of difference they create against our established patterns of comprehension.

Readings of Viennese Music Criticism

Although it is quite possible to overestimate the prevalence of extreme, derogatory words about music in Vienna during this time, such rhetoric was by no means uncommon, particularly in newspaper reviews of new concert music and opera. The immediate historical context, in Vienna as in much of Europe, was the conflict of opinion about the relative value of Wagnerian “Music of the Future” as opposed to the more tradition-minded music epitomized by the works of Johannes Brahms. In Vienna, the discussion took on a particularly sharp edge because not only was Brahms a well-known resident of the city, but Bruckner, who was also a prominent figure there, was often seen as the representative of the Wagnerian aesthetic in the realm of the symphony. Stark differences regarding the virtues of these two compositional approaches and their leading exponents often inflected critical responses, as in these infamous examples from Hugo Wolf, in the Wiener Salonblatt, and Eduard Hanslick, in the Neue Freie Presse, respectively:

Conspicuous is the crab-like progress in Brahms's output. It has, to be sure, never reached beyond the level of mediocrity, but such nothingness, emptiness and hypocrisy as prevails throughout the E-minor symphony has not yet appeared in any previous work of Brahms in so alarming a manner. The art of composing without ideas has decidedly found in Brahms its worthiest representative. Just like the Good Lord, Herr Brahms is a master at making something from nothing. 8

The Overture to the “Meistersinger,” which hurls out all of the leitmotifs of the opera piecemeal in a flood of chromatic passages and sequences, eventually whipping them willy-nilly into a veritable tonal hurricane, must raise the suspicion among the uninitiated that the Nuremberg Meistersingers were primarily concerned with cyanide. I hesitate to call this the most unpleasant opera overture in the world only because of the even more hideous prelude to “Tristan und Isolde.” It always makes me
think of the old Italian picture of that martyr whose intestines were slowly reeled out of his body.\footnote{9}

Such cruelly brilliant phrases and images are indeed tempting to pass around in conversation—this was surely part of the intention behind them—but any attempt to make sense of this sort of discourse in a culturally grounded way must move beyond a quotational approach, resisting the urge to traffic in \textit{bon mots}, if it hopes to understand what these words meant, where they came from, and how they fit into a larger social, communicative context. The extremity of many critical comments about the music of Bruckner and, to a lesser extent, Brahms can easily inspire a defensive reaction even today; thus many scholars who deal with this material, sensing that a degree of caution is needed, have sought ways to explain and often to defuse such extreme statements. One well-worn tradition is to dismiss critical opinions that seem mistaken or out of sympathy with modern views as mistakes or “misjudgments.”\footnote{10} In an age in which the canon of nineteenth-century music is securely established, it is not hard to pass silently over opinions that look like failures of judgment, yet this does little to help us grasp what Hanslick was thinking and hearing at the time. Nor does it help to try to explain and minimize the import of critical opinions on the basis of biographical circumstances, by, for example, emphasizing that Hugo Wolf had been rebuffed as a student in his efforts to receive compositional guidance from Brahms and was thus primed to derogate his music as a reviewer.\footnote{11} The impulse to mollify the import of refractory critical vitriol is quite understandable, and may even seem natural, but it does not aid historical analysis, especially when such impulses assume that one key can unlock the riddle of why music critics wrote what they did—be it a commitment to one musical party or the other, a grudge, or a simple incapacity to grasp or understand certain musical works. Each of these factors surely played a part, but none alone, or even in simple combination, is able to accommodate the complexity of the facts on the ground or engage the underlying cultural conditions, and therefore cannot lead very far into the exploration of music’s place in larger constellations. For this, a whole network of considerations that emerge from the social, cultural, political, and material situation of musical performance and reception, as well as writing about music, needs to be brought into the discussion.

Serious scholarly interest in the intersections between music, criticism, and cultural politics in this milieu is not new, of course. A number of sophisticated efforts have explored the musical reality behind specific criticism made at that time; for example, Klaus Hübner took Wolf’s quip

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\textit{...}”
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that Brahms exercised “the art of composing without ideas,” which was meant as a strictly derogatory statement, as the starting point for the musical analysis of the superb motivic economy of some of Brahms’s late piano pieces, and Dorothea Redepenning searched for the positive musical grounds behind the sense expressed by several critics that Bruckner’s music lacks “logical thinking.” The approach to Viennese music criticism that I am most interested in—because of both its interpretive sophistication and its influence—originated in the early 1990s in the writings of American musicologists. The most salient works in this area are by Leon Botstein and Margaret Notley, both of whom emphasize the crucial, even determining, influence of politics on musical taste and critical commentary, with particular attention to the role of liberalism in politics and musical reception. These scholars find in the musical culture of the time, especially in the disputes about Brahms and Bruckner, reflections of a crisis of Viennese liberal culture and its conflict with antagonistic political forces that were rising at that time. For Botstein, “between 1873 and 1897 a dramatic political shift away from liberalism helped to define the Viennese world of aesthetic and cultural politics” so strongly, he argues, that “the Brahms-Wagner division, the Brahms-Bruckner conflict, and the Makart-Feuerbach rivalry had roots in the social and political divisions that developed during the 1870s.” The most crucial division was between a liberal, *grosbürglich* establishment that had a significant Jewish component and “a new radically conservative movement that sought to establish a political and cultural alternative to the cosmopolitan liberal conceits of Vienna’s cultural, literary, and academic elite.” Botstein concludes that “the Wagner-Brahms conflict was more about disciples and the polemics of cultural politics than about music,” while recognizing that “even where fundamental aesthetic issues were at stake, as in the Bruckner case, the social and political dimensions of the conflict were decisive.” Parallel divisions in cultural politics and aesthetic matters “represented segments within [a] Viennese public whose antagonisms deepened and rendered extreme what otherwise might have remained a serious matter of aesthetics.” Notley, who approaches the topic from a slightly different angle and moves more directly from music criticism to cultural politics, sees both Brahms’s music and its positive reception by critics as expressions of a liberal worldview that valued reason, moderation, individualism, and rationality. She argues that this liberalism was opposed with increasing strength in the 1880s by what “amounted to a non-rational cult of emotion and instinct,” which she associates with radicalism, political reaction, anti-Semitism, and Wagnerism. Notley holds that this worldview was expressed, if not by Bruckner’s music directly, then by its
enthusiastic reception by critics and audiences. She argues that politics played a crucial role in the public's response to music, as can be seen from the "ardent support" Bruckner received in "the press of the Pan-Germans and of the Christian Socialists, the most important of the anti-Liberal parties on the far right formed during that decade."

This interpretive approach can point with justification to the tendency to construct this music and its reception along party lines. This pattern was established long ago and has survived several metamorphoses. For example, Theodor Helm referred several times to the Brahms "party" in his review of a performance of the First Symphony by the Vienna Philharmonic on 26 March 1882. In 1883, Josef Schalk interpreted the reception of Bruckner's symphonies as part of a larger struggle that he glossed in terms of Wagner's late worldview as the conflict between the German spirit and the spirit of the modern. In his 1886 review of the Seventh Symphony, Hanslick declared that "Bruckner has become a military command and 'the second Beethoven' in the articles of faith of the Wagner community." Richard Heuberger wrote in the opening paragraph of his obituary of Bruckner, which Brahms and Hanslick reportedly admired, that in his last decade Bruckner had become the object of a "passionate as well as exaggerated cult" ("ebenso leidenschaftlichen als übertriebenen Cultus"), to which Heinrich Schuster responded a few weeks later in his own obituary of the composer that it was rather the "opposition to Bruckner" that was a "party matter." These "parties" were soon identified with religious and political agendas. Schuster's obituary associated opposition to Bruckner with "the old Liberal" tendency in politics, while in 1920, Ernst Decsey (who was himself Jewish) linked the "battle of the Brucknerian symphony" with the struggle of the Catholic ethos against "the faithless soul of liberalism." An 1890 article from the Catholic newspaper *Das Vaterland* titled "Ein Opfer der Wiener Musikkritiker" ("A Victim of the Viennese Music Critics") claimed, in a statement that betrays a völkisch slant, that the animosity of the "clique" that opposed Bruckner was due to the "great discomfort" they felt at seeing a composer stepping to the forefront whose works were not the property of the Simrock Verlag, Brahms's main publisher. In his massive Brahms biography, published between 1904 and 1914, Max Kalbeck, writing from the other side of the debate, offered what has become an influential account of musical politics in the 1880s, when "music," as he wrote, "became mixed up with politics and obscurants of various party camps had their hands in the matter." He rather crudely reinforced the notion, often drawing on anti-Catholic imagery, that Vienna was rent by organized musical disputes of an almost military cast, describing "troops summoned to oppose
Brahms” supported by “extremists of various reactionary, religious, political and social congregations” and “bands of rowdies eager to agitate” following “battle orders,” thronging the standing-room section at Brahms concerts, hoping to “terrorize” the Musikverein audience.25

Postwar scholarship, especially English-language work, has generated its own interpretive approaches to nineteenth-century Bruckner and Brahms criticism that can tend to inscribe a slightly different set of dividing lines, which crystallized especially with Notley’s work, based on a dichotomy of liberalism and a Wagnerian right wing. It is not surprising that scholars and especially commentators have adopted the construction of “Brahms as Liberal”; yet they have not always done so with the kind of subtlety it requires, which Notley herself largely supplied.26 Care is needed here for several reasons. Although, as will be discussed below, efforts in this area can be greatly facilitated by the work cultural historians have done over the last two decades to elucidate the cultural politics of Austrian liberalism, the term liberal remains a tricky one to apply with due sophistication in this connection. Not only is “liberal” a heavily freighted term in contemporary American culture, but its etymological implication of freedom and its accrued sense of progressiveness belie the conservative social politics common among the liberal bourgeoisie in the later nineteenth century and threaten to obscure the resistance, incomprehension, even animosity, felt by many liberals toward modernist artistic innovation. Likewise, it is certainly true that much speaks in favor of linking Brahms and nineteenth-century liberalism—not only were many of his patrons and supporters members of the cream of liberal society, he himself was a skeptical secularist, his works succeeded very well on the open market, and his music exhibits two tendencies important to the liberal project, namely historicism and rationalism—yet it is equally true that partisans of Brahms, Bruckner, and Wagner cannot be slotted into neat social, political, or religious categories that mirror the cultural politics that we now believe drove musical opinion. Brahms and his circle were not free of regressive tendencies.27 Some of Bruckner’s outspoken supporters, including Paul Heyse and Ludwig Speidel, were not Wagnerians, and Jews and liberals, as well as anti-Semitic nationalists and reactionaries, were among the fierce champions of Bruckner, and Wagner for that matter.28 Likewise, a broad reading of musical journalism of the time contravenes a binary view of the politics of Viennese music criticism that divides critical response into pro-Brahms (and thus anti-Wagner and anti-Bruckner) criticism published in liberal journals and pro-Bruckner (and thus pro-Wagner and anti-Brahms) appearing in the reactionary nationalist press. Uwe Harten’s survey of Bruckner reviews written during the
composer’s lifetime by forty-three authors, published in “fifteen liberal journals of various shades,” shows only a weak symmetry between a critic’s basic musical orientation and the politics of the papers in which he (or, very rarely, she) published.29

It is without question that an illiberal temper is expressed by the chauvinism and especially the anti-Semitism that lurches through some music criticism of that time, yet today it may be deceptively easy, and in some ways tempting, to draw very sharp distinctions between what look like positively liberal tendencies and those cultural impulses that we properly revile and that, particularly in hindsight, look foreboding. There is now little danger of supposing, let alone seriously arguing, that music criticism expressed little more than matters of musical taste and objective artistic judgment. If anything, we are more likely to err in a different direction by assuming that we have now finally surveyed the situation rightly and that we now understand what music critics were “really” talking about—namely politics, and quite specifically about liberalism versus political reaction and/or radicalism—and thus feel encouraged to make too direct an equation between partisan musical opinions and apparently parallel political tendencies and developments.

Recent scholarship, including the latest contributions by Nicholas Cook and Kevin Karnes, as well as those by Notley, Botstein, and several others, has continued to affirm and illuminate the complex interactions of politics, religion, aesthetics, and social tendencies that shaped Viennese musical culture, and particularly criticism, in the late nineteenth century, especially in connection with Brahms and Schenker.30 The critical reception of Bruckner during his lifetime has, however, remained marginal to the scholarly discussion; focussing on it offers, therefore, the opportunity of deepening and sharpening our understanding of the field in which it operated. It is clear that an array of overlapping causes, none of which worked alone, are implicated in this. In order to do justice to the richness of the situation, it is necessary to treat the cultural politics of liberalism and its “others” along more than one simple axis, with the understanding that “ideology offers the social subject not a set of narrowly ‘political’ ideas but a fundamental framework of assumptions that defines the parameters of the real and the self” and, therefore, that cultural realities and subjectivity are “constructed within more than one system of differences.”31 Writing specifically about musical history, Leon Botstein recently raised concerns about the reductiveness of criticism that not only fails to take proper measure of the aesthetic moment of the music it considers but also constructs its historiography of Viennese musical culture along a single axis.32 Dominick LaCapra’s caution against “a reductive contextual historicism
that converts all artifacts into mere representative documents” and his imperative that critical study of the “high culture of fin-de-siècle Vienna” should seek to “rethink the entire relation between artifact or text and context in a way that contests both formalistic and historicist methods” challenge interpreters to pursue below obvious levels of meaning and implication. The relationships between text and context most relevant to my project concern those between prevailing interpretive paradigms and scholarly approaches, music criticism and its social situation, and verbal description and musical text.

**The Fin-de-siècle Vienna Paradigm**

The crucial historiographic starting point here, as for so much work in this area, is the so-called fin-de-siècle Vienna paradigm. In its simplest terms, this paradigm, which originated in the work of Carl Schorske in the 1960s and 1970s, much of which was included in his prize-winning *Fin-de-Sie`cle Vienna* and later took on something of a life of its own, sees elements of Viennese cultural life, including various forms of artistic expression, in the last decades of the nineteenth century as manifestations of the “eclipse and failure” of a broadly defined culture of liberalism and the rise of various forms of illiberal political and cultural tendencies including nationalism, anti-Semitism, Christian socialism, and mass populism, which found decisive political realization with Karl Lueger’s ascent to the office of mayor of Vienna in 1897. Schorske’s fin-de-siècle Vienna was a culture in crisis, in which liberalism gradually lost its cultural prestige and authority. Just as its political powers were draining, the younger lights of Viennese culture retreated from liberalism into political resignation and “the cultural escapism offered by the traditional sensual, Catholic culture of the aristocracy.” This construction of a crisis, shaded by portents of decline and even doom, leaves, as James Shedel wrote, “little room for doubt that substituting an aristocratically based Gefühlskultur for the liberal culture of reason and law was a decisive symptom of Austrian society’s sickness unto death.”

If the import of a text can be measured by the quantity and quality of the scholarly work it has productively informed, then Schorske’s *Fin-de-Sie`cle Vienna* is unquestionably an epochal work for scholars and critics of Viennese modernism, art, and culture. Part of what makes Schorske’s approach so stimulating is his insight that “political values, both explicit and implicit, reflect material circumstances and, in turn, condition cultural-aesthetic styles.” This general formulation of the relationship of politics, material conditions, and cultural expression is now, it seems safe to say, well accepted, yet Schorske’s representation of
fin-de-siècle Vienna, for all of its influence, has attracted important critique, much of it from historians who have rethought the nature of Viennese liberalism, looked for a more critical handle on its role in politics and society, and re-examined the actuality of its ideology, all of which has tended to make Viennese liberalism seem both less pervasive and less “liberal” than is commonly assumed. One set of cautionary responses concerns the role played by liberalism in Viennese politics and culture. Some scholars hold that Schorske overestimated both the influence of liberalism in its heyday during the 1860s and the effects of its decline in the 1880s and 1890s during its “extrusion from political power.” It has also been objected that Schorske’s view of fin-de-siècle Vienna is so strongly inflected by the knowledge of subsequent developments—including the retreat of liberalism as a leading political and cultural force in Europe and the United States in the mid-twentieth century, the collapse of the Habsburg empire following defeat in 1918, and, less directly but more horribly, the emergence of Nazism, which drew directly not only on the anti-Semitism but also on the irrational politics in a “sharper key” Schorske diagnosed in fin-de-siècle Vienna—that it raises the problematic question of an Austrian or Viennese Sonderweg, a concept borrowed from the historiography of Germany that holds that the German people followed a unique path of historical development that facilitated the rise and political success of National Socialism.

Critical scholars have also deepened the available view of turn-of-the-century Viennese culture in ways that have made the lines of distinction between liberalism and competing political forces less bright and secure than they initially seem. Much suggests that Viennese liberalism was a more complex phenomenon than is commonly assumed. Thus John Boyer wrote that despite a “superficial, self-proclaimed ideological component,” which was at times dismissed as a “mask” of reason,” liberals in fact “possessed a highly complex social interest program designed to maintain and enhance their constituents’ vested social and political privileges.” Furthermore, upon closer analysis, nationalism, the Social Democratic and Christian Socialist movements, and even anti-Semitism, all begin to appear less as alien forces that simply threatened liberalism from the outside than as developments that emerged within the ambit of liberalism itself. Pieter Judson, who argues that there are ways in which liberalism “may have been responsible for the foundation of the so-called irrational politics which supposedly repudiated it,” finds structural continuities between liberal philosophies of the public sphere and those of “radical nationalists and even some antisemites in the 1890s.” Recent scholarship has also
facilitated productive questions about whether the Catholic culture of Grace and the liberal culture of the word, to borrow Schorske’s coinage, are properly seen as opposites or as two poles along a rather fluid continuum.  

In view of these developments, Judson offered a direct challenge to scholars:

If the study of Vienna 1900 is going to recover the intricate genealogies of political mobilization and cultural explosion of the Austrian fin de siècle, it must be informed by a greater recognition of the complex and influential liberal legacy to Central European politics and culture. The compelling but ultimately ahistoric paradigm that has dominated most discussions of Vienna 1900 must be replaced by approaches that rest on a greater appreciation for historical, geographic and social context.

Musical scholarship has been slow to respond to this call. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the signal achievement of American scholarship on Viennese culture, headed by the work of Carl Schorske, was to extract basic cultural and political distinctions, to focus and distill them. Now, a generation or two later, what is needed is to open them up again, in order to try to further unfold the complex role played by music in the cultural discussion of those times, and thereby recover something of the complexity of experience in musical listening, performing, and perceiving that existed then and there. This project carries a special charge for musicology because Vienna of the late nineteenth century—in addition to being the birthplace of the discipline of Musikwissenschaft—was home to Brahms, Mahler, Bruckner, Hanslick, Schenker, Wolf, the young Schoenberg, Guido Adler, among others. The re-evaluation that is essayed here begins by taking closer heed to the social nature of journalistic criticism, which was the main forum for Viennese musical opinion.

**Reading Viennese Music Criticism as a Social Medium**

Viennese music criticism was a literary genre in its own right, and reading it as a genre—in the strict sense of that term as a category that takes account of its modes of publication and consumption, as well as its sociohistorical context and its relationship to concert life and to listening—enables a firmer grasp of key points about not only its verbal texts but also its social nature and its meaning. One of the leading hallmarks of Viennese music criticism of the time was that it was published largely in the daily press, not in specialized music journals. Music criticism usually appeared as a feuilleton, often on the front page alongside news of very different sorts. These feuilletons encompassed far more than
music criticism, ranging from social critique to literary essay. They placed wit and sentiment above reasoned judgment, and partook fully in what Geoffrey C. Howe recently described as an Austrian tradition of employing “language as a tool of persuasion and equivocation” rather than as a “tool of faith and reason.” The most successful critics, therefore, were usually not only the most strongly opinionated, but also the most subjective, craftiest, most stylish writers—and the most fun to read and discuss. In a striking turn of phrase, Robert Hirschfeld identified a new species of feuilletonistic music criticism, “die Kunst der kritisch bewegten Formen” or “the art of critically moving forms,” that arose with the establishment of greater but still limited press freedom in 1848. Less noticed perhaps, but quite palpable is a change in tone and demeanor in the 1880s, when music criticism began to grow distinctly more polemical, partisan, and sharper edged and, as Manfred Wagner pointed out, moved away from the discussion of the craftsmanship of musical works and the quality of performance toward discussions of aesthetics, musical meaning, and cultural politics. This was partly a matter of generational change, which was especially marked during this decade, as a number of new, younger critics—Hans Paumgartner, Theodor Helm, Max Kalbeck, and for a few years Gustav Dömpke and Hugo Wolf—appeared on the scene. It may also have been fueled by a growing Viennese taste for sensationalism, often grist for the feuilleton, which, as Richard Specht recalled, tended “to make a scandal and nothing but a scandal out of things that should otherwise be serious,” as in the campaigns against Feuerbach, Waldmüller, Bruckner, Wolf, Klimt, and Mahler in which he saw the “bloody traces” of the old Habsburg Spanish court ceremony lingering in a Viennese culture denied the outlet of the bullring.

This populist edge marks a point of distinction from the kinds of music criticism published in specialized music journals. These journals were written primarily for active musical amateurs, for whom reviews of recent compositions, articles about singing or piano methods, advertisements for new publications of music, and the like were as important as reviews of concert performances. In contrast, after 1848, Viennese critics wrote primarily about music performed, and often composed, in Vienna, a city that was coming to see itself as the leading center of European music. After the events of 1866 and 1870, music became increasingly central to the self-identification of Austria, and its capital, Vienna. As Martina Nussbaumer effectively demonstrates in her book *Musikstadt Wien*, the construction of Vienna as “eine Urstätte deutscher Tonkunst” gathered force and political significance as Austria’s political position as a leader of German-speaking Europe began to fade. This
meant, among other things, that music was already accumulating a political cast as a symbolically important art form associated with “Germanness” that was of interest beyond the immediate circle of active concert goers. Nevertheless, music criticism, even in regular newspapers, was quite technical and detailed and sometimes included references to particular keys and themes, or even to specific pages or measures in the score; occasionally, even musical examples were included (a practice that became a regular part of the popular discourse about music only with the rise of program notes).

The communicative function of music criticism depended on its audience in other ways. During the last third of the nineteenth century—a time when simply listening to music (not playing it oneself or encountering it as part of some other performative context, whether in worship, parade, dance, or something else) was in fact a fairly new phenomenon—music criticism was increasingly written for an audience then emerging across Europe and America largely comprised of people who listened to music in the concert hall, as opposed to those who knew music primarily from playing it or singing it themselves, or from amateur or domestic performances. Public concerts of orchestral music had come of age in London and Paris in the late eighteenth century, but standing professional orchestras that gave series of regular symphonic concerts only became established in the second third of the nineteenth century. The Musikverein building, which was and remains the most important and prestigious concert space in Vienna, was built in 1870 under the auspices of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde and was located only a few meters from the Handelsakademie, another pillar of the ascendant bourgeoisie. The institution of the late-nineteenth-century public concert, as Hanns-Werner Heister wrote, was conceived of as space in which autonomous music found its highest realization (“Realisierungsort autonomer Musik”), and thus where, according to this aesthetic ideology, art achieved its proper freedom from necessity, from explicit social function, even from any specific expressive or dramatic purpose. Yet the symphonic concert has conflicted historical roots that reach back to exclusive aristocratic events of the sort that gave rise to the symphony in the eighteenth century, as well as to the commercial popular virtuoso concerts of the early nineteenth century, which were as much populist entertainment as what we would like to call “serious music.” Latent tensions between elite and popular, between music as privileged aesthetic discourse and music as direct rhetorical appeal, between heart and brain in music (as Schoenberg was to put it much later) shaped the social nature of the concert in the time of Bruckner and Brahms, as they undoubtedly still do. In short, the
symphonic concert as a cultural form embodied many of the virtues and contradictions of the educated bourgeoisie, the social class that cultivated it in the late nineteenth century. These basic tensions can be read quite palpably in music criticism, as well as in the larger spheres of cultural politics in which they were negotiated.

An important frame of reference for any deep reading of this body of criticism, then, is the concept of the bourgeois public sphere, as established by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Habermas conceives of the bourgeois public as a “sphere of private people come together as a public” unrestricted by state power and outside the circles of family or dynastic affiliation. Here the bourgeoisie could engage in the enlightened rational debate that served as the medium of public opinion in liberal bourgeois society in the epoch following the French Revolution. This idealized conception plainly does have some applicability to Viennese music criticism, which was a forum of public opinion carried out in the daily press, the archetypical medium of the bourgeois public sphere. Yet it is necessary to consider how a range of impinging forces tempered the ideal of an imagined “free marketplace of ideas.” During the later decades of the nineteenth century, the advance of capitalism placed the unity of the bourgeoisie under considerable strain; a growing distinction arose between the “old middle class” and the “economic haute bourgeoisie,” and the independence of public opinion eroded as commercial interests increasingly penetrated the emergent mass media and public culture. This meant that a unitary public as a single unified community of bourgeois opinion could hardly exist, since competing sets of opinions and interests subsisted within the bourgeoisie itself.

Furthermore, in the musical world of Vienna, lines were blurred between public commitment and private, personal interests in ways that compromised the rationality of opinion formation. In addition, the slow tempo of Enlightenment in Austria allowed structures and, just as importantly, the mentality of the ancien régime to linger in ways that countermanded the enlightenment ideals commonly ascribed to the bourgeois public sphere. Many of the musical institutions that structured bourgeois musical life in Ringstrassenzeit Vienna, including the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, the Wiener Tonkünstlerverein, the Akademische Wagner-Verein, and the Wiener Philharmoniker, were voluntary associations of the sort that were a prime means by which the bourgeoisie realized its will to lead and structure society in this epoch. (Others were not, notably the Hofmusikkapelle and the Hofoper, both of which were linked to the court.) As Cornelia Szabó-Knotik has emphasized, the circle of musicians, critics, and patrons around Brahms,
and to a lesser extent around Bruckner, often proved crucial to the formation of public opinion. These groups may not have included many actual members of the nobility, yet their active promotion and support of new music can be seen as an “imitation” of aristocratic patrons of a century earlier. These circles also continued some of the functions of the aristocratic salons; there, in private, the essential taste-makers and shapers of musical life, who now were critics rather than aristocrats, were cultivated not simply through friendly social contact, but also by means of informal performances, rehearsals, and discussion in ways that helped form the judgments offered in the public sphere.62

The extraordinary influence exerted by the press, and by the *Neue Freie Presse* in particular, on Viennese bourgeois self-identity, taste, and cultural opinion was noted by, among others, Stefan Zweig, who wrote that “whatever appeared in the [paper’s] feuilleton seemed vouched for by the highest authority,” and Wilfred Steed, who found that “the greater part of what does duty for ‘Austrian opinion’ is dictated or suggested to the public by the editor-proprietor of the *Neue Freie Presse*.”63 In the musical arena, the influence of the press on opinion, prestige, and even repertory was known and often questioned. One persistent negative response to Brahms was, for example, that his reputation was not merely greater than merited by the qualities of his works but had been artificially trumped up by the press. (An idea mirrored strangely by Brahms’s own assertion that “Bruckner owes his fame exclusively to me. Without me no one would have given a hoot about him, but this happened very much against my will.”64) Wagner harped on this theme late in life, most notably in “Über das Dichten und Komponieren” and “Über das Opern-Dichten und Komponieren im Besonderen” (both 1879), as did Hugo Wolf, who was quite ready to believe that Brahms’s music was more or less foisted upon the concert audience because of his personal connection with critics and conductors.65 This angle was still available to Max Graf in 1900 when he opened his “Brahms-Studie” with a polemic about the antagonism between authentic modern art, which he praised for its revolutionary, metaphysical, and heroic character, and journalism, which he denigrated as superficial, shallow, and lacking any sense of the “eternal sources of art.” According to Graf, the “journalistic world” is thus naturally opposed to all modern art, excepting that of Brahms, whose work, Graf felt, did not display any of the traits of heroic modernity, and therefore received unusually strong support in the press.66

The most proximate critique, and in many ways still the most penetrating, of the role of journalism in Viennese public discourse is Karl Kraus’s. For Kraus, opposing the corrosive effects of journalism on
the social conscience and exposing the moral hypocrisy of the bourgeois press were great causes. He famously focussed attention on the crucial but often overlooked point that the press does not so much report events as create them through its coverage:

Is the press a messenger? No: it is the event. Is it speech? No: life... I therefore welcome the charge that all my life I have overestimated the press. It is not a servant—How could a servant demand and receive so much? It is the event. Once again the instrument has run away with us. We have placed the person who is supposed to report outbreaks of fire, and who ought doubtless to play the most subordinate role in the State, in power over the world, over fire and over the house, over fact and over our fantasy.  

Kraus's key insight into the function of journalistic criticism, though, may be the recognition that it substitutes linguistically expressed opinion for real experience. It thus not only short-circuits the formation of valid judgments but actually, as Walter Benjamin remarked, “paralyzed the imagination” of its readers, constraining the possibility of genuine sensuous or aesthetic experience by holding sway “over our fantasy” by isolating “information from experience.” Part of the reason that Kraus was suspicious of music criticism was because he was, as Robert Scheu once called him, the advocate for the “rights of the nerves” against “the police, press, morality, and concepts,” all of which sought to shape, mold, and prefigure moral judgment, sensory response, even experience itself. Music criticism was an early expression of the increasingly opinion-driven discourse of the press, epitomized by the feuilleton, in which opinion functions as a form of “false subjectivity that can be separated from the person and incorporated into the circulation of commodities,” independent of any real experience of the ostensible object of discussion.

All of this suggests that, through the linguistic medium of the feuilleton, music criticism enabled circuits of communication to be completed between instrumental concert music and its audience, for unlike many genres of nineteenth-century music, such as lieder, program music, and opera, symphonies and chamber music generally did not have words attached to them; indeed the identity of these genres depended on their nonverbal, “purely musical” character. This music was therefore both more open to symbolic interpretation than was vocal music, and its explanation potentially more fraught. One function of writing about this music was, then, to connect music with the verbal realm, which enabled nonmusicians, and indeed musicians themselves, to engage music with the mainstream of cultural discussion, which is
primarily verbal. This function was even more important then than it is now, for at a time when occasions to hear concert music were far more limited, words and verbal codes were more powerful in shaping the hearing and perception of music.

At times, music criticism actually seems to have been designed as a mechanism to organize, direct, and even discipline the perception of musical works. Musicologists have grown fascinated by the ways that words predicate hearing.\(^\text{71}\) It would be nice to assume that good music criticism, as one writer recently proposed, is that which intentionally “prolongs and deepens the experience of music” and “brings the reader nearer to the ineffable essence of music.”\(^\text{72}\) But this intention was by no means a given in music criticism in fin-de-siècle Vienna.\(^\text{73}\) Not only did Hanslick’s and Kalbeck’s criticism of Bruckner (like Wolf’s Brahms criticism, among others) begin from distaste for the music, as Hanslick openly admitted in his reviews of the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies, but such writing was in no small measure designed to school potential listeners in this distaste by providing verbal representations that assigned negative denotations to the wordless connotation of the music. Clearly, this criticism was often pursuing something other than what is now normally assumed, perhaps too optimistically, to be the function of what Edward Cone called the “critic proper,” namely helping “the listener consider the work in such ways as to enable him to perceive it directly for himself, independently of any interpretation.”\(^\text{74}\)

This complex set of circumstances begins to explain why Viennese music criticism so obviously flouts the widespread twentieth-century position that critical opinion is at its best relatively neutral and dispassionate, and gains validity by leaving behind narrow judgments of taste and personal prejudices in the pursuit of unbiased, “objective” understanding of an art work.\(^\text{75}\) To the contrary, the best critics, like all good feuilletonists, had what has been called “commanding subjectivism of judgment.”\(^\text{76}\) It is noteworthy that, in establishing the principles of Musikwissenschaft, Guido Adler was at pains to ensure that the music historian not “allow himself to be dragged like an everyday critic into the confusion of unstable value judgments.”\(^\text{77}\) Since even the most knowledgeable and serious of critics of the time were not ultimately pursuing the same goal as Cone’s “critic proper,” we must be a bit chary of taking their opinions and comments too directly as frank “objective” evaluations of the music without being aware of the paradox of trying to coax grand musical judgment from essayistic expressions of the moment. Yet, the virtuosity and subjectivity of criticism that colors, even discolors, its musical judgments may make those critical words all the more revealing when read in other less obvious ways.
Music Criticism and the Establishment of Austrian Bourgeois Identity

One interpretive imperative that develops from the historical critique of the fin-de-siècle Vienna paradigm is the demand that the nature and role of liberalism in the Austrian bourgeoisie be treated with renewed subtlety and historical precision. The final decades of the nineteenth century were without a question a time of fundamental change for Viennese society under the pressures of a straining empire, the increasing demands of democracy, capitalism, and technology, and the cultural, aesthetic, and psychological ramifications of the onrushing processes of modern rationalism. Unlike the aristocracy and even the proletariat, the bourgeoisie—the social group that embodied liberalism—was not a rigidly defined group; to be bourgeois was not simply a matter of birth, but also of professional attainment and social affiliation. Pieter Judson links this basic characteristic to what he calls the “associational life” of the bourgeois public sphere, which was particularly strongly formed in Vienna “institutions like the voluntary association[s] that underlay the new civil society, institutions separate from both bureaucratic state and traditional ständisch corporations.” The centrality of these associational organizations to the liberal bourgeoisie was not simply external, but structural in the strong sense of the term, for “the liberals’ worldview originated and spread largely through a particular kind of organizational experience” and “liberal assumptions about society were embedded in their very organizing structures.” In particular, they gave social expression to an essential dynamic of inclusion and exclusion, by which an individual must pass “certain threshold requirements” in order to gain the privilege of equal participation in the bourgeois public sphere. Thus the liberal construction of public citizenship carried “a distinctive combination of invisible hierarchy with proclaimed democracy.”

Because it was situated in this structural field, music criticism took part in a larger process by which contradictions and tensions inherent in both the ideology and social position of Austrian bourgeoisie were negotiated. It is hardly a surprise that the printed word would here function as an essential means of articulating and arguing—one might well say “imagining”—the terms of inclusion and exclusion in the bourgeoisie, for this was the first social class to have emerged in the age of “vernacular print capitalism,” for which journalistic discussion was a prime shaping force, and the first ruling class whose class solidarity was not primarily concrete, but achieved on an “essentially imagined basis.” When this body of music criticism is viewed from this position, it starts to fall more clearly into place as something quite different—and much
more interesting—than a conflict between liberalism and other opposed political interests; instead, it emerges as an arena for contesting an internal conflict within the Viennese bourgeoisie, and perhaps even within individuals themselves.81

Returning to the more traditional, and perhaps more Germanic, categorization of Brahms (who is arguably the central figure in the discussion) as a bürgertlich artist rather than as an essentially liberal artist is helpful as a first step in clarifying and focussing the terms of the current discourse about the cultural politics of Viennese musical life.82 In particular, it helps to move the discussion of music’s social and political dimensions beyond a series of fairly blunt binary oppositions defined by liberalism (e.g., liberal versus antiliberal, liberal versus Christian socialism and German nationalism, liberal rationality versus “sharper-key” irrationality, and so forth) toward the recognition of an array of overlapping axes of difference in which liberalism is one value among several that defined finer shades of difference and identity within the German-speaking bourgeoise of Vienna. To regard Viennese musical politics as an intramural, rather than intermural, conflict is not an entirely novel perspective; indications from the time suggest that the basic divisions were understood as part of a conflict within one larger group. This can be read, for example, from the use of the terms “pope” and “antipope” to characterize the relationship of Brahms and Bruckner. In a rather bitter series of remarks in 1895, Brahms stated: “Nietzsche once suggested that I became famous only by accident: I was needed by the anti-Wagnerians as an antipope. That is of course nonsense.”83 Brahms here refers to a passage in Nietzsche’s Der Fall Wagner (1888), in which the philosopher does suggest that Brahms’s success was circumstantial—even accidental—but Nietzsche does not use the telling term “antipope”; Brahms supplied that word himself.84 While one might take it as nothing more than a convenient metaphor to describe the figureheads of two antagonistic groups, on closer consideration it may be more than this. The Papal Schism of the fourteenth century, during which time there were two claimants to papal authority, arose not over essential issues of theology or doctrine but largely from mundane politics, and it did not, unlike the Reformation of the sixteenth century, lead to a permanent division or to theological and ecclesiastical revolution. Brahms’s usage certainly stems in part from the clear identification of Bruckner as a decidedly Catholic man and artist, something which the agnostic Brahms found alien and apparently disagreeable, yet the term also, intentionally or not, betrays a recognition that this was a struggle of two tendencies within a single “church,” namely that of Germanic symphonic music celebrated in the bourgeois concert hall.
Socially and culturally, the points of difference between Bruckner and Brahms—and just as importantly between their respective audiences and admirers—were comparatively narrow. Indeed both men were relatively typical examples of the newly emergent urban bourgeoisie of the time: both were born to relatively low social position, both consistently worked with substantial success to improve their social standing, both came to Vienna as adults to pursue a career, and both of them were rather strongly connected with the new associational and institutional structures of Vienna (from the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde to, in Bruckner’s case, the University of Vienna). Differences that carried considerable significance at the time undoubtedly did exist between the social character of the two composers: one was a native of upper Austria, and the other from Hamburg, Germany; one was a Catholic believer, and the other a skeptical Protestant; one began his musical career as an organist and church musician, and the other as a pianolion; and, to be sure, Brahms was more fully enmeshed in the social world, habits, and mindset of the gebildete, liberal bourgeoisie. These divisions, which have always been seen and often exploited to serve various agendas, appear less stark when placed against the situation of Antonín Dvořák, whose concert music and operas were beginning to gain some performances in Vienna at this time. As David Brodbeck’s recent article “Dvořák’s Reception in Liberal Vienna” highlights, real ethnic and political issues were involved. Not only was Dvořák a Czech, but a number of his works from the time made use of Czech musical elements and had titles that identified them as Czech (including Slavonic Dances, Slavonic Rhapsodies, Czech Suite, Furiant), and his music was clearly heard by German-speaking critics in Vienna as ethnic. Moreover, critical response to Dvořák’s music was inflected by the politics of Czech identity and language, which were particularly hot at this time because many German Austrians believed that the language ordinances enacted in 1880 favored Czech speakers and disadvantaged the many German speakers in Bohemia and Moravia.

Reading criticism of Bruckner and Brahms as part of a larger debate of inclusion and exclusion carried out within the circle of the Viennese German-speaking Bürgertum—rather than a debate conducted between liberals and “others”—also helps to clarify why concern tended to focus so intensely on issues that mirror deeper tensions at stake for the bourgeoisie at this time, including the claims of secular rationalism versus forms of transcendence; the elite individual versus a large, mass public, and historicism versus progress. This tension can only have intensified because both of these composers were working with roughly parallel aims, namely, to create post-Beethovenian symphonic works
adequate to their time and place. Indeed, given the very tight terms of debate, Freud’s notion of the “narcissism of small differences” can help to explain why it was so traumatic. Freud argued that when the characteristics that articulate socially decisive categories and differences are very narrow and fine, great weight is placed on defining, articulating, and claiming small points of significance. In Freud’s view, points of distinction that are very slight paradoxically pose the greatest threat to the ego’s sense of self-identity; because these are less rationally explainable, they tend to give rise to particularly sharp feelings of antagonism and expressions of aggression, which may help to explain why some critics felt the need to resort to rhetoric that would be otherwise inexplicable.

It is significant in this regard that Bruckner’s sharpest critics were Germans resident in Vienna. The stylistic constellation of rationality, which was typical of the European bourgeoisie as a whole, was somewhat less tightly woven, less inextricably bound into the social and cultural fabric in “semi-feudal Austria,” where, as Adorno emphasized, the rationality of the “laws of exchange” and its attendant “bourgeois autonomy” thrived far less than in Germany. The musical expression of high-bourgeois rationality was epitomized in many ways by Brahms, who, like Beethoven, as Adorno pointedly noted in this connection, was a German and a primary progenitor of “the rationality of integral composition” in Vienna. When Freud revived his concept of “the narcissism of minor differences” in Civilization and Its Discontents (1930), he specifically identified animosity and ridicule between South Germans and North Germans as a classic example of the way small differences could inspire aggression. In recent musicological writing, the tendency has been to consider the strongest divide to be that between German and non-German, a category that is often considered to have been defined by anti-Semitic distinctions. This system of inclusion and exclusion did have a real presence in nineteenth-century thinking and was of course drawn with growing extremity in the early twentieth century, yet in the late nineteenth century, the distinction within German-speaking central Europe between Protestant Germany and Catholic Austria was also potent. Criticism of Bruckner and Brahms was especially filled with references to these religious types; Bruckner himself once wryly put it in these terms to his friend Anton Meißner: “You see, Anton, we both have fiery natures and are Catholics. Brahms is for cold natures and Protestants!”

The contrast between the climate of opinion in Vienna and Germany was, as we saw at the start of this essay, pointedly noted at the time, and while it may seem odd that Bruckner was initially accepted more readily outside of Vienna than in it, this pattern of response actually becomes quite understandable when seen in its immediate social
context. The individuals involved in ongoing critical discussions in Vienna were enmeshed in a remarkably tight network of personal connections that meant that these critics were often not reviewing performances of works by unfamiliar composers given by unfamiliar celebrities but music composed and performed by men they knew. Given the narrow social circles of musicians in Vienna, this meant that personalities and personal issues inevitably influenced critical opinion. To judge by the meanness of many of his private comments, Brahms felt a sense of uneasy symphonic rivalry with Bruckner; his repeated comments to Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, Richard Specht, Max Kalbeck, and others that Bruckner's music was a "swindle," among other disparagements, are ample evidence of this. What is less widely recognized is that this scornful attitude must have been at least partially a result of rivalrous anxiety toward a composer who was beginning to succeed with his symphonies, the genre most important to the self-definition of any German-speaking composer who aspired to greatness and in which Brahms admittedly struggled. Bruckner suspected that Brahms's attitudes toward other composers were based in part on his feelings of insecurity; he said of Dvořák that he was a "talent," but that "Brahms knows full well that Dvořák can never become a danger to him," an attitude that was neatly (and implausibly) inverted by Kalbeck, who defended Brahms from the charge that he acted out of anxiety by pointing out "the exceptional magnanimous way he sought to promote Anton [sic] Dvořák, who must have seemed a much more dangerous rival than Bruckner." No matter how one gauges the potential threat to Brahms posed by Dvořák, the chronology of performances of Bruckner's music and critical responses to it in the mid-1880s suggest that his ascent caused some discomfort in Brahms's circle. The successful premiere of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony in Leipzig on 30 December 1884 seems to have aroused negative feelings in Brahms; his sour comments to Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, who had attended the Leipzig concert, are remarkable in this regard, especially since, as August Göllerich and Max Auer pointed out, at this time Brahms could not have heard nor seen the Seventh Symphony! The performance of the Seventh Symphony in Hamburg, Brahms's hometown, on 19 February 1886, a month before the Viennese premiere, had garnered a big, rather positive review in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, as well as the unexpected admiration of Eduard Marxsen, Brahms's old teacher; this can only have fueled the angst of Brahms and his circle before the Viennese premiere of the work on 21 March, especially coming on the heels of the Viennese premiere of his own Fourth Symphony on 17 January 1886, which was somewhat coolly received.
Reading Music Criticism Again

It remains to return to the criticism of Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony, with which the essay began, and to read it in ways that go beyond the fin-de-siècle Vienna paradigm, not to reject or to try to refute this paradigm—it has far too much historical relevance and critical power for that—but to think against it in order to supplement it, even at times to subvert it, in the pursuit of clearer, fuller insight. I want to get back to the words of Bruckner’s critics and the music they describe. In particular, I am interested in reading through the overt level of musical judgment and explanation offered in these texts in order to begin to grasp more firmly how they encoded cultural critique. My approach is indebted to Hayden White’s argument that readings of historical writing can work to expose the “deep structure of the historical imagination” by reaching beneath the “manifest content” of a text to its “understructure,” a level that exists prior to conscious decision and “prefigures” historical understanding.102 By focussing on moments of extreme, critical rhetoric in Bruckner reviews—for it is at those moments that criticism is most likely to convey unspoken, and perhaps unspeakable, cultural assumptions and prejudices—it is, I believe, possible to begin to uncover layers of meaning lying behind the overt critical text and reconstruct ways in which music was heard to articulate these meanings.

One piece of the “understructure” of this discourse that emerges with particular frequency and force in such a reading is the setting of boundaries for inclusion and exclusion in the invisible hierarchy of bourgeois identity. The most important axis of difference was the possession of adequate faculties of reason and, perhaps more subtly, a commitment to treating what Max Weber called Zweckrationalität (instrumental rationality) as a crucial basis of judgments of utility and social value.103 The valorization of reason was of course a hallmark of liberalism since the Enlightenment, when it was first established that reason should be the guiding principle of civil society and that the ability to reason was an essential characteristic of humanity; yet nineteenth-century liberalism, which depended evermore on maintaining a threshold of inclusion in an age of gradually increasing democratization of all phases of culture, needed to define reason against its other; therefore, as Judson wrote, liberalism “implicitly posited the existence of a potentially darker side to human existence, a realm of unreason.”104 It cannot be a mere coincidence that the concerted criticism of Bruckner by liberal Viennese critics devolved on accusations that his music was illogical, irrational, and representative of nonrational states of consciousness including drunkenness, dreams, religious mysticism, or Wagnerian Wahn.105
Anxiety about rational regulation and control was a motive force in Viennese society. As Peter Vergo pointed out, “The Habsburg concept of dynastic power was inextricably linked with the ideals of stability and the preservation of the existing order”; these were ideals that existed very concretely in the structures of “official” life in Vienna . . . regulated down to the most minute details,” from which “the unforeseen, the irrational was excluded,” if only ostensibly. Stefan Zweig, looking back through rose-tints in the 1940s, mythologized this sentiment: “In this vast empire everything stood firmly and immovably in its appointed place . . . nothing would change in the well-regulated order. . . . All that was radical, all violence, seemed impossible in an age of reason.” Despite Zweig’s sentimental view, the social and bureaucratic apparatus of the late-nineteenth-century Habsburg bourgeoisie was hardly a paragon of rationality, but was rather baroque in its intricacy. Moreover, a sense has long persisted that the official structures of the late Habsburg Empire existed in a never fully reconciled tension with the deeper grain of Viennese life, which was infused with a respect for, even an affiliation with, those nonrational, mysterious, fateful, sublime, and sensuous dimensions of human existence that rationalism has always found hard to encompass. As a result, an uneasy relationship, which was figured in many different ways—between order and disorder, between the regulated and the anarchical, between reason and instinct, to name a few—manifested itself both culturally and psychologically. This unresolved equation was soon to form the seedbed, to take a very powerful instance, of Freud’s theory of the unconscious, which is a sophisticated model of the interactions of the controlling (Superego) and the uncontrollable (Id). Something similar was behind Max Weber’s famous comments, born of a different German context, at the end of The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism about the threat of an “iron cage” forged by the force of the unchecked “ascetic rationalism” inherent in capitalism as he saw it.

In music criticism, this fundamental duality was expressed in various terms, often deploying conceptual pairs such as logic versus inspiration, tradition versus innovation, and natural versus unnatural. Conventional bourgeois values fell quite clearly on one side of this equation and were voiced emphatically in complaints about Bruckner’s music concerning its apparent formlessness, reliance on repetition, chaotic structure, and disturbing desire to contaminate symphonic music with theatrical elements, all of which climaxed in declarations that Bruckner was “by far the most dangerous of musical innovators” or “an anarchist who pitilessly sacrifices everything that is called logic and clarity of development.” In this discussion, the value of rationality had special salience and was repeatedly at issue for Bruckner’s critics. It
often served as an emblem of the bourgeois value system, as part of what Hermann Broch described as the congeries of value that formed the “conditions of the style or non-style of the nineteenth century, in which rationalism, individualism, historicism, romanticism, eclecticism, skepticism are all embedded and sustained in a kind of Manchesterism calculated for all eternity, all converging in an inextricable bond, yet each retaining an organic unity.”111 Much of the resistance and even animosity Bruckner aroused went right back to competing concepts, which were probably not consciously articulated, of rationality and its role in artistic creation and reception. This was the reason why, for one segment of the audience, Bruckner’s symphonies were, as Johannes-Leopold Mayer suggested, “a public nuisance,” and why, as Carl Dahlhaus once observed, those “who felt at home in the Brahms camp” found in this music “the basic axioms of musical thought threatened, even more so than by Wagner.”112

Yet one cannot justifiably deny—notwithstanding the critics eager to do so—that Bruckner’s compositional approach was rational, for it was, even to a fault. He had devoted several years in his early adulthood to the study of the discipline of counterpoint under Simon Sechter, and in his 1876 inaugural address, upon his appointment to the University of Vienna faculty, Bruckner declared his commitment to a “science of music” that analyzes music to its “elements” and “atoms.”113 Yet in Bruckner’s oeuvre, rationalism was applied to the production of musical works not aimed primarily at the ideals of organic unity in the service of subjectively expressive, historicist romanticism, but rather to artistic effects that ultimately reach beyond the merely reasonable or logical, whether to the sublime, the awesome, or the Absolute. The achievement of such an artistic impression called upon a second order of logic, which, as Broch pointed out, could be traced back to the high Middle Ages, “which were theologically at least as rational as modern science—even magic has rational foundations, all the more so a mysticism in the mold of Eckhart—and were nevertheless far removed from any kind of individualism, romanticism, or decorativism.”114

One palpable manifestation of these different orders of musical rationality subsists in differing attitudes to the sensuous nature of music. Max Weber identified “Protestant asceticism” as a fundamental element of the “the spirit of capitalism” and believed that by the end of the nineteenth century an emerging form of “ascetic rationalism” was exerting widespread influence on social ethics and the “plastic elements of modern culture” alike.115 Nietzsche had not so long before written about “the desensualization of modern art.”116 The increasing presence of asceticism in the project of modernity has, I think, been well
established, but again here some of the Viennese cultural strains—undoubtedly stemming from a Catholic culture of plasticity and incarnation—cut against this and were at issue in Bruckner's music and its reception. This may be identified provisionally as what Adorno called the "sensuous culture of Vienna" with its "intense delight in pleasure," which in music was embodied by "a certain luxuriant lushness of harmonic feeling, a sense of letting the sounds melt on the tongue and an enjoyment of dissonance." For Bruckner, this harmonic sensibility could overrule the rules of strict style and conventional harmonic syntax; indeed, at times it seems that for Bruckner, far from determining the inexorable unfolding of things as fixed laws, musical rules existed in order to be bent or even trespassed artfully.

Bruckner's approach, which reflects a possibly unexpected dose of irony together with a Catholic sensibility that the human transgression of certain rules is quite inevitable but can be forgiven, is rather different. It may not submit easily to the rules, be it the rule of counterpoint, "good taste," or social convention; but it does not, however, try determinedly to break them down, to revolutionize them, or discard them for some sort of anarchical utopia. Rather, it seeks chinks in the system and finds opportunity in them for expression and pleasure. A direct appeal to Michel Foucault is hardly necessary to identify pleasure, musical or otherwise, with the rule of self-control, to suggest that pleasure arises dialectically from regulation and discipline, that libertinism and permissive behavior exist only in tandem with their opposites, and that, in both bourgeois and Christian morality, pleasure is often linked with illicit conduct and transgression. A distinctive relationship of regulation and control was inherent in the cultural attitude that grew up within the Lebenswelt of the old Habsburg Empire, with its legendarily complex set of structures based on absolutism, religious dogma, and baroque ceremony. The rules of this empire were notoriously brittle and only grew more so as modernity increasingly permeated Austria after 1848; to abide by that system must have entailed a degree of good-spirited tolerance for the absurd, along with a skillful pleasure in skirting the official rules of a system of rigid, intricately involved regulation, which one has no interest (nor any real possibility) of escaping, let alone overthrowing, yet which cannot be followed slavishly. This is obviously quite different from a system that esteems the authentic adherence (authentic both literally and existentially) to the rule of law.

One example of how this all played out musically may be found in the dominant preparation that precedes the third theme in the first movement of the Seventh Symphony (mm. 103–22), which achieves magnificent effect with elegance of means, exploiting a prolonged,
luxuriantly dissonant sonority that inhabits a gray area between long-held harmonic suspension and extended tertian harmony (see Ex. 1). This passage was not much discussed at the time (nor has it been by present-day writers), yet it did excite the attention of three great music theorists—August Halm, Heinrich Schenker, and Ernst Kurth—early in the twentieth century, each of whom proposed rather different interpretations of it. For Halm, this passage was no ordinary organ point, nor an “eleventh chord,” but “the most grandiose of dominant effects” (“die grandioseste Dominantwirkung”) intensified by multilayered suspensions into “a phenomenon of tension, indeed of triumphant, jubilant tensile strength” (“ein Phänomen von Spannung, ja von triumphierender, jauchzender Spannkraft”). Schenker, not surprisingly, was far more resistant; at one point, he referred to it as an example of a bad, “unzeitgemäß” organ point that appears artificially like a “deus ex machina.” He observed that in this passage, Bruckner pushed the limits of tertian chordal construction so hard that when the pitch F-sharp, which is the root of the dominant chord, arrives in the upper voice it appears paradoxically as the seventh of G-sharp (see m. 115). Kurth echoed this point as he noted that this passage had more to do with “gravitational dissonance” (“typische Schwerkraftsdissonanzen”) than actual harmonic suspension. More salient to the present discussion than the nuances of how these theorists attended to the harmonic and tonal nature of this passage is that each of them paid special attention to this passage and was interested in the ways in which it exploited a kink in the harmonic system. Furthermore, Bruckner’s symphonic design plays on a different order of ambiguity—or, better, singularity—gesturally and functionally; such an extraordinarily strong lead-in threatens to dwarf the slender theme (which ordinarily should be more noteworthy than its preparation) that follows, and, even though it is a highly distinctive thematic idea in its own right, the gesture of this preparatory dominant is not accounted for in the recapitulation.

An even more significant example for the present discussion, partly because of the remarkable words about it offered by Gustav Dömpke, is the brief transition from the first theme to the second theme in the Adagio of this symphony (see Ex. 2). In the review in which he declared that Bruckner composes “like a drunkard,” Dömpke also wrote this:

At the end of the first section [of the Adagio], the composer tries to shock us with a particularly audacious combination. He mixes bass [and Wagner] tubas with horns and lets them execute the most hair-raising, chromatic, divergent progressions possible. We truly shudder from the
Example 1. Continued
putrid odor that the discords of this putrefaction-crazed counterpoint force into our noses.\footnote{122}

These bars, which are certainly impressive, cannot be missed by anyone who hears the symphony, yet have not received much attention from recent commentators (Robert Simpson hardly mentioned them, nor did Wolfram Steinbeck or Stephen Parkany).\footnote{123} Neither Hanslick nor Kalbeck commented on this passage, while Helm heard this music as spooky, but neither threatening nor repugnant: “The sonic effect of the tubas in Bruckner’s Adagio is indescribable. Sometimes they make one shiver, as if from being spooked; for example, in the four bars, which sound like a sigh from the grave, before the entry of the Gesangsperiode in F-sharp major.”\footnote{124}

Paumgartner was hardly alarmed by them: “The first horn leads mysteriously from the main theme to the second theme, pianissimo and accompanied by the four [Wagner] tubas and the contrabass tuba, which descends into the darkest depths.”\footnote{125}

This music evidently was not universally outrageous to its first audiences, which makes the extremity of Dömpke’s visceral reaction all the more significant. In part, Dömpke must have been responding to the passage’s perceived Wagnerian identity (in addition to the prominent use of Wagner tubas, its chromatically altered harmony was of a sort often heard as Wagnerian at this time), the rejection of which was a linchpin in Hanslick’s refusal of Bruckner’s style.\footnote{126} These bars do present an intense, dissonant sonority—derived from an augmented sixth chord, intoned by Wagner tubas against a chromatic motif in the
horns—that prolongs harmonic tension to almost extravagant length (often more than twenty seconds in performance), emphasizes its dissonances, and resolves to splendid, unexpected effect, ushering in a songful, attractive, strongly contrasting theme group.\textsuperscript{127} Despite this unconventional treatment, it is certainly possible to construct an interpretation of this passage that emphasizes its stylistic authenticity and musical logic. Prolonging a dominant function for dramatic and expressive effect was a long-established trump card of nineteenth-century symphonism, having been treated with great power by Beethoven; thus one could well judge that Bruckner was extending, elaborating, and intensifying a possibility inherent in the tradition in which he was working. The passage under discussion can also be accounted for nicely as part of a network of important cadential progressions that occur across the symphony, systematically deploying strongly “gravitational” secondary dominants and protean augmented-sixth chords to support the larger design of the symphony. For example, Bruckner introduces the emphatic C-minor arrival, at m. 233, of the first movement with a clear applied dominant, while he is content to introduce the two most important returns of the tonic key later in the movement (mm. 281 and 391) with unconventional chromatic motion.\textsuperscript{128} The augmented sixth chord that agonized Dömpke is only one of a series of such chords that serve as the pivots of important formal hinges in this symphony. The first chord (first movement, mm. 47–50) presents the chord as the harmonization of one of the work’s most important intervallic cells (the chromatic-neighbor tone motif, C–B–A-sharp) to introduce that movement’s secondary theme group (see Ex. 3). The main theme of the

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Adagio features an augmented sixth chord in its first measure (see Ex. 4), and the spectacular climax late in that movement is based on the most fundamental of augmented sixth progressions (mm. 176–77). The Finale penultimately culminates in a progression that resolves, although obliquely, the augmented sixth chord introduced in the first movement to the tonic key (see Ex. 5).

Yet the very distinctive sensuous impact of the passage in the Adagio—and all that was denoted by its unabashed luxuriating in special timbres and dissonances—must have troubled the ascetic rationalism of Dömpke’s ear more deeply than any explanation could
overcome. The possibility that these bars could be taken by many listeners as splendidly justified, both aesthetically and stylistically, challenged him to represent them in terms of the most immediate sensory experience of physical revulsion—a repugnant odor—so as to render in words the depth and intensity of his rejection of this music and its all too powerful aesthetic presence. The imputation of a repellent smell to Bruckner’s music was extreme but not unprecedented; Kalbeck referred to the odor of “Bengali fire” (a type of sulfurous firework) that hung about the Finale of the Seventh Symphony, and in his 1885 review of the Quintet for Strings in F, he described Bruckner’s music as redolent of “the perfume of heavenly roses and the stink of hellish sulfur,” lacking only the waft of incense to complete the mystical experience. Likewise, Dömpke’s clear implication that Bruckner’s music was sick and corrupted was not new; Hanslick declared that he found the Seventh Symphony “unnaturally bloated, morbid and pernicious” and filled with “fevered overexcitement,” while Kalbeck asserted that the symphony had been created out of the “dead and mutilated remains of an old world dedicated to ruin” (“die todten und verstümmelten Überreste einer dem Untergang geweihten alten Welt”). This sort of cant, especially if contrasted with repeated references to the healthiness of Brahms’s music, exploits rhetoric that soon became a mainstay of cultural pessimism, as well as racist and anti-Semitic propaganda; it is remarkable to see ostensibly “liberal” critics hauling out verbal weapons that would seem more at home in reactionary screeds. In fact, these verbal attacks on Bruckner evince some odd parallels with Wagner’s ranting in “Das Judentum in der Musik,” most notably by harping on Bruckner’s supposedly all but parasitical dependence on the music of Beethoven and Wagner himself, in a way that strangely mirrors Wagner’s infamous denunciation of Jewish musicians not only for writing crassly derivative music, but also for failing to be genuinely creative. Consider in this connection Kalbeck’s assertion that the Seventh Symphony could exist only “by the grace of its great predecessors” and was finally “nothing more than an impromptu comedy of stock figures, attractive and repulsive by turns; a brightly colored picture painted with motives from Beethoven and Wagner,” with an Adagio that was “a timid schematic copy of the Adagio of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with the free employment of Beethovenian and Wagnerian melodies.”

This vein of criticism is hard to square with a reading of these critics as “liberal” in any full sense of the term, yet it is quite consistent with a reading of this criticism as part of a larger struggle over the self-identity of the Austrian bourgeoisie. As Ann Laura Stoller argues, “The discourse of degeneracy” was less a “vehicle of bourgeois empowerment”
than an “expression of ‘social anxiety,’ ‘internal disorder,’ and political fear.”133 Within the context of Viennese musical politics, this perspective makes a great deal of sense, as this language was used to dismiss music that was distasteful, yet contained an undeniable power to move audiences and, even more disturbingly, to touch and move the violently resisting critic. This may help account for the apparatus of restraint, often repressive or even punitive (recall Kraus’s evocation of medieval instruments of torture), occasionally brought to bear in resisting Bruckner’s music.

The phase of Bruckner’s critical reception I have been discussing was precisely coincident in time and place with the founding declaration of musicology, Guido Adler’s “Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft,” in which Adler actively contested the unhistorical, subjective mode of criticism that prevailed in the leading genres of feuilletonistic criticism of the time.134 In so doing he joined a battle over musical discipline and enjoyment, or what Suzanne Marchand has called the process of “professionalizing the senses” that developed in the field of academic historical criticism and attempted to “consider music from a standpoint disabused of subjective judgments based on taste or politics.”135 Ian Biddle recently suggested that Adler “aimed squarely at wresting the study of music from the amateur, from that ‘lover’ of music, the hopeless enthusiast.”136 These terms can apply almost directly to Hanslick’s criticism of Bruckner, and a similar impulse was expressed with greater crudity, one might say, by Hanslick’s acolytes Kalbeck and Dömpke. Biddle states, rightly in my judgment, that Adler’s project is not “usefully characterised simply as a disavowal or an elaborated Puritanism in the face of popular enthusiasm,” but it is hard to judge some criticism of Bruckner as anything but that. Indeed, rather than attempting to develop a disciplined and therefore ultimately an appreciated, enjoyable way of hearing this music, dismissive criticism of the sort that Gutmann reproduced in his advertisement was intended to demean and defuse this music, to provide listeners a way of hearing it that negates its power by constructing its innovations as dangerous, delusional, and deceitful, but emphatically not as legitimately powerful or genuinely effective.

Bruckner worried that the aggressive, coordinated criticism of Hanslick and his allies had “ruined” some of his symphonies for posterity.137 Perhaps he had some cause for concern. The afterlife of this body of criticism has been surprisingly strong, especially in the Anglo-American realm, where Hanslick and Schenker are securely placed among the most foundational commentators on nineteenth-century instrumental music, and where prevalent views of Bruckner remain tinged by presumptions traceable to criticism from the 1880s and 1890s. One conventional position, as a perusal of leading American
music-history textbooks will reveal, is that his symphonies are not well
structured, derivative of Beethoven and Wagner, expressive of mystical
states, and unduly infused with theatrical elements. Bruckner’s place
in the performance repertories of American and British orchestras may
have become quite solid, yet the relative absence of his work from the
canon (to evoke the famous distinction Joseph Kerman drew), from
textbook anthologies and, in train, syllabi is still very much with us. In a
certain sense, within the rails of the musicological, enjoying Bruckner,
and even more, taking him quite seriously, is matter of “enjoying the
other” and thus cutting against some of the usual disciplinary
restraints. Perhaps this enjoyment thus gains a bit of freedom not
available when enjoying the canonized saints of the realm, and perhaps
this may produce a charge of a sort that can help rearrange some of the
discipline’s established patterns of judgment and evaluation.

Likewise, understanding of the culture of fin-de-siècle Vienna has
been both empowered and constrained by the historical and interpretive
paradigms that have grown up with it over the last two generations.
Judson’s call for the “study of Vienna 1900” to work to “recover the
intricate genealogies of political mobilization and cultural explosion of
the Austrian fin de siècle” while stimulating “a greater recognition of the
complex and influential liberal legacy to Central European politics and
culture” can be answered in the field of music by teasing out the under-
currents of music and criticism in ways that challenge the canonical
lines in interpretation. Opening new, more intricate, and more incisive
paths—as I hope to have done in this article—through this field, in
which politics and aesthetics often cross at strange angles, can only help
further renovate and complicate our understanding of fin-de-siècle
Vienna and of ourselves, both as musicologists and as heirs of liberal
bourgeois culture. Approaching the topic in this way, especially to the
extent that current views of liberalism are implicated in it, may make
the project a bit less comfortable, for we cannot distance ourselves from
it quite so easily, but sometimes, as in antagonistic Bruckner reviews,
critical discomfort generates real insight, intentionally or otherwise.

Notes
Benjamin M. Korstvedt is the George N. and Selma U. Jeppson Professor of Music at
Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, and a former senior fellow at the
Internationale Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften in Vienna. He is the author of
Bruckner: Symphony No. 8 (2000) and most recently Listening for Utopia in Ernst Bloch’s
Musical Philosophy (2010). He has worked extensively with the music of Anton
Bruckner and has published articles on Bruckner’s symphonies, their textual history,
and their reception in both fin-de-siècle Vienna and Nazi Germany. He is also the
editor of the first modern edition of the 1888 version of Bruckner’s Fourth Symphony, which is published in the Bruckner Collected Works edition (2004) and has been widely performed and recorded. Email: bkorstvedt@clarku.edu.

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Gutmann, who published Bruckner’s Quintet (1884) and Fourth Symphony (1890) in addition to the Seventh (1885), was a remarkably enterprising impresario as well as publisher; see Leon Botstein’s comments in “Music and Its Public: Habits of Listening and the Crisis of Musical Modernism in Vienna, 1870–1914” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1985), 732–35.

2. “Es wirkte wie ein Beckenschlag. Ungeheures Aufsehen war die Folge.” Ernst Decsey, Bruckner: Versuch eines Lebens (Berlin: Schuster & Loeffler, 1920), 94. Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the author. Decsey’s words not only literally echo Gutmann’s comments quoted below but also allude to the cymbal crash that marks the climax of the Adagio of this symphony. In the 1940s, the authenticity of this cymbal crash became the subject of dispute (now essentially resolved in favor of its authenticity), but in 1920 Decsey would not have doubted its legitimacy.


4. Constantin Floros, Anton Bruckner: Persönlichkeit und Werk (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2004), 56. Reading this letter in emotional, personally tragic terms has a long, contorted history that includes, in addition to genuine as well as maudlin biographical sympathy, an address Joseph Goebbels gave in 1937 as part of the ceremonies surrounding the Nazi enshrinement of a marble bust of Bruckner in the Ruhmeshalle der Deutschen in Wallhalla. Goebbels declared that, given the ways in which “intellectual carpet-baggers . . . misused their esteemed station as judges” to condemn his music, “one can understand the shocking document written in Bruckner’s hand that is held today in the archives of the Vienna Philharmonic.” Goebbels, who misidentified the date of the letter as 1884, saw it as a clear demonstration of a German genius pushed over the brink by “bitterness” and “emotional anguish,” and he considered it one more piece of historical justification for his own 1936 ban on the publication of art criticism. See “Joseph Goebbels’s Bruckner Address in Regensburg (6 June 1937),” trans. John Michael Cooper, Musical Quarterly 78 (1994): 605–9.

5. Karl Kraus, “Anton Bruckners Bittschrift,” Die Fackel 223–24, 12 April 1907, 1–3. Strictly speaking, Kraus published a facsimile and transcription of Bruckner’s draft of the letter, which had been given to him by an unidentified former student of Bruckner. This text differs in some details from the final letter, but not in its basic import. The text of the actual letter was not published until 1924, when it appeared in two editions.


27. See, for example, Notley’s review of statements by Brahms that “we would consider to be in poor taste, if not outright anti-Semitic” in Lateness and Brahms, 20–21, as well as Jan Swafford’s in Johannes Brahms: A Biography (New York, Knopf, 1997), 426–27, and Daniel Beller-McKenna’s discussion of Brahms’s sympathy for Prussian nationalism and militarism in “The Triumphlied, Op. 55, and the Apocalyptic Moment,” in his Brahms and the German Spirit (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 98–132.


29. Harten concluded that thirty-three of these critics were more positive than negative and that, of the reviewers active during the 1880s, when Bruckner’s reputation was being forged, the truly negatively disposed critics in fact comprised only Hanslick, Kalbeck, and Dömpke. (Heuberger’s attitude was similar but he was active only from 1890.) Nor did Harten find clear correspondence between sympathy for Wagner and for Bruckner. All of this suggests that, in their musical opinions, critics did not directly channel individual political orientation or the politics of the newspapers for which they wrote. Harten’s study is reported in “Round Table: Bruckner und die österreichische Presse,” in Bruckner-Symposion: Bruckner-Rezeption 1991, ed. Othmar Wessely (Linz: Kommisionsverlag, 1994), 93–98. McColl’s detailed summary of the social and political profiles of the various Viennese newspapers in Music Criticism in Vienna 1896–97 is also relevant here.

Examples of unsympathetic responses to Bruckner in German nationalist papers can also be found, including Frank Gehring’s complaint in the Deutsche Zeitung that the Fourth Symphony was “nothing but decorative music to which the form of the classical symphony was applied in a rough and ready way”; quoted by Andrea Harrandt in “Bruckner in Vienna,” in The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner, ed. John Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32.
30. I refer to Cook’s *The Schenker Project: Culture, Race, and Music Theory in Fin-de-siècle Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Kevin C. Karnes’s *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History: Shaping Modern Musical Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), as well as Notley’s *Lateness and Brahms*, and Botstein’s writings on Brahms and his milieu, including “Time and Memory: Concert Life, Science, and Music in Brahms’s Vienna,” and “Brahms and His Audience: The Late Viennese Years, 1875–1897.”


36. Shedel, “Fin de Siècle or Jahrhundertwende,” 83.


39. Schorske coined the phrase the liberals’ “extrusion from political power” in *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, xxvii. This unusual term was discussed by both Scott Spector, in “Marginalization: Politics and Culture beyond ‘Fin-de-Siècle Vienna,’” in *Rethinking Vienna 1900*, 13, and Boyer, “Review: Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*,” 725.

40. This is Shedel’s central point in “Fin de Siècle or Jahrhundertwende.”


43. Judson, “Rethinking the Liberal Legacy,” 62 and 63, respectively.

44. Shedel, “Fin de Siècle or Jahrhundertwende,” 98; also see Carl Schorske, “Grace and the Word.”

45. Judson, “Rethinking the Liberal Legacy,” 76.

46. Cook’s both The Schenker Project and Karnes’s Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History seem to be inspired by a somewhat similar impulse.


48. Hirschfeld, “Musikalische Kritik in der Wiener Zeitung,” Jubiläumsnummer der Wiener Zeitung, 1703–1903 (8 August 1903): 60. This phrase, which obviously plays off of Hanslick’s musical ideal of “töndend bewegten Formen,” was chosen by Sandra McColl as the title of her book, Critically Moving Forms.


Peter Vergo similarly identified a “certain delight in the persecution of the great, the kind of popular scandal that is expressed by the specifically Viennese word Hetz (a hunt or chase).” *Art in Vienna, 1898–1918*, 2nd ed. (London: Phaidon, 1981), 16.

52. The most prominent of these journals were German, including the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, founded by Robert Schumann in 1834 and the *Berliner Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* founded by A. B. Marx in 1824. During the era of Bruckner and Brahms, Vienna had several such journals, including *Deutsche Kunst- und Musikzeitung* (1874–1902), *Musikalische Rundschau* (1885–94), *Österreichische Musik- und Theater-Zeitung* (1888–1905), *Neue Musikalische Presse* (1892–1909).


54. This topic has been discussed in detail by Leon Botstein in “Music and Its Public” and “Listening through Reading: Musical Literacy and the Concert Audience,” *Nineteenth-Century Music* 16 (1992): 129–45.


57. See, for example, Nancy Fraser’s “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 109–42, esp. 111–17. Also see Norley’s comments in *Lateness and Brahms*, 158–59.


60. The classic study of this phenomenon in the wider European context is Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).


69. Scheu is quoted in Benjamin, “Karl Kraus,” 438.


71. Peter J. Rabinowitz considers that “what you hear and experience is largely dependent upon the presuppositions with which you approach it, and . . . those presuppositions are to a generally unrecognized degree verbal in origin.” “Chord and Discourse: Listening Through the Written Word,” in Music and Text: Critical Inquiries, ed. Steven Paul Scher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 39. Or, as Carolyn Abbate has it: “Our experience of the musical works is, of course, conditioned by verbal codes . . . so that any attempt to separate writing about music from music itself is futile.” Unsung Voices (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 18.


73. Also, despite what we might assume, reviews were not invariably based upon actual reportage. Kalbeck’s review of Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony was not in fact a report on the concert, which the critic did not attend because of illness. Rather, his strongly negative review, which appeared thirteen days after the event, was not directly stimulated by the performance but by Hanslick’s urgent request, made on the day that Gutmann’s flyer was published, that Kalbeck not fail to add his voice to the discussion of the “wild Bruckner concert.” “In dem wilden ‘Bruckner’-Concert darf Ihre Stimme nicht fehlen!”; quoted in Franz Scheder, Anton Bruckner Chronologie: Textband
(Tutzing: Schneider, 1996), 499. Reading between the lines of Kalbeck’s review, it does seem to have been based on a reading of the score and, presumably, of other reviews.


77. “Der Musikhistoriker darf sich nicht wie der Tageskritiker in das Gewirre labiler Wertbemessungen hineinzerren lassen.” Guido Adler, *Methode der Musikgeschichte* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1919), 52. Also see Suzanne Marchand, “Professionalizing the Senses: Art and Music History in Vienna, 1890–1920,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 21 (1985): 44–45. The legacy of Hanslick’s approach to music history and aesthetics, and Adler’s response to it, has most recently been discussed by Kevin C. Karnes in Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History, which unfortunately was published only after the present article was essentially conceived and written.


81. To take this position, I might add, is to return to something that was inherent in Carl Schorske’s original formulation of the crisis of fin-de-siècle Vienna, which has been lost in some later appropriations. Schorske’s first great essay on the topic, “Politics and the Psyche: Schnitzler and Hofmannstahl,” which was published as early as 1961 and was later used as the first chapter of his famous book, clearly constructs the essential cultural dynamic as a crisis of liberal Viennese culture in which competing forces were played out not so much politically, but within a social class and even within the psyche of the individual.


The term “antipope” had already been in occasional circulation in Viennese music criticism; the earliest relevant use of the terms I have located is in an unsigned review of the First Symphony published in the Wiener Abendpost on 30 December 1876: “Es gibt eine nichts weniger als geringfügige Gemeinde, die an eine Mission dieses Mannes glaubt und—sei es aus Ueberzeugung, sei es, weil man wider Päpste auch in Musik am bequemsten mit Gegenpäpste spielt—den Geruch einer besonderen Kunstheiligkeit um ihn verbreitet. Für sie ist eine neue Notenreihe von seiner Hand gleichbedeutend mit einer neuen Offenbarung, ein Gegenstand visionärer Ahnungen und brünstiger Verehrung,” quoted in “Kritiken zu zeitgenössischen Aufführungen der ersten Symphonie von Johannes Brahms,” in Brahms-Kongreß, Wien 1983, 495. In an 1891 review of Brahms’s Alto Rhapsody, Ludwig Speidel recalled that the art historian Thausing, who had died in 1884, once managed to say to Brahms, “You are only the vice-Meister; when the Meister (namely Richard Wagner) is dead, then you shall be the Meister” (“plegte zu Brahms zu sagen: ‘Sie sind nur der Vizemeister; wenn der Meister (nämlich Richard Wagner) einmal todt ist, dann sind Sie der Meister’”); quoted in Charlotte Pinter, “Ludwig Speidel als Musikkritiker” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Vienna, 1949), 576.


My juxtaposition of liberalism and “others” echoes Notley’s title, “Brahms as Liberal, Bruckner as Other.” It also reflects Szabó-Knotik’s apparently unrelated discussion of what she terms the “successful othering” of Bruckner by which the “respective standing” of Brahms and Bruckner “in the culturally trend-setting Viennese society of their day has shaped the image of them that has been handed down to this very day” since “the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion . . . shapes the historical narrative meant to describe aesthetic qualities on which the canonization as a master of the musical universe seems to be based. This means that while Anton Bruckner has in the meantime received his place in the musical museum . . . his social marginalization is still relevant whenever biographical details come into play.” See Szabó-Knotik, “The Universe of Master Composers: Strategies of Networking and Gendering in Ringstrassenzeit Vienna’s/Western Music Life,” spacesofidentity.net, vol. 4, no. 1 (April 2004), http://www.yorku.ca/soi/_Vol_4_1/_HTML/Szabo-Knotik.html (12 April 2007).

The classic statement of the psychology of conflicts that devolve on small differences occurs in Freud’s 1917 paper “The Taboo of Virginity,” in which he argues that it is precisely “the small differences” among the otherwise similar “that cause feelings of strangeness and animosity between them” (“dass gerade die kleinen Unterschiede bei sonstiger Ähnlichkeit die Gefühle von Fremdheit und Feindseligkeit zwischen ihnen
89. Kalbeck, Dömpke, and Brahms were all German-born, while Hanslick was a native of Prague.


91. Adorno contrasts this with a distinctive Viennese approach that did not play by the rules of that musical rationality in which “nothing is left to chance and everything unfolds according to fixed laws,” but instead had a rather more “playful” attitude to the rules and also retained something of a “pre-rational music” that, in Adorno’s phrase, “had not yet submitted to the dominance of abstract numerical relations.” See Adorno, “Vienna,” 205, 210, and 212.


93. An influential expression of this tendency is the list of German and non-German antinomies Ernst Hanisch culled from Wagner’s writings and identified as “dichotomies typical of his age, which formed the ideological basis of the German Sonderweg and were admirably suited for exploitation in 1914 and again in 1933”; see “The Political Influence and Appropriation of Wagner,” in The Wagner Handbook, ed. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski, trans. John Deathridge (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 190–91. This list was adapted by Notley in her discussion of the politics of “Bruckner and Viennese Wagnerism,” in Bruckner Studies, ed. Paul Hawkshaw and Timothy L. Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 62–63, and by Nicholas Cook in his consideration of some of Schenker’s core concepts in The Schenker Project, 163–67.

94. The most well-known of these was published at a relatively late date by Hugo von Hofmannsthal as “Preuße und Österreicher: Ein Schema,” in Vossische Zeitung, 25 December 1917; repr. in Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden: Reden und Aufsätze II (1914–1924), ed. Bernd Schoeller with Rudolf Hirsch (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1979), 459–61. This text plainly traffics in well-known stereotypes (the systematic, worldly, dialectical, striving Prussian against the pious, ironic, private, intuitive Austrian), yet does encapsulate common opinions. I would like to thank Rüdiger Zill for alerting me to this text. The tensions between Protestantism and Catholicism in German-speaking Central Europe were strong and multivalent. In Bismarck’s empire, anti-Catholic sentiment was politically mobilized for nationalistic purposes during the Kulturkampf. In Vienna, anti-Protestant sentiment was often associated with anti-Liberal and anti-Semitic attitudes as well.


96. Perhaps the crucial relationship was between Bruckner and Hanslick and, by extension, Brahms, who was closely allied with the critic, both personally and professionally. The relationship of these men was permanently shadowed by Bruckner’s appointment to the faculty of the University in 1875, which was actively opposed by Hanslick, who Bruckner believed was henceforth his “enemy”; see his letter to Hans
Sittard, 24 March 1886, in Bruckner, Briefe 1852–1886, 293. Many have observed that residual ill will continued to inflect Hanslick’s attitude toward Bruckner and color his reaction to his music. Floros offers a concise summation in Anton Bruckner: Persönlichkeit und Werk, 51–58. Also see Korstvedt, “The Critics and the Quintet: A Study in Musical Representation,” in Anton Bruckners Wiener Jahre: Analysen – Fakten – Perspektiven, Wiener Bruckner-Studien 1, ed. Renate Grasberger, Elisabeth Maier, and Erich Wolfgang Partsch (Vienna: Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2009), 145–66.


98. Recall Brahms’s famous declaration to Hermann Levi in the early 1870s that “I will never compose a symphony! You have no idea of how it feels for one of us always to hear a giant tramping from behind!” (“Ich werde nie eine Symphonie komponieren! Du hast keinen Begriff davon, wie es unsereinen zu Mute ist, wenn er immer so einen Riesen hinter sich marschieren hört”); quoted in Stefan Kunze, “Johannes Brahms oder: Das schwere Werk der Symphonie,” in Johannes Brahms: Leben und Werk, 111.


105. This theme was strongly emphasized in reviews of Bruckner’s Quintet in 1885 by Hanslick, Kalbeck, and Dömpke. See Notley’s discussion of the criticism of the Quintet in Lateness and Brahms, 25–27 and 186–90, as well as Korstvedt, “The Critics and the Quintet: A Study in Musical Representation.”


108. Robert Musil’s brilliantly ironic take on Kakania, his term for the Habsburg state in its final phases, in Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften, captures this uneasiness vividly indeed.


110. These words are from Kalbeck’s reviews of Bruckner’s Quintet (“Bruckner ist bei weitem der Gefährlichste unter den musikalischen Neueren des Tages”) in Die Presse, 28 January 1885, and Hanslick (“im Moment des Komponierendes zum Anarchisten wird, der unbarmherzig alles opfert, was Logik und Klarheit der Entwicklung, Einheit der Form und der Tonalität heißt”) in Neue Freie Presse, 26 February 1885.


114. Broch, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time, 35.


118. Adorno, “Vienna,” 213. As early as 1879, Nietzsche wrote that “the spirit of the Counter-Reformation is the spirit of modern music,” Human All Too Human, no. 219, 131.

119. Nowhere was this difference of opinion—or rather conflict of cultural mentalité—more succinctly expressed than in Schenker’s outrage at Bruckner’s music and at his maxim, which Schenker heard as a student in his harmony course at the conservatory: “That is the rule, gentlemen. Of course, I don’t compose that way.” Heinrich Schenker, Harmony, ed. Oswald Jonas, trans. Elisabeth Mann Borgese (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 177–78.

Bruckner’s attitude to musical rules is simply not compatible with a position, like that of the mature Schenker, that considers musical syntax and structure to be governed by the force of infallible natural law. The significance of the repeated assertions by Hanslick and his allies that Bruckner’s music was “unnatural” becomes clearer when
seen from this angle, too, for an appeal to the authority of nature was inherent in the conservative view that the rules of counterpoint and harmonic progression encode natural law, as was a historicist bent that preferred that which was traditional, or even epigonal (to invoke a fraught term from the time), to that which was deliberately progressive, let alone radical or revolutionary. See Broch, Hugo von Hofmannsthals and His Time, 34–35.


121. Schenker, Harmonielehre, 422.


127. This F-sharp-major theme group is one of the few passages in Bruckner that Adorno specifically commented on. In his Mahler monograph, Adorno identifies it as one of the rare examples of a “fulfillment passage” in music before Mahler. Adorno proposes “fulfillment” as one of Mahler’s paradigmatic musical gestures, characterized by

128. Also see the discussion of these harmonic designs in Benjamin Korstvedt, “Between Formlessness and Formality: Aspects of Bruckner’s Approach to Symphonic Form,” in The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner, 184.

129. One might also recall Hanslick’s remarkable claim that Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto had actually raised the “gruesome idea” that a musical composition could “stink to the ear.” (“Tschaikowskys Violinkonzert bringt uns zum ersten Mal auf die schauerliche Idee, ob es nicht auch Musikstücke geben könnte, die man stinken hört.”) See Hanslick, Aus dem Tagebuch eines Rezensenten, 30.


131. Hanslick commented several times about the healthiness of Brahms’s music. For example, he suggested that Brahms’s Third Symphony recalls the “full healthy vigor” of middle-period Beethoven (“gesunde Volkkraft der zweitens Beethovenschen Periode”), Neue Freie Presse, 5 December 1883; repr. in Hanslick, Concerti, Componisten und Virtuosen der letzten fünfzehn Jahre, 1870–1885 (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, 1886), 362. He called the Violin Sonata, op. 99, and the Cello Sonata, op. 100, two children of “the same manly, strong, healthy spirit” (“desselben männlich, starken, gesunden Geist”), Neue Freie Presse, 7 December 1886; repr. in Aus dem Tagebuche eines Musikers: Kritiken und Schilderungen (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, 1892), 210. And he found the strength of the String Quintet, op. 111, to be its “expression of healthy, relatively simple feelings” (“Ausdruck gesunder, verhältnismäßig einfacher Gefühle”), Neue Freie Presse, 18 November 1890; repr. in Aus dem Tagebuche eines Musikers, 316.


138. See the discussion of Bruckner in, for example, Leon Plantinga, Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe, Norton Introduction to Music History Series (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 435–40, and Donald J. Grout, Peter


140. Biddle coins the phrase “enjoyment of the other” in “On the Radical in Musicology,” paragraph 2.


142. Judson, “Rethinking the Liberal Legacy,” 76.