

Mahler and Schoenberg: Early Modernism in Vienna

5/11/17

Figures in turn of the century Vienna

- Klimt
- **Wittgenstein**
 - “There is no reason to look, as we have done traditionally—and dogmatically—for one, essential core in which the meaning of a word is located and which is, therefore, common to all uses of that word. We should, instead, travel with the word’s uses through “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing” (PI 66).”
- Herzl
- Hitler
- **Freud**
 - *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905)

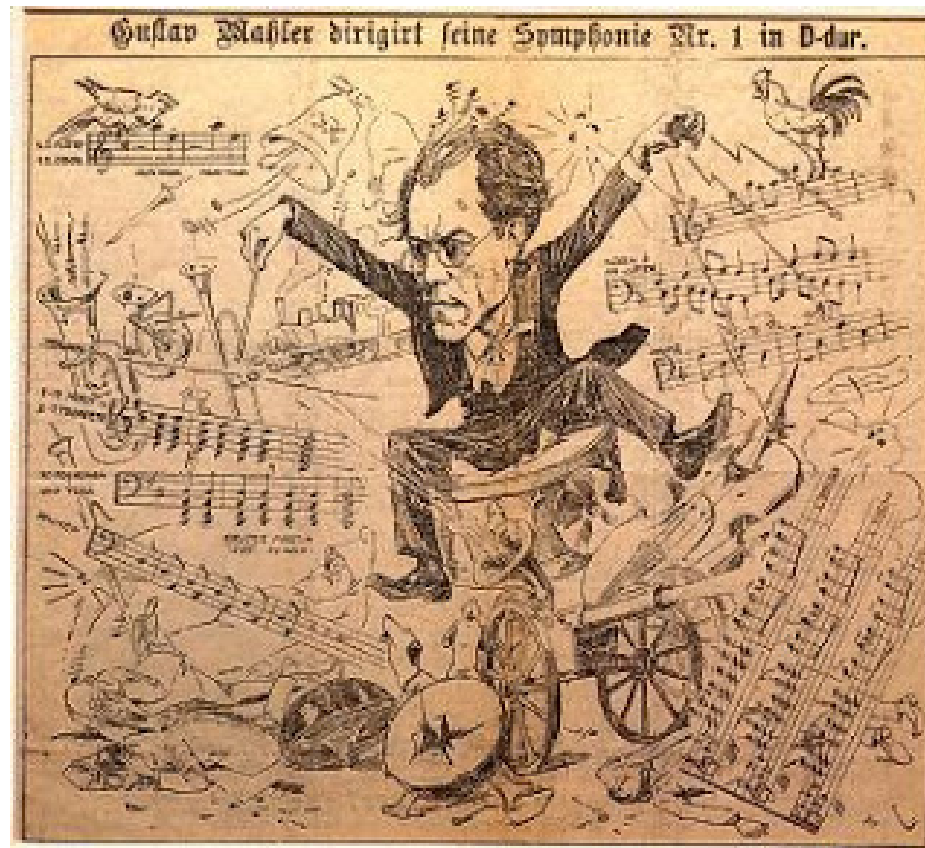
Maximalism and *Weltanschauungsmusik*

- Expansions
 - Tonal
 - Temporal
 - Motivic saturation
 - Amplitude
- *Weltanschauungsmusik*: “music that expresses a world view.”

Gustav Mahler (1860 - 1911)

- Family of Jewish distiller and tavern keeper. 13 siblings. Assimilated.
- Fame as a conductor. “Meteoric rise” to the pinnacle of the field, culminating with appointment in 1897 (age 36) directorship of Vienna court opera.
 - Textual fidelity; e.g. removal of Mozartean *musica ficta*.
 - ““*Tradition ist Schlamperei!*” (*Tradition is just sloppiness!*)
- Tensions with superiors; tensions with Vienna. Carl Leuger (christian socialist, anti-semite) is the Mayor.
- 1902 marries Alma Schindler, 20 yrs his junior.
- 1908 conducts *Tristan* in NYC

Anti semitic cartoon



Mahler's lieder

- *Das Knaben Wunderhorn*
 - German folk lyrics
 - But viewed from a “modern” perspective – complexity of music
 - “communicate a deeply ironic double message, indicating at once the urgent need for a return to simple values and the utter impossibility, at this late date, of ever achieving simplicity.”

Mahler, Symphony No. 1

- (At first) The Titan: A Tone Poem in the Form of a Symphony
 - Then, drops 2nd movement, presents as a “brahmsian” work of absolute music.
- Mov. 1 “like a sound from nature”
- Mov. 3
 - High and low; frere jacques

Symphony No. 2 in C minor - “Resurrection”

- Ambivalent relationship to programmatic content; “resurrection” refers to the text of the final movement (choral)
 - Formerly, first movement had been symphonic poem after *Dziady*, by Mickiewicz, a poem whose hero was named Gustav.
- But this gets replaced with broader ‘content’ more appropriate to eschatological scope

Aborted program note to 2nd symphony

- We stand by the coffin of a well-loved person. His life, struggles, passions and aspirations once more, for the last time, pass before our mind's eye.—And now in this moment of gravity and of emotion which convulses our deepest being, when we lay aside like a covering everything that from day to day perplexes us and drags us down, our heart is gripped by a dreadfully serious voice which always passes us by in the deafening bustle of daily life: What now? What is this life—and this death? Do we have an existence beyond it? Is all this only a confused dream, or do life and this death have a meaning?—And we must answer this question if we are to live on.

Maximalism

- 4 flutes, alternating on 4 piccolos
- 4 oboes, two alternating on English horns
- 3 clarinets, one alternating on bass clarinet
- 2 E \flat clarinets, one alternating on B \flat clarinet, both to be doubled in fortissimos
- 3 bassoons
- contrabassoon
- 10 horns (four for use offstage)
- 8–10 trumpets (4–6 for use offstage)
- 4 trombones
- contrabass tuba
- Percussion (requiring seven players):
- 7 timpani, 6 (3 players) onstage, one offstage
- 2 pairs of cymbals, one offstage
- 2 triangles, one offstage
- snare drum (more than one if possible)
- glockenspiel
- 3 tubular bells
- 2 bass drums (one offstage, played with a wooden stick)
- 2 tam-tams (gongs), high and low
- 2 harps, several players per part if possible
- Organ
- Largest possible contingent of all strings

Density of reference

- Mahler, Symphony no. 2
- Chorus (9th)
- Tremolos (9th)
- Unisoni in arresting string motifs, key of C minor (5th)
- *Mit durchaus ernstem und feierlichem Ausdruck* (“With grave and solemn expression throughout”) (Funeral march of the 3rd)

Mahler, Symphony no. 5, adagietto

- Love letter to his young wife Alma?
- (uncharacteristically) a crowd pleaser

Late works

Symphony no. 8 (1906)

858 singers, 171 instrumentalists

Medieval Latin hymn *and* Goethe!

Part II

“a symbol of the universe in sound”

Symphony no. 9 (1909)

- **Mov. 4 (adagio) finale**
- Really slow, mournful
- “while earlier works have ‘images’ of death, the late ones ‘taste’ of it” (Taruskin p. 800)
- ‘first person’

Arnold Schoenberg (1874 - 1951)

- Jewish family, poor. Works as a bank clerk.
- Formal instruction from Alexander Zemlinsky
- Scrapes by, teaching and orchestrating. Students: Berg and Webern (“Second Viennese School”)
- Serious student of painting: studies with Richard Gerstl, who also teaches his wife Mathilde (daughter of Zemlinsky). Mathilde and Gerstl have an affair. She comes back to Arnold; Gerstl kills himself.
- WWI; joins military in 1915. 1916 discharged for poor health.
- *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen*
- WWII – dismissed from Berlin job.
- 1933 Malkin Inst. In Boston; commutes to NYC, winters cause serious health problems.
- 1934 moves to California.

periods

- Tonal
- “Atonal?” “pantonal” “expressionist”
- Serial
- Fourth period...

Verklarte Nacht, op. 4 (1899)

- Tone poem for string 6tet; combining chamber music (brahms) and program music (wagner)?
- Dehmel's poem: a woman impregnated by another man whose husband forgives her. D minor → D major
- Rejected in Vienna; alienation becomes “point of pride.”
- Illegal chord: Ab9 in “fourth inversion”
- Zemlinsky: “it sounds as though you have taken a still-wet version of the ‘Tristan’ score and smeared it.”

Dehmel, Verklarte Nacht

Two people walk through a bare, cold grove;
The moon races along with them, they look into it.
The moon races over tall oaks,
No cloud obscures the light from the sky,
Into which the black points of the boughs reach.
A woman's voice speaks:

I'm carrying a child, and not yours,
I walk in sin beside you.
I have committed a great offense against myself.
I no longer believed I could be happy
And yet I had a strong yearning
For something to fill my life, for the joys of
Motherhood
And for duty; so I committed an effrontery,
So, shuddering, I allowed my sex
To be embraced by a strange man,
And, on top of that, I blessed myself for it.
Now life has taken its revenge:
Now I have met you, oh, you.

She walks with a clumsy gait,
She looks up; the moon is racing along.
Her dark gaze is drowned in light.
A man's voice speaks:

May the child you conceived
Be no burden to your soul;
Just see how brightly the universe is gleaming!
There's a glow around everything;
You are floating with me on a cold ocean,
But a special warmth flickers
From you into me, from me into you.
It will transfigure the strange man's child.
You will bear the child for me, as if it were mine;
You have brought the glow into me,
You have made me like a child myself.

He grasps her around her ample hips.
Their breath kisses in the breeze.
Two people walk through the lofty, bright night.

Brahms the Progressive

- Every work has a *Grundgestalt*; a basic shape from which its content is all derived.
- *Pimpenkraft*
- *Form in music* serves to bring about comprehensibility through memorability.
- Music is like language in that “its vocabulary must be proportionate to the intellect which it addresses.”
- Artist as clock
- “In the sphere of art music, the artist respects his audience. He is afraid to offend it by repeating over and over what can be understood at a single hearing, even if it is new, let alone if it is stale old trash.”
- “An alert and well-trained mind refuses to listen to baby talk.”
- Weird numerological fixation:
 - “Does not the mystic correspondence of the numbers of their dates suggest some mysterious relationship between them? Brahms' one-hundredth birthday anniversary in 1933 was the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Wagner. And now, as this essay is being rewritten, we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Brahms' death. “
- “A transition, a codetta, etc, should not be considered as a thing in its own end...this means that segments or sections which fulfill structural relationships should do so without being mere trash.”

Brahms the Progressive, continued

- Digression to Mozart, who has irregularities in his work. A wise performer “will systematize irregularity, making it a component principle of the organization.”
- ‘musical prose’
- “Asymmetry, combinations of phrases of differing lengths, numbers of measures not divisible by eight, four or even two, i.e. imparity of the number of measures, and other irregularities already appear in the earliest works of Brahms.”

Expressionism and “the emancipation of dissonance”

- Express *yourself*; this implies abandonment of culturally conditioned materials, e.g. tonality (think back to Schoenberg vis a vis Helmholtz)
- Freud and the unconscious
- “The earlier Romantic puzzle of absolute music – music that describes the indescribable and expresses the inexpressible – was thus updated for the psychoanalytic age.”
- 1906 – Schoenberg very depressed.
- *Harmonielehre*: the difference between consonance and dissonance is one of degree, not kind.
- Birth of “tonal” and “atonal”

6 little piano pieces, Op. 19

- No 1 and 2

Webern, Six Bagatelles for String Quartet, Op. 9 No. 5

String Quartet no. 2, Mov. 4

Schoenberg and Modernism

- Metaphysics is defined by a basic duality (noumenal vs phenomenal). The noumenal is defined negatively, as that which lies outside the empirically verifiable. The proposition of metaphysics is thus a critical one: it asserts the limits of knowledge. This self-critique of philosophy becomes, in Romanticism and Modernism, a self-critique of representation. Similarly, Schoenberg's critique of musical language is powerfully shaped by an awareness of the inadequacy of language – specifically, the inadequacy of musical language modeled on the representation of human emotions.
 - (paraphrased from Julian Johnson, “Schoenberg, Modernism, and Metaphysics”)
- “The structures of rational knowledge, representation, and language are inadequate in the face of the totality of the world and our experience of it.”
 - cf. Romanticism...same? Different?

Pierrot Lunaire, No. 1

- *Text*
- *Sprechstimme* or *Sprechgesang* (Speech-song)
- Contour rather than pitch.
- Whole-tone scale *Grundgestalt*
- no. 18, “the moonspot”

Five Orchestral Pieces, Op. 16

- “seeks to express all that swells in us subconsciously like a dream.” (program note)
- No 1 (“Vorgefühle”)
- No 3 (“Farben”)
 - “*klangfarbenmelodie*”
- *cf.*
Anton Webern, Op. 10, Five Pieces for Orchestra