Crossing Genres: The Influence of Photography on Peter Altenberg’s Literary Work

Peter Altenberg’s Literary Work

Also spielen wir Theater,
Spielen unsere eignen Stücke,
Frühgereift und traurig,
die Komödie unsrer Seele,
Unsres Fühlens Heut und Gestern,
Böser Dinge hübsche Formel,
Glatte Worte, bunte Bilder
Halbes, heimliches Empfinden,
Agonien, Episoden...

Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Einleitung of
Arthur Schnitzler’s Anatol (1893)

The official Viennese journal published an imperial decree on Christmas Day in 1857 in which Franz Joseph expressed his wish to have the city walls of Vienna removed, the bastions in the middle of the city leveled and the big open ground used for the exercising the troops (commonly known as Glacis) converted into a build-up area.¹ Pulling down the fortifications and changing this military area into a civilian use had far reaching consequences: a modern city landscape took over the medieval aspect of Vienna. However, similarly to Haussmann’s Paris the same manner did not exclude military strategy as at both ends of the Ringstrasse two enormous military barracks were to keep their parade grounds. In the same way as in Paris, the fast rise of the industry and commerce, demanding rapid transportation of goods within the capital required the reorganization of the city. On completion of the project, the unity of the town and suburbs became a tangible reality.

On the Ringstrasse, planted with plane trees, the best architects had applied their minds to the concept of a Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of

¹ Vienna 1890-1920 p. 109.
Crossing Genres: The Influence of Photography on Peter Altenberg’s Literary Work

All the arts had contributed to the beautification and renovation of Vienna as architects, graphic artists, painters and writers worked closely together and met regularly in the famous Viennese coffeehouses. These cafes were on the one hand ‘home from home,’ pleasant, cozy places and the other hand gave place for ideological exchanges, discussions, visited by politicians, painters, writers and merchants, “by the idle and the rich or by the luckless who have otherwise have frozen in their homes” (Spiel 56). Viennese coffeehouses were public places that fostered public debates, gave place to political discussions, literary events – almost no successful author could afford not to show up at one of the well-known places.³

Industrial growth led to a rapid rise in population and the widening of city boundaries, and also awakened the thirst of the Viennese for ostentation, pageantry and display (Spiel 52). While looking at the exhibition catalog entitled Traum und Wirklichkeit, the astonishing number of posters, brochures, tourist guides, and illustrated newspapers is striking. This is also the time when the first photographs appeared in newspapers; in Vienna the first photographically illustrated magazine, “Das interessante Blatt,” was published at the turn of the century (Lensing 51). Photography was born almost at the same time as the railway and the two evolve hand in hand: the world of tourism is the world of the camera, argues Colomina (47). The number of tourist increased with the emergence of the railway in Vienna.⁴ As Schivelbusch argues in his book, the railway

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² The most important architects of the Ringstrasse: Eduard van der Nuell, August von Sicardsburg, Theophil Hansen, Heinrich von Ferstel, Friedrich von Schmidt, Gottfried Semper and Karl von Hasenauer (Vienna 171)
³ e.g. Cafe Griendsteidl, Cafe Central, Cafe Museum, Herrenhof.
transforms places into objects of consumption. Similarly, photography is circulating as commodity in magazines in order to be consumed by the masses. As Susan Sontag writes in her book *On Photography*, photographs became objects of everyday life: “[t]hey age, plagued by the usual ills of paper objects; they disappear; they become valuable, and get bought and sold; they are reproduced. Photographs, which package the world seem to invite packaging” (4-5).

This way of packaging of the modernized city is manifested in cultural artifacts. The writer and actor, Egon Friedell described this transformation as a new trend towards brevity in life and literature:

“We no longer settle down comfortably with the given things. Our whole civilization is dominated by the principle: *Le minimum d’effort et le maximum d’effect!* … We travel not by leisurely mail-coach but in express trains, receiving hasty speed-pictures of the scenery we pass … Books are surrogates for experience, a makeshift help for people who have no time. Brevity and stringency are thus the foremost need the modern book has to fulfill – not a skimpy or aphoristic brevity, but that substantial, compact kind which is a steady requirement especially of the most deeply thoughtful writer.” (quoted in Spiel 100)

Friedell then added: “This is the basic principle of Peter Altenberg.”

With Peter Altenberg, one of the famous coffeehouse writers, a new genre, the ‘small prose,’ had entered Austrian literature, which became a fashion in the Vienna of the early twentieth century. Altenberg interpreted his little pieces of poetic work as “Extracte des Lebens. Das Leben der Seele und des zufälligen Tages, in 2-3 Seiten eingedampft, vom Überflüssigen befreit wie das Rind im Liebling-Tiegel! Dem Leser bleibe es überlassen, diese Extracte aus eigenen Kräften wieder aufzulösen” (“Was mir der Tag zuträgt” 6).

Egon Friedell

In my essay, I would like to look at how Peter Altenberg’s literary work was influenced by the emergence of new visual forms such as photography and photographic postcards. While analyzing some of his verbal-visual collages, I would like to shed light on the connotative and denotative function of the images he used in his work. The questions I would like to answer are about the function of the photographs: are they here to illustrate the text or rather to construct the text? Do they serve as a critique against the mass consumption of images? Before my examples from Altenberg’s collection, I will discuss some theoretical approaches to photography by Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag and Christian Metz in order to show the double function of photography that also characterizes Peter Altenberg’s use of photographic images.

Similarly to Le Corbusier, as we could see in Colomina’s book, Altenberg worked on writing over and violating the images he collected. Photography helped him to establish an innovative literary style and create his own literary portrait in order appear as a public figure in fin de siècle Vienna. Before looking at his special inscribed photographic postcards and photographs I would like to take an excursion in modern Vienna and investigate the emergence of photographs in various artistic contexts.

5 Traum und Wirklichkeit Wien p. 310
“It seems that in Latin ‘photograph’ would be said ‘imago lucis opera expressa’; which is to say: image revealed, ‘extracted’, ‘mounted’, ‘expressed’ (like the juice of a lemon) by the action of light.”

Roland Barthes: Camera Lucida

The traditional definition of photography, “a transparent presentation of a real scene,” is an implicit diagram instituted by the analogical model of the camera obscura - a model that would pretend to present to the subject a faithful “reproduction” of a reality outside itself (Colomina 77). Photography can present at least a piece of the world, miniature of reality that “everyone can make or acquire” (Sontag 41). Vertov, however, has not placed himself behind the camera lens to use it as an eye, in the way realistic epistemology when he employed the lens as a mirror: approaching the camera, the first thing the eye sees is its own reflected image. It does not only represent reality but also reproduces reality (Vertov 15). As Susan Sonntag writes in her book: “[t]o photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power” (4). In deciding how a picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, the photographer imposes a standard on his subject. Although there is a sense in which the camera captures reality, the photographic image is similarly an interpretation of the world as paintings are.

Most of the ideas about photography were not written by photographers or by historians of photography but by outsiders. All of them refer to the

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"Reading Images" p. 60

Susan Sontag and Walter Benjamin both discuss photographs as evidence. Sontag refers to the use of photos by the Paris police in 1871 as useful tool of modern states in the surveillance and control of their increasingly mobile populations. ("Plato’s Cave" 41) Similarly Walter Benjamin characterizes Atget’s photographs as "pieces of evidence." ("The Work of Art..." 70)
double effect of photography, to the ambiguity of the photographic images. Walter Benjamin, in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) the camera is the epitome of the destructive, consumptive political economy of capitalism; it dispels the “aura” of things by reproducing them in a leveling, automatic, statistically rationalized form (64-5). In photography art is designed for reproducibility and replaces the cult value with exhibition value (68). Mechanical reproduction freed the work of art from dependence on ritual thus the art object is not valued for its existence but for its being on view. On the other hand the invention of photography is hailed as “the first truly revolutionary means of production”, a medium that was invented with “simultaneously with the rise of socialism” and that is capable of revolutionizing the whole function of art and the senses as well” (67). In the age of mechanical reproduction as Benjamin writes, the emergence of mass production and consumption alters aesthetics, the nature of art and the relation of the public with it.

Roland Barthes’s early essay “The Photographic Message” (1961), shows alertness to the “connotation procedures” which result in the ideological construction of the photographs juxtaposing it to the denotative function of the photographs, to its objectivity (20-22). The difference between the connotative and denotative function arises from the discontinuity from between the moment when the photograph was taken and the present moment when one looks at the photograph. A further ambiguity is due to the contrast between the living image and the dead thing as Barthes explains in another essay “Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography” that by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of “that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting
this reality to the past (‘this-has-been’), the photograph suggests that it is already dead” (59). Photographing is essentially “an act of non-intervention,” argues Susan Sontag (45). The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording cannot intervene. Sontag refers to Dziga Vertov’s *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), which gives the image of the photographer as someone in constant movement, someone moving through a panorama of various events in one day with such a speed that any intervention out of question.

The emergence of photography coincides with the development of psychoanalysis. Benjamin writes that it is through photography that “one first learns of the optical unconscious, just as one learns of the drives of the unconscious through psychoanalysis.” In his article on Peter Altenberg’s photo collection about body parts of women, Leo Lensing explores the analogies between photography and Freud’s concept of the fetish: the photographs signify loss of the object photographed and simultaneously it is a protection against the total loss of that moment. Similarly, Sontag shows that photographs became especially popular at the moment when the human landscape experienced a rapid rate of change as Atget’s Paris exists only in his photographs (47-8). As the examples show, connotation and denotation, the visible and the invisible, the ‘Real’ and the ‘Life,’ recording and intervention, conscious and unconscious are interpenetrating with one another. This leads to a new spatial model, in which, as Colomina writes, “interior and exterior are no longer clear-cut divisions” (82).

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8 Walter Benjamin. “Short History of Photography” p. 47
"Endlich enthält der Künstler das Auge des Momentphotographen-Apparates, endlich! Immer wird ja unsere Seele von selbst hinzukommen als Retoucheur ... Moment-Photographen wollen wir werden und unsere Seele wirke von selbst als Retoucheur."

Peter Altenberg¹¹

Modern Vienna was not particularly associated with photography but there were some famous photographers such as Hugo Henneberg, Heinrich Kuehn, and Hans Watzek (group called Trifolium) who exhibited their photographs at the Vienna Secession and also held exhibition in London, Paris and New York. Their goal was to overcome the objectivity of the medium. In doing so, they tried to achieve artistic effects while modifying their pictures in the printing process.¹²

Furthermore, photography influenced a number of the great painters and graphic artists of the Secessionist movement. Gustav Klimt also published photographs, which he had taken of Emilie Flöge, the owner of an exclusive dress shop whose 1902 portrait is one of the major achievement of Vienna Secession.¹³ Egon Schiele made photographs in collaboration with the professional photograph, Anton Trcka, and was mainly interested in self-portraits featuring double exposures and expressionistic poses.¹⁴ The writer and graphic artist Alfred Kubin worked as a photographer’s apprentice in Klagenfurt before his illustrator career. Even if Kubin turned away from photography the

¹¹Peter Altenberg drew this parallel in the catalog of the Secessionist exhibition in 1902. Barker p. 67.
¹²There were different techniques to achieve a more aesthetic quality in photography: the early photographers used special lenses that softened the focus and exploited the tone values of diffused light. Secondly, they printed their images painstakingly, often superimposing multiple impressions. For more bibliographical details about the work of the Trifolium see Lensing’s article on “Literature and Photography in Modern Vienna” p. 48.
¹⁴For more information and bibliographical details on Schiele’s photographs see Leo Lensing: "Literature and Photography in Modern Vienna” p. 161.
influence of the "vielen Tausenden von Bildern", mainly landscape photographs can be traced in his later illustrations.\textsuperscript{15} A further crossing between fine art and photography was the necessity to publicize their aesthetic program. The artists of the Viennese Secession produced photographic postcards and posters, new modern forms of visual art mostly for advertising purposes, which had begun to evolve into a distinct art form at the end of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{16} In their journal, Ver Sacrum, many photographic images were published.

The emergence of photography caused changes in architecture, as well. In her book, Colomina examines modern architecture’s encounter with modern media environment. Architecture is more than buildings that we can experience directly because it also exists as representation through drawings, photographs, writings and advertising. One of the pioneers of modern architecture, Adolf Loos, who made his mark with buildings of highly individual nature, was proud of the fact that his interiors were totally ineffective in photographs (Colomina 104). Taking a photograph of the interior of a building equaled for Loos to the separation of the objects from their place or using Benjamin’s term, from its ‘aura.’

Colomina contrasts Joseph Hoffmann’s photogenic buildings with those of Loos showing that the former is conceived from outside in as opposed to the latter from inside out (51). Applying the Benjaminian terminology, Loos aims to offer “lived experience” (Erlebnis) with an emphasis on tactile appropriation in his interiors (68). On the other hand, for Hoffmann’s buildings in that the visual appropriation dominates, the term “Erfahrung,” meaning experience without the

\textsuperscript{15} Bisanz pp. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{16} Vienna 1890-1920 p. 134-5.
intervention of consciousness, can be used (72). This example shows that the organizing geometry of architecture has shifted from the human eye to the camera angle, thus architecture became modern is its engagement with the new mechanical equipment of mass media: photography, advertising and publicity.

"Die größte Künstlerin vor allem ist die Natur und mit einem Kodak in einer wirklich menschlich-zärtlichen Hand erwerbt man mühelos ihre Schätze"

Peter Altenberg: "Wie ich es sehe" (293)

Photographic images also found their way into literary works. It was, however, not welcome by the Young Vienna writers who equated photography with naturalism and rejected it under Hermann Bahr’s leadership as to mechanistic and inattentive to the unconscious life (Lensing 48). Photography in literature evoked Zola’s naturalist writings, which were the anti-example for Young Vienna writers. On the other hand, Karl Kraus, an uncompromising fighter against injustice, a rigorous adversary of everything and everybody in the arts, politics and social life used photography in many different ways in his work. Kraus’s play “Die letzten Tage der Menschheit” entails photographs and it was one of the first major literary works that made imaginative use of photographic images. Similarly, he utilized photographs in his satiric newspaper articles.¹⁷

Formally, one can distinguish three types of literary texts that incorporate photography: 1. portrait photographs of literary authors, 2. “appropriated photographs” that is, photographs transformed into aesthetic assemblages through inscribed texts, 3. “phototexts” that is, literary constructs which are illustrated by or otherwise configured with photographic reproductions. All three forms are present in Altenberg’s interaction with photography.

Peter Altenberg came from a merchant family by the name of Engländner, he borrowed his pseudonym, which he liked to abbreviate to P.A., from a small village on the Danube. Besides his literary oeuvre well known is the legend of the man who once had given the address as „Vienna I, Café Central” in his literary handbook (Spiel 60). Hilde Spiel characterizes him as the inveterate bohemian:

“The ‘Holy Fool’ in Dostoievsksian sense; the worshipper of very young girls and ‘fallen’ women, indeed the friend and protector of the somewhat innocently depraved, pretty and sentimental little whores of imperial Vienna; the first to proclaim that black was beautiful … the passive paedophile who plastered his room with photographs of scantily clad female children…” (119).

About ten volumes of his collected sketches remain in print. Many of the titles express the intensely personal way in which these prose pieces were written: “Wie ich es sehe” (The Way I See It), “Vita Ipsa”, “Fechsung” (Harvest) or “Was der Tag mir zuträgt” (What the Day Tells Me). When Altenberg was asked, in 1901, to explain how he imagined his texts before writing them down on paper, he replied that the events of the day seemed to be recorded in his mind unconsciously and automatically as photographs (Lensing 49).

As the titles of his works show, Altenberg was concerned with the act of seeing, vision. He was a collector of photographs and picture cards. Leo Lensing argues that his inscribed and signed photographs and postcards constitute second oeuvre in his work (47). The intensity of his interest in photography he once described the genesis of his literary career as the reaction to the photographic image. As opposed to the Young Vienna group, for Peter Altenberg there was no contradiction between photography and literature as he set out to transform photographic images into verbal-visual collages.

"On Under der Linden avenue in Berlin there is the window display of a court photographer. There is someone photographed with a paintbrush in his hand: aha a painter! Then there is someone photographed with a cigarette in his hand: aha a smoker! Then there is someone who doesn’t have anything at all in his hand: aha a North Pole discoverer. And then there is Herr Harden photographed with a pen in his hand: aha a writer!"

Karl Kraus

One big group of the photographs is portraits of himself, which he used to create his own visual image by publishing these photographs on the frontispieces of his prose collections. Most of the portraits were taken about him by the same photographer, Trcka, in that he rather staged then was simply sitting for them. This can be traced in the different portraits that appeared on the frontispieces of his publications (Appendix 1). Peter Altenberg is a very early example for a writer who pursued a sustained strategy of linking his work to authorial portraits.

19 Quoted in Barker-Lensing p. 137.
20 Lensing 168
21 The first frontispiece appeared in "Wie ich es sehe" published by Fischer Verlag, Barker 89
The portrait series between 1901 and 1911, as Lensing indicates his article, show, that Altenberg tried to establish a firm connection between his portrait and signature (161). Searching for the image of the writer can be traced in his way of staging poses and adding textual notes to his portraits. Some of the portraits draw the viewer’s attention to Altenberg’s eyes (e.g. the portraits #28 and #27) especially the so-called “Monokel-Aufnahme” (Appendix 2), whose extreme close-up was unusual of the time as Lensing notes (56). There is a visual emphasis on the eye reminiscent to Dziga Vertov’s camera-eye from the *Man with the Movie Camera*. Through this attribute one gains the impression of a visual writer whose work must be similar to the photographer’s. This image is in accordance with one of the titles of his prose collections, “Wie ich es sehe.”

Peter Altenberg’s interest in photography can be connected with the central role of autobiography in his work. Altenberg was a highly eccentric writer who lived a public life, which he published in his extracted prose writings. Editing his image evokes the dichotomy of publicity and privacy. Roland Barthes notes in *Camera Lucida*, “[t]he age of photography corresponds precisely to the irruption of the private into the public, or rather to the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private consumed as such, publicly” (8). Altenberg’s frontispieces illustrate how modernity coincides with the publicity of the private turning the private into consumable merchandise.
"Wer meine 10.000 Ansichtskarten, seit 20 Jahren von mir gesammelt, mit und ohne Text versteht, lieb hat, der braucht eigentlich nicht mehr in die berühmten Gemäldegalerien mühselig zu pilgern, er bekommt alles in Extrakte, wenn er nämlich geistig-selisch dazu befähigt ist..."  

Peter Altenberg: „Mein Lebensabend“

Peter Altenberg had an extended postcard collection and inscribed photographs. Inscribed photographs are works that receive their meaning by the juxtaposition of image and text. Leo Lensing describes Peter Altenberg’s inscribed images as “fabrications” that is, a collective term used to describe the staged, the altered and appropriated photographs.\(^{22}\) Altenberg not only mounted and juxtaposed photographs, thereby creating a type of collage, but also had these assemblages reproduced as postcards, which he then experimentally inscribed with different texts, using a procedure akin to photomontage. Altenberg also published his work in an art magazine, *Kunst*.\(^{23}\)

In the exhibition catalog “Traum und Wirklichkeit” as well as in Andrew Barker and Leo Lensing’s book, many of Altenberg’s inscribed photographs and photographic postcards were published. In the following, I would like to take a closer look at one of the inscribed photographic postcards then at a page of Altenberg’s newly published photo album. By juxtaposing text and image, I would like to keep in mind Barthes’s note about the complexity of analyzing inscribed images: “to describe is thus not simply to be imprecise or incomplete, it is to change the structures, to signify something different that is shown”.\(^{24}\)

\(^{22}\) Lensing refers to Anne Hoy’s book entitled *Fabrication: Staged, Altered and Appropriated Photographs*, 1987  
\(^{23}\) Barker-Lensing p. 135.  
\(^{24}\) “The Photographic Message” p. 18
Similarly to Le Corbusier, Altenberg’s inscribed photographs and postcards often reveal his resistance to a passive consumption of photography. Some of his short prose writing as well as his inscribed postcards can be interpreted as critique on the images occurring in the world of tourism and mass media. As Benjamin puts it photography makes everything accessible: “distant places, famous people, springtime” (66). Altenberg subverts the reader’s expectations when instead of the usual greetings, he writes fictional miniature narratives that are not in acute connection with the visual image on the postcard. One example for this destruction is the following text that he wrote on a postcard, which shows a waterfall (Traun bei Gmuden, Appendix 3): “So sein Deine Seele! Sie stürze, versinke, verliere sich, zerstäube! Aber in ruhigeren Bette finde sie dann, gesichert, gesammelt, ihr klares, geklärtes Dahin-Wallen”.  

It is important to note, that the photograph frequently does not have specific meanings in itself but rather in its relationship to other photographs and the layout of the page. Altenberg often collected his images into albums thus placed them into a special order so that the pictures can tell a story; create a pictorial narrative. The preformed image is reworked similarly to Le Corbusier’s creative interpretive process with postcards. Le Corbusier removed the images from their original context, painted on them, erased their details, reframed them (Colomina 118-28). In both cases we are dealing with images that have been worked on, composed, constructed. The relationship of these pictures is significant as Roland Barthes writes:

25Quoted in Barker-Lensing 140
"All images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers a floating chain of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others. Polysemy poses a question of meaning... Hence in every society various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs" ("The Rhetoric of the Image" quoted in Colomina 100).

There is one photo album that preserved images in the original way as Altenberg placed them next to one another. In this album (1918) there are photographs, postcards and various realias from everyday life reminiscent to the Le Corbusier archives. The album consists of 50 pages and a title page. On the title page there are three short quotes that provide a frame to the images afterward:

"Es gibt Geheimisse und hysterische Ratzel der Frauenseele, die selbst ein moderner Dichter unmöglich begreifen, enträtzeln kann."

Meine merkwürdige Beziehung zu der 20-jähr. Tirolerin Anna Ptaczek wird mir ein ewiges Rätzel bleiben. Da versagt die moderne Erkenntnis!!

Ich male die Natur mit meinen beiden treffsicheren photographischen Augen, mit meiner treffsicheren Seele."

The juxtaposition of an aphorismatic wisdom, an autobiographical note and an aesthetic statement is a concise verbal summary of Altenberg’s photo album.

Next, I would like to focus on one page of the album that is described by Barker in order to show how Altenberg created a pictorial narrative in his postcard and photo collection. It is again his personal experience that is in the center of the page (Appendix 4). Andrew Barker, the author of the book on Altenberg’s biography made a successful attempt by using Altenberg’s diary to create a coherent narrative to this

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26 Some of the pages of the photo album are published in Barker-Lensing pp. 180–90.
page that contains a chaotic arrangement of a landscape postcard, two photos of a dancer, a tattered piece of paper from a calendar, a bill from a restaurant and piece of paper from a drugstore. By paralleling Altenberg’s written diary and letters, Barker tells about the importance of the day in Altenberg’s life (Fest von Sankt Petrus and Paulus), his relationship to Paula Demant (the woman on the picture) and the poet’s health problems at this time.  

This example shows that Altenberg not only produced a photo album with different images but was able to give the extract of a time period in a page, a pictorial narrative similar to his written short prose works. Collecting visual images and preserving every trace of someone’s life and work evokes the Le Corbusier archives that Colomina discusses in her book. Their interaction with the new visual forms is very similar: instead of a passive consumption they both transform them trying to dominate and occupy this new space.

It is clear to see that the industrialization of photography permitted a rapid absorption in various ways in turn-of-the-century Viennese society. Photographs become everyday objects of the lived environment. The popularity of the new visual images in Peter Altenberg’s work can be explained in different ways as his artistic work is embedded in a complex social and cultural context of fin de siècle Vienna.

In Vienna many different artists worked close with one another. The term “Gesamtkunstwerk” can be applied for the architecture of the Ringstrasse but also to the Viennese cabaret, which gave place to a

28 Barker-Lensing 172-175
diversity of artistic expressions. Similar phenomena are the numerous new genres that appear in journals as well as on the streets, such as the feuilleton, short prose, posters or postcards. As Hilde Spiel illustrates vividly, the Viennese cabaret, _Die Fledermaus_ (The Bat) was installed amidst Josef Hoffmann’s perfect Jugendstil décor under the leadership of the philosopher Egon Friedell. There the young Kokoschka showed his first fairy tale on slides. At the opening the first wife of Adolf Loos, Lina, read a prologue by Peter Altenberg. Bahr, Blei and Polgar all contributed to the cabaret as writers but occasionally as actors, as well (Spiel 108-9).²⁹

There are many double artists such as the graphic artist, philosopher and writer, Alfred Kubin, the writer and painter Oskar Kokoschka but also Hugo von Hofmannsthal, whose master poems remind the reader on Böcklin’s paintings, worked closely with Richard Strauss. All his life Altenberg remained in friendly terms with several painters and architects such as Gustav Klimt and Adolf Loos (Spiel 118). As I have showed in my introduction, the coffeehouses, among others, served as public places that provided room for discussions and artistic exchanges. Photography’s interaction with the Secessionist Movement, architecture and literature indicates that this new media also occupied a space in the “Gesamtkunstwerk” concept.

The new aesthetic developments were also influenced by economic factors that fostered the development of new genres. Struggling in an increasingly national and international art market required artists to

²⁹ The same pattern can be seen in the establishment of the Munich cabarets (Die elf Scharfrichter and Simplicissimus), which were founded in the 1890s in order to bind artists and writers together. For example Kandinsky’s poster announced the first exhibition, which contained the works of the members of “Die elf Scharfrichter.” The Munich cabaret provided space to several aesthetic tendencies.
work together in order to publicize their work and to determine the art market themselves instead of being dependant on it. Journals that provided a space to several new aesthetic tendencies and enabled various artists to publish their work served the same purpose. There appeared a tendency in art to create something that can be used such as “applied poetry,” self-absorbed poetic subject or “Gebrauchsmusik.”

This goes hand in hand with the reverse intention of aestheticizing everyday objects in order to make technology beautiful as one can observe in art nouveau household objects or on the façade of the Otto Wagner house on the Wienzeile. In the case of photography, we can see that photographers very early at the turn of the century, the Trifolium in Vienna, wanted to create aesthetic photos as they tried to overcome the objectivity of the new media by experimenting with several new techniques.\(^30\) The same double approach thus aestheticizing a mass-produced image but also criticizing the passive consumption of it is the characteristic of Peter Altenberg’s encounter with photography.

The emergence of mass production and consumption alters aesthetics, the nature of art and the relation of the public with it, writes Benjamin. The new aesthetic development can in Peter Altenberg’s case be observed in his short writings, “extracts,” aphorisms, poems, textual-visual collages; he never undertook a project such as writing a longer prose work. It is typical of other writers in Vienna at this time if one thinks of Schnitzler’s “Einakter” and short stories, Hofmannsthal’s poems and Kraus’s feuilleton. The emergence of these highly subjective short literary forms can be interpreted as a reaction to the appearance of the

\(^{30}\) For a detailed history of ‘Kunstfotographie’ at the turn of the century see Ursula Peters book on the Stilgeschichte der Fotographie in Deutschland 1839-1900. pp. 274-354.
camera. Photographs, which package the world, invite packaging in other artistic expressions. As Susan Sontag puts it photographic images “do not seem to be statements about the world” – as opposed to what is written – they are “pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make and acquire” (5).

On the other hand, the camera implies that the world cannot be represented as a unity; it rather consists of a sequence of rapidly changing, blurred images, impressions, and facets. This is reflected in Ernst Mach’s ideas (Empiriokritizismus), which were widespread among Vienna’s young intelligentsia. Mach described the idea that the ego is not a substantial entity but a complex of sensory perceptions; therefore the self has a merely relative continuity. This is the theoretical background Impressionism is based upon, which in literature is a way of writing that aims to grasp a fading moment on paper that can be used to describe Peter Altenberg’s short prose work.

As the theoretical approaches show, a double effect characterizes photography. Altenberg reacted to the irreducible objectivity of the photographic image, but he also explored its symbolic quality of implying something that is not visible. In his inscribed photographs he combined a critical approach with the aestheticization of the mass-produced images. While experimenting with different poses, photography offered him a media that he could also use to create his own image of the public intellectual. As we could see in modernity there is no longer sharp division between interior and exterior, between privacy and publicity. Peter Altenberg lived his eccentric in a public setting, in hotels and in coffeehouses and published his own experiences in his short pieces of poetic work as well as in inscribed photos and postcards.
Peter Altenberg’s verbal-visual collages can be interpreted as blueprints of modernity that carry double meanings: visible and invisible, connotation and denotation, privacy and publicity. To set up an analogy between Altenberg’s work and photography, I would use Koehn’s simile saying that in Altenberg’s work “seine Optik der eines konturenauflösenden Filters, nicht einer um Tiefenschärfe bemühten dokumentarischen Photographie” (quoted in Barker 82).
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Crossing Genres: The Influence of Photography on Peter Altenberg’s Literary Work


Vertov, Dziga. „We: Variant of A Manifesto“

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APPENDIX #2
APPENDIX #3
"Die Altenberg-Galerie
- was war das?

Wer P.A. in seinem
vierten Stock-Zimmer
des Graben-Hotels
besucht hat,
weiss es.
Das Haus war,
mit besonderer
Erlaubnis des Hoteliers
- wo hätte der Dichter
nicht solche
besonderen Erlebnisse
erwirkt?!
vom ersten Stock an
eine Ausstellung,
treppenaufwärts
und rings um den Liftschaft
schlängelte sich
an den Wänden
ein Band
zahlloser,
eingerahmter
Photographien
Naturbilder,
Porträts,
Akte
- alle
von der riesigen
Kinderhandschrift Altenbergs
Überkritzelt..."

Anton Kuh
(quoted in Burker-Lensing 142)
These treatments don’t manipulate the original content of photograph and remain limited to aesthetic value addition processing only, but sometimes photographers cross the red line and manipulate their images to an extent that their original meaning is completely changed from what it was originally shot. Photo manipulation is considered as a negative word in some photography genres like photo journalism, while its synonym “photo processing” has a positive connotation and seen as vital process in other photography genres like fashion, commercial advertising and landscape photography. The inclination towards digital imaging technology by media started around late 1970s. The influence of other organizational characteristics is quite relevant to this study. This collection contains three texts about photography by German philosopher Walter Benjamin. In these works, Benjamin analyzes the impact of photography on world culture. The anthology includes three works by German philosopher, critic, writer, and translator Walter Benjamin, which speculate on photography: A Short History of Photography; Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century; and The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. The afterword is supplied by well-known photography historian Vladimir Levashov. Is landscape photography the best type of photography? Or is it portraits? What about macro or street photography? The answer is that there is no “best” genre of photography. Instead, you have to figure out which popular photography genre is the best fit for you. Below, I’ve outlined 19 different types of photography to help you quickly explore which of these genres might be most appealing.