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Cultural Memory and Intellectual History: Locating Austrian Literature

I am writing a book on the intellectual history of German-speaking Austria since the eighteenth century. *The Austrian Tradition in German Culture: An Intellectual History* is about the borderline situation of intellectuals who lived in Austria and wrote in German. Historians of Germany and Austria have often (for quite different reasons) been reluctant to emphasize this ambiguity. For Germans it is usually self-evident that Austria is part of German culture, while Austrians often assume that Austria is quite distinct from German culture. My argument draws attention to changing configurations of Austria and Germany over time and explores the perceptions of Austrian intellectuals about these relationships. My intent is to locate Austrian intellectual history within the wider context of language, culture, and politics in Central Europe and to offer an historical frame of reference for scholars who work on Austrian writers and philosophers.

My goal is to make Austrian thought more visible, but also to locate this intellectual tradition historically. An important part of my imagined audience is readers who are familiar with Sigmund Freud or Ludwig Wittgenstein, Robert Musil or Hermann Broch, Elias Canetti or Ingeborg Bachmann, the Austrian economists or social scientists, and want to make sense of how to locate these figures historically. My aim is to characterize an understanding of Austrian intellectual traditions that will be useful to students of Austrian history and other nearby fields—not only for literature and philosophy but also for historical work on Germany and on non-German peoples in Central and Eastern Europe. My project draws attention to the special place of German within the languages of Austria since the eighteenth century.

For the MALCA conference, I propose to discuss the emergence of a conception of Austrian literature in the context of the invention of Austrian national identity after 1945. Austrian national identity was a construct of the postwar era that was designed to draw on distinctive qualities of the Austrian past, but nearly always for polemical, apologetic purposes. My presentation will emphasize the ways in which discussions of national identity and cultural memory since 1945 have functioned as obstacles to understanding Austrian literature and intellectual traditions. My paper will concentrate primarily on Austrian political and literary historians from the 1940s and 1950s, and on interpretive strategies that have both shaped and reflected Austrian conventions and memories.