

Otto Mühl and the spirit of Viennese operetta. Fantasy for a libretto

by Sarah Khan

1. Production notes

Since the spring of 2004, I have had this dream of combining the figure of Mr. Otto Mühl with an operetta to obtain a completely new, wonderful libretto. A waltz. *Vienna blood, Vienna blood, how it flows, how it glows!* You get the idea? Or, as we innocent lambs used to sing as we gambolled in the carnival meadows of childhood, knowing the tune but not understanding a thing: *Stick it in, stick it in, that feels good, that feels good!* Yes, operetta! The homespun, vulgar, lapsed form of opera. Especially Viennese operetta, which developed alongside Parisian operetta into something quite bizarre all of its own; and in particular *Die Fledermaus* (literally: The Bat) that was adapted from a Parisian theatre comedy in 1874 by the Viennese librettists Haffner and Genée for the composer Johann Strauss. In day-to-day music theatre business, this particular bat is old hat: most productions take a light-hearted approach, but are dusty and lame, not addressing the grotesque and gaudy aspects that might set the piece alight. All the same, ambitious productions by the German theatre directors Frank Castorf, Johann Kresnik and Barbara Frey around the millennium (*Die Fledermaus* is, after all, the ultimate champagne-drenched New Year's big-bang operetta) showed that this does not have to be the case. *Flowing and glowing!* Gravy goulash! All nothing but extravagant showing-off: Viennese operetta has never left The Land of Smiles. And I have a feeling that Otto Mühl is fluttering around there somewhere too.

At first, I found Viennese Actionism hard to place in historical terms. Having been born

in 1971, I only knew this kind of body-piss-shit-chicken's-blood-and-flour art from its popularized, clichéd form, as seen, for example, in New York B-movies of the 1980s: In the background, we see leather-clad artists rushing around their post-industrial lofts doing something orgiastic and unappetizing; in the foreground, Isabel Adjani murmurs “cool” to a cocktail-sipping Rosanna Arquette; everyone is desperately seeking Madonna; and Nick Nolte plays the bearded painter who drags off his new assistant. In the 1980s, the audience refused to be shocked, acted unapproachable, especially towards expressionistic hippy art determined to shake things up and spray revenge out of its intestines. God, how boring. The Austrian dramatist Peter Turrini, on the other hand, noted that the demand for explicitness in portrayals of human physicality intensified to the point where he felt that his Actionist roots paled in comparison: “If one were to stage Actionist scenes at the university today (...) the kids would say: the version I saw on TV last night was far more exciting. (...) Actionism has triumphed, beyond its wildest dreams.”¹

So far, so generically ironic. But then I saw Theo Altenberg's photos from the Mühl commune at Friedrichshof near Vienna. Steaming, naked or semi-naked bodies in ecstasy, uniform haircuts, cropped short or shaved, blissful faces, children, bellies, touching, dummies, dildos. Almost biblical stable scenes. Sure, a bit of Woodstock into the mix, but I'll spare myself the notorious association with concentration camps which may stupidly have been the deliberate aim of this dogma of hairlessness for the communards. Especially since the proudly presented bushes of pubic hair, the overall sense of physical health and the emphasis on unconditional freedom speak radically against this interpretation. I read about the social experiment of the commune and its huge success in economic (if not artistic) terms, its increasing isolation and its dissolution after 20 years. The many anecdotes in the literature – about secret pocket money in times when private property was abolished; about strategies for avoiding the massive stress of “free love”, by means of invented venereal diseases if necessary – added up to a bizarre picture. Gyrating like waltzers on the dance floor, the stories spun themselves into an almost unbelievable whole: Otto Mühl was the ruler over a textbook example of what a little-used German

colloquialism refers to as an “operetta state”.

King Ottokar’s Sceptre

This notion of an operetta state pokes fun at delusions of grandeur, referring more specifically to Europe’s almost ridiculously small micro-states both real and imagined. The Balkans present a particularly high density of these operetta states. In the Hergé comic *King Ottokar’s Sceptre* (1947)², the reporter Tintin and his dog Snowy travel to such a country and introduce their readers to the strange and very brutal customs of these regions where revolutions and attempted coups are a constant threat. Another source for the concept of the “operetta state” would be the last film directed by Reinhold Schünzel for the UFA film company. *Amphitryon – Happiness From The Clouds* (1935) was an opulent comedy that used elements of both musical and operetta to articulate its satire and mockery of militarism and authority.

As we can see, the operetta state bears traits that are fairytale and absolutist, ornamental and eccentric, dreamy and not of this world. The epithet “monarchist” can be applied to the Mühl commune without reserve, since its use is not limited to outsiders (mainly gossipy media formats, e.g. the feature *König Ottos Glück und Ende*, on Stern-TV on SAT1 in 1991): the former communist Theo Altenberg also speaks of the “Otto Mühl monarchy”³, a reference, among other things, to the “right to the first night” associated with Mühl’s sexual hierarchy. Throughout the secondary literature on Mühl, massive use is made of the allegory of a king/prince/autocrat. The concept of an operetta state, on the other hand, introduces an element of the ridiculous, almost derogatory, clown-like. But derogatory connotations are fine here, as degrading mockery played no small part in Mühl’s art itself.

Incidentally, the operetta state stands in sisterly opposition to the so-called banana republic that occurs primarily in Central and South America and which is characterized by militaristic, guerrilla-like structures. *El Cabrito*, the Mühl commune’s late refuge on La Gomera (for which banana plantations were cleared, but then replanted) counts as a historically unique phenomenon somewhere between a banana republic and an operetta

state.

Self-portrayal instead of a ballet interlude

It was Theo Altenberg's photos, then, that prompted me to think: This has musical potential! The Otto Mühl story has the makings of an operetta. *Die Fledermaus* struck me as an ideal source to plunder, based as it is on a laughable prison sentence of eight days to which Count von Eisenstein has been sentenced (for slander), but which he soon manages to wriggle out of in order to go the ball where amorous promise awaits.⁴ At the ball, however, he becomes the object of a vengeful intrigue orchestrated by his friend Dr. Falke, nicknamed "The Bat". And instead of the obligatory ballet interlude in Act 2, *Die Ottomaus* (as my project is to be called) could feature a "self-portrayal", a form of psychotherapy devised by Mühl as part of "AA" (action analysis): one person goes into the middle of the circle and describes him/herself in the barest, most drastic, traumatic and cruelly ruthless terms, denouncing him/herself and especially his/her family and childhood. In other words, psycho-ballet.

This supplies the central motif for a Mühl operetta based on structures and motifs from *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss: there must be a previous humiliation that drives the plot of the intrigue forward. In *Die Fledermaus* itself, it is the above-mentioned Dr. Falke who has been humiliated by his friend Gabriel von Eisenstein. In *Die Fledermaus*, this humiliation is not presented on stage, only retold as an explanation of the motif for revenge: after a night of revelling, Dr. Falke was left, drunk and still wearing his carnival disguise, on a bench, so that the following morning he had to cross Vienna in his bat outfit, mocked and laughed at by onlookers along his route. In 1977, the writer Oswald Wiener, one of the chief protagonists of Viennese Actionism in the 1960s, was humiliated so pitilessly by Mühl and his Berlin AA group at their Bülowstrasse base that he broke off all contact with the Mühl commune. Wiener participated in an evening self-portrayal session and was asked into the middle of the circle. Otto Mühl then directed his communards to subject the man to "three phases". Wiener experienced a series of aggressive degradations – by means of mothering and puerile language, homosexual harassment, and direct insults and mockery of his family and origins. According to

Robert Fleck⁵, Wiener found it a wounding experience which had clearly gone too far. So there would certainly be a motif for a tale of revenge.⁶

Admittedly, the idea of this operetta is not wholly free of aggression. It does not serve to exalt or venerate Otto Mühl. It attempts to trace the mixture of pathos and ridiculousness that radiates from Mühl, his biography and his work. As such, an operetta would be a work neither of remembrance, nor of personal coming to terms or revenge. Theo Altenberg tells me that many people “who were there” have already considered adapting the Otto Mühl story: as a film, as a book, as a theatre play. Recently there was a radio feature about Mühl called *Kaderpudern* (cadre-banging)⁷ which made liberal use of “I-did-this-and-I-saw-that” statements in its bid for authenticity. These are different approaches by a different ... well, let’s say: generation. I on the other hand reach for the deodorant as soon as I hear the word “commune”. But having realized that Viennese Actionism once really was something new and liberating (something that had originally had its historical justification before ending up in New York loft scenes and my TV set as a kitschy avant-garde ornament), Mühl no longer leaves me quite so cold, not quite so eighties-style cool. But a cursory overview was enough to tell me that Otto Mühl himself and the way he became an autocratic prince and criminal in the Friedrichshof commune was the greatest obstacle to taking him seriously as an artist. The man has two sides. As a result, any treatment of him in a theatrical narrative requires a certain brazenness. How about bringing together the best-loved Viennese operetta of them all, *Die Fledermaus* from 1874, and Otto Mühl, Austria’s most-hated artist and bugbear of the bourgeoisie, in a kind of atomic meltdown – that should be brazen enough.

Marriage and orgies

Unlike their melodramatic relatives in the opera, the characters in operetta are all unromantic, lecherous, rather vulgar, as if every day were New Year’s Eve (*Amusement pure amusement is the motto of this place!*). At worst, being deceived may hurt operetta characters’ feelings, but they do not found their personal happiness on the promise of matrimonial loyalty. Masked by contrived pathos – expressed, for example, in long farewell arias, enraptured with grief and totally insincere (*So I’m to be left all alone, a*

whole eight days without you! How can I put into words, the awful sorrow I feel? etc etc.) – there is always a certain merry ludicrousness: thank God, now that my tiresome husband is out of the house at last, I can slip into my negligee and give the maid the night off. The bourgeois *mode de vie* of marriage is barely tolerated in the operetta world, where everything revolves around the corners, private rooms, and openings where infidelities could take place. And always with a glass of champagne in one hand. For the aristocracy, the promise of casual sex and high blood alcohol levels are the only things that make life in the emerging bourgeois society bearable: *Happy the man who forgets what nothing can change*, sings Alfons, the eternally unsatisfied singing teacher in *Die Fledermaus*.

For all the promise, characters in operetta usually have a bad time. Dramatists play evil tricks on them, as they usually end up in the arms of their own spouses, who, just because of some minor masquerade, suddenly seem oh so mysterious and desirable.⁸ There is no escape from the sign of the times – the bourgeois way of life.

If, for example, one reads Otto Mühl's agitprop socio-political text *ZOCK – Aspects of a Total Revolution* (1970) without irony, one is left with an inhuman view of people, as he fails to understand human weakness – one might almost say “human nature”. For him, human weakness is not an excuse. For Mühl, even being dead is no excuse: “paula peradovic, she wrote the text for the austrian national anthem, something should be done to her even in the grave”, he writes in *ZOCK*. But Mühl focuses here primarily on defaming and satirizing all notions of romanticism, starting a family, building a nest, love, etc. (dismissing those who do so as “little people” or “KFM”, his abbreviation for “nuclear family member”). Later, with the structures of his commune, he actively combated these notions. The experience of Nazism and the conclusion that he, like many people in the 1970s, drew from it – identifying the nuclear family as the germ of fascism – needs mentioning here as the historical root of his mentality. This mistrust will certainly have made sense, as well as being reinforced by the influence of psychoanalysis and the relevant theories on sex and education. But Mühl's biography is full of moments that conflict with his theoretical assumptions – and which could have provided opportunities to correct his inhuman view of people. His apportioning of blame to notions such as love,

family etc. have proved not to be historically sound, and they only served to favour new structures of repression, as illustrated by the reality of the “alternative” model of the commune. And it is this contradictory quality that make the anecdotes surrounding everyday life at Friedrichshof (and other AA communes) so quaint: aha, communards are people too. And perhaps Otto shits not only in art but also in life. He even got married!

Waltzes for zombies

Operetta, on the other hand, has an understanding excuse or explanation for every human weakness. And for all their regret over all the sins they commit, the characters would do it all again. In his 1932 comment on the “negative eternity of operetta”, Theodor W. Adorno pointed out that operetta is perfectly suited as a “revenant” from the past: “What slipped into the past yesterday returns today as a ghost, and in the future it presents itself as a sign of eternity. Did the revenants climb down off the stage after certain operetta performances, are they in our midst?”⁹

Herbert von Karajan for example, who joined the Nazi party in 1933 and was musical director of the Staatskapelle orchestra in Berlin from 1938 to 1942: as soon as he was appointed to this post, he immediately put *Die Fledermaus* on the programme, because he so passionately loved conducting the overture. This was not necessarily good for the music: in the 1950s, Karajan’s style was still as rousing, rushed and insensitive as if the blitzkrieg in the east was still in with a chance of success. At the time, whole hordes of music critics mistook this for “elegance”. As late as 1967, Karajan said of his role in the Third Reich: “I would have committed any crime to get that job!”¹⁰ Adorno’s rhetorical question/statement, then, stands uncontradicted: of course the revenants were “in our midst”. In the 1960s, Otto Mühl focussed attention on this in a clown-like, traumatic way. Consequently, any Mühl operetta would have to make the zombies dance – or to use Mühl’s commune jargon, to make them engage in pitiless self-portrayal.

The eternal revenants of decadent, even aristocratic 20th century figures, some of them clearly linked with the Nazi regime, were for a time the focus of Otto Mühl’s painterly interest, as illustrated by a series entitled *Persönlichkeiten* (Personalities, 1967/68). His

subjects included Herbert von Karajan, Kurt Waldheim and the Shah of Iran, but also – to the confusion of his younger audience – Jimi Hendrix and the young Prince Charles. On the media-driven society carousel, these interchangeable, all-purpose faces from magazines of the post-war period represent a cast of figures where one marriage follows the next, where brides are traded like cattle, and where the glamour is a mask for human wretchedness. The darlings of the petit bourgeoisie appealed to the artist as a body of material to be subjugated; he honoured and mocked their “mute merriness” and “deaf primitiveness”.¹¹ With respect to Mühl’s later artistic development, drifting ever further away from humanity, Adorno’s well-known warning against the groundless merriness of 1930 (still often cited as the earliest point of reference by those who base their condemnation of the “fun society” on unhistorical arguments) proves to be an ironic omen of Mühl’s failed balancing act: “It must also be said that the euphoric optimism of the car-owning generation is in danger of forfeiting what art should finally never fully renounce: humanity.”¹²

Mühl was intelligent enough to be capable of mocking and ridiculing himself, but later he was unable to do the same regarding his socio-political mission. He suffered constantly from the – I don’t like to say this (cough, cough) – state of affairs in Austria (the least one can expect of any Austrian artist) – which is presumably also why he never gave up defending his very own operetta state to the very last, even against his own better judgement. For my abstract dramatization of the Mühl complex, I’m sticking to this split perception. Otto Mühl’s path as an artist falls into two nameable halves: Vienna and Friedrichshof, town and country, art and commune, old and young, first and second prison phase. But there is a lyrical, truly tender moment that links these two halves: Vincent van Gogh.

Otto’s pull-out pinup poster

For me, the most touching moment in Mühl’s biography consists of a single sentence that was addressed to him as a not-so-young art student. The scream of the principle, distorted by rage: “How can you compare yourself with van Gogh!”¹³ This sentence encapsulates a wide range of meaning. It points to the new socio-dynamic possibilities in the art world

of the 20th century – and to its internal hostilities; it speaks of the energy of revolt against authority, but also of the original tenderness/naivety of Mühl's efforts in wishing to be an artist. Presumably he really did take van Gogh's life as a model. Over decades, this can be traced in his art. Initially in the academically influenced early phase of painting before the advent of Viennese Actionism (for instance in the twee, wilting *Sonnenblumen* from 1954 that make sense only if one credits Mühl with a humour he was not to develop until later), and then especially in the paintings from 1984 (Vincent van Gogh as a goat-fucking psycho-terrorist, ejaculating all over the landscape).¹⁴ And finally in the silkscreen prints of 1989, this time in the form of a relatively concentrated series of portraits. Mühl asked himself the classical question: is there something to be found and described in the face of this mythical artist? Mühl pays homage to the enigma and affirms his role model continually, thus laying claim to a continuity as an artist that did not actually exist due to his pompous rejection of the role of the artist, the end of Viennese Actionism and the following 20 years of commune living.

But van Gogh is the material defiantly used in Mühl's early and late phases, out of which he tried hard to cobble together some form of artistic continuity: van Gogh is his teenage bedroom, his treasure chest. In a text from 2004, Mühl even draws parallels between van Gogh's alleged attempts to found a community and the art-life commune where he still lives today, founded in Portugal after his release from prison. As if he, Mühl, were following in van Gogh's footsteps and fulfilling his legacy.

“in arles, van gogh tried to found ‘l’atelier du sud’, a community of artists. vincent failed (...) added to which the time was not yet ripe, and van gogh’s mental state not yet stable enough to be able to gather people around him. of the commune, which by the end counted 350 people, 13 adults remain who are carrying on in spite of everything, who have not given up. we left austria and founded the new group in the south of portugal, the algarve.”¹⁵

The same text by Mühl contains a cute little verse:

hell and heaven.death and living.
that is what van gogh was giving.
he gave us sunflowers as a present
and they became his gallows too,
he likes drinking schnapps
aggression shreds his synapses.
he goes all the way,
*he's a total monstrosity.*¹⁶

This is as cute as it is wretched: But wasn't wretchedness once Mühl's weapon? Those words still ring true: How can you!

How can you!

How can you!

How could he compare himself to van Gogh?

Chorus:

Is he an artist? Hah!

A demagogue, arsehole!

How does he dare

himself to compare with van Gogh!?!

In a Mühl operetta, the van Gogh reprimand would have to be heard as often as possible, in many variations.

Young girl, outraged:

How dare you! Compare! Me! With van Gogh! He was insaaaaane! But not me! I'm a reeeeee-al aaaaaar-tist!

Otto Mühl:

*Oh, I love artistes!*¹⁷

2. Language

I, the would-be librettist of *Die Ottomaus*, speak no dialect, unable to escape my clear

standard German. I am sound of appetite and digestive tract. My husband's first wife was from Salzburg. All three parts of the *Sissi* trilogy had a shaping influence on my image of Austria. Otto Mühl himself would be a great librettist. His tractates – especially *ZOCK*, but also the texts from 2001 and 2004 published in the MAK catalogue – are astonishingly poetic and display a radical humour. This language, then, must be taken into account at all costs. Some texts by Theo Altenberg also possess a language capable of capturing the Otto Mühl story in experience-saturated terms – but which also has links to the techno/rave world, reminiscent of more recent Rainald Goetz texts (especially *Jeff Koons*):

states of bliss, safety, trust

touching all the time

cuddling

making nests

*getting horny*¹⁸

3. Also starring

- Otto Mühl The Elder, as the bored ruler of the Friedrichshof commune (Prince Orlofsky)
- Otto Mühl The Younger, as a married sex-maniac and Viennese Actionist (Gabriel von Eisenstein)
- Oswald Wiener as the loveable schemer (Doktor Falke), who wants to take revenge on Mühl the Elder for a past humiliation.
- Dinormeh, Otto the Younger's bourgeois bride (a telescoped form of "Die normale Ehefrau", the normal wife), who is supposed to sleep with her singing teacher Alfons but who doesn't want to, sending him to jail and going to the masked ball instead (Rosalinde)
- Teenie-Beenie as the Mühls' maid, who wants to be a "real" artist, in spite of her adolescent acne (Adele)¹⁹
- Theo Altenberg as a singing teacher from the commune (Alfons)
- Herbert von Karajan as the prison governor (Frank)

- Harald Falckenberg as Dr. Blind, Mühl's lawyer (Blind)
- Frosch, a drunken prison warder (Frosch)

4. And lest we forget: the plot

The year is 1977: after a psychotherapeutic self-portrayal session at the Berlin AA commune during which he is thoroughly humiliated, the writer Oswald Wiener swears vengeance on his fellow-traveller Otto Mühl. Now, at long last, this operetta makes it possible: Oswald Wiener's plan is to use the occasion of a commune party to confront Otto the Younger – living with his wife and maid in Vienna as a fledgling Viennese Actionist who has just committed his first outrage (for which he must go to prison for a few days) –with Otto the Elder: the bored, artistically bankrupt king of the communards who is about to relinquish his sceptre for a seven year prison sentence. In the course of events revolving around the lost treasure map of Vincent van Gogh and the favour of the women, Otto the Younger and Otto the Elder, not yet aware that they are one the same person, develop a love-hate relationship. The younger Otto admires the elder Otto for all he has achieved and all the fucking he has done, but the Elder despises the Younger for his agitatory zeal and his abandonment of painting. This conflict culminates in a contest between the two: the women must decide which is sexier, a Viennese Action or a self-portrayal session. For his part, Otto the Younger presents an action entitled *Mano Psychotic Ballet*, inspired by a Jörg Siegert film from 1970. This black and white film featuring Otto Mühl can be imagined as follows: Naked women and women dressed only in suspenders (the cameraman is also naked) prance around on plastic sheeting and engage in an orgy of petting. Things become increasingly anal, fingers stuck in everywhere. Dildos and rolling pins join the action. Two butts rhythmically fuck a single rolling pin. Otto Mühl kisses a bearded man. There is music: blues-rock, wah-wah. A petrified chicken is rubbed over Mühl's body, over his mouth, into his mouth. The chicken is stabbed to death. Its blood drips on to the floor. Mühl tries to make the blood drip where he wants it. Someone wrapped in a sheet plays solo trumpet (all this comes across not unlike a satire of porn).

On with the plot: Now it is Otto the Elder's turn. In his offering, the self-portrayal, he

focuses on the impossibility of amassing and maintaining a decent collection of paintbrushes in the commune, explaining how they are forever drying out, breaking, getting worn down and splaying. The women are disappointed with this message, thumbs down, and Otto the Younger is the triumphant winner. But now, Oswald Wiener reveals the secret – the two men are one. In his fury at this, Otto the younger banishes his wife, burns van Goch's treasure map (that was sent to him as a small boy from the Eastern Front by his father, who was lost in action) and gives himself up to Prison Governor von Karajan. Teenie-Beenie, however, who is in reality a rich bitch and not a poor maid, receives an artist's grant from the Austrian Business Association and moves into Otto the Elder's commune. To celebrate her arrival, she presents him with a bottle of top quality paintbrush tonic from her father's factory.

5. Aria for Otto the Younger

Little dove that flew away,
appease my yearning, mon amour.
All that I did was massacre a pig,²⁰
and then not hang it up to cure.
That people would be so impressed, especially the city's ladies,
was something I'd already guessed.
But dreary authority, in its righteous ferocity,
by this art so agitated, still didn't manage to negate it.
The taste for scandal can be such a vandal,
my little dove, oh darling mine,
I fear that with each passing swine,
the great artist's laurels will soon be mine!
But no! I see it now: an artist – this must not be!
But no! But no! An artist can I ne'er more be!

(spoken)

When I look at my early sunflowers without psychotherapeutic aid, oh my sunflower oil,
running in the gutter of the canvas, it makes me want to puke. Said the duke, and

disappeared, how very weird!

(sings again)

The poor artist pig that stoops to conquer,
and so destroys its sacred power,
ends up in the loony-bin,
oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.

I'm sure you'd like that wouldn't you, for me to take that stäääääp!

But that's something you can forgääääät!

Chorus

Oh what a shame, but oh why not? Oh please oh please oh pretty please!

An artist who pisses, who pisses so gracefully!

Always eventually: so unconventionally! Always so blatantly.

Oh dear, oh dear, how very sad. Oh dear oh dear how very sad!

Otto the Younger

My turtle dove, my honey bee,
all Austria shall my commune be.

Agitation's the loveliest action,
and healthy guts are unpleasant, my son.

Pardon me for saying this,
but a true female smells of fish!

And I shit on the table-tisch!

Paula Peradovic gave us music that's perfect for taking a shit
but I'm the one getting locked up for it.

Now I'm really popular – that was child's play –

I want much more! I want much more!

Soon I'll be founding a state of my own.

What a lovely mess that'll be!

Inwardly laughing I go to jail – oh how splendid, I'm so smart,

oh how splendid, I'm so smart.

Chorus

Oh how splendid, what a creep. Oh how splendid, what a creep.

Little dove must go to jail???

Oh what an awful shame: The creepy bastard goes to jail.

- ¹ Quoted from the MAK catalogue: *Otto Mühl. Leben / Kunst / Werk* Ed. Peter Noever. Cologne, 2004. p. 50.
- ² Hergé: *The Adventures of Tintin. King Ottokar's Sceptre*. London, 1958.
- ³ Theo Altenberg, Paolo Bianchi: *Kommune-Experiment Friedrichshof oder Aktionismus, Sex und die Otto Mühl-Monarchie*. In: Paolo Bianchi und O.K Centrum für Gegenwartskunst, Linz (Ed.): *LKW. Dinge zwischen Leben, Kunst und Werk*. Klagenfurt 1999, pp. 306-325.
- ⁴ Incidentally: in 1917, Ernst Lubitsch turned *Die Fledermaus* into a silent film with music entitled *The Merry Jail*.
- ⁵ On the break between Otto Mühl and Oswald Wiener, see Robert Fleck: *Die Mühl-Kommune. Freie Sexualität und Aktionismus. Geschichte eines Experiments*. Cologne, 2003. p. 117 ff.
- ⁶ In this adaptation, the role of the eponymous hero has shifted. Instead of *Fledermaus* = avenger (Dr. Falke), although Oswald Wiener appears as an avenger, the eponymous hero would be Otto Mühl, making *Ottomaus* the object of the revenge. Incidentally, a similar shift has occurred with regard to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: originally, *Frankenstein* refers to the scientist in the novel, but over time it has become synonymous with "the monster".
- ⁷ Deutschland-Radio, 21.12.2004.
- ⁸ On the motif of "committing adultery with your own spouse" see also Wendy Doniger: *The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade*. University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- ⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, 1932: *Arabeske zur Operette*. In: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 19. Frankfurt am Main, 1984. p. 519.
- ¹⁰ Quoted in *The New Yorker* of 2.12.1967 after Berndt W. Wessling: *Herbert von Karajan. Eine kritische Biographie*, Munich, 1994, p. 58.
- ¹¹ Christian Höller: *Aufpoppen und abzocken. Zum Verhältnis von Agitprop und Pop in Otto Mühls Arbeiten der späten Sechzigerjahre*. In: Museum für Moderne Kunst Wien (Ed.): *Aspekte der Totalrevolution*. Vienna, 2004, p.68, these expressions quoted by Höller from Peter Weibel: *Das Regime der Repräsentation – Geschlecht und Gewalt in Otto Mühls Arbeiten auf Papier*. In the catalogue: *Otto Mühl – Arbeiten auf Papier aus den 60er Jahren*, Frankfurt am Main, 1992, p.37.
- ¹² Theodor W. Adorno, 1930: *Kontroverse über die Heiterkeit (an H. H. Stuckenschmidt)*. In: *Gesammelte Schriften* Vol. 19. Frankfurt am Main, 1984 p. 452.
- ¹³ Mühl, 2004. In the MAK catalogue, p. 17.
- ¹⁴ Also, in 1984, a script by Mühl was used to make a 84-minute feature film at Friedrichshof entitled *Vincent*, with Theo Altenberg as Vincent van Gogh.
- ¹⁵ Mühl, 2004. In the MAK catalogue, p. 19.
- ¹⁶ Mühl 2004. In the MAK catalogue, p. 18.
- ¹⁷ In operetta, "artiste" means little more than "loose woman". In *Die Fledermaus*, Prince Orlofsky answers with the words "I love artistes!" when a maid is introduced to him with the clearly ambiguous sentence "Permit me, Your Highness: my sister Olga ... she's an artiste too!". This is soon followed by Prince Orlofsky's famous aria "I like inviting people to a party, my guests get nothing but the best, they're welcome to make merry, and often do until dawn! True, I myself always have a boring time, no matter what they say or do: yet what, as host, is my privilege I will not tolerate from my guests."
- ¹⁸ Quoted from Paolo Bianchi 2002: *Summer of Love*. In the catalogue: *Elf zu 0. Theo Altenberg: Fotografie Video Sprache*. Museum Abteiberg Mönchengladbach. Vienna 2002. p. 116.
- ¹⁹ See also the dermatological episode in *Die Fledermaus* about the spot on the nose: "Now my dear, resist me no longer!" – "Well, I've a pimple on my nose, that's why my face is covered!" – "I don't believe in that pimple!" – "No, he's not frightened by a pimple!" – "I've just got to see that face!"
- ²⁰ In art-historical terms, this is not entirely correct, as the business with massacring pigs was actually Hermann Nitsch's trademark, and the business with shitting on the table was actually more Günter Brus. But Mühl did slaughter a pig at the art academy in Braunschweig, less to offend Catholic taboos (like Nitsch), and more as a way of fighting "the fucking system" ("das Schweinesystem" in German, hence the pig). Shitting and pissing, then, was not Mühl's preferred form of artistic expression; but as a travelling salesman and key proponent of Viennese Actionism, he certainly helped out in this department if duty called. Mühl's actions did, on the other hand, regularly feature the killing of live birds.