

SCANDA(LOOS)

THEATRICALS AND PRINT MEDIA
IN THE
CONTROVERSY
OF THE
MICHAELERPLATZ BUILDING

SEBASTIANO FABBRINI¹

In his 1931 monograph on Adolf Loos, Heinrich Kulka wrote that “the history of the Michaelerplatz building was the story of the painful birth of the modern style,” describing the architect as a martyr for the modernist cause: “the man, who bled for it, who was nearly tortured to death by a pack of philistines both outside and within the architectural profession, made it possible, through his heroic perseverance against a whole nation, to enable us to build as we build now.”² This text — written when the architect was still alive — exemplifies the theatrical tone of the Loosian historiography. The tone reflects both the type of discourse that

¹ *I would like to thank Michael Osman for taking the time to discuss this article with me and Lisa Fetchko for helping me in the editing process.*

² *Heinrich Kulka, Adolf Loos: Das Werk des Architekten (Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1931), 31.*

emerged in Vienna at the turn of the century and the narrative that Loos himself promoted — a narrative based on the dramatization of the architect's role. In the extensive body of historical work on this subject, the production of Loos's architecture is narrated as a theatrical play: a *mise-en-scène* in which the architect is a character.

The theatricalization of Loos's work must be understood in the context of the transformations that took place in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna. This is the period in which Vienna's emergence as a cosmopolitan city — the emblem of which was the new Ringstrasse — triggered massive growth in the theatre sector.³ Between Loos's birth in 1870 and the explosion of the Michaelerplatz controversy, Vienna saw the construction of a multitude of new theatres. Along with the Hofoper and Burgtheater — the theatres of the court and the aristocracy on the Ringstrasse — numerous private theatres emerged, opening their doors to a bourgeois and middle-class audience.⁴ The new stages were influenced by the so-called suburban theatres of the Biedermeier period: Carltheater, Theater in der Josefstadt and Theater an der Wien.⁵ These theatres provided an artistic home for playwrights such as Johann Nestroy and Ferdinand Raimund, composers such as Johann Strauss and Franz Lehár, and actresses such as Eleonora Duse and Sarah Bernhardt. Moreover, a number of theatres dedicated to cabaret started to appear: the Jewish venue of the Budapest Orpheumgesellschaft was established in 1890; the Kabarett Nachlicht operated between 1906 and 1907; and the legendary Kabarett Fledermaus, named after Strauss's operetta, became the center of Vienna's artistic scene from 1907 to 1913 (Fig. 1). Loos, along with his friends and collaborators Karl Kraus and Peter Altenberg, was a regular guest, designer, chronicler

3 Käthe Springer, "Theater and Cabaret," in *Vienna 1900: Art, Life and Culture*, ed. Christian Brandstätter (New York: Vendome Press, 2006), 309.

4 In the second half of the nineteenth century, a multitude of theatres opened in Vienna: Harmonietheater (1865), Stadttheater (1870), Ringtheater (1874), Volkstheater (1889), Raimundtheater (1893), Volkssoper (1898) and Landstrasser Bürgertheater (1905), among others.

5 Carltheater, Theater in der Josefstadt and Theater an der Wien are known as suburban theatres because they are located in three suburban districts of Vienna: Leopoldstadt, Josefstadt and Mariahilf.

and reviewer in these venues. As noted by Käthe Springer, the most influential actors in the “applied arts cabaret” were the designers, those responsible for the sets, the costumes, the direction and frequently the overall concept.⁶

The important role that theatrics came to play in Vienna reflected the social and political transformations that agitated the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. The revolutionary movements that overturned Prince Metternich’s regime in 1848 brought about a number of liberal reforms: new parliaments held elections with broad franchise to create constituent assemblies in numerous regions of the Empire and new freedoms—including freedom of association and freedom of the press—were introduced. Even though the uprising did not have a successful ending, the social and political tensions erupted in the events of 1848 forced the central government to accept increasingly open forms of public debate. Theatre became a crucial space in this post-revolutionary period, as it gave voice to these latent tensions and helped the masses to access the stage of public life.

One of the most significant innovations brought about by the boom in the theatre sector was the introduction of a heterogeneous group of genres: operetta,

6 Springer, “Theater and Cabaret,” 319.

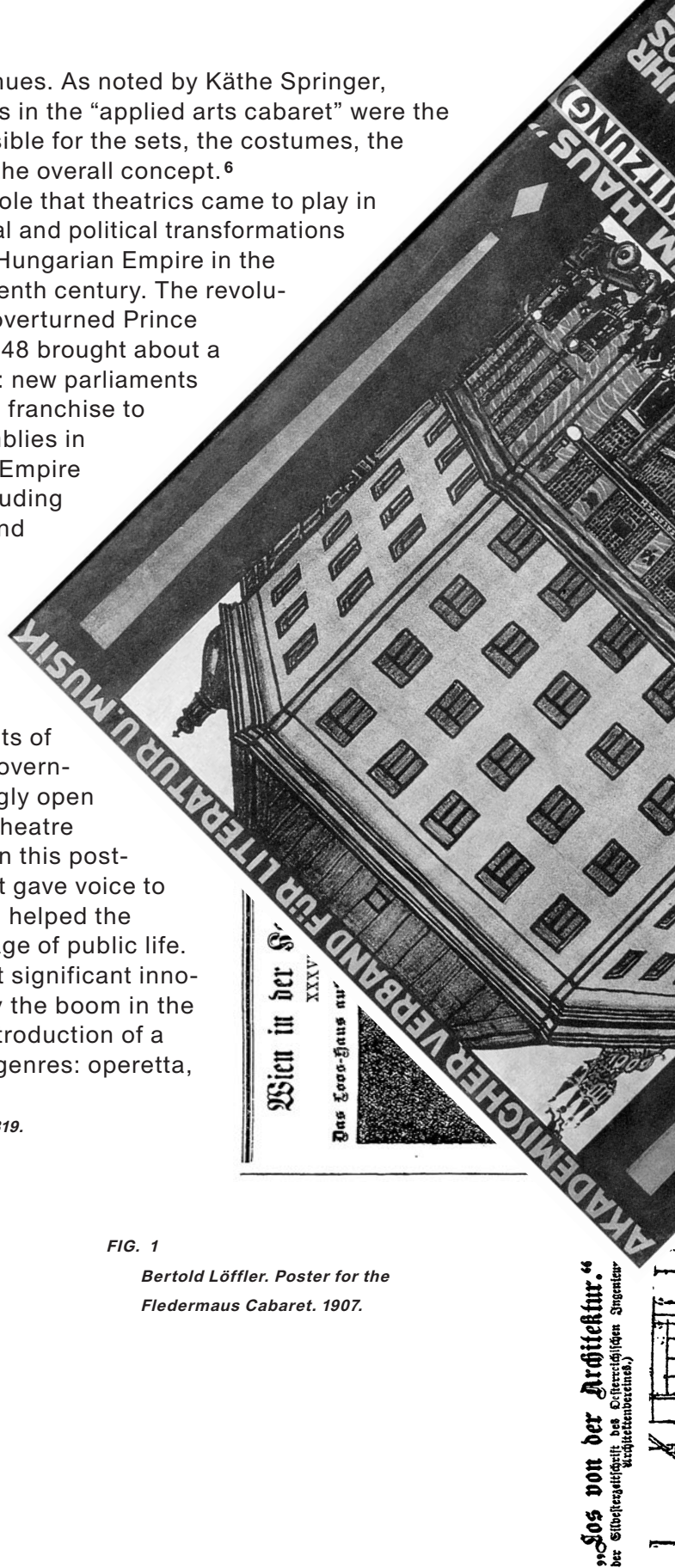


FIG. 1

Bertold Löffler. Poster for the *Fledermaus Cabaret*. 1907.

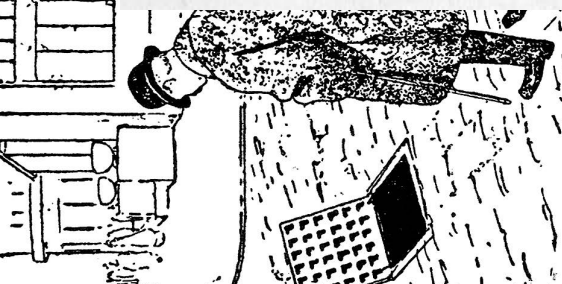
FLEDERMAUS

THEATER u. KABARETT

KÄRNTNERSTRASSE JOHANNESG.
TAGESKASSA GRABEN 15



9-4
NACHTS



— Kunststück ging der Mobe-
gen. Möglich blieb er erkannt fleh-
en, was er solange vergeblich gelu-
(8)

cabaret, pantomime, vaudeville and comic opera, among others. Some of them originated in Vienna, while others were imported from foreign cities, such as Paris and Venice (*commedia dell'arte*). Unlike the genres hosted in the aristocratic venues, these performances were accessible — both intellectually and financially — to a broad audience and allowed for a new participatory form of theatre: spectators were expected to react to the performance, manifest their emotions, sing along with certain parts of the music or shout out phrases to the performers. The involvement of the audience often reached extreme levels. For example, at the premiere of *Eine Wohnung ist zu Vermieten* at the Theater an der Wien, the audience reacted antagonistically to Johann Nestroy's social satire: the crowd tried to sabotage the event with an aggressive action of whistling and stamping, leading to a major theatre scandal.⁷ Many plays enacted in the Viennese theatres of the time were based on stories designed to raise controversy and to provoke strong reactions in the audience. Playwrights and actors wanted to address scandalous themes in order to engage and stimulate the crowd and — at the same time — the audience wanted to be provoked and involved in the action: a new *scandal genre* was being created. The participation of the audience assumed the status of theatrical performance, transforming the spectators into actors capable of influencing what was happening on stage. The political and social tensions that the Imperial government tried to repress in the city could be expressed and performed in the theatre, allowing those who were excluded from the public debate to make their voices heard.

The narrative and dialogic modes tested in these theatrical settings rapidly infiltrated a number of different fields, influencing the modes of public interaction between citizens. Loos's interest in the theatre world, along with his collaboration with several Viennese theatres and cabarets, leads us to believe that he was very familiar with these principles. By virtue of his

⁷ *Edgar Yates, Theatre in Vienna: A Critical History, 1776–1995 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 101.*

involvement in this world, Loos managed to transfer the language of theatre into the realm of architecture, allowing for the development of a broad public debate on architecture. The infiltration of theatrical modes into Loos's work manifested itself very clearly in the controversy over the Michaelerplatz house. Located in front of the Imperial palace, in the heart of the city, Loos's building sparked a major scandal because of its bare design and its rejection of the traditional ornaments. The architect, the clients (the tailors Goldman and Aufricht), the municipal authorities, the press and the Viennese citizens engaged in a harsh, two-year-long discussion over the design of this building, fuelling a heated controversy.⁸

The Michaelerplatz scandal, however, was not unprecedented in Vienna. The first precedent was the Hopfer, the Imperial opera house built on the Ringstrasse in 1869. The building was critiqued so harshly by the public that the lead architect Eduard van der Nüll hung himself, while his partner August von Sicardsburg died few weeks later under mysterious circumstances.⁹ Evidently, what interests us is not the mystery of the architect's death, but rather the way in which the entire story

was constructed and handed down to subsequent generations. The important point is the dramatization of the narrative that accompanies the production of architecture. A similar narrative was used in the controversies sparked by two other projects that preceded the Michaelerplatz house: Joseph Maria Olbrich's Secession building (1898) and Otto Wagner's Karlsplatz museum (1900).¹⁰ These examples show

8 *The reflections on the Michaelerplatz house that I present in this article rely on a consolidated body of historical research. Christopher Long's research on Loos and the Michaelerplatz house, published in The Looshaus (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), has been a particularly important source of historical data.*

9 *Nicholas Parsons, Vienna: A Cultural History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 209.*

In the late 1860s, the project for the Hopfer became the target of a polemical press campaign. The controversy escalated when the Emperor himself criticized the design of the opera house at the opening ceremony of the building. Deeply troubled by this criticism, Eduard van der Nüll committed suicide. His partner August von Sicardsburg died nearly ten weeks later, diagnosed with tuberculosis.

10 *Peter Haiko and Renata Kassal-Mikula, Otto Wagner und das Kaiser Franz Josef Stadtmuseum: Das Scheitern der Moderne in Wien (Vienna: Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien, 1988).*

that, at the turn of the century, architecture was beginning to be conceived as a performance subject to public debate and exposed to a broad critical audience. The novelty did not lay in the theatricalization of architecture itself — which is an old *topos* — but rather in the theatricalization of the process that leads to the creation of architecture. Not only architecture was conceived in performative terms, but also the public debate and the narrative that accompany the design and building process took up a theatrical tone. The performativity of this architecture was not expressed through the staging of formal elements (as Baroque architects used to do), but rather through the staging of a collective dialogue on the production of architecture.

The theatricalization of architecture, along with the opening of the architectural debate to a mass audience, was deeply related to another phenomenon: the growth of the print media. Two main transformations allowed for the rise of the print media in the second half of the nineteenth century: on the one hand, the emergence of a broad bourgeoisie expanded the section of the Viennese population that could read and, therefore, access the press; on the other hand, the 1848 political upheavals forced the Emperor to loosen his repressive control over the press, allowing for the development of a dynamic and relatively free media landscape. Magazines and newspapers played a crucial role in the development of a public discussion about the performance of architecture. Loos was not out of place in the world of media: on the contrary, he had plenty of experience and knew how to deal with the press. When he started the Michaelerplatz project in 1909, he was known mainly for his work as a writer and journalist. In fact, after he returned from his American travel in the mid-1890s, he attracted notice for his articles and reviews in a number of Viennese newspapers. Because of a lack of commissions, in this initial phase of his career Loos took a step back from the architectural profession and focused on writing. In a 1902 autobiographical essay, he

described himself as a “writer on art.”¹¹

Therefore, it is not surprising that Loos’s closest friends at the time were writers, not architects.¹² Two figures were particularly important to him: Peter Altenberg — writer, poet and founder of the cultural review *Kunst* — and Karl Kraus — writer, director, actor and founder of the remarkably popular magazine *Die Fackel*. The friendship with Altenberg and Kraus, along with the frequentation of the most vibrant literary coffeehouses, pushed Loos to assume an active role in Vienna’s rich media landscape. With the financial support of the tailors Goldman and Aufricht (the clients of the Michaelerplatz project), Loos founded the magazine *Das Andere* in 1903. Published as a supplement to Altenberg’s review, *Das Andere* lasted only one year, but had an important role in establishing Loos’s position in the world of the Viennese print media.

Hence, when the project for the Michaelerplatz building began, the press provided the platform on which the theatrical plot of the public controversy could unfold. Which characters took part in this play? In Loos’s narrative, the protagonist was the architect, the solitary builder-hero in constant battle with a legion of opponents — from the municipal authorities to the architectural critics. Loos’s heroic status was accentuated by the physical pain that he endured during the construction process of the Michaelerplatz house. According to the historical narrative, in the summer of 1911 — weakened by the stress of the controversy — he experienced a severe ulcer attack.¹³ Loos’s sickness was widely publicized by his supporters, who blamed the ulcer attack on the municipal authorities and on those who criticized the project. Loos’s friends went to great lengths to emphasize the Michelangelesque suffering of the hero, who had sacrificed his health for his artistic creation. Loos told the press that he was “losing blood by the liter.”¹⁴ Kraus reported that the architect was “very sick.”¹⁵ Kulka wrote that he was “close to suicide.”¹⁶ Kokoschka accused the Viennese authorities of “forcing an artist

11 Adolf Loos, *Deutsch-Osterreichisches Kunstler und Schriftsteller Lexikon (Vienna: Kosik, 1902)*, 113.

12 Christopher Long, *The Looshaus (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011)*, 26.

13 Long, *The Looshaus*, 135.

14 Adolf Loos, “Main Haus am Michaelerplatz,” *Parnass (1985)*: ii–xv. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

15 Karl Kraus, *Letter to Hearwarth Walden, September 1911*. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

16 Kulka, *Adolf Loos: Das Werk des Architekten*, 30. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

onto his sickbed.”¹⁷ Walden complained about this “unprecedented oppression of an artist.”¹⁸ In the dramatization of Loos’s illness, we see a clear example of both the influence that the theatre world exerted on the Michaelerplatz story and the role that the print media played in fuelling the controversy. The figure of the suffering hero — alone against institutions of political and cultural power — was a typical character on the Viennese stages of the turn of the century.

The nemesis of the architect-hero was the city council, the powerhouse of the municipal government. In fact, as soon as the scaffoldings of the Michaelerplatz building were removed, the city council cried scandal and decided to suspend the building permit. Representative Karl Rykl demanded that the permit for what he called a “monstrosity of a building” (*scheusal von einem wohnhaus*) be delayed until the façade was redesigned according to the Viennese traditional style.¹⁹ Shortly after, representative Hans Schneider did a sketch over Loos’s elevation, requesting a set of revisions for the façade. At the beginning of the controversy, the position of the municipal authorities was strongly supported by the press: the tabloid *Die Neue Zeitung*, for example, published an article which demanded “most energetically that the building office put an end to such work, before the whole city is shot to hell.”²⁰ Such a bold, polemic tone was not unusual in the print media of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna: a style of journalism based on a satirical attitude and a spectacularly aggressive criticism was emerging and most writers (Loos included) were attracted by it.²¹

In the narrative that accompanies the historiography of the Michaelerplatz controversy, Loos is not the only figure performing as a theatrical character: the members of the city council, for example, seem to be taken directly from a theatrical play. The leader of the council, Major Karl Lueger, was an old, nearly blind man: his blindness prevented him from seeing the

17 Oskar Kokoschka, *Letter to Hearwarth Walden*, July 1911. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

18 Hearwarth Walden, “*Schonheit! Schonheit! Der Fall Adolf Loos*,” *Der Sturm* 2 (1911): 556. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

19 Karl Rykl, “*Stenographischer Bericht über die öffentliche Sitzung des Gemeinderates vom 22 Oktober 1910*,” *Amstblatt der k.k. Reichshaupt und Residenzstadt Wien* 19 (1910): 2558.

20 “*Die Mistkiste am Michaelerplatz*,” *Die Neue Zeitung*, December 7, 1910. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

21 Paul Reitter, *The Anti-Journalist: Karl Kraus and Jewish Self-Fashioning in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

Ann Marie
Perl

DES
"SCA"

t
t

be
of
Blä
cor
whi
disc
had
spee
"Ornā

- 22 Long, Th
23 Adolf Lo
Morgen, t
by Christo

he criticized without under-
- right in the middle of the
n by Josef Neumayer, another
s almost completely deaf:
not able to hear Loos's argu-
omprehending their meaning.²²
micipal authorities was
oic narrative: "I have been cen-
like Frank Wedekind and
was the reaction that Loos
ote, "scandal begins when
ressive intervention of the city
nself to several distinguished
uthorities and to attract
In fact, the controversy of
something that exploded
he architect made an effort
es of controversy, Loos
ty of a building" as the motto
l at the end of 1911. In
osters with the motto printed
ns (Fig. 2). The goal was
st and the authorities,
nd his obtuse opponents.
random: in 1907, two years
, Loos wrote a critique
ie newspaper *Fremden-*
²³ Hence, the language of
repertoire. He knew
tention and inflame public
lic lectures that he
he came up with a new
Viennese audience:
Christopher Long, from the

la
S C

*Kraus, Half-Truths and One-
A Half-Truths: Selected Aphor-
ed. Harry Zohn (Chicago: Uni-
ty of Chicago Press, 1990).
Loos, "Die Entdeckung Wiens,"
len-Blatt, April 7, 1907.*

onto his sickbed.”¹⁷ Walden complained about this “unprecedented oppression of an artist.”¹⁸ In the dramatization of Loos’s illness, we see a clear example of both the influence that the theatre world exerted on the Michaelerplatz story and the role that the print media played in fuelling the controversy. The figure of the suffering hero — alone against institutions of political and cultural power — was a typical character on the Viennese stages of the turn of the century.

The nemesis of the architect-hero was the city council, the powerhouse of the municipal government. In fact, as soon as the scaffoldings of the Michaelerplatz building were removed, the city council cried scandal and decided to suspend the building permit. Representative Karl Rykl demanded that the permit for what he called a “monstrosity of a building” (*scheusal von einem wohnhaus*) be delayed until the façade was redesigned according to the Viennese traditional style.¹⁹ Shortly after, representative Hans Schneider did a sketch over Loos’s elevation, requesting a set of revisions for the façade. At the beginning of the controversy, the position of the municipal authorities was strongly supported by the press: the tabloid *Die Neue Zeitung*, for example, published an article which demanded “most energetically that the building office put an end to such work, before the whole city is shot to hell.”²⁰ Such a bold, polemic tone was not unusual in the print media of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna: a style of journalism based on a satirical attitude and a spectacularly aggressive criticism was emerging and most writers (Loos included) were attracted by it.²¹

In the narrative that accompanies the historiography of the controversy, Loos is not the only figure

centered in the members of the city council, but also from a theatrical perspective as an old, blind man seeing the

the Michaelerplatz

17 Oskar Ko.

Walden, July

Christopher Lo.

18 Hearwarth Walden,

Schonheit! Der Fall A.

Sturm 2 (1911): 556. Tran

Christopher Long in The Lo

19 Karl Rykl, “Stenographischer

über die öffentliche Sitzung des

Gemeinderates vom 22 Oktober 1910.

Amstblatt der k.k. Reichshaupt und

Residenzstadt Wien 19 (1910): 2558.

Perl 371

“Michaelerplatz,”

, December 7, 1910.

Christopher Long in

the Anti-Journalist: Karl

vish Self-Fashioning

cle Europe (Chicago:

f Chicago Press, 2008).

“genius” of Loos’s design, which he criticized without understanding. When he died in 1910 — right in the middle of the controversy — his place was taken by Josef Neumayer, another member of the old guard, who was almost completely deaf: because of his deafness, he was not able to hear Loos’s arguments, which he rejected without comprehending their meaning.²²

The censorship of the municipal authorities was instrumental in creating Loos’s heroic narrative: “I have been censored, censored by the police, just like Frank Wedekind and Arnold Schoenberg.”²³ Censorship was the reaction that Loos had hoped to provoke. As Kraus wrote, “scandal begins when the police put a stop to it.” The suppressive intervention of the city council allowed Loos to compare himself to several distinguished artists persecuted by the political authorities and to attract the attention of the public opinion.²⁴ In fact, the controversy of the Michaelerplatz building was not something that exploded against Loos’s will: on the contrary, the architect made an effort to provoke it. Wishing to fan the flames of controversy, Loos used Karl Rykl’s epithet “a monstrosity of a building” as the motto of the public lecture that he delivered at the end of 1911. In addition to that, he had a thousand posters with the motto printed and distributed to the Viennese citizens (Fig. 2). The goal was to publicize the fight between the artist and the authorities, between the protagonist of the play and his obtuse opponents.

The choice of words was not random: in 1907, two years before the Michaelerplatz commission, Loos wrote a critique of a building on Karntner Strasse for the newspaper *Fremden-Blatt*, describing it as a “monstrosity.”²⁵ Hence, the language of controversy was already part of Loos’s repertoire. He knew which words to use in order to attract attention and inflame public discussion. For example, since the public lectures that he had given in 1909 were poorly attended, he came up with a new speech in 1910 designed to provoke the Viennese audience: “Ornament and Crime.” As noted by Christopher Long, from the

²² Long, *The Looshaus*, 101.

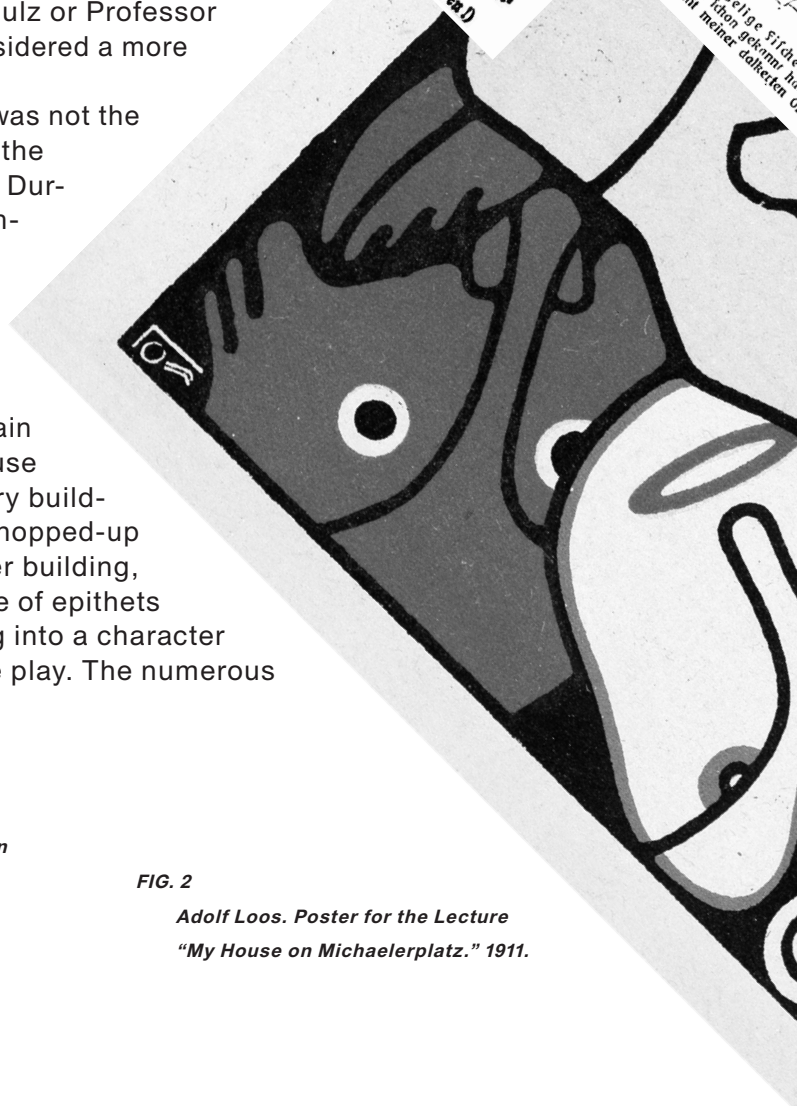
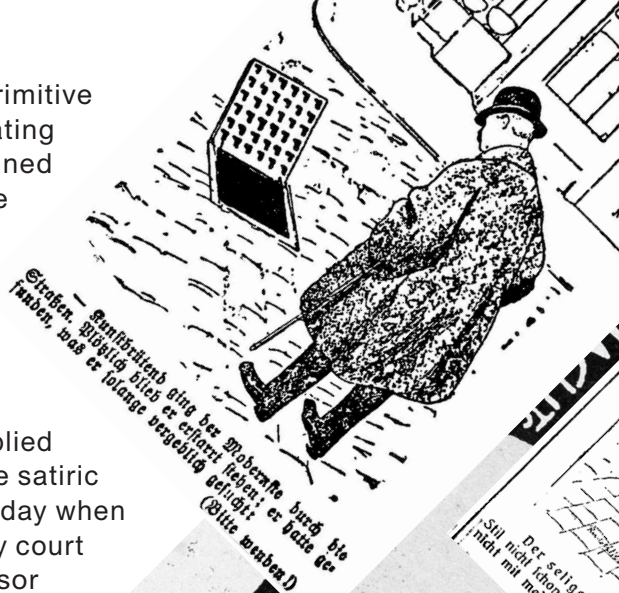
²³ Adolf Loos, “*Mein Erstes Haus*,” *Der Morgen*, October 3, 1910. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

²⁴ Karl Kraus, *Half-Truths and One-And-A Half-Truths: Selected Aphorisms*, ed. Harry Zohn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

²⁵ Adolf Loos, “*Die Entdeckung Wiens*,” *Fremden-Blatt*, April 7, 1907.

incendiary title to the references to primitive Papuans tattooing themselves and eating their enemies — everything was designed to shock.²⁶ Likewise, the link he made between criminality and several modern architects (Olbrich, Hoffmann, Eckmann) was intentionally provocative. When he presented the same lecture in Berlin two months later, the German press accused him of being a fanatic. He replied with a brief statement published by the satiric magazine *Der Ullk*: “There will come a day when incarceration in a jail cell decorated by court wallpaperer Eduard Schulz or Professor Van de Velde will be considered a more severe sentence.”²⁷

“Monstrosity” was not the only epithet assigned to the Michaelerplatz building. During the course of the controversy, the Viennese newspapers and magazines invented many other epithets designed to arouse the interest of the public: grain elevator, dung crate, house without eyebrows, factory building, prison, matchbox, chopped-up crate and dresser-drawer building, among others.²⁸ The use of epithets transformed the building into a character with an active role in the play. The numerous



26 Long, *The Looshaus*, 83.

27 Adolf Loos, “Ornament und Verbrechen,” *Der Sturm* 6 (1910): 44. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

28 Long, *The Looshaus*, 107.

FIG. 2

Adolf Loos. Poster for the Lecture “My House on Michaelerplatz.” 1911.

AKADEMISCHER VERBAND FÜR LITERATUR U. MUSIK



MOTTO: "EIN SCHEUSAL VON EINEM HAUS"
(AUS EINER WIENER GEMEINDERATSSITZUNG)

IM SOPHIENSAAL

**MONTAG, DEN 11. DEZEMBER 1911 UM HALB 8 UHR
ABENDS VORTRAG DES ARCHITEKTEN ADOLF LOOS**

**MEIN · HAUS · AM
MICHAELERPLATZ**

MIT SKIOPTIKONBILDERN

Karten bei Kehlendorfer I, Krugerstr. 3 zu K 4, 3, 2, 1, —.50

**Mitglieder des „Akademischen Verbandes für Literatur und Musik in Wien“ und des „Vereines
für Kunst und Kultur“ zahlen halben Preis · Die Mitgliederaufnahme erfolgt tägl. von 10–12 Uhr
vormittags im Hause I. Bezirk, Reichsratsstrasse 7**

cartoons and caricatures of the building that appeared in the press emphasized the theatrical nature of the controversy. The tabloid *Die Neue Zeitung* published a cartoon (deliberately simplified) showing how the building would look when completed, under the headline “The dung crate on the Michaelerplatz.”²⁹ *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt* published a cartoon under the caption “Away with Architecture,” showing Loos staring at an open sewer gate, implying that it was the source of his inspiration for the façade (Fig. 3).³⁰ *Der Morgen* ran a cartoon showing the Baroque architect Fischer von Erlach standing before the building and proclaiming: “What a shame I was not aware of this style, otherwise I would not have despoiled the square with all my stupid ornament” (Fig. 4).³¹ The magazine *Kikeriki* poked fun at Loos with a satirical cartoon that read: “The Looshaus by itself would be quite beautiful. It is just that the Imperial palace does not fit very well: so, away with the palace.”³² These cartoons functioned as the *bozzetti* of a theatrical scenography: the building constituted the backdrop of the scene, Michaelerplatz was the stage, the captions provided the script, and the caricatured subjects were the actors, represented in the act of pronouncing their lines in front of an audience — namely the readers of the newspapers.

Loos understood very well the importance of the media and, on more than one occasion, used the press to manipulate public opinion. For example, when the first critiques started to appear in the newspapers, he supplied drawings of the other competition entries to the press, apparently hoping to illustrate the qualitative difference between his design and the other proposals.³³ These projects, designed by rather mediocre architects, were published by *Der Morgen* under the headline “Stylistic distress.”³⁴ Moreover, in the last months

29 “Die Mistkiste am Michaelerplatz,” *Die Neue Zeitung*, December 7, 1910. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

30 “Los von der Architektur,” *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt*, January 1, 1911. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

31 Rudolf Herrmann, “Das Loos-Haus,” *Der Morgen*, early 1911. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

32 “Los von Fischer von Erlach,” *Kikeriki*, October 19, 1911. Translated by Christopher Long in *The Looshaus*.

33 Long, *The Looshaus*, 13.

34 “Baustiljammer,” *Der Morgen*, December 11, 1911.

FIG. 3

Cartoon “Away with Architecture.”

FIG. 4

Cartoon “Fischer von Erlach and the Loos-Haus.”

„Los von der Architektur.“
 (Aus der Silberzeitschrift des Österreichischen Ingenieur- und Architektenvereins.)



— Kunstbrütend ging der Modernste durch die Straßen. Plötzlich blieb er erstarrt stehen; er hatte gefunden, was er solange vergeblich gesucht.
 (Bitte wenden!)

Wien in der Karikatur.

XXXVI.

Das Loos-Haus auf dem Michaelerplatz.



Der selige Fischer v. Erlach: Schade, daß ich diesen „Stil“ nicht schon gekannt hab', dann hätte ich den schönen Platz nicht mit meiner dalkerten Ornamentik verschandelt!

of the controversy, Loos used the media to build consensus on his final design. When the city council rejected his proposal, he developed a revised design, characterized by the presence of bronze window boxes in the façade: however, before submitting it to the authorities, Loos circulated it to the print media in order to test their response. After the most influential newspapers rendered a positive verdict, Loos presented the project to the city council, which no longer had the strength to oppose it.³⁵ Interestingly, Loos drew the sketch of the revised façade on a photograph of the building taken from the same angle and with the same framing of the picture that most newspapers published. The relationship between the architect and the press was therefore very intricate: Loos managed to manipulate the press and — at the same time — was influenced by it.

In conclusion, the narrative modes and the dialogic patterns of the Michaelerplatz controversy derived from the theatre world and — through the print media — infiltrated the realm of architecture, opening the discipline to a broad public debate. The theatricality of Loos's architecture, however, went beyond the composition of volumes, forms and spaces: the Michaelerplatz controversy reveals that the entire process leading to the design and construction of Loos's architecture had a theatrical connotation.³⁶ Not only the building was conceived as a theatrical scenography, but also the Viennese population was regarded as a theatrical audience and the characters of those involved in the controversy were developed with the same degree of care as the characters of theatrical actors. The parallel development of the theatre and the press — emphasized by the emergence of new theatrical and journalistic genres — set the foundations for a new mode of story-telling and a new form of public interaction in the city. What defined the stories that both playwrights and journalists were constructing in this period was the emphasis on shock, provocation and controversy. This new narrative genre — the *scandal genre* — rapidly influenced

35 Long, *The Looshaus*, 133.

36 Beatriz Colomina, "Intimacy and Spectacle: *The Interiors of Adolf Loos*," *AA Files 20 (1990)*: 5–15.

In this article, Colomina discusses the theatricality of Loos's architecture in relation to the interiors of the Moller and Müller houses.

the way in which people looked at and talked about architecture. Loos understood very well these dynamics and — through the staging of the Michaelerplatz controversy — managed to ride the wave of the *scandal genre*, instead of being crushed by it. In fact, after two years of incandescent discussion, his design was approved by the city council without any substantial changes. Loos's convincing performance in the role of the "martyr for the modernist cause" allowed for a rather scandalous architecture to be built in the heart of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.