

JAKUB GORTAT
Łódź
ORCID: 0000-0002-7433-6928

**AGAINST POLITICAL COMPROMISES – COMING TO TERMS
WITH THE AUSTROFASCIST AND NATIONAL SOCIALIST PAST
IN JOHN OLDEN’S DOCUDRAMA *THE BLUE DANUBE* (1965)**

The Blue Danube (*An der schönen blauen Donau*), written by Hellmut Andics and Franz Hiesel and directed by John Olden, may be viewed as a groundbreaking television docudrama due to the fact that the camera left the indoor sphere traditionally reserved for the television format, along with filming on location, and even introducing types of shots that were rather unusual for television at the time. From today’s perspective, thanks to research, we know that topics such as Austrofascism and the 1934 civil war had been latent in the Austrian memory culture, and in the case of television, the entire period between 1933 and 1938 was treated as a taboo in the first two decades after the war. At the time, as Eva Waibel points out, “Die Fernsehspielfassung ist gekennzeichnet durch die beinahe vollständige Eliminierung der Topoi Austrofascismus und Bürgerkrieg, die reduzierte Darstellung österreichischer Täterinnen und Täter sowie eine Stärkung des widerständlichen Charakters des Protagonisten“ (Waibel: 54).

Thus, Olden’s television film appears as a breakthrough for two reasons. First, it deals with the Dollfuß regime and the antagonism between social democrats and conservatives which blocked an essential post-war consensus between the *ÖVP* and the *SPÖ*. The consensus was based on a myth that would later be dubbed the ‘camp street myth’ (*Lagerstraßenmythos*). Their respective predecessors, the *CSP* (*Christsoziale Partei*) and the *SDAP* (*Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschösterreichs*), according to the myth, had a shared responsibility for the reciprocal political antagonism that triggered the civil war in 1934 with both sides suffering equally under Nazi occupation. After 1945, two leading political parties, the *ÖVP* and the *SPÖ*, maintained a bond of mutual democratic survival, something that was in complete contrast to the two camps’ animosity toward each other before the war (see Rathkolb 2001: 286).

Secondly, the film is also about a reminder of Austrian Nazi crimes against fellow Austrians with the assassination of Chancellor Dollfuß on July 25, 1934, suggesting that Germans were not the only Nazis. In this essay I analyze the film’s narration (as understood by Bordwell 1985: 53), first focusing on its hybrid form, then the film’s fabula and syuzhet (terms also used by Bordwell, who differentiates between fabula, syuzhet and style, see Bordwell 1985: 49-53) and paying special attention to the char-

acters perceived as symbolic figures, who stood for various political beliefs which existed in the time the fabula is set (according to the theory of film characters proposed by Pfister and Eder). Ultimately, I concentrate on the film's problematic distribution and reception.

AUSTRIAN CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE UNTIL THE 1960S

Although it is widely known that after the Second World War, Austria declared itself the first victim of Nazi aggression thereby establishing a salient post-war origin myth, in the early post-war Second Republic there were actually at least four competing narratives that interpreted the question of national identity in the context of the country's recent, National Socialist past (Wodak, de Cillia 2005: 316). The first narrative was the aforementioned firm belief in Austria's status as the first victim of Hitler's aggression. The second narrative described 1945 as the birth of the Second Austrian Republic and Austria's 'rebirth,' with the State Treaty, signed in 1955, acting as a birth certificate (Wodak, de Cillia 2005: 328). The other two narratives were championed by conservative elements. One affirmed the heroism and martyrdom of Austrian soldiers who fought in the Second World War, while the last, although connected with the first victim myth, focused on the (marginal) role of anti-Nazi resistance in the country (Neugebauer 2014). By the end of the 1940s, there had emerged a "sectional culture of remembrances" regarding National Socialism and the Second World War (Pirker, Koch, Kramer 2019: 182-183) with one of the leading actors being the veterans' union (*Kameradschaftsbund*). The union fostered recognition and support for former soldiers while it regarded resistance fighters as traitors. Furthermore, the cold war, in which the communists were perceived as a new enemy, also played a significant role in whitewashing the *Wehrmacht* and enhancing military values in both Austria and West Germany (Pirker, Koch, Kramer 2019: 184). The belief in Austrian soldiers behaving ethically while fighting in the German *Wehrmacht* was easy to reconcile as anti-communism sentiment dominated the narrative of the political elites.

There was one more narrative which had a connective function in the Austrian politics of memory, albeit not as strong as anti-communism, which related not only to the Nazi, but also the Austrofascist past of the country. The so-called myth of Camp Street (*Mythos Lagerstraße*) offered a catharsis from responsibility for all shortcomings and errors committed in the First Republic and rendered all political elites – regardless of their worldview – victims of National Socialism (Cohen-Weisz 2016: 101). Although the myth became the foundation of an anti-fascist compromise, it was very controversial and incoherent in nature (Falter 2019: 91-93). Nonetheless, it remained unquestioned for many years, partly due to the fact that unlike the Federal Republic of Germany, the Austrian Second Republic had not been interested in coming to terms with its Nazi past (see e.g. Hammerstein 2017). Even though several scandals shook the pillars of Austrian politics of remembrance, the true reflection of

Austria's role in National Socialism would only surface with substantial procrastination in the 1980s (see e.g. Axer 2011; Uhl).

The scarcity of debates on the past does not mean, however, that Austrian public discourse was completely devoid of any narratives touching upon the Austrofascist and Nazi past of the country. A significant role in this regard was played by the public television channel, *ORF*. This was especially so when television established its position as a mass medium as many Austrian households had television sets during the 1960s and 1970s. Considering the fact that the Nazi past was on the margins of Austrian filmmakers' interest in the early post-war period (Moser 2007), one can regard the television programs and films which focused on the Nazi period as a 'slow-moving breakthrough'. Austria's even most recent past, had formed an important topic of *ORF* programming since the television first channel's launch. Renée Winter argues that between 1955 and 1970, television elaborated its principal formats of telling stories about the Austrian past, established a visual canon concerning National Socialism and became the subject of debates on recent Austrian history (Winter 2014: 14). *ORF* produced and broadcast its own documentaries about Nazism, whereby it cooperated with the newly established Institute of Modern History in Vienna (first as an independent institute, then since 1966 as a university entity) and to lesser extent with the Documentation Center of the Austrian Resistance (*DÖW*, established in 1963). Since the establishment of both institutions is regarded as one of the turning points in the Austrian remembrance culture (Bailer 2013: 9-12), one can assume that the application of research on Austrian contemporary history, conducted and presented by historians on public television, was one of the first steps to introduce the difficult past to mainstream media. Furthermore, *ORF* purchased and broadcast films from abroad that dealt with National Socialism: teleplays, TV adaptations of theater plays, and literary adaptations. The role of the political television cabaret program, *Zeitventil*, in coming to terms with the Nazi past is also not to be underestimated (see Winter 2014: 109-114).

Austria's long theatrical tradition, the emergence of the television, and the development of political satire all influenced the form and content of another television-specific genre: *Fernsehspiel*, which is usually translated into English as teleplay, television drama or television movie. Four elements distinguished the Austrian teleplays from its British and West German counterparts: firstly, the literature-orientation, secondly, the Austrianness – the fabula of a teleplay is always set in Austria, third the preference of historical themes which have a didactic relevance, and finally a theater-typical staging (Haberl 1996: 360-361). The plays very often presented ordinary Austrians at home or in bars, where they would talk about their worldview and share their private convictions of political and historical matters, without great passion or emotion.

Just like the artists from the cabaret group *Zeitventil*, authors of teleplays sensed the right moment to jeer at Austrian coziness and the 'national good' of National Socialism being imposed upon on the country from the outside. And the reactions were often marked with outrage and scandal. *Der Herr Karl*, directed by Erich Neuberger and written by Carl Merz and Helmut Qualtinger, is regarded as the first teleplay of

this kind. The play is a 55-minute monodrama delivered by Helmut Qualtinger and broadcast in prime time on November 15, 1961. It later transferred to the stage in Austria. The protagonist of the teleplay, the eponymous Mr. Karl, at first glance seems a decent, amiable middle-aged gentleman. However, he is gradually revealed as an unscrupulous collaborator, conformist, and egoist. After and even during the play's transmission, the Austrian Broadcasting Company received thousands of letters and phone calls, and almost every newspaper carried a reaction to the program (Pfabigan 2002). Ordinary Austrians were outraged, complaining about the grave distortions in the story set in Nazi times. The teleplay was surprising and indeed shocking for its audience. However, *Der Herr Karl* did pave the way for other teleplays, to be broadcast on ORF in the 1960s, touching upon, usually in a satirical way, the country's difficult past. This trend evolved into more televisual forms, such as documentary series, docudramas, and finally television series and full-length fictional films broadcast on television (see Winter 2014; Pollach 2005; Öhner 2005).

Thus, the film discussed in this article should be regarded as a work firmly embedded in the new storytelling trends pursued by television. As I will expound, it corresponds with the definition of a docudrama, combining elements of a documentary with traits of a fiction film. In terms of its fabula, though, it encroaches on the myths compounded in the early Second Republic, particularly the aforementioned myth of Camp Street.

AGAINST POLITICAL COMPROMISES

The Blue Danube commences as a standard documentary film. Archival footage, recorded in the 1920s and 1930s, shows some of the leading Austrian politicians of the First Austrian Republic and ordinary Austrians. These pictures are intermingled with photographs and occasionally newspapers clippings, introducing the audience to the political and social climate of the First Republic. These visual documents are accompanied by a narrator, whose loud and rather dramatic timbre is reminiscent of the narration in post-war newsreels. The narrator fades away in the fourth minute of screen time as the film shifts from documentary into fiction. This transition is almost imperceptible since the whole film is shot in black-and-white. As the narrator ends his speech with a mention of the Hitler Youth, there is a close-up shot of long, white socks on someone's legs – a characteristic sign of the Hitler Youth. The fictional part commences with the reconstruction of the political scene in Austria in July 1934 – on the one hand an exercise of the *Heimwehr*, a paramilitary organization supporting the authoritarian regime, and on the other, the planning of a coup by Nazis, which indeed took place in July 1934, culminating in Chancellor Dollfuß's assassination. These political issues become a background for the main thread in the syuzhet which revolves around two characters: Christine Gasser, otherwise known as Tini (Christiane Hörbiger) and Franz Schantl (Hans Peter Musäus), who are both presented in the introduction of the film's fictional section.

The couple comes from different social milieus. Tini is from a social democratic family. We might assume that her father (played by her real father, Attila Hörbiger, a movie star popular in Austrian cinema since the 1930s) used to be an enthusiastic socialist since in the new regime he is closely monitored by the police. Indeed, he has to regularly present himself at a police station where he is humiliated by Officer Bramburi (Karl Paryla). We also learn that both of Tini's bothers have had to flee to Russia. In contrast, Franz comes from a bourgeoisie family. The Schantls' house appears in the script as a bourgeoisie mansion: "Großbürgerlich hohe, große Zimmer, düster, altmodisch, gediegen eingerichtet, das Interieur stammt aus der Zeit vor dem ersten Weltkrieg" (Hiesel 1965: 72). We also learn that the family has a maid, Frieda. Franz is a son of a *Heimwehr* officer (played by another star, Erik Fey), thus representing the polar political opposite to Tini's family. However, Franz's political worldview is far more radical since he has recently become a member of a Nazi group which is planning a coup against Chancellor Dollfuß. His engagement with the Nazi group is, as one can imagine, a bone of contention between the couple.

One of the salient supporting characters is Mr. Redlich (Emil Feldmar), a local scrap metal dealer whose store serves as a hideout for the Nazis' weapons. Redlich, the only Jewish character in the film, is in the wrong place at the wrong time. While having a drink in his stockyard one night, Redlich upon hearing a noise and seeing someone in his yard, makes the fatal decision to go and investigate. During the assault on Redlich, the authors use film language to juxtapose the innocence and honesty of the victim (the name Redlich, is also symbolic, since the adjective 'redlich' can be translated as 'upright' or 'honest') with the deceitfulness and callousness of the Nazi perpetrator. Redlich appears in the foreground of a multi-plane frame, the light allowing him to be perfectly visible while the shallow focus diffuses objects – items from his workplace. Otto, the Nazi character (Walter Kohut) appears from behind the frame, rapidly approaching Redlich from the left, who is unaware of the threat until the very end. Otto hits the man in the back and Redlich gives out a single moan and collapses.

Having been present when Redlich was murdered, Franz is extremely disturbed and distances himself from his Nazi cohorts. Tini and Franz's mother get very worried about him. Franz's disappearance coincides with the execution of the coup by the Nazis. These two events form the climax in the syuzhet and both lead to tragic endings. Mrs. Schantl (one more star, Vilma Degischer) together with Tini are paralyzed by the tragic news delivered by Mr. Schantl that Franz has been found dead. The cause of his death remains unclear; however, we might assume that he was murdered by his former Nazi cohorts. In the script Tini, before leaving the Schantls' house, was supposed to say: "Uns alle wird es noch treffen. Alle!", meaning that no one in Austria would be protected from the threat of National Socialism (Hiesel 1965: 192). However, in the film Tini leaves the house instead, still in deep shock after realizing that Franz is dead. The political message is left unsaid, and the film ends with an epilog that shows the fates of selected characters. We learn that the body of Mr. Redlich was found in the Danube canal, that Otto was condemned to death and executed, Schantl senior fought

in the Second World War with his regiment in the Caucasus and ‘remained there’ (here the camera briefly shows a cemetery). We also find out that the widow of Mr. Redlich (Alice Lach) was murdered in Mauthausen concentration camp, finally that Tini married a tram driver, while the police officer Bramburi continued in his profession and now enjoys his retirement.

There is no doubt that the teleplay awakened a memory that had been latent and deals both with the Austrofascist regime and National Socialism. The authors evoke the memories of an Austria that was divided into three political forces which fought each other. The writers avowedly display their proximity to a social democratic and liberal worldview, and include characters of symbolic meaning¹ and from all three political persuasions, to which the authors dedicate essentially equal film time. The Dollfuß regime is represented by Mr. Schantl, a colonel in the *Reichswehr*. Schantl’s engagement in military activity goes hand in hand with his authoritarian behavior in his family circle. We learn that he used to serve in the military when the monarchy was in power and insisted on giving his son, Franz, the second name of Ferdinand, in honor of the Habsburg monarchy. He is the epitome of a patriarchal system of values. Despite his wife’s concerns, he does not strive for reconciliation with Franz after a vehemently quarrelling with him. When his son suddenly reappears and wishes to talk with the colonel, probably wanting to warn him of the coup plan, the father does not allow the son to speak. This lack of communication between the two would later have very serious consequences. One can assume that if Schantl senior had listened to his son, he might have prevented his demise and hindered the assassination of Dollfuß. Schantl is thereby a classical *type*, a one-dimensional and static figure, an archetypal authoritarian, conservative father, who does not change until the very end of the *fabula*.² Even in the face of his son’s death he remains calm, while Mrs. Schantl bursts into tears. His statement expressed in the beginning of the film that the enemy, though defeated, but not destroyed, is related to the political left, would later be proved to be completely wrong. The authors of the teleplay stress that the real peril for the Austrian state was not the socialists, but the Nazis.

Another character who stands for the authoritarian regime is police officer Bramburi, a sadistic type, who expresses antisemitic and anti-Slavic prejudices, and relishes in keeping Gasser in his office for hours before completing the necessary documentation regarding Gasser’s report to the police. He sees socialist plots everywhere and is dedicated to tracking down all missing socialists who are wanted after the 1934 February uprising. For him, just like for Schantl, socialists are the only threat to peace. Thus, when Mr. Redlich, the Jew who operates a metal scrapyards, reports to Bramburi that he has found a weapon in his store, the police officer suspects him of being a socialist. Bramburi is presented in a much more negative light than Schantl since he appears as a sadistic, anti-democratic servant of the regime. The last words of the

¹ I refer to the concept of symbolic characters as proposed by Eder.

² When I describe a film character, I employ the terminology coined by Pfister (1988: 177-181), with exception of ‘symbolical’ characters as distinguished by Eder (2014: 521-541).

voice-over narrator which in the epilog accompany the film's ending shot – a close-up of flowers in the garden of the now retired Bramburi – refer to him: “Bramburi ist über alle Zeiten Polizist geblieben und heute in verdientem Ruhestand. Er züchtet mit großem Erfolg Margarethen, Vergissmeinnicht und Primen, im Volksmund auch Himmelsschlüssel genannt. Denn alles zarte gedeiht unter seinen Händen.” With a certain dose of irony, the narrator expresses his dismay about the undisturbed life of the abhorrent police officer.

A male voice-over narrator is a continuation of the formula used in most documentaries broadcast on Austrian television in the 1960s. As Winter points out, “juxtaposed archival photographs, footage, and documents were usually accompanied by a male voice-over that offered a consensual recapitulation of past events” (2019: 194). However, an ironic narrator is a novelty, something untypical for an objective documentary and conveys the impression of a critical journalistic comment. Undoubtedly his remark pertains not only to the singular, fictional character, but is embodied in a more general context and serves as a sarcastic comment on the overdue condemnation of the authoritarian regime in the Second Republic. When we take into account that apart from officer Bramburi and Schantl senior even an episodic character – a *Heimwehr* member who courts Tini – is impertinent and obstinate – it becomes evident that all characters who support the Austrofascist regime are negative and thus become symptomatic – they mirror the initial attempts in popular culture to come to terms with the country's authoritarian past.

The program's second political perspective connected with socialists, unfolds with the characters of Tini and her father. We do not learn many details of their worldview since they represent a group that had already been repressed by the government. An important fact known from the backstory is the aforementioned exile of Tini's two brothers. Despite their protest being stifled, the socialists are still regarded as a threat. Moreover, the values they represent are in stark contrast to the worldview of the conservative regime's supporters. Tini is endowed with an entire set of positive values: she is hardworking, self-confident, resourceful, and independent. She distinguishes herself from all other characters with a cap – a kind of kepi but with a short vizor, which emphasizes her individualism. This idealized image with a strong feminist undertone also embraces other characteristics in her relations with the two men she loves: she has a caring approach to her father and is deeply concerned about her boyfriend, Franz. What is more, she is the causative force which tries to dissuade him from being involved in the shady deals of the Nazis and bring him back to her and his family. Over the course of time, we observe the shift of roles and positions traditionally ascribed to both genders: Franz has doubts about his role in the Nazi group, he is torn between continuing to belong to the group and leaving them. He admits to Tini what the Nazis' true intentions are. He is unable to reach a decision on his own and becomes a passive, sensitive character who is blatantly exposed to the influence of his father and his girlfriend. Tini, in contrast, represents a very active and remedial approach.

Finally, the third perspective belongs to the Nazi characters who significantly differ from one another. First, there are Nazis who represent the political level – the

counselor in the German embassy in Vienna; Anton Rintelen (Oskar Willner), an Austrian politician who was actually meant to become provisional chancellor of the Austrian government after the coup; and above all the Nazi officer Sass (Reinhardt Glemnitz), usually called by his rank *Sturmbannführer* (therefore probably a *SS* or *SA* member). His appearance in the sixth minute of the screen time is accompanied by a brief ominous sound. The greeting of 'Heil Hitler' that he exchanges with the doorman confirms that he is very much a Nazi. His firm voice and resolute tone stress his high political position. It becomes obvious that he is the main executioner of the coup and thus the principal villain in the film. He pulls the strings in the meetings of the shadow cabinet and explicates the orders he received in Munich. The treacherous role of the German embassy, the German instructions related to the assassination and the sudden emergence of the threat personalized by the *Sturmbannführer* as a man from the outside encroaching on Austrian politics – are all signs of Austria's annexation by Nazi Germany which are in full accordance with the popular, entrenched construe of the *Anschluss* perceived as a consequence of external, Nazi German aggression.

Nevertheless, as we can see, the coup (and the possible annexation) is arranged with the contribution of local Nazis. Mr. Wondrak, Tini's employee, coordinates the coup on the local level, managing young Nazi boys on the premises of his company. While all other Nazis speak standard German, Wondrak is the only character who speaks with a dialect. Interestingly, Wondrak only speaks vernacular German with his wife, while in the meeting with the young Austrian Nazis his dialect is much more similar to standard German. The fact that his wife appears to be privy to the outlines of his activity gently draws attention to some women being bystanders during the ascendancy of National Socialism. Her role is, however, relegated to conversations with her husband. Mrs. Wondrak (Lotte Lang) is depicted as a character with traditional female attributes – she mainly cares for the household (we can see her knitting at a table during a conversation with her husband). Both Mr. and Mrs. Wondrak – (while Mrs. Wondrak is an episodic character, Mr. Wondrak is a significant supporting character) are ambiguous, but open, and multidimensional characters. Although Mr. Wondrak plays a crucial role in the plan of the coup, he is kind to Tini. Not only does he have nothing against hiring a daughter of a known socialist, but he also treats her with respect and benevolence. This quasi-cooperation between a socialist and a Nazi is striking from both parties' perspectives. Wondrak probably could have hired any other girl for typing his documents, therefore his tolerance for the young woman would indicate that he is not a very zealous Nazi. On the other hand, Gasser, who loathes the Dollfuß regime, can tolerate a Nazi being the employer of his daughter. First it suggests that for the socialists it was the Austrofascists who were viewed as far worse than the Nazis. Secondly, the supposition arises that the authors of the docudrama include (perhaps inadvertently) the myth of the Nazis being perceived as a solution for the severe unemployment at the time (both in Germany and in Austria).

But let's return to Wondrak and his construction as a dynamic character. Motivated by a sudden impulse or a hunch that events might not develop according to plan, he warns police officer Bramburi in an anonymous phone call about the possible coup

the following day. In this call he introduces himself as ‘a friend of Austria’, which is tantamount to distancing himself from the Nazis. Most likely he fears that in the event of a failed coup the police may interrogate him and find evidence leading to his involvement in the attempt. His concerns turn out to be justified since after the abortive coup the police pay him a visit. He justifies himself by telling the police that he rents his place to some people, but he did not know what they were doing. We can interpret his decision to inform the police about the planned coup as being motivated by sheer opportunism and judging by the information delivered by the narrator in the epilog, we may infer that Wondrak preserved his longstanding stance and aligned himself with the new, Nazi regime as he acquired many Jewish businesses. To a certain extent, Mr. Wondrak appears as another version of Herr Karl, an opportunist capable of adjusting himself to any political reality.

The film’s last presentation of the Nazis consists of visualizing them as a collective, a mob composed of dozens of extras. On the one hand some of them are a little bit awkward and inattentive during the preparations for the coup, on the other when they are presented as a crowd, they do not diverge from the popular image of the German Hitler Youth. They listen carefully to the speech given by the *Sturmbannführer*. Two of them – Otto and Franz, the male protagonist at this stage still believing in Nazism – gaze at the Nazi leader with a strident, firm unblinking facial expression, which underlines their devotion. The young Nazis show a quite different image when they have to kill time due to the coup being temporarily postponed. They gather at an inn and are extremely loud which is in contravention of the law. Many of them are drunk, sing songs and shout. One of the men holds a young waitress on his lap and insolently gropes her body (she, however, seems to like the man’s behavior, which leads us again to a reflection on ordinary women being attracted by Nazism). In this scene the director uses a deep space composition with multiple planes. Figures of men are deployed in many different distances from the camera and in addition they fill in most of the space in the frame. This conveys the impression of their number and predominance. The manners of the Nazis contrast with the cultural behavior of the rest of the guests who are in the minority and are sitting in the adjacent room. Here, Mr. Wondrak, who straddles a traditional Viennese identity and a Nazi stance, is one of the loudest participants.

In the only hitherto published essay about the docudrama, Winter (2019) analyzes the film from the point of view of dealing with antisemitism. She argues that David Redlich, the Jew murdered in his scrap metal yard, is representative of all Jews killed by the Nazis, and corresponds with the expression of ‘a singular Jew’ coined by Jennifer Kapczynski in reference to Victor, a singular Jewish character in the much later German miniseries *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter* (Generation War, 2013) who represents the fate of all contemporary Jews (Kapczynski 2015). Redlich in Olden’s film stands for old, assimilated Austrian Jews, who fell victim to Nazi aggression. Winter adds that it is Tini who challenges Franz’s conscience, trying to understand how one can witness Redlich’s death and react with indifference. Her voice may then be interpreted as a protest against passiveness to the suffering of persecuted Jews (Winter

2019: 198). Remarkably, Winter notes, “the action of digging deeper and wanting to know more is here undertaken by a young Austrian woman associated with the social democratic milieu” (Ibid). Indeed, the young female socialist is the only character who really cares about the truth regarding Redlich. This is another factor that contributes to the idealization of the heroine and – symbolically – social democracy itself.

However, some historians may probably polemicize with the juxtaposition of antisemitism and the Dollfuß-Schuschnigg-regime. In fact, Jews enjoyed relative political tolerance in the Austrofascist era. They could assume certain public positions and were treated as an important partner who guaranteed financial loans to the government. There was a transactional nature in the Jewish-Austrian relations: the leading Jewish newspapers supported the regime for its struggle against National Socialism. Erika Weinzierl points out that in the Dollfuß-Schuschnigg era many Jews from the Nazi Reich took shelter in Austria and the Jewish spirituality and culture in Vienna could flourish (1985: 24-25). On the other hand, the perennial verbal abuses against the Jews were still tolerated on the political level (Pauley 1992: 261-273) and the authoritarian government did not undertake any actions against acts of antisemitism in society (Königseder 2005: 56).

AGAINST STEREOTYPES

The Blue Danube distinguishes itself from numerous, previously broadcast ‘classical’ documentaries with composition typical for a feature film: shooting both in the studio and on location, elaborated *mise-en-scène* (for instance Wondrak’s plant, Redlich’s scrap metal yard, the house of the Schantls), the large depth of field in some frames, and dynamic cutting in the most dramatic scenes. With regard the sound, there is a dramatic soundtrack (music composed by Carl de Groof), composed of drums, wind and stringed instruments. It maintains the suspense in the scene when Redlich is killed and accompanies the climax when the fake *Heimwehr* militia and police troops are on their way to kill the chancellor. A dramatic soundtrack is something fairly usual for a fiction film, but not necessarily for an early teleplay. With only a few exceptions the characters are fictional, but on the basis of the constellations between them we might reconstruct an excerpt from Austria’s contemporary past – the hostility between socialists and conservatives as well as the threat of National Socialism. As a typical docudrama, Olden’s film comes to the audience with material that is commonly known, includes a voice-over narrator at the beginning and ending of the film and signals moments of dramatic tension.³

It should be emphasized that the scenes directly leading to the climax – the assassination of Dollfuß – are shot without dialogs. While the young Nazis in their uniforms are on their way to Michaelerplatz, they do not say a single word. Also noteworthy is the fact that the camera does not show the crucial moment of Dollfuß’s

³ These are some additional characteristics of docudrama proposed by Paget. See Paget 2011: 96-116.

assassination. In one shot the assassin aims his gun at Dollfuß, then we hear a gun being fired. The camera does not show the victim, but a rapid cut moves the focus to a portrait of the chancellor which is now broken. Shooting a portrait instead of a person recalls what Gertrud Koch calls 'fragmentation' of figures, when she refers to the religiously rooted concept of *Bilderverbot*. Koch names the example of figurative depictions of cherubs in the medieval Jewish art (Koch 1993: 219). On the one hand, in accordance with the ban of depiction, the pictures of cherubs are incomplete, since the figures consist only of a head and wings. On the other hand, any depiction of them at all confirms the mimesis. Following the arguments formulated by Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory*, Koch points out that "the developmental line which extends from the taboo on images to the monotheist *Bilderverbot* clearly does not stop short at theology" (Koch 1993: 219-220). In fact, one can often encounter the term in literature about the representation of the Holocaust in film. In this regard, the ban refers to the depiction of mass death in gas chambers (see e.g. Corell 2009: 13-28). In the case of the examined film, the metonym of the picture of Dollfuß destroyed by an Austrian Nazi conveys the impression that although the chancellor is to be condemned for his authoritarian style of governance, killing him was an act of evil and its depiction should be 'protected' by a *Bilderverbot*, and the whole scene 'fragmented.' Although being a dictator that suppressed democracy, he was still a lesser evil when compared to the Nazis and indeed one of their first victims.

Even though with the fabula set in 1934 and not in 1938, this undoubtedly brings into question the interpretation of the *Anschluss* as an event started by external factors and supersedes the univocally positive stereotypes of ordinary Austrians facing National Socialism. In fact, the authors seem to argue that some Austrians had already been influenced by and cooperative with Nazism. Another significant factor which contributes to the undermining of the traditional, patriotic identity of Austria is the critical image of the eponymous Danube. The river is one of the most recognizable symbols of Austria and is the country's largest river, flowing through numerous Austrian towns and cities, including Linz and Vienna. It has played a very important role in the country's economy and has always been both an attraction for the tourist and a recreational location for Austrians. In the capital, the Danube, especially *Donauinsel* (The island of Danube) and *Donaukanal* (the Danube Canal) is a destination for many Viennese people who want to spend their free time in the open air. In Olden's film, the Danube is deprived of its sentimental and romantic image. In the black-and-white photographs it is an impassive, grey, unattractive river. Its image is connected with the water's grey color due to industrialization rather than being employed as symbol in the creation of a national myth (see Hanisch 2019: 196-197). The Danube Canal in the film serves as a place for the Nazis to dispose of Mr. Redlich's body, which lies in the epilog on the canal's bank. In the aforementioned scene of the Nazis' meeting in a guesthouse, one of the drunken men inadvertently evokes the fact of throwing a dead body into the river in a song and only because of Tini's dismay (who showed up to dissuade Franz from continuing to be associated with the Nazis) does he realize his sloppiness and explains it is just a song.

Not only does the image of the Danube acquire a new, morose interpretation in the docudrama. This reinterpretation relates to the melody of *An der schönen blauen Donau* (Blue Danube), a waltz composed in 1866 by the Austrian composer Johann Strauss II. It is one of the most recognizable musical symbols of Austria, traditionally played at Viennese New Year balls, dubbed by the 19th century Eduard Hanslick (1885: 340) as ‘patriotisches Volkslied ohne Worte’ (a patriotic folk song without lyrics), and has been adapted by many composers. The waltz is the opening theme in Olden’s docudrama, but the first recognizable tones are distorted and give the melody a gloomy tone. The theme recurs in the film as a diegetic sound in the scene when the Nazis assume control of Austrian radio. They use the popular melody as an interlude, waiting for information about the transition of power to Rintelen and blocking any official communiques about the fate of Austria. The incessant sound of the waltz mirrors the ambience of uncertainty, keeping the characters (and the audience too) in suspense. The instrumental use of the popular waltz leads to its eventual recontextualization. Ultimately, Austria managed to retain its independence, but from now on Strauß’s music would gain a new, non-romantic, and joyless association. The ironic re-interpretation of the beautiful blue Danube by the film’s authors becomes even more evident when we take into account the fact that only ten years earlier another film entitled *An der schönen blauen Donau* was screened at movie theaters. While this earlier work, directed by Hans Schweikart, was the product of a cultural reconstruction of this great operetta film and belonged to the artistic trend of alignment with Austria’s patriotic narrative, the docudrama may be viewed as a work which challenged this tradition and recontextualized significant Austrian myths.

DISTRIBUTION AND RECEPTION

The Blue Danube, a film of hybrid form, also had a hybrid distribution. As with many television films that would later emerge, it was a West-German-Austrian co-production, produced by a Viennese television film production company Scheiderbauer under contract to the Northern German Broadcasting (*NDR*). The person who wrote the film’s script was Franz Hiesel, an Austrian-born playwright who at the time of the film’s production was the chief playwright of the radio drama department for the North German Broadcasting *NDR* in Hamburg. In an interview with the magazine *Hör Zu* Hiesel admitted having no idea why the film was not broadcast simultaneously in Germany and Austria but presumed that due to availability of the West German television in Austria the film might have reached an Austrian audience in January 1965. However, Hiesel did express his satisfaction that the film was eventually broadcast by *ORF* (Jentzsch 1966: 28-29). The film had its premiere on the West German television channel *ZDF* on January 14, 1965, in prime time (8:15 p.m.). In Austria, however, the film first had a cinematic release on April 30, 1965. This must have been astonishing to the audience since probably for the very first time they watched on a movie theater screen a film that was made for television. This oddity was noticed by the reviewer of

the daily newspaper *Die Presse*: “Der Beginn verblüfft, denn auf der Kinoleinwand steht: ‘Ein Fernsehfilm.’“ (Winge 1965). The television premiere of the film, in fact, happened a mere one year later, on May 3, 1966.

Die Presse praised the new motifs discovered by the Austrian filmmakers, whose peers until that moment had usually been interested in silver woods (probably an allusion to *The Forester of the Silver Wood*, *Der Förster vom Silberwald*, aka *Echo der Berge*, an oversimplified Heimatfilm from 1954). The characteristic that the reviewer extols most is the film’s realism or even naturalism in the depiction of Vienna – an Austrian mix of poverty, unemployment, opportunism, cowardness and brutality. This statement is one of many that prove that at least the critics were ready for and deeply interested both in coming to terms with the difficult past (not only the Nazi, but also the Austrofascist one) and a departure from the idealized, entrenched image of Austria that dominated Austrian film at the time. The reviewer adds a remark, hoping that this is an example of new Austrian cinema: “Hier sehe ich zum erstenmal nach vielen leeren Jahren den möglichen Anfang eines österreichischen Films“ (Winge 1965).

Realism is also the main factor that deserves appraisal in the daily *Der Kurier*: “Er [the film – note by the author] läuft jetzt in den Kinos und ist eine Visitenkarte, die uns Ehre macht (...). So haben wir Wien in einem Spielfilm selten gesehen. So ist es nämlich wirklich. Es wurde nichts aufpoliert und nichts mit Staubzucker übergossen, vor allem aber handeln die agierenden Personen echt” (Anonym 1965 – *Kurier*). The reviewer marvels at the actors: Erik Frey for his role as the *Heimwehr* officer Schantl and Attila Hörbiger as an old socialist, and he extols the directing skills of John Olden and the photography of Elio Carniel with this combination contributing to a credible and astounding image of Vienna in the 1930s: “ein Traumensemble für einen österreichischen Film – allerdings von einer Fernsehfilma gedreht” (Ibid). The reviewer’s last sentence may be viewed as a complaint or dissatisfaction with the fact that such a realistic film had not been made in the ‘traditional’ way, but was a product of television. This critical voice mirrors to a certain extent the specifics of Austrian film in the 1960s, the specter of the crisis that would strike the film industry in the following years and the significance of television in coming to terms with the difficult past.

The social-democratic *Arbeiter-Zeitung* compares the film with the play *Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald*, written by Ödön von Horváth (which was adapted for a television play in 1961 by Erich Neuberg). He states that in both films the essential Austrian symbols had been recontextualized – the waves of the Danube do not sound exclusively like the rhythm of a waltz and its water is a muddy grey and not always blue. This is another critical text that evinces the propensity to praise realism in an Austrian film. In particular, the re-enacted scenes of the assassination deserve, according to the author, great praise (Walden 1965). However, the love story between Tini and Franz, reflected the convention typical for a German speaking film that the audience had very much become accustomed to. The reviewer argued that sometimes the stereotypical depiction of some characters was another drawback of the film. Nonetheless, the general image of the film is indisputably positive. The author claims that the film contributes to a national reconciliation between former enemies.

One of the most enthusiastic reviews was published in the communist *Volksstimme*. Here, the author was enthralled by the fact that an Austrian film finally deals with this difficult chapter from the recent past and marveled both at the construction of the characters and the actors who played them. He claims that intermingling historical events with a fictional (love) story is a good idea, because the film can better reach the audience (Rothmayer 1965).

Other press reviews, however, are more skeptical or even negative. The journalist of *Salzburger Nachrichten* after having watched the film on television has nothing against touching upon the difficult past, but the number of drawbacks of the film is so long that the newspaper leaves no illusion that they would not be recommending the film. First, according to the author too much time had passed since the events presented in the film. Second, the script was full of stereotypical characters. Third, the journalist compares the docudrama with the earlier documentary about the Nazi coup⁴ and comes to the conclusion that Olden's film makes a much worse impression. Even the performance of great actors, in the journalist's opinion, cannot compensate for the generally negative result (Anonym 1966 – *Salzburger Nachrichten*).

The same tone of disappointment appears in a review in *Neues Österreich*, a newspaper which was founded after the war by representatives of the leading political parties. Although coming to terms with the past is a necessary and important issue (the author even uses the term *Vergangenheit bewältigen*), the review states, the script is highly unsuccessful. The journalist argues that the film avails itself of numerous simplifications and two-dimensionality in the depiction of the characters. Furthermore, he maintains that particular threads do not fit in with one another. The author summarizes his review with the same observation put in the beginning – the noble intentions do not guarantee the high quality of the film (Hitzenberger 1965).

The tabloid *Krone-Zeitung* demonstrates a very peculiar and ambiguous approach to the film. When it was screened in movie theaters in 1965, the newspaper praised the film in a short review and even recommended it as a completion of a history lesson in school (Anonym – *Krone* 1965). However, one year later, *Krone* reproached the filmmakers for creating cliché characters and the general concept for depicting very poignant events from the recent past by means of individual characters and not a collective of Austrians. The journalist also complains about alleged technical drawbacks of the film (Anonym 1966 – *Krone*). In other major daily newspapers: *Kleine Zeitung*, *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, *Wiener Zeitung* and *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten* the film was in the TV program guide but had no other information apart from where and when it was on.

Although noticed by the press, the film scarcely attracted the attention of movie theater goers. Released on April 30, 1965, the film was screened in only one arthouse Viennese theater and for a mere week. Just as in the case of other television films, due to the lack of any data in the archives of the *ORF*, we are unable to assess the film's

⁴ *Der 25. Juli 1934*, directed by Walter Davy, written by Helmut Andics, broadcast on the Austrian television on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the coup, on July 24, 1964.

rating, since such a data was not collected until the 1990s. The resonance among the audience is also impossible to estimate since the television protocols relating to the feedback of the viewers have only been stored since the end of the 1960s. However, as demonstrated, the film received a mixed reception in the press, ranging from great praise to total rejection. Furthermore, the general concept of dealing with Austria's recent past was not questioned in any review. Some critics even argued that was high time to that this past was dealt with, while two newspapers contended that it was either too early or too late to deal with the corporative state and National Socialism.

CLOSING REMARKS

As the first film with a dramatic structure and a substantial number of fictional characters (I still refrain from calling this work 'fiction film'), *The Blue Danube* questions the heritage of the Austrian film that had hitherto contributed to the creation of Austria's patriotic identity. Although some key national symbols are contorted and the script employs a character of a Viennese opportunist Nazi, the critics do not object to these representations. It is rather the melodramatic convention that makes some critics look askance at the docudrama. The film, though, should be viewed as a milestone in dealing with the Austrofascist and Nazi past in the public discourse, actually the only full length 1960s Austrian film that deals with this past using a fictional story.

It departs from the predominant patriotic narrative of the national identity, questions some stereotypes ascribed to Austria, such as the positive image of Danube, the role of the classical music, the peacefulness of Austrians, and challenges the established political compromise of Camp Street. In broader terms, *The Blue Danube* appears as one of the first films to even impugn the so called first victim myth, by showing that among the Austrian population there were some illegal Nazi activists who were already seeking *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany in 1934.

References

Primary sources

- Hiesel F. (1965), *An der schönen blauen Donau* – the script of the film, Archives of the Northern German Broadcasting (NDR), file no. 79, Fernsehfilmproduktion Dr. Heinz Scheiderbauer K. G.
- Anonym (1965), *Die Rechtfertigung des Österreichers*, "Kronen-Zeitung" May 1: 12.
- Anonym (1965), *Ein 'echter' Film*, "Der Kurier" May 3: 11.
- Anonym (1966), *Billigstes Klischee*, "Kronen-Zeitung" May 5: 10.
- Anonym (e.h.) (1966), *Vor dem Bildschirm notiert: An der schönen blauen Donau*, "Salzburger Nachrichten", May 5: 7.
- Hitzenberger, F. (1965), *Auch filmisch unbewältigte Vergangenheit*, "Neues Österreich" May 1: 13.
- Jentzsch F. (1966), *An der schönen blauen Donau. Dokumentarspiel um den Dollfuß-Mord*, "Hör Zu" 18: 28-29.

- Rothmayer G. (1965), ...und Politik made in Austria, "Volksstimme" May 1: 9.
 Walden F. (1965), Mord an der schönen blauen Donau, "Arbeiter-Zeitung" April 30: 3.
 Winge H. (1965). Filmverjüngung durch TV. 'An der schönen blauen Donau' geht neue Wege, "Die Presse" May 3: 6.

Secondary literature

- Axer C. (2011), *Die Aufarbeitung der NS-Vergangenheit. Deutschland und Österreich im Vergleich und im Spiegel der französischen Öffentlichkeit*, Köln: Böhlau Verlag.
- Bailer B. (2013), *50 Jahre Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes*, w: DÖW (Hrsg.), *Opferschicksale. Widerstand und Verfolgung im Nationalsozialismus. 50 Jahre Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes*, Wien: DOQ, 9-30.
- Bordwell D. (1985), *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Cohen-Weisz S. (2016), *Jewish Life in Austria and Germany Since 1945: Identity and Communal Reconstruction*, Budapest-New York: Central European University Press.
- Corell C. (2009), *Der Holocaust als Herausforderung für den Film. Formen des filmischen Umgangs mit der Shoah seit 1945. Eine Wirkungstypologie*, Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Eder J. (2014), *Die Figur im Film. Grundlagen der Figurenanalyse*, Marburg: Schüren.
- Falter M. (2019), *Die Grenzen der Demokratie. Politische Auseinandersetzungen um Rechtsextremismus im österreichischen Nationalrat*, Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Haberl G. (1996), *Kinobeispiele am Bildschirm. Der österreichische Fernsehfilm als ästhetisches Problem*, in: Schlemmer G. (ed), *Der neue österreichische Film*, Wien: Wespennest, 359-370.
- Hammerstein K. (2017), *Gemeinsame Vergangenheit – getrennte Erinnerung? Der Nationalsozialismus in Gedächtnisdiskursen und Identitätskonstruktionen von Bundesrepublik Deutschland, DDR und Österreich*, Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag.
- Hanisch E. (2019), *Landschaft und Identität. Versuch einer österreichischen Erfahrungsgeschichte*, Wien: Böhlau Verlag.
- Hanslick E. (1885), *Die moderne Oper. Kritiken und Studien*, Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für deutsche Literatur.
- Kapczynski J. M. (2015), *The Singular Jew. Representing National Socialism's Jewish Victims in Recent Historical Cinema*, w: Kobrynsky O., Bayer G. (eds), *Holocaust Cinema in the Twenty-First Century. Memory, Images and the Ethics of Representation*, New York: Wallflower Press, 117-140.
- Koch G. (1993). *Mimesis and Bilderverbot*, "Screen" 34(3): 211-222.
- Königseder A. (2005), *Antisemitismus 1933–1938*, in: Tálos E., Neugebauer W. (eds), *Austrofaschismus. Politik–Ökonomie–Kultur 1933–1938*, Wien: Lit, 54-67.
- Moser K. (2007), *Zwischen Aufarbeitung, Distanzierung und Verdrängung. Nationalsozialismus im österreichischen Nachkriegsfilm der Jahre 1945-1955*, w: Stern F. et al (eds.), *Filmische Gedächtnisse. Geschichte – Archiv – Riss*, Wien: Mandelbaum, 113-135.
- Neugebauer W. (2014), *The Austrian Resistance 1938–1945*, Wien: Steinbauer.
- Nichols B. (1994), *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Öhner V. (2005), *Fernsehen – Geschichte – Gedächtnis. Zur Transformation dokumentarischer Inszenierungsweisen der Historie*, w: Gerbel C. et al (eds), *Transformationen gesellschaftlicher Erinnerung. Zur „Gedächtnisgeschichte“ der Zweiten Republik*, Wien: Verlag Turia + Kant, 131-157.

- Paget D. (2011), *No other way to tell it. Docudrama on Film and Television*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Pauley B. (1992), *From Prejudice to Persecution. A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism*, London: University of North Carolina Press.
- Pfabigan A. (2002), *Orgien im Gemeindebau. Der Herr Karl als Zeitgenosse*, w: Benay J., Stieg G. (eds), *Das Land der Satire*, Bern: Lang, 56-80.
- Pfister M. (1988), *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pirker P. / Koch M. / Kramer J. (2019), *Contested Heroes, Contested Places: Politics of Remembrance at Vienna Heldenplatz / Ballhausplatz*, w: Echternkamp J. / Jaeger S. (eds), *Views of Violence. Representing the Second World War in Museums and Memorials*, New York: Bergahn, 174-214.
- Pollach A. (2005), *Close-up. Das österreichische Fernsehspiel von 1955 bis 1967*, w: Szely S. (Hrsg.), *Spiele und Wirklichkeiten. Rund um 50 Jahre Fernsehspiel und Fernsehfilm in Österreich*, Wien: Verlag Filmarchiv Austria, 15-32.
- Rathkolb O. (2021) *The Paradoxical Republic: Austria 1945–2020*, New York: Bergahn Books.
- Uhl H. (2004), *Vom Opfermythos zur Mitverantwortungsthese: NS-Herrschaft, Krieg und Holocaust im >>österreichischen Gedächtnis<<* w: Flacke M. (ed), *Mythen der Nationen. 1945 – Arena der Erinnerungen*, Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin, 481–508.
- Waibel E. (2019), *Zeitkritik im Hauptabendprogramm. Faschismus und Krieg im frühen österreichischen Fernsehspiel*, w: Keilbach J., Rásky B. And Starek J. (eds), *Völkermord zur Prime Time*, Wien-Hamburg: New Academic Press, 47-68.
- Weinzierl E. (1985), *Zu wenig Gerechte. Österreicher und Judenverfolgung 1938-1945*, Graz: Styria.
- Winter R. (2014), *Geschichtspolitik und Fernsehen: Repräsentationen des Nationalsozialismus im frühen österreichischen TELEVISION (1955 – 1970)*, Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Winter R. (2019), *Interventions. Options for Action Against Antisemitic Violence in the 1965 TV Play 'An der schönen blauen Donau'*, w: Keilbach J., Rásky B. And Starek J. (eds), *Völkermord zur Prime Time*, Wien-Hamburg: New Academic Press, 193-204.
- Wodak R., de Cillia R. (2005), *Commemorating the past: the discursive construction of official narratives about the 'Rebirth of the Second Austrian Republic'*, "Discourse & Communication" 1(3): 315–341, DOI: 10.1177/1750481307079206.

Dr Jakub Gortat, Zakład Niemcoznawstwa, Uniwersytet Łódzki (jakub.gortat@uni.lodz.pl)

Słowa kluczowe: dokudrama, austrofaszizm, przezwyciężanie przeszłości, historia Austrii, nazizm

Keywords: docudrama, Austrofascism, coming to terms with the past, Austrian history, National Socialism

ABSTRACT

An der schönen blauen Donau (*The Blue Danube*), written by Hellmut Andics and Franz Hiesler and directed by John Olden in 1965, may be viewed as a groundbreaking television docudrama in Austria for two reasons.

Firstly, it offered a new, hybrid form called 'docudrama,' which combined elements of a documentary film with the features of a fiction film. Secondly, in the context of the Austrian culture of remembrance, the film was astonishing in that its narrative boldly dealt with topics considered taboo at a time of an informal consensus between the two major political parties: the ÖVP and the SPÖ

as well as their successors, the CSP and the SDAP. In line with this consensus, no mention of the antagonism between the conservatives and socialists during the authoritarian rule of Chancellors Dollfuß and Schuschnigg was made in the public discourse, instead, both parties claimed to have been victims of the Nazi terror (the so called “camp street” myth – Mythos der Lagerstraße). An der schönen blauen Donau significantly infringes this consensus, showing the persecution of socialist activists by the Austrofacist regime and the downplaying of the activity of the underground Nazis in Austria (the so called illegale Nazis). Embedded in the context of the Austrian post-war culture of remembrance, the paper analyses the teleplay’s narrative, paying special attention to selected characters representing three political movements in Austria: the socialists, the conservatives and the Nazis.

Film narration analysis is the principal research method applied in the paper. Its last section also examines the reception of the docudrama and its problematic distribution.