Karl Amadeus Hartmann: The Politics of Musical Inner Emigration

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The waning of old-modernist models of history, Adorno's chief among them, has made possible the reevaluation of composers once overshadowed by the modernist mainstream. In the case of Karl Amadeus Hartmann, this reconsideration has taken several forms: looking at his symphonies within the larger history of the genre, re-appraising his role as a public postwar musical figure responsible for Munich's Musica Viva concerts,¹ and also examining the nature of his political engagement. Hartmann can thus fruitfully be compared to composers such as Eisler and Dessau, whose work served more overt political aims than his own.² Several recent publications address directly the question of Hartmann's political stance and its musical realization. Vindicating Hartmann as a political composer is no easy matter: not only must one face the far from unambiguous role he played from 1933-1945,³ but one must also rehabilitate the very possibility of political music itself, against its discreditation within the modernist mainstream. Principled appeals to ethics or to Hannah Arendt's political theories must thus be grounded in close musical analysis to be more than a mere rhetorical gesture.

The Musik-Konzepte volume on Hartmann's opera Simplicius Simplicissimus is uneven going. The opening essay by Peter Becker hardly discusses music at all, instead indulging in a collage-like free association of loosely related materials. Hanns-Werner Heister wastes far too much space on incoherent and vitriolic ranting against the current political situation, with all the bitterness of a disappointed old '68er; when he does actually discuss Hartmann, he pads his footnotes with long quotes from Wikipedia entries and polemically overstates his case for Hartmann's leftist. This is a pity, for Heister has been one of the composer's long-standing advocates, and his earlier work on the topic was much more careful. After Heister's vituperative name-calling, Ulrike Böhmer's sober reconstruction of the history of the opera's composition comes as a relief. Egon Voss follows with a consideration of whether Simplicius could be considered socialist, and

¹ See the exhibition catalogue, Karl Amadeus Hartmann und die Musica Viva, ed. Renate Wagner (Munich: Piper, 1980); also Alexander Rother, "Rethinking postwar history: Munich's Musica Viva during the Karl Amadeus Hartmann years (1945–63)," The Musical Quarterly, 90(2), Summer, 2007, pp. 230-274.

² Hanns-Werner Heister, Vom allgemeingültigen Neuen : Analysen engagierter Musik : Dessau, Eisler, Ginastera, Hartmann (Saarbrücken: Pfau Verlag, 2006).

comes to a negative conclusion. Hartmann's "politics," in his one opera as elsewhere in his work, were rather one of generalized and often abstract humanitarianism, thus of pity more than oppositional critique. Here he must be sharply distinguished from a composer like Eisler whose political affiliations were much clearer, and who had thus to emigrate to survive. Stefan Weiss's chapter, which concludes the volume, is refreshing in its candid willingness to view Hartmann critically. In particular, Weiss dispenses in no uncertain terms with the hazy term "confessional composer" (Bekenntnismusiker) which has muddied so much work on Hartmann (unfortunately, the pioneering publications by Andrew McCredie, who did much useful editorial work for Hartmann, were marred by this term.)4 As Weiss sardonically comments, Hartmann's own self-interpretation as one who had to "make a confession" (Bekenntnis ablegen) against Nazism was not only taken literally by many commentators, but also formulaically repeated "like rosary-beads" (gebetsmühlenartig) ever after. No proper appreciation of Hartmann is possible until this cliché is discarded. Weiss has little time for inflated claims of Hartmann as composer of "resistance," either: "in the twelve years [of Nazi rule] he waited at home, got married and cussed at the government" (p. 117)—but never so loudly as to be jailed.

Biographical references alone will not suffice to make Hartmann a hero of musical resistance. Does the music itself tell us something different? Nina Noeske's contribution is perhaps the most theoretically ambitious, seeking to sketch in notions of musical ethics and claim Hartmann as an ethical composer. Her thesis is that listeners to Hartmann's music cannot miss its ethical qualities of confessional uprightness and honesty, qualities from which the value of his music is inseparable.

To argue this, however, Noeske has to go against the grain of the history of music aesthetics, and risks falling into a pre-modern, pre-Kantian position. For it is impossible to know whether any artist, or any user of a language, is or is not absolutely "sincere," as the entire tradition of modernism has never tired of reminding us, from Nietzsche and Freud to Derrida. There is no way out of language's irreducibly rhetorical dimension, and no guarantee that we may not be deceiving ourselves even with the best of intentions. No one can get into the black box of another person's brain to find out whether that person's statements are in fact absolutely accurate representations of their sincere intent. The eighteenth century already grasped this problem and developed the aesthetics of the sublime partly in response to it. When Noeske claims that "music itself is life or the subject and its character" (p. 104), she sidesteps the entire tradition of Romantic hermeneutics, which never made such a direct equivalence, but understood that works of art had to be interpreted in order to understand the expression of life within them. In the language of structural linguistics: the subject of the statement (énoncé) can never be identical to that of the utterance (énonciation). As Dahlhaus summed this problem up in his Musikästhetik:

Musical expression is not to be immediately related to the composer as a real person.
Even the most extreme "expressionists" of the 18th century, Daniel Schubart and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, did not display, when they "expressed themselves in music," their

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own empirical private persons, but rather their "intelligible I," analogous to the "lyrical I" of poetry.\(^5\)

One cannot literally tear one's heart out and paste it on the paper. Yet this is precisely what Noeske claims for Hartmann. She thereby involves herself in some argumentative complications. For instance, she claims "solidarity" is a feature of Hartmann's music, and adduces as evidence for this his quotations of Jewish melodies and workers' songs, along with his "reference to 'taboo' techniques such as dodecaphony" (p. 105). We would logically have to ascribe a similar ethical quality to Webern's fidelity to the same "taboo" technique, despite his documented admiration for Hitler.\(^6\) Ethics and politics are not exactly the one and the same thing (Would a sincere Nazi be redeemed by his wholehearted sincerity?) Noeske admits, with reference to Dahlhaus, that music may acquire secondary political meaning independent of its inner constitution (p. 106), but this does not answer the question of how music may be inherently political. A close examination of Hartmann's own postwar revisions of works written in the 1930s might help us grasp how he himself saw the relation of those pieces to the context of their composition.

Noeske's essay does open up interesting questions that need to be further discussed. She is absolutely correct to recognize a specifically gestural quality in much of Hartmann's music (although she might have noted that its ancestry would be found in Mahler, in whose music Adorno also found gestural aspects). This is particularly true of early works like Misere (1935), or the earlier versions of symphonies, such as the Sinfonia Tragica (1940/1943) and the Symphonie "L'Oeuvre" (1937-1938). It was precisely these gestural elements that Hartmann excised in his postwar revisions, and they are often cryptic in character, suggesting an unstated (political?) program at work. (we might remember here Mahler's later suppression of the original program to the Third Symphony as cognate.) Noeske is also right to note that Hartmann's music does often seem to refer closely to its composer's character, although that character is not always as attractive as his defenders suggest: elements of depressiveness and self-pity or self-torture are hard to miss (as is also the case at times in Shostakovich). Finally, she does also confront some of the dangers of Hartmann's Aesopic quotational practice: "The aspect of solidarity in music presupposes that no irony may be involved. Nonetheless the question arises: what if the quotes are not identified?" (pp. 106-107).

Here we have the crux of the matter. For the problem is that Hartmann uses musical quotations as a peculiar kind of shorthand, but often forces them to bear a significance diametrically opposed to their original context. Thus Simplicius frequently quotes Stravinsky, yet does so in a way that appears to ignore that composer's irony or humor. The Devil's March from L'Histoire du Soldat is quoted in the introduction to Act I. The aesthetized anticipation of "barbarism" in L'Histoire cannot be used to depict the real existing brutality of Nazism without a certain mismatching; Stravinsky's Devil has a sardonic charm one would hardly want to associate with the Nazis. Similarly, when

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Simplicius takes up his *Sackpfeife* to drive away the wolves in Act I of the opera (bars 94ff.), there is a direct quote from the famous opening of *The Rite of Spring*. What is the purpose of this? The irritation is not strictly speaking a modernist one, as in Ives' collages of marching band music, or Mahler's Frère Jacques march in the First Symphony. The music is meant to suggest the pastoral naivete and innocence of Simplicius, something for which Stravinsky's neo-pagan ritual seems strangely unsuited. At the same time, however, the quote is meant to signal—in shorthand, as a sign to the audience—Hartmann's own refusal to bend to the Nazi rejection of Stravinsky's modernism as *entartete Kunst*. The quotation is thus intended on two metamusical levels, one within the opera and one outside it. Yet these two levels conflict with each other. The sophisticated, fin-de-siècle neo-primitivism of the *Rite*, with its culture-weary turn to the *frisson* of the barbaric, emphatically clashes with the intended pathos of Simplicius as (German!) naïf. The listener has a shock, but it is an unresolvable one, that cannot refer to any transcendent or metamusical beyond (again, in contradistinction to the irony of Ives or Mahler).

In other cases, too, one has a hard time understanding the purpose of Hartmann's quotations. In an obvious homage to Berg's *Violin Concerto*, *Simplicius* quotes a Bach chorale, surrounding it with dissonant counterpoint. Yet the effect is less poignant than in Berg, since it is oddly unfocussed. If Berg's chorale has a clear allegorical subtext in its words—*Es ist genug*—Hartmann's chorale was associated with multiple texts: *Nun ruhen alle Wälder, Innsbruck ich muss dich lassen, Wer hat dich so geschlagen*. Which text is Hartmann referring to? Simply to claim, as an earlier critic did, that "listeners can make their own individual choice of text"? for the chorale is to beg the question. Why are Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances* quoted in the Overture (mm. 148ff.)? The intention is not in the least parodic; rather, Hartmann seems to assume that since the audience will recognize the quoted material, he may rely on it to "communicate" in shorthand form a reference to war and also to "Russian music" *in toto* (once more in opposition to Nazi ideology). Strangest of all is the repeated use of Prokofiev's March Op. 12 no. 1 in the opera, both in the overture and in the work's final *agit-prop* chorale. As Weiss (p. 116) points out, Prokofiev, who left the Soviet Union for several decades not long after the revolution, and who wrote this piece early on in his career, was hardly a model socialist.

Unlike the practice of modernist quotation, often meant to destabilize the canon, Hartmann's seems to be desperately appealing to that canon, precisely as a reserve of moral or humanitarian values, in a time of barbarism. In other words, he is banking on the substantiality of musical "culture" as a counterweight to Nazi *Unkultur*. This was a frequent enough tactic among literary Inner Emigrants; so the poet Oskar Loerke wrote bitterly about his experience of listening to Bach under Nazi rule, or implicitly appealed to Bach as witness to *Kultur* in a volume of essays. But it is also an inadequate and self-

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8 See his poem "Auf dem Bachfest 1938 zu Leipzig," *Die Gedichte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1984), p. 611, or "Das unsichtbare Reich Sebastian Bachs," pp. 495-498, where Bach presides over an invisible *Reich*—opposed to the Third—of divine justice not of this world. As Albrecht Dümling has recently pointed out, the concept of "inner emigration" is less familiar in musicology than in literary scholarship; see his "What is Internal Exile in Music?" (2009), online at http://orelfoundation.org/index.php/journal/journalArticle/what is internal exile in music/, accessed June 26, 2013.
deceiving stance, because it fails to grasp that precisely the German culture of *Bildung* and inwardness it appeals to was unable to prevent the rise of Hitler. Herein lies a central problem of Hartmann's musical politics. One often has the sense that the composer himself sensed the inadequacy of appealing to abstract and general (meaning: middle-class liberal) "cultural values" against Nazi power: the desperately rhetorical flailing of the music, its gesticulatory—as opposed to gestic—character betrays this, as if the significance of the quotes had to be underlined by the music to make sure the audience would not miss the point (Noeske is thus not entirely correct to say that quotation "does not need any additional commentary" to be clear, p. 106: quite often it does.) As Brecht, who was himself well aware of the dangers of helpless rhetorical or moral posturing in the face of real Nazi power, wrote: a teacher without students risks talking too loudly.9

Hartmann's penchant for musical quotation was a life-long one. Even in his last, incompletely *Gesangsszene*, one is startled to hear a flute and tam-tam duet clearly pinched from *Le marteau sans maître* amidst Hartmann's otherwise quite un-Boulezian moral diatribe. The Eighth Symphony, too, literally borrows not only a passage from Webern's Op. 10 orchestra pieces (the Mahlerian climax of number 4), but also the nine-note dissonance that forms the climax of the *Adagio* from Mahler's own Tenth Symphony. (Hartmann even takes over Mahler's orchestration, with its long-held trumpet note connecting two chords.) In each case, there is no real ironic distancing or marking off of the quotation, but only a naïve homage; to the end of his life, Hartmann could not resist appropriating other musics he admired within the often very different textures of his own. This gives him an occasionally epigonal or eclectic feel that can interfere with the expressive force and originality of his music.

Raphael Woebs' book promises with its title a vindication of the notion of political music with reference to Hannah Arendt. Unfortunately, the book does not carry through with this. After a brief introduction on the concept of political music, which leaps wildly around in less than twenty pages from Praetorius, Wagner, Brecht, and Eisler to Adorno and Dahlhaus without ever working any of it out, the second chapter—a mere nine pages long—treats Arendt fairly cursorily. Lengthy biographical chapters follow on Hartmann as inner emigrant, once again falling into the trap of treating his own postwar autobiographical writings as evidence, and as postwar organizer of Musica Viva. Less than thirty pages are actually devoted to Hartmann's music, and only to two compositions, the *Piano Sonata "April 27, 1945"* and the *Gesangsszene*. In none of this, despite the book's title reference to Arendt, does Arendt actually play much of a role; rather the occasional reference to her gets swamped in a morass of other references to everyone and anyone from Roland Barthes and Ernst Bloch to Derrida. No clear concept as to what political music might actually be emerges, either. Woebs is forced to admit that, as his subject himself wrote not long before his death, "taking a political position is, for an artist, only indirectly possible" (p. 112), and he actually tries to argue—with reference to Beethoven's famous remark that the *Pastorale* was "Mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerey"—that Hartmann's "politics" consisted in "the subjective emotions [*Empfindungen*] of pity faced with images of horror [*Schreckensbilder*]" (p. 124). This is hardly a convincing notion of political music. Matters are not improved by the arbitrariness of Woebs' "analysis" of the music, where he actually relies, in all

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seriousness, on key-symbolism (Schubart's notion that G sharp minor expresses "das gepresste Herz," p. 122) or on Scriabin's synaesthetic matching of pitches to colors (p. 138).

Marie-Therese Hommes' extensive monograph is devoted to two composers, Hartmann and Ludwng Zenk (1900-1949), a now forgotten Austrian twelve-tone composer who, like Hartmann, was a student of Webern. Unlike Hartmann, however, Zenk metamorphosed from a left political engagement before the Anschluss into an ardent supporter of Nazism, and abandoned his earlier dodecaphony for a return to traditional tonality. Comparing Hartmann and Zenk is thus a bit like comparing apples and oranges; the burden of proof lies with the author and her theoretical ambitions (on which more later). The first part of the book is devoted to a single work of Hartmann's, not discovered until 2004. The piece in question, composed in 1942, is incidental music for Shakespeare's Macbeth, written for the Bavarian State Theater, a "bastion" (p. 12) of National Socialism in the German theatre world. After a brief ban on Shakespeare's work, the Nazis apparently approved of staging Macbeth—often however in cut and modified form—as a means to display the evil perfidy of England. The discovery of this work of Hartmann's clearly forces one to modify the picture of the composer painted by scholars like McCredie and Heister as a determined anti-Nazi who had supposedly withdrawn from any musical collaboration with the regime. Careful philology and historical context are here as important as textual hermeneutics. Hommes shows that Hartmann could not in fact have been as entirely withdrawn from Nazi musical politics as he later claimed to be: he had to show evidence of compositional activity in order to evade being drafted into the Wehrmacht, and was helped in this by (among others) Werner Egk. Hartmann's composition for Macbeth was, along with a failed attempt at composing incidental music for Büchner's Danton, part of this strategy of survival.

Yet Hommes' analysis of the music for Macbeth further complicates the picture of Hartmann's activity during the Third Reich by understanding it as a veiled form of criticism of Nazism. Among the most astonishing finds of Hommes' book is that Hartmann actually recycled music from other pieces in his incidental music. Chief among those borrowings is—mirabile dictu—the same Prokofiev March, Op. 12 he had already used for the climactic chorus of Simplicissimus. Within the context of the music for Macbeth, this march becomes a "metaphor for liberation from Macbeth's rule of force (Gewaltherrschaft)" (p. 60). As Hommes argues (p. 40), Hartmann's reading of Macbeth was influenced by a posthumous book on Shakespeare (edited by Martin Buber) by the anarchist-socialist and Jewish pacifist Gustav Landauer, murdered by right wing paramilitaries in 1919, after he had participated in Kurt Eisner's short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic of 1918-1919. Landauer read Macbeth as a man possessed by demonic forces; given that Macbeth seems, in Hartmann's incidental music of 1942, to become an allegory of Hitler, this might imply a "demonic" reading of the dictator like that of Thomas Mann's essay "Brother Hitler" and his story "Mario and the Magician."

Even further, though, Hommes finds echoes of Hartmann's other works in the Macbeth music, including the "Jewish" pentatonic material used most prominently in the First String Quartet (pp. 61-65: this pentatonic material recurs throughout Hartmann's entire oeuvre, giving it a unity across individual works.) However, in Macbeth, Hartmann "used the Jewish melody... only in a small, altered excerpt and not in its original form, as in Simplicissimus," for which he "had, as regards the performance context and the risk
resulting from this, good grounds" (p. 65). Not only the quoted material, but also formal principles similar to those in the symphonies can be found here, such as that of Steigerung (dramatic heightening) followed by a despairing collapse (p. 65). Against passages of typically Hartmannian pathos and chromaticism, the incidental music contrasts others of apparently deliberate banality, such as the Banquet Music in purest C major, which moreover alludes ironically to a Nazi propaganda hymn of 1935 celebrating the reoccupation of the Saarland (pp. 73-74). This latter topical context could hardly have been much in the minds of listeners in 1942, yet Hommes adds (p. 77) that this same tune was also used as a parade march by the SS Division Totenkopfstandarte in Munich.

Nonetheless, it remains uncertain how much of the additional hidden program or semantics of Hartmann's music was actually grasped by its public at the time. As Hommes notes, it would also be possible to interpret Hartmann's Macbeth score according to Nazi aesthetics: the "pentatonic, non-conforming tonality" (p. 80) is associated with the witches, and chromaticism with evil spirits. Hommes cites (pp. 79-82) five reviews from Munich newspapers of the time, almost all positive; the only criticism made of the music was that it was too effective and risked distracting from the play or converting it into an opera. Thus a hardline Nazi like Josef Magnus Wehner could write approvingly of the production.

Even after 1945, Hartmann's "musical politics" did not become less complicated. Since his work had been so little performed during the Nazi period, he had no public reputation to bank on, in contrast to composers such as Orff and Egk, who had not been too scrupulous about currying favor with the Nazis. Orff thus continued to have considerable influence and recognition after 1945, especially in Hartmann's home city of Munich, and despite Hartmann's own laudable attempts at reintroducing the German public to musical modernity after twelve years of reaction. Hommes documents Hartmann's talking out of both sides of his mouth regarding Orff, both privately denouncing his music and his politics and also publicly praising and befriending him in order to gain his support. It is perhaps thus not entirely surprising that Hartmann reworked his 1942 Macbeth music into music for a radio drama in 1946, tightening the structure and making some cuts and additions. The other works he had written and kept in the drawer between 1933 and 1945 would require much more extensive revisions.

Hommes' detailed examination of one particular case in Hartmann's oeuvre shows how difficult it is to ascribe specific political content to a musical work without attention to context. Her contention that analytic close reading alone would not have been adequate (p. 399) is thus correct. However, her own methodological construct of "compositional action" (kompositorische Handlung), which attempts to bridge between immanent compositional content and the context in which it was produced, is not worked out strongly enough to do the work she wants it to do. Thus at certain moments one feels that the book risks falling apart into the old dichotomy of life and works, analysis and biography; moreover, the intended comparison of Hartmann and Zenk turns out to be less than solidly founded. A good instance of conceptual vagueness is the brief section titled "Opening up of a new space of action" (Erschliessung eines neuen Handlungsraumes III, pp. 365-366), where Hartmann's tortured relationship with Orff is discussed. "In this course of action [i.e., Hartmann's alternate criticizing and wooing of Orff]... we may assume it was a question of an 'opening of a new space of action' for the real securing of an artistic-compositional existence, which admittedly only related to an external
configuration, but did not in the least imply stylistic or aesthetic compromises of any sort" (p. 366; the meaning is oblique even in German). Does "compositional action" then mean nothing more than rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's? In the book's conclusion, the author returns to this metaphor of "space of action," but without much clarification. By "opening a new space of action," Hartmann and Zenk "created a type of virtual and ultimately real 'third space' in which they sought their artistic-compositional placement and establishment in a space of public presence after refused, hindered or disappointed chances during the Third Reich" (p. 394). Hommes' "places" and "spaces" are confusing as a set of Russian matryoshka dolls. What one surmises she means, underneath the unwieldy phrasing, is that Hartmann's "third space"—of musical inner emigration—was neither the first space of conformism to Nazi demands, nor the second space of overt refusal and emigration (such as Eisler's and Dessau's openly politicized anti-Nazi music). Yet even Hartmann could not remain in this ideal realm of neither-nor and had to risk, however briefly, a venture into the Nazi musical public sphere with his Macbeth music.

Although Hommes has not entirely fulfilled the theoretical promise held up by her book, she has presented new and unfamiliar material. Moreover, her idea of musical action is a suggestive one, and could be developed further than she has with the help of sociology. Kommunikatives Handeln is a key concept in the work of Jürgen Habermas, for instance. Given the inherent polyvalence of musical semiotics, grasping music's potential political meaning is not possible without such an expanded concept of music as social action. Hartmann's work will surely continue to be a fruitful historical case of how the problems of musical politics might be addressed.

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