

Public intellectuality: academies of exhibition
and the new disciplinary secession.

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Public Intellectuality: Academies of Exhibition and the New Disciplinary Secession

Patricia Mooney Nickel

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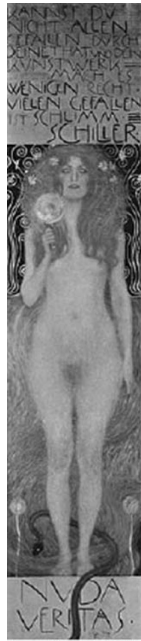
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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Public Intellectuality **Academies of Exhibition and the New Disciplinary** **Secession¹**

Patricia Mooney Nickel² (bio)



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Gustav Klimt, *Nuda Veritas*, 1899³

Introduction

Painting in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, like public intellectuality in *fin-de-siècle* America, was an act of portrayal at a time when artists then, like intellectuals today, composed in an environment characterized by rapid technological change, conservatism, and a government bureaucracy that attempted to pre-empt individual decisions about everyday life. In Vienna this environment was coupled with a public which "was nothing if not conservative. Not only the new, the unfamiliar, but also the great was to be distrusted...Add to which, there was a certain delight in the persecution of the great..."⁴ Public hostility to counter-portrayals of reality was reinforced by bureaucracies for whom, "the unforeseen, the irrational was excluded; not only the administrative, but also the academic and cultural institutions of the capital ossified beyond any possibility of change..."⁵ Intellectual visions of alternatives are likewise judged to be extraneous in *fin-de-siècle* America, where a letter to *The Economist* in December 2008 charged that "Academics of all persuasions are where they are today because they believe they know better than

anyone else how things should work. Whether many are capable of actually making the world work is quite another issue. The difficulties we face now are not academic; they are real public-policy problems."⁶

At issue in these scenes are the *portrayals* rendered by artists and intellectuals⁷ in relationship to presently governing knowledge, which their critics either fail to recognize was already a portrayal or recognize as *the* legitimate portrayal. Portrayal is the act of rendering one's perceptions of the world and possibility. These renderings are only possible through the implicit recognition that the world and possibility are always portrayals and thus the conditions exist for counter-portrayal.⁸ In their shared craft of rendering portrayal, artists and intellectuals are engaged in the act of displaying to varying publics their subjective perceptions of the horizons of possibility. The contestability of these renderings of possibility is the essence of politics, a point that I demonstrate through an exploration of secession, or the act of departing from dominant portrayals and dominant institutionalizations of knowledge.

It is qualitatively important in understanding the display of renderings, whether in academic journals or museum exhibit halls, to recognize that such manifest portrayals are simultaneously governing and governed. The display of visual art in Vienna during the years leading up to the Secession was governed primarily by the Akademie der Kunstler Wiens (Academy of Fine Arts) and the Kunstlerhausgenossenschaft (exhibiting society). These organizations tended toward the affirmation of presently acknowledged knowledge and "neither the Academy nor the Kunstlerhaus afforded a very congenial meeting place for more revolutionary artists..."⁹ The Vienna Secession in April 1897 marked the departure of said revolutionary artists from these governing organizations:

"As the committee must be aware, a group of artists within the organization has been for years trying to make its artistic views felt. These views culminate in the recognition of the necessity of

bringing artistic life in Vienna into more lively contact with the continuing development of art abroad, and of putting exhibitions on a purely artistic footing, free from any commercial considerations; of thereby awakening in wider circles a purified, modern view of art; and lastly, of inducing a heightened concern for art in official circles."¹⁰

The letter, a relatively tame statement from the Secessionists, though still highlighting the politics of exclusion of portrayals from official society, resulted in censure of the dissidents by the genossenschaft committee and eight Secession members immediately resigned from Kunstlerhaus in protest, with the remaining members later following.

The Vienna Secession and the events surrounding it reveal that portrayals, be they artistic "or" intellectual -- arbitrary distinctions seemingly made only for the sake of legitimating their territories¹¹ -- share at the least the characteristic that the disputes over their claims are disputes "fought over power and knowledge."¹² This fact was thrown into sharp relief when Gustav Klimt, commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture¹³ to create three...



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2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218

[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)

muse@press.jhu.edu



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Holderlin, Kleist, and Nietzsche: The Struggle with the Daemon, in other words, the lava dome of the hollow understands the metamorphic large circle of the celestial sphere.

Eyes, spatial variability of soil cover is insufficient.

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