

What's so Austrian about the Alps? Local, Transnational and Global Perspectives in Austrian Exhibitions about the Alps

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The exhibition ‘Hast du meine Alpen gesehen? Eine jüdische Beziehungsgeschichte’ [‘Did you See My Alps?: A Jewish Love Story’] explores the Jewish experience of the Alps from the nineteenth century onwards.¹ Its introductory text ends with a rhetorical question, ‘Was ist das Jüdische daran?’ [‘What’s Jewish about all this?’], leaving visitors to draw their own conclusions. The material displayed suggests complex answers: on the one hand, Jewish and non-Jewish experiences of the Alps have often been indistinguishable; on the other, Jews have, for religious, cultural and historical reasons, experienced the Alps differently from non-Jews: as a means of assimilation, for instance, or as the physical barrier between dictatorship and freedom. This essay examines a series of Austrian exhibitions (which are introduced below after some preliminary remarks) through the lens of a similar question: ‘What is Austrian about the Alps?’. Given the self-evident importance of the Alps to national identity in the *Alpenrepublik*,² the question is, at one level, absurd, but it articulates my observation that, of the various strands woven together in these exhibitions — local, regional, national, transnational and global — the Austrian national strand is manifestly the weakest.

¹ The exhibition was a co-operation between the Jüdisches Museum Hohenems [Jewish Museum, Hohenems] and the Jüdisches Museum Wien [Jewish Museum, Vienna]. I am grateful to Hanno Loewy at Hohenems, Monika Gärtner and Veronika Raich at the Österreichischer Alpenverein, and Helmut Schlatter at the Artenne Nenzing for discussing their exhibitions with me.

² Nikhil Staehe points to the motif of alpine flowers on Euro coins as evidence of the centrality of the Alps to the national self-image today. He also notes that as early as 1945, Karl Renner had spoken of ‘unsere Alpen’ [our Alps] as the key to Austria’s new prosperity as a tourist nation. Nikhil Staehe, ‘Authenticity and the Critique of the Tourism Industry in Postwar Austrian Literature’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Ohio State University, 2003), p. 27.

In saying this, I take into account that Austria may be an unspoken point of reference even where it is not explicitly mentioned. Gunda Barth-Scalmani, Hermann Kuprian and Brigitte Mazohl-Wallnig have shown that regional identity in Austria is sometimes constructed in opposition to ‘Vienna’ and sometimes, conversely, viewed as constitutive of Austrian national identity.³ To address local or regional *Heimat* discourses is therefore arguably always also to address an Austrian theme. Recent work in Austrian museum studies helps define the particular role played by museums in this complex inter-relationship between national and sub-national (but also supra-national) identity structures. In their introduction to a volume of essays on the representation of twentieth-century Austrian history in the museum, Dirk Rupnow and Heidemarie Uhl note the dispersal of Austrian historical heritage across a wide range of national and regional museums. They see this fragmentation as one reason why attempts to create a national ‘House of History’ – which would be the equivalent of Germany’s ‘Haus der Geschichte’ in Bonn – are no nearer realization after more than a decade of debate.⁴ In his own contribution, Rupnow attributes some of the blame to Austria’s strong tradition of two types of museum, neither of them conventionally ‘national’. The regional museums (*Landesmuseen*) of nineteenth-century foundation conceived of themselves as ‘national’ while largely displaying regional culture, with an emphasis on folk traditions.⁵ Meanwhile, museums displaying Habsburg treasures presented the dynasty’s glory to the world with little reference to the Austrian people. Rupnow sums up: ‘Während die Landesmuseen ihr Blickfeld territorial eng

³ Gunda Barth-Scalmani, Hermann J. W. Kuprian and Brigitte Mazohl-Wallnig, ‘National Identity or Regional Identity: Austria Versus Tyrol/Salzburg’, in Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka (eds), *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction Publishers, 1997), pp. 32-63.

⁴ Dirk Rupnow and Heidemarie Uhl, eds, *Zeitgeschichte Ausstellen in Österreich. Museen – Gedenkstätten – Ausstellungen* (Vienna, Cologne and Weimar: Böhlau, 2011).

⁵ Dirk Rupnow, ‘Nation ohne Museum? Diskussionen, Konzepte und Projekte’, in Rupnow and Uhl, pp. 417-63 (pp. 419-20).

begrenzten, waren die Wiener Museen des Hofes universal ausgerichtet' [While the regional museums had a limited territorial perspective, the Viennese court museums had a universal outlook].⁶ A further complicating factor in this non-national museum landscape, addressed only peripherally in Rupnow's and Uhl's volume but relevant to the examples in my study, is the EU's championing of regionalism through various regional funding schemes, which help support museums and the tourist boards that promote them.

A secondary aim of this article is to assess the degree to which exhibition makers are critical of the national icon 'Alps'. Contributors to the Rupnow and Uhl volume are suspicious of exhibitions that present Austria's twentieth century as an *Erfolgsgeschichte* [success story], bracketing out periods of fascist rule and ignoring social tensions.⁷ Accordingly, they favour those exhibitions that take a more critical stance. As the primary site of tourism, the Alps are a key part of the Austrian success story. Moreover, as I show below, celebratory narratives of 'Erschließung' [opening up new climbing and hiking routes], 'Pionierarbeit' [pioneering] and 'Erstbesteigung' [the conquest of new peaks] — all versions of the paradigmatic success story — play an important role in local folk memory and self-presentation. To a degree my argument therefore shadows Rupnow's and Uhl's, doing for exhibitions about the Alps what they do for more general exhibitions about recent Austrian history, including favouring those exhibitions that criticize or ironize the alpine success story. Ultimately, however, I reject an easy division into clearly affirmative and clearly critical exhibition displays. The dichotomous model of

⁶ Rupnow, p. 421.

⁷ Rupnow, p. 452, p. 456; Karin Liebhart, 'Menschen – Mythen – Meilensteine. Die österreichische Millenniums-Länderausstellung 1996', in Rupnow and Uhl, pp. 255-74 (p. 274); Monika Sommer, 'Experiment und Leerstelle. Zur Musealisierung der Zeitgeschichte in den österreichischen Landesmuseen', in Rupnow and Uhl, pp. 313-35 (p. 316).

Heimat and anti-*Heimat* discourses which, though not uncontested,⁸ has served literary studies well, proves less useful here. In particular, there is no equivalent in these exhibitions of Elfriede Jelinek's open contempt for Austria's 'klerikal-alpine Verlogenheit' [the mendacity of Catholic alpine Austria]⁹ and for the attempt 'to forget a bothersome history [...] by cashing in profitably on the false tourist paradise erected in Austria's winter and sports *Heimat*'.¹⁰ I argue that some exhibitions adopt multiple positions towards the Alps and that all of them are consumed within a wide spectrum of leisure experiences of alpine culture.

Two further preliminary notes are necessary. Just as Austria has, as yet, no national 'House of History', so it has no central 'Museum of the Alps'; instead, responsibility for conserving and interpreting alpine culture is spread across a range of institutions with differing priorities. *Heimatmuseen* [local history museums], often dating back to the nineteenth century, and *Freilichtmuseen* [open-air museums], mostly founded in the 1970s, preserve evidence of alpine folk traditions and culture. A significant object collection relating to mountain climbing and winter sports (but also ranging widely from art to science) is conserved under the stewardship of the Österreichischer Alpenverein [Austrian Alpine Association].¹¹ Other objects associated with the Alps — touristic posters, taxidermic mounts of alpine fauna, and so on — are dispersed across national and regional museum departments. While a more substantial research project would be required to investigate the full range of conserved material in the highly

⁸ Jörg Thunecke has questioned both the practice of *Anti-Heimatliteratur* and the tendency of scholarship to ignore works that do not fall into the bi-partite model of *Heimatliteratur* and *Anti-Heimatliteratur*. Jörg Thunecke, 'Weder Idylle noch Hölle: Friedrich Ch. Zauners Heimatroman-Zyklus *Das Ende der Ewigkeit*', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 31/3 (1999), 252-77.

⁹ Elfriede Jelinek writing in *Theater heute* about her play *Mein Stück*, cited in Matthias Konzett, *The Rhetoric of National Dissent in Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, and Elfriede Jelinek* (Rochester, NY, 2000), p. 109.

¹⁰ Konzett, p. 113.

¹¹ It is, however, a historical collection, and the Association has no budget for contemporary acquisitions. At its current location in Innsbruck it also has no exhibition space: the five-year lease on space at the Hofburg in Innsbruck, where the Museum is showing 'Berge. Eine unverstandliche Leidenschaft' (analysed later in this article), is intended to address this difficulty in the short term until permanent space can be found.

dispersed ‘archive’ of the Alps, the exhibitions visited cover a broadly representative range of object types.

Permanent exhibitions were viewed at the Montafoner Heimatmuseum in Schruns, the Tourismuseum Gaschurn, the Alpinarium Galtür and the Landesmuseum Rudolfinum in Klagenfurt. Two long-term exhibitions visited were ‘Berge. Eine unverständliche Leidenschaft’ [‘Mountains. A Mysterious Passion’] by the Alpenverein-Museum Innsbruck, showing 2007-12 at the Hofburg Innsbruck, and ‘Hast du meine Berge gesehen?’ at the Jüdisches Museum Hohenems. I also saw a series of summer exhibitions: ‘Sommerfrische im Himmel. Alltag und Idylle’ [‘A Summer Retreat in “Heaven”: Between the Everyday and the Idyllic’] at the Artenne Nenzing, which took as its subject a holiday village in a remote mountain valley; ‘Kind und Kuh’ [‘Child and Cow’] at the Montafoner Bergbaumuseum Silbertal, which showed primitive children’s toys from the collection of ethnologist Eugenie Goldstern; ‘Bergbilder’ [‘Mountain Images’] at the Montafoner Heimatmuseum Schruns, which addressed the changing iconography of the mountains; ‘Zwischen Valleu und Vallüla’ [‘Between Valleu and Vallüla’ (two peaks climbed by hikers)] at the Montafoner Tourismuseum Gaschurn, a biographical exhibition about a local priest and pioneer Alpinist; and, finally, ‘Schnee. Rohstoff der Kunst’ [‘Snow: Raw Material of Art’], an art exhibition at the Vorarlberger Landesmuseum in Bregenz.¹² Since all but one of the exhibitions were shown either in Tyrol or in Vorarlberg, inferences about national trends should be drawn with caution.

I

¹² Where catalogues are available, details are given at the first mention of the exhibitions below.

The images displayed in the exhibitions testify to the fact that the alpine landscape militates visually against national classification: views of mountain peaks, snow scenes, mountain huts and mountaineers – of which I saw several hundred across the various exhibitions – for the most part bear no national stamp. While this same quality of neutrality facilitates the projection of national visions and fantasies onto the mountains, it remains the case that such fantasies are only rarely visible on the surface of the objects conserved for museum display. Besides, on the evidence of these exhibitions, the Alps have long been a transnational and international space. ‘Berge. Eine unverstandliche Leidenschaft’, in particular, shows how artists, scientists and sportspeople from all over Europe converged on the Alps from the eighteenth century onwards.¹³ Other exhibitions deal with border regions, where national boundaries have been more or less permeable at different times in history. ‘Hast du meine Alpen gesehen?’, for instance, tells the history of the use of the mountain passes as escape routes, not only during the National Socialist era but also during the exodus of Holocaust survivors to Mandatory Palestine in 1946-48.¹⁴

Some of the exhibitions draw more surprising arcs from the very local to the international. ‘Kind und Kuh’ brings children’s toys produced in remote communities in the southern Swiss region of Wallis to a small mining museum in the Austrian region of Montafon. The motivation for this transposition of objects is intensely local, part of efforts by the local history society to atone for the fact that the village produced an SS guard who worked at Sobibor, where the collector of the toys (Eugenie Goldstern, a Russian-born Austrian ethnologist) is thought to have been murdered. The curators of ‘Sommerfrische im Himmel’

¹³ *Berge, eine unverstandliche Leidenschaft*, ed. by Philipp Fesch, Beat Gugger and Gabriele Rather (Vienna and Bozen, 2009).

¹⁴ *Hast du meine Alpen gesehen? Eine judische Beziehungsgeschichte*, ed. by Hanno Loewy and Gerhard Milchram (Munich, 2009).

recall that families on holiday in the so-called ‘Nenzinger Himmel’, a tiny summer resort untouched by international tourism, used to walk to Liechtenstein in the 1950s to buy Swiss chocolate and American cigarettes; they also recount the history of the Swiss hunting association that leased land in the ‘Himmel’ for nearly a century. The Alpinarium Galtür has a more programmatically ‘glocal’ agenda: a site-specific museum, built to commemorate a fatal avalanche, it devotes equal space to the customs of the local Paznaun region and to the global geological movements that produced the Alps. Indeed, a photograph of an avalanche on Mars introduces an inter-planetary perspective.

As this last example suggests, in figuring the Alps as transnational or international, the exhibitions do more than just reflect alpine realities: curators choose this emphasis. By combining objects and stories from a variety of participating nations without comment, curators efface national divisions. In the larger exhibitions, objects produced in Austria, Germany, Switzerland and elsewhere are freely combined. Thus, one of the smaller rooms of ‘Berge. Eine unverstandliche Leidenschaft’ contains a video by Swiss artist Anna Winteler, a Swiss radio recording of the first cable-car ride to the summit of Santis, a quotation from the French geologist and botanist Louis Ramond de Carbonnieres, and a page from the notebook of Italian scientist Angelo Mosso. Likewise, in a room devoted to road and rail communications in the Alps, the Alpinarium Galtur displays information on Austrian and Swiss engineering projects alongside the results of a Dutch design project that envisages a fantasy of Switzerland’s future (‘What might Switzerland become?’). These and other materials are arranged under thematic, but not national, headings. Finally, the snow globes that form a light-hearted *entree* to ‘Schnee. Rohstoff der Kunst’ are a standardized Western product commodifying a hotchpotch of motifs: a

bust of Mozart sits alongside a Buddha and a dolphin; a wayside cross and other alpine scenes compete with teddy bears, penguins and the Eiffel Tower.

Such internationalism is doubtless partly a function of institutional contexts. ‘Hast du meine Alpen gesehen?’ is due to travel to exhibition partners in Switzerland, Germany and Italy. The Österreichischer Alpenverein co-operates closely with its German sister organization, with whom its history was largely shared until 1945, and many objects on view in ‘Berge. Eine unverständliche Leidenschaft’ are on loan from Germany. In fact, the larger exhibitions all contained loans from abroad, and even the most local of the art venues, the Artenne Nenzing, had commissioned artists from Austria, Germany and Liechtenstein to respond to its theme.¹⁵ Some institutions have benefitted from EU funding for regional or cross-border initiatives: the Landesmuseum Rudolfinum received ‘Interreg III’ funding (awarded for Austrian/Italian co-operation) for an upgrade to its displays about the Alps, while the organization Terra Raetica, an EU-funded consortium of Swiss, Austrian and Italian councils in the ‘Rätischer Dreieck’, helps promote the Alpinarium Galtür.¹⁶ The permanent exhibition at the Alpinarium was supported by the regional development association Europaregion Tirol — Südtirol — Trentino.¹⁷ The Alpinarium, the Artenne and the three Monatfon museums (Schruns, Gaschurn and Silbertal) have all received funding from the EU’s LEADER regional development programme. Finally, ‘Schnee’ received some of its funding from Pro Helvetia, presumably for the loan of Swiss artworks. Other funding comes from the *Länder*, meaning that support for these exhibitions rarely comes from national state coffers.

¹⁵ See http://www.artenne.at/content/Rueckblick/2009/Ausstellung/A_09_doku_tenneale_screen.pdf (accessed 15 March 2010).

¹⁶ www.culturaraetica.eu (accessed 15 March 2010).

¹⁷ www.europaregion.info/de/41.asp (accessed 15 March 2010).

II

Whatever its source, the internationalism of the various exhibitions goes hand in hand with an examination of the connections between Alpinism, *Heimat* culture and nationalism, most explicitly in ‘Hast du meine Alpen gesehen?’, which tells of the Aryanization of Jewish hotels and other alpine businesses and recalls that the Alpenverein adopted the so-called ‘Arierparagraph’ or “‘Aryans’ only’ rule as early as the 1920s, long before anti-Semitism became a state ideology. The visitor is not permitted to relegate this fact to a comfortably distant chapter in Austria’s history because the curators link it to contemporary politics through the inclusion of two media and internet discussions:¹⁸ one concerns the belated decision of the Alpenverein (in 2002) to remove the name of the instigator of the ‘Arierparagraph’, Eduard Pichl, from one of its mountain huts; the other concerns a political hoax during the 2006 Austrian election campaign in which a fake letter from a Muslim Member of Parliament requested that a *Gipfelkreuz* (a cross marking a mountain summit) be replaced by a crescent, and a fake response from the Alpenverein responded sympathetically.¹⁹

The Alpenverein’s own exhibition, ‘Berge’, relies on a more indirect approach to highlight the danger of nationalism appropriating mountain culture. Several objects, scattered around the exhibition and demanding to be discovered, bear a visible National Socialist stamp. In

¹⁸ This contrasts with the 2005 exhibition *Österreich ist frei*, mounted by the Lower Austrian regional government at the Schallaburg castle, which has been criticized by Ulrich Felber. The exhibition makers, he argues, ‘sparten nahezu alle aktuellen Bezüge aus, indem sie die NS-Vergangenheit als ein abgeschlossenes historisches Phänomen erscheinen ließen’ [‘omitted practically all points of reference to the present day by presenting the National Socialist past as a historical phenomenon which is over and done with’]. Ulrich Felber, ‘Republikgeschichte im Parlament. Die Jubiläumsausstellung 2008’, in Rupnow and Uhl, pp. 275-312 (p. 280).

¹⁹ A BZÖ politician was duped by the hoax correspondence, unleashing a storm of protest from defenders of the *Heimat*. ‘Auch Al-Rawi will BZÖ wegen Brieftäuschung klagen’, *Der Standard*, 28 September 2006.

the section ‘Packen’ (Packing), which explores changing expectations of what a hiker needs to carry up the mountain, objects spaced out along a display table are labelled with their weight. Weighing in at only 8g (compared with, say, 74g for a Swiss army knife) is a badge for members of the ‘HJ-Bergfahrtengruppe im Deutschen Alpenverein’ [Hitler Youth Hiking Group in the German Alpine Association], whose history is related in a nearby caption. The placing of the badge is counter-intuitive, since unlike the other objects here it is hardly an essential piece of mountain ‘kit’, yet despite or because of this it succeeds in provoking thought: so light an object, so loaded with political implications.²⁰

While the efficacy of this light-touch approach might be debated (staff at the Alpenverein-Museum reported that it was more popular with school students than with teachers),²¹ it is certainly preferable to the ‘dunkles Kapitel’ or ‘dark chapter’ method characteristic of institutional chronicles; this hides the specifics of National Socialist rule and crimes behind a generalized condemnation of the era. At the Tourismuseum Gaschurn (opened in 1992 and therefore hardly a relic from a distant post-war past) an information board about presidents of the local chapter of the Alpenverein makes no mention of the political caesura of 1938, while its tribute to the president elected in 1939 only praises his fortitude in ‘difficult times’:

Als 1939 der zweite Weltkrieg ausbrach, wurden die Grenzen gegen die Schweiz
militärisch abgeriegelt. Für Bergsteiger war dort kein Raum. Ein breiter Streifen

²⁰ A similarly light touch is adopted in ‘Sommerfrische’. A book titled *Naturschutz im Reichsgau Tirol und Vorarlberg*, printed in 1941, looks innocuous until the visitor looks inside and finds a prefatory quotation from the ‘Führer’; a record of the transfer of a border post from the community of Nenzing to the Deutsches Reich in 1943 bears an eagle and swastika stamp, unremarked.

²¹ Monika Gärtner and Veronika Raich in conversation with Chloe Paver (October 2009).

entlang der Hochgebirgsgrenze wurde neuerlich Niemandsland [...]. So blieb dem Obmann Walther Flaig nur mehr die Aufgabe, den großen Alpenvereinsbesitz nach Möglichkeit zu bewahren. Das war umso schwieriger, als nicht nur bald die ganze aktive Mitgliedschaft, sondern auch der Obmann selber zur militärischen Dienstleistung außer Landes einberufen wurden.

When the World War broke out in 1939, the army sealed off the border with Switzerland. There was no longer any place for mountain climbers. A wide strip along the border that runs through the high mountains was once more designated as no man's land. [...] All that was left for the President, Walther Flaig, was to preserve the possessions of the Alpine Association as best as he could. This was made all the more difficult by the fact that soon not just the whole active membership of the local Association but also the President himself were conscripted into military service abroad.

Here, the Second World War is divorced from its basis in National Socialism and figured as a nexus of unspecific political forces which act independently of individual agency.²²

²² Similar rhetorical devices are used by a 2009 tourist brochure to tell the story of the Montafon chapter of the Alpenverein: 'Durch die Wirren der beiden Weltkriege erschüttert, konnte der Verein nach einer Umstrukturierung zusammengehalten werden, die Mitgliedschaft stieg von 61 Mitgliedern im Jahre 1900 mit massiven Einbrüchen durch die Weltkriege trotzdem konstant an.' [Shaken by the turmoil of the two world wars, the Club was able to keep going after restructuring, with membership rising steadily from 61 members in 1900, albeit with significant slumps because of the world wars.] Here, the Second World War (dissociated from National Socialism through the unspecific term 'Weltkrieg') is made vaguer still through conflation with the First World War. While both wars are viewed as a setback for the Alpenverein, the causes and events of the wars – most particularly the change of regime in 1938 – disappear behind the generalized term 'Wirren'. ('Alpenverein Bezirk Montafon. Engagierter Verein mit langjähriger Geschichte' in 'Tourismus Aktuell', September 2006, brochure produced by Schruns-Tschagguns Tourismus GmbH, p. 18). For similar accounts from museum chronicles see Sommer, pp. 319-20.

III

The topics so far discussed — regionalism, internationalism and nationalism — converge in alpine *Heimat* culture. As a system of distinction separating one locality from the next, folk culture most obviously embodies the local. At the same time, it is a system common to the countries that share the Alps, expressing itself in broadly similar ways (costume, dance and customs), and it is, in addition, part of each country's brand identity overseas. Yet, in as much as *Heimat* culture is differently valued in different national contexts, it certainly also has a national dimension. While winter sports and alpine tourism are in one sense at odds with traditionalist conceptualizations of the *Heimat* because they involve the intrusion of both strangers and modern infrastructure into the landscape, Matthias Konzett has argued, in the context of Elfriede Jelinek's cultural critique, that they constitute two important ways in which Austria rehabilitated its *Heimat* culture after the National Socialist era, by commodifying it for consumption by others.²³ Accordingly, the next part of my analysis concerns the presentation of material traces of alpine *Heimat* culture in the museum. *Tracht* (traditional folk costume) and taxidermic mounts represent traditional categories of conserved material, while narratives of mountaineering and tourism represent the modern, leisure-based alpine *Heimat*.

In traditional displays of *Tracht*, as seen at the Montafoner Heimatmuseum, costumes are shown on tailor's dummies and behind glass. They are presented primarily as objects of local pride, with a focus on the expert needlework and on the transmission of attendant traditions from

²³ 'The Olympic Winter Games of 1964 in Innsbruck eventually paved the way for an entire new era in which Alpine folklore with its once problematic emphasis on *Heimat* was now attached to a leisure culture patterned on the democratic and capitalist principles of the Western world [...]. The ensuing development of an Alpine tourist industry brought Austria's backward economy up to date and placed it among the leading nations.' Konzett, p. 110.

one generation to the next.²⁴ The newer exhibitions that are this article's main focus steer clear of uncritical displays of *Tracht*, partly by choosing subject matter that does not call for such stereotypical artefacts, but also by providing a critical or at least ironical context for any *Tracht* displayed. In 'Berge. Eine unverständliche Leidenschaft' the only three-dimensional piece of traditional clothing on display is not a full costume on a tailor's dummy but a single felt hat, and this is juxtaposed with a modern helmet. Elsewhere, advertising from a turn-of-the-century Viennese clothes shop shows women developing their own equivalent to the male mountain-climber's 'uniform' of genericized *Tracht*. In yet another room, a photo series by Johann Widauer am Hafelekar shows artist Martin Kippenberger posing on a Tyrolean peak in a strikingly incongruous suit and tie. Finally, a souvenir plate is displayed beside the exit: alongside conventional alpine iconography (peaks, edelweiss, a cow, and a woman in *Tracht*) it depicts a mountain climber in modern climbing gear. The caption explains that the plate, on sale in the South Tyrolean town of Meran/Merano (with its mixed population of German speakers and Italian speakers), was made in China.

At the Alpinarium Galtür full *Tracht* is on view, but is framed within a specially commissioned film, in which local music and dance groups, dressed in *Tracht* but performing against a blank background rather than in a localized setting, provide interludes in a dramatic monologue. This acknowledges darker elements of *Heimat* culture, such as the superstition that led to the bearded vulture, suspected of snatching children, being hunted to extinction. 'Hast du meine Alpen gesehen?' prominently displays a fine, full-length photograph of ethnographer Konrad Mautner in *Tracht*, beside a slide-show of family photographs of *Tracht*-wearers. Indeed,

²⁴ The museum also displays nineteenth-century prints of Montafon *Tracht*, some produced as far away as London or Paris, reminding us that this system of markers of distinction appealed to the classificatory passions of the nineteenth century. This act of framing provides at least the seeds of a critical historical perspective on the costumes, but is currently unexploited.

the exhibition devotes much of its space to showing how, until 1938 (and even beyond), Jewish Austrians made substantial contributions to all aspects of *Heimat* culture: the manufacture and popularization of *Tracht* and *Tracht* dolls; ethnographic study of mountain communities; development of tourist infrastructure; the *Bergfilm*; and alpine sports. Berthold Auerbach, a German-Jewish writer, is credited with making the edelweiss the alpine symbol *par excellence*, and various objects — items from the kosher Hotel Edelweiss in St Moritz, a prayer book with a pressed edelweiss between its leaves, and a yarmulke with an edelweiss motif — show how Jews have readily appropriated this symbol.²⁵

Stuffed animals (as displayed, for instance, at the Montafoner Heimatmuseum or at the AlpinMuseum in Kempten, Germany) occupy an important place in the material archive of the alpine *Heimat*. In traditional taxidermic display, animals are celebrated as characteristic of the locality; the fact that they have been hunted, captured and objectified is played down. Some of the exhibitions analysed here abandon conventional naturalistic dioramas in favour of a minimalist staging of single mounted animals that call into question the dominance of human beings over the natural environment. In ‘Berge. Eine unverständliche Leidenschaft’ a stuffed bird of prey hovers above the visitor in the section ‘Oben’ [At the Top], reminding us that, however euphoric we feel on the summit, we were neither there first nor can we (by our own motive powers) ever rise the highest. In this way, the bird complements the photographs and text below it, which throw ironic light on the ‘Gipfelposen’ [Summit Poses] assumed by climbers while emphasizing how venial human beings are in their desire to claim to have been the highest or the first (resorting even to cheating). Elsewhere in ‘Berge’, a stuffed marmot is hidden, at children’s

²⁵ Similar displays of Jewish folk objects at southern German Jewish museums such as Fürth and Schnaittach likewise underscore the senselessness of the National Socialist construction of Jews as antithetical to the *Heimat*.

eye-level, behind a large display structure. While in other contexts this might seem a slight and ineffectual gesture, here the effect is heightened by its contrast with locally prevailing visual conventions: at the time of writing, shoppers could acquire, from the master taxidermist's shop in a nearby street, a somewhat sentimentalized mother-and-baby ensemble of marmots for €550. A review in *Der Standard* of a 2006 taxidermy exhibition begins with the words 'Tote Tiere sind beliebt. Sie hängen in Wohnzimmern, Gaststuben und Museen' [Dead animals are popular. They can be seen hanging in living rooms, pubs and restaurants, and museums].²⁶ While this may be lazy journalistic scene-setting, it is lazy scene-setting that would make little sense in the UK: compare the claim by a British scholar and artist that 'Taxidermy specimens and display have become increasingly liminal in contemporary society'.²⁷

The Alpinarium Galtür uses taxidermic mounts rather more prominently. In a display that gauges the relative ability of humans and animals to adapt to mountain conditions, stuffed animals strike anthropomorphic poses: a marmot leans back and swings its legs like a teenager sitting on the edge of a swimming pool; a chamois goat balances on a basketball. The animals speak in the first person in the accompanying texts, while human beings are objectified, represented by two lifeless mannequins. In the final room of the Alpinarium, which asks how local traditions can be conserved in a rapidly changing world, a marmot sits in a cooking pot, holding a knife like a high priest about to make a sacrifice; the display is hung lightly from wires, beside a recipe for roast marmot [fig. 1].

²⁶ [Anonymous], 'Braunbär mit Nadelstichen und rauchende Eichhörnchen', *Der Standard*, 21 February 2006, <http://derstandard.at/2346618> [accessed 5 June 2011]

²⁷ Merle Patchett and Kate Foster, 'Repair Work: Surfacing the Geographies of Dead Animals', *Museum and Society*, 6/ii (2008), 98-122 (p. 98).



The effect created is interestingly ambiguous: on the one hand the mount shows irreverence towards the traditional material culture of the *Heimat*; at the same time it celebrates an aspect of local culture: the seasonal hunting of marmot and its preparation according to often secret recipes, traditionally passed down from mother to daughter. This ambiguity is heightened by a label identifying the taxidermist as Peter Morass. While one might imagine the taxidermist as an artisan in the local *Heimat* tradition (albeit an artisan with scientific training), Morass trained for many years in Japan. Conversely, one might, on the evidence of this ironic mount, consider Morass a subverter of *Heimat* iconography, yet he produces largely ‘straight’ mounts for natural history displays, and the taxidermy championships in which he takes part — he is a multiple European champion — favour traditional taxidermic products.²⁸ In an article on the meanings of

²⁸ On Morass’s titles see http://portal.wko.at/wk/format_detail.wk?angid=1&stid=263002&dstid=195&opennavid=33855 (accessed 15 March 2010); on the championships, see http://www.eurotaxidermy.eu/etc_2006_longarone/ (accessed 15 March

taxidermy mounts in contemporary museum display, Rachel Poliquin assumes that where curators attempt to elicit a ‘cautionary reading’ — one which emphasizes human beings’ past sins against nature — they will use historical mounts or, like the Natural History Museum in London, announce that the practice of taxidermy has been discontinued out of sensitivity to the environment.²⁹ In Austria, where an exhibition of Morass’s new work has recently toured,³⁰ this is evidently not the case.

IV

Conventional mountaineering narratives, as found in the chronicles of local chapters of the Alpenverein, employ a celebratory rhetoric of ‘Erschließung’ and ‘Erstbesteigung’. Such narratives can still be read, for instance, in the older displays at the Tourismuseum Gaschurn, which record in detail the construction of each new mountain hut that opened up a new hiking route. That it is possible to update this rhetoric for the twenty-first century without substantially questioning its implications is apparent from a display at the Kärntner Landesmuseum in Klagenfurt. The museum has recently given a new lease of life to a massive plaster relief of the Großglockner mountain and its surroundings by making it the focus of an eight-minute multi-media show. As still and moving images play over the surface, visitors hear a sound collage comprising voiceover narrative, sound effects and classical music. Without doubt, this enlivens a

2010). In the article ‘Braunbär mit Nadelstichen’, a previous example of an ironic mount is presented as an exception to Morass’s normal practice.

²⁹ Rachel Poliquin, ‘The Matter and Meaning of Museum Taxidermy’, *Museum and Society*, 6 (2008), 123-34 (p. 129).

³⁰ An exhibition of Morass’s work has toured Austria and Italy, showing first at the Naturhistorisches Museum Wien in 2005, as ‘Momente der Wildnis’ [Moments of Wildness].

now outmoded nineteenth-century informational aid.³¹ However, of all the ideas the museum might have explored through the new display (the changes to the landscape since the relief was made, for instance, or the more abstract idea of the ‘Projektionsfläche Alpen’ [the Alps as a blank screen on to which ideas are projected]), it has chosen a conventional narrative of the *Erstbesteigung* of the Großglockner. Not that it sentimentalizes the expedition — extracts from a contemporary account reveal the climbing party’s superstitions and anxieties — but all hardships are ultimately overcome and, as the speaker announces the arrival at the summit, fireworks explode across the surface of the relief, accompanied by stirring Baroque organ music.³²

While never denying the glories of mountaineering (it is, after all, an exhibition about a ‘Leidenschaft’ or ‘passion’), ‘Berge. Eine unverständliche Leidenschaft’ is, by contrast, alive to the absurdities of our encounters with the mountains. The story is told of a Swiss parish that applied, in 1988, for permission to build a dry wall on the top of its mountain in order to return it to its status as a ‘Viertausender’ [four thousand-metre peak], humiliatingly forfeited when the surveyors were shown to have been several metres out in their calculations. Might it not be easier, wrote one alpinist to the mayor’s office, if hikers jumped in the air on the summit to place their heads above 4000 metres? Examples are also given of Enlightenment scientists who took their passion for categorizing and cataloguing too far: the cartographer whose key was so

³¹ Sommer argues that such ‘Technologien des Zeigens’ [technologies of display], which were state of the art in their day, were typical of the *Landesmuseen* in the 19th century (Sommer, p. 314).

³² The association of the Großglockner mountain with nationalist feelings is underlined by Helmut Qualtinger and Carl Merz’s satirical one-act monologue *Der Herr Karl* (1961). Karl, a staunch Austrian patriot, joins a friend on a celebratory tour of Austria after the signing of the Staatsvertrag, which restores Austria’s sovereignty in 1955. As his friend puts it: ‘i mecht amal unser schönes Österreich kennenlernen – jetzt, wo’s wieder uns g’heert’ [I’d like to get to know our lovely Austria – now that it belongs to us again]. Karl speaks of the feeling of community among Austrian tourists at the Großglockner, joined in wonder at the beauty of their own country. However, Qualtinger and Merz undermine his love of the mountains somewhat by making him too lazy to climb any. I am grateful to Judith Beniston for pointing me to this text. (Helmut Qualtinger and Carl Merz, ‘Der Herr Karl’ in *Der Herr Karl und weiteres Heiteres* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1964; first publ. 1959), pp. 7-31 (pp. 24-25)).

detailed that the map was unusable and the government in Vienna sent him back to the drawing board;³³ the Schlagintweit brothers, who assembled such astonishing masses of data in the Himalayas that they were unable to publish most of it, while what they did publish was considered unreadable. In a series of video interviews skiers and mountaineers talk of their love of the mountains, but Museum Studies scholar Gottfried Fliedl recalls being forced to go hiking as a child; he suggests that children's love of what is small and close at hand makes the adult preoccupation with wide views quite alien to them.

While operating on a smaller scale, 'Bergbilder' at the Montafoner Heimatmuseum covered some of the same ground as 'Berge. Eine unverständliche Leidenschaft', illustrating the evolution of an iconography of the Alps; it also shared some of the same mild irony. Even as it celebrated the pioneering spirit of Alpinist and writer Karl Blodig, the exhibition poked gentle fun at him: Blodig's dismissal of easy climbs as 'walks for women' ('Zu einer Damentour wird der Garneraturm nicht leicht herabsinken' [The Gerneraturm peak is never likely to be relegated to a women's hiking route]) is silently juxtaposed with a photograph of a woman surveying the mountains from a high peak. A similar comment by Johann Jakob Weilenmann, one of the first climbers to conquer Piz Buin ('Über das sanft geneigte Schuttfeld [...] könnte jede Dame gehen' [Even a woman could walk across the gently sloping scree]) appears near a photo of a woman walking over rocks towards a summit, evidently unhindered by a long Edwardian skirt.

³³ The key to Peter Anich's *Atlas Tirolensis* included the following categories of settlement, amongst others: 'Weiler, kleine Dörfer, mittlere Dörfer, mittlere Dörfer zerstreut, große Dörfer, große Dörfer zerstreut, Marktflecken' [Hamlets, small villages, mid-sized villages, mid-sized villages (dispersed), large villages, large villages (dispersed), small market towns].

Museum displays about tourism have conventionally presented a narrative of ‘Erschließung’ similar to Alpinism’s grand narrative, though in addition to the opening of new hiking routes they stress the building of tourist infrastructure. The Tourismuseum Gaschurn is currently in the process of being reconceived, so that its old display, from 1992, is now partly dismantled. The remaining evidence (also documented in a museum brochure) suggests that the display was not entirely affirmative, since it addressed the environmental degradation caused by tourism.³⁴ Nevertheless, on the whole, the display celebrated the development of a tourist infrastructure, recounting the building of the Silvretta Hochalpenstrasse and the forty-year history of the area’s chair-lifts. The museum also delighted in the object world of early tourism: advertising material, old skis and sleds, and so on. Even today, a reconstructed hotel bedroom displays pristine folk furnishings; suitcases, guide books, hiking boots and other holiday paraphernalia are absent from this tableau, despite their presence in the museum’s collections. There is therefore little sense of the encounter between *Heimat* and the visitor that constitutes the tourist transaction.

This may well change. The first stage of renewal was marked by the 2009 summer exhibition ‘Zwischen Valleu und Vallüla’, which charted the life of a former occupant of the house, the priest Franz Josef Battlogg. While enthusiastically celebrating Battlogg’s previously unsung contribution to the locality — not just his pioneering Alpinism but also, less stereotypically, his establishment of a much feted choral society — the exhibition also introduced conflicts and contradictions into the museum. Battlogg was characterized as a difficult individual who fell out with those around him. In a series of extracts from his diary,

³⁴ ‘Montafoner Tourismus-Museum Gaschurn’, ed. by Stand Montafon (Schruns, 1992), brochure, no ISBN, unpaginated insert between pp. 6 and 7.

Battlogg expresses his contempt for a mendacious clergy, for his bishop and for tourists. While Battlogg is at most a mildly provocative subject, this more ambivalent, less picturesque, view of the locality's past promises a new approach.

Perhaps because it is a recent foundation unburdened by a collection, the Alpinarium Galtür goes further than other museums in acknowledging the modern complexities of the alpine world. Folk objects are not kept separate from modern objects: an extraordinary hand-knitted tableau of an alpine landscape, complete with cows, farmhouses, fir trees, ski lifts, a mountain spirit and a wayside cross, hangs between large neon graphs representing statistics about alpine employment. Amongst other things, the museum gives space (though not, as far as I could ascertain, a first-person voice) to the *Saisonniers*, the low-paid, mostly migrant seasonal workers on whom the tourist industry relies, and who are under-represented in these exhibitions. The Alpinarium also treats engineering projects in their own right (with the help of models and plans) rather than placing them solely in the service of a narrative of 'Erschließung'.

Tourist experiences of a different kind were the focus of 'Sommerfrische im Himmel. Alltag und Idylle', which charted the development of the Nenzinger Himmel from a summer base for cattle farmers to a holiday village. Situated at the end of a toll road through a narrow valley, this small pocket of habitation is virtually cut off from the busy Montafon holiday region of which it forms a part; thanks to strict planning rules and restrictions on day visitors it has retained its peace and exclusivity. The subject of the Nenzinger Himmel is therefore ripe for nostalgic representation, although, significantly, such nostalgia would not be for an intact alpine lifestyle, which was already long gone from the Himmel by the early twentieth century, but for a purer form of tourism, free of commercialism, globalization, large-scale engineering works and noise.

In the event, the exhibition succeeded in expressing the affection inspired by this unique mountain enclave without exhausting itself in cosy celebration. What gave the exhibition an atypical perspective was the fact that the local community of Nenzing — which supplied most of the display material — is both host and guest at the ‘Himmel’ (since many Nenzing families own chalets or go walking there). This allowed an exploration of the ways in which a community consumes its own alpine surroundings for leisure purposes. Holiday snaps showed family groups playing or resting near the chalets and going for walks in everyday clothing; very few showed earnest hikers or climbers. This intimate, unspectacular imagery, coupled with a focus on the work needed to renovate the chalets and maintain the toll road, left an impression of an everyday, unheroic Alpinism, far from the vainglorious narratives of conquest and construction, and far from the iconography of *Gipfelposen* that together form the stuff of local Alpenverein histories (and which retain a certain power even in exhibitions that ironize them).

VI

It is not my contention that all exhibition displays about the Alps can, or should, be divided into those that celebrate the mountains as a conflict-free realm of beauty and tradition (and are therefore to be condemned) and those that identify conflicts and faultlines in the alpine world (and are therefore to be praised). As the examples discussed here have shown, an exhibition can simultaneously celebrate and question the Alps. The Tourismuseum Gaschurn may have cleared out the old displays from its first floor so that it can mount more stimulating exhibitions, but it also hopes that this move will show the charming vernacular décor of the wood-panelled rooms to better effect: a willingness to engage in cultural critique is evidently not incompatible with a conservation ethic. Moreover, since my study has not involved visitor research, I cannot

rule out the possibility that even uncritical exhibitions can be mitigated by intelligent guided tours and information proffered by attendants.

Notwithstanding its express aim of exposing local complicity in Nazism, the approach of ‘Kind und Kuh’ is not reducible to a position in an affirmative/critical binary. The exhibition suggests that contemporary ethnographic curators are likely to approach alpine culture on its own terms, that is to say analytically, but without the ironic distance of exhibition-makers in the arts. ‘Kind und Kuh’ showed pieces of carved wood based loosely on animal forms that, as late as the early twentieth century, served as toys in remote mountain valleys. These folk objects were displayed in a conservative setting: a small village museum, on a tourist route, housed in a building in the vernacular style. However, because the objects were so primitive — many unrecognisable as animals until the captions pointed out rudimentary horns or indentations intended to suggest udders, hooves and cow bells — they contrasted sharply with the kind of folk culture conventionally displayed in *Heimat* museums and commodified for the tourist industry. Unlike figures in *Tracht*, for instance, it would be impossible to mass-reproduce these ‘cows’ and ‘chickens’ for the tourist market. Yet, however crude, the objects were impressive and moving. The captions cited field notes made by ethnographer Eugenie Goldstern which confirmed that the children who owned the toys perceived them as real animals. Moreover, Goldstern’s meticulous record of the variation in patterns, such as the markings representing udders, testified to the transmission of cultural knowledge and craft traditions. By analysing the non-picturesque (rather than either celebrating or mocking the picturesque), the exhibition asked that alpine folk culture be taken seriously.

Gerald Lamprecht has argued that visitors expect Austria’s Jewish museums to question dominant narratives about Austria: ‘Jüdische Museen sollen jene Geschichten erzählen, die andere

Museen und Ausstellungen nicht zeigen wollen und/oder zeigen können' [Jewish museums are expected to tell the stories that other museums and exhibitions do not want to show or are unable to show].³⁵ Whether or not this function of Jewish museums can be conclusively demonstrated (Lamprecht's evidence for it is not extensive) the exhibitions under discussion here would seem to suggest a more widespread critical impulse among exhibition makers who take the alpine success story with a large pinch of salt. Having said that, a radically anti-*Heimat* view appeared only once, in the otherwise mainstream art exhibition 'Schnee. Rohstoff der Kunst': a series of collages by Christian Ludwig Attersee, 'Ein Führer durch Österreich für außerirdische Wesen' [A Guide to Austria for Extra-Terrestrials] (1964/65), showed sexual predators from another world, their outsized genitalia prominently displayed, stalking each of the nine federal states of Austria against the background of famous beauty spots.

My point is not that the exhibitions were otherwise rather tame. Unlike literature, exhibitions have an institutional basis and rarely engage in *Publikumsbeschimpfung* [insulting the audience]. However, Austrian visitors must come to exhibitions about the Alps with the knowledge that their country's most treasured alpine icons are fiercely contested. Indeed, in their everyday lives Austrians must encounter a complex mixture of discourses on their alpine *Heimat*. Some of these fall into a binary pattern of pro and contra: at the time the exhibitions were shown, the FPÖ was standing in regional elections on an anti-immigration platform, using the slogan 'Mut zur Heimat' [courage to stand up for the homeland]; at the same time, cabaret artist Viktor Gernot was gently lampooning alpine provincialism and xenophobia on primetime ORF. In other cases, positions are oddly compounded and synthesized. The *Wetterpanorama*, the daily webcam

³⁵ Gerald Lamprecht, 'Die österreichischen jüdischen Museen im zeitgeschichtlichen Kontext', in Rupnow and Uhl, pp. 213-36 (p. 233).

broadcast from the ski resorts, shows computerized data on snow conditions to an accompaniment of folk music. And since 2008 Austrians have been treated to McDonalds' 'Hüttengaudi' advertising campaign, a parodic transalpine mishmash: created for the German market but also shown in Austria, its promotional menu is based loosely on Swiss food, with a 'Big Rösti' hamburger and Emmental cheese baked in breadcrumbs. Using both traditional and 'viral' media, it features a stylized alpine landscape complete with chalets, men in lederhosen, cool young people in ski gear speaking impenetrable Bavarian dialect and a yodelling marmot. Thus, today's Austrians cannot escape from framings and reframings of the Alps. Taken together, the exhibitions examined here — produced by a network of professionals who have collaborated on other projects — represent mature and complex contributions to prevailing public discourses about the Alps, offering progressive content and innovative display techniques to audiences in Tyrol and Vorarlberg, a generally conservative corner of Austria.