

**The concept of space in
Franz Schreker's opera
*"Der ferne Klang"***

*The influence of spatial concepts
on the development of
poly-stylistic composition*

Preface:

In the beginning of the 20th century, some composers tried to develop a poly-stylistic approach in their music. The most striking example is probably Charles Ives in his pieces, or Edgard Varese, both of them American composers. But also in Europe we can find compositions, which combine different materials in the form of a collage. Alban Berg does so in *Wozzeck* or in his orchestra pieces, Gustav Mahler in his symphonies and Franz Schreker in his operas. The poly-stylistic ideas emerge in these pieces often through a description of reality. Rather than referring to an abstract idea of absolute music, those composers try to grasp the reality itself, the sounding chaos, which is around us, in order to musicalize it in their pieces.

The idea of space and spatial movement is hereby most crucial. Gustav Mahler used to observe the movement of sounds on fairs, he walked from one sound-source to the next one and observed how the sounds he heard changed when he moved, Franz Schreker often went to big mass celebrations in Vienna and observed people's behaviour,¹ Varese took the sounds of New York and transformed them into music and Ives listened to moving bands from the top of the church tower.

The idea of a reality characterized by different layers and movements of sounds, which create a sort of acoustical maze is common to all these approaches and it is quite interesting that this concept then produced an idea of spatial movement of music that allowed composers to integrate very diverse materials in the same musical work.

In my analysis, I want to show how this is made in Schreker's opera: "Der Ferne Klang". This concept of special movement is probably most easily and most convincingly realized in the form of the opera, but, as mentioned before, not limited

¹ Vgl.: F. Schreker: „Entstehungsfragen einer Oper“ in „Die Boettcherstraße“ II (Berlin 1930)

to operas. It can be found in symphonies and orchestra pieces as well (in Gustav Mahler or Alban Berg, as well as Charles Ives). The logic of this compositional grammar in Schreker's opera could therefore also be applied to "absolute music" and I am convinced that this approach may open new understandings, especially for post-modern approaches we find in today's music.

Regarding the operas of Franz Schreker – especially the second act of "Der ferne Klang", or the third act of "Die Gezeichneten" –, a specific use of the phenomenon of space of the stage, not as something already existing, but as a parameter of depiction is evident. The spatial situation is hereby not only used to describe the psychological or mental state of the characters, the space is sometimes even produced by using musical techniques.

This essay describes some of these techniques of working with the space of the stage in Schreker's music. Thereby I want to use the terminology utilized in the analysis of films where the consideration of this aspect is very detailed, while the traditional look at the opera does not care about this problem. On no account do I want to confirm the old prejudice that Schreker's music is just music for films without any independence of its own; but I think that the specific quality of Schreker's music, his compositional grammar, can be made visible by looking at those analogies².

² cf. Gösta Neuwirth: „Stichworte zu Schrekers *Gezeichneten*“ in: *Art Nouveau, Jugendstil und Musik*, editor: Jürg Stenzl, © Zürich 1980: „Er (Schreker) hat durchaus konsequent für seine Kompositionsweise in musikalischen Kameraeinstellungen ein Komponieren mit Zeitfeldern gefunden, das weder mit der ‚dichterisch-musikalischen Periode‘ Wagners noch mit den motivisch-thematisch begründeten Formideen der Wiener Schule etwas zu tun hat. Die Sprache des Films und das Traumdenken hängen eng zusammen: Schreker antizipiert als Komponist einer neuen szenischen Welt, was im Film erst in der letzten Zeit, etwa im Essay ‚Il cinema di poesia‘ von P. P. Pasolini, wirklich reflektiert worden ist.“ (He (Schreker) consequently found a composing in time-fields, which fit well the musical camera position he composed and which is neither comparable to the ‚poetical-musical period‘ of Wagner, nor with the motivic-thematic ideas of form we can find in the Vienna school. The language of film and the language of dream is closely connected: Schreker anticipated as the

1. "Tableau musicale imaginaire" or the voyage to the isle

Hector Berlioz used the expression "Tableau musicale" for the first time. He used this expression to title the last part, the Coda, of his first Cantata "La mort d'Orphée" for the "prix de Rome"³. Berlioz tries to evoke a dramatic scene in the imagination of the recipient. He creates an imaginary space in which he wants to guide the view of the auditor / spectator by using the music like the lens of a camera. On this occasion certain musical motives or fragments of motives are used semantically. They remind the recipient about the situation in which they were used before and they become signs the auditor has to transform into visual impressions. It is decisive that Berlioz' concept is based on a sort of transformation or postponement. The acoustical sign can be transformed – used in this semantical way – into an optical sign, a picture or series of pictures, by the recipient's imagination. The compositional grammar resulting from this technique would be one of signs that is considering the acoustical events as signs for other things. This compositional grammar would not only be based on immanent musical structures – although even these structures can occur as a sign (for instance the Amen-fugue that is used ironically in "La Damnation de Faust") – but would move in an associative way over an imaginary topography of signs. In this case the composer seems to arrange sound symbols in such a way that their development would have to follow the composer's imagination.

Franz Schreker who explored the resulting possibilities and made them prolific for his operas took up this compositional grammar in a very consequent way. A fact that can also be seen in his interest for psychoanalysis and for formal models based

composer of a new scenic world, what was reflected only recently in film, as for instance in P. P. Pasolini: 'Il cinema di poesia')

³ cf. Hector Berlioz: „La mort d'Orphée“ in Berlioz „complete works“: „Romeprize Works“

on the logic of dreams, which can be considered as structures dealing with this process of moving over an imaginary landscape of signs⁴.

The beginning of the second act of "Der ferne Klang" exactly is such a "Tableau musicale imaginaire". What we can find is a voyage over an imaginary landscape, created by a well-calculated use of musical signs, which have semantic connotations.

The beginning of the overture of the second act still seems to be very traditional: the main motives are presented; the "atmosphere" is introduced. But after a closer look on the motives and the tone it can be discovered that the motives receive their semantic meaning not only during the second act, but the motives are even full of connotations, memories and relations that evoke associations in the imagination of the recipients.

In this opening of the second act, there are three main characters: in the beginning there is a fifth in the bass and in the cellos, accompanied by an African drum. This is combined with a second G-A in the strings, which causes a suspended tonality between C-major and A-minor. But more important is the consideration of the motives fit into this basic sound⁵: at first there is a perpetuum-mobile-motive in the second strings (motive A) that is full of connotations. It refers to Bohemian folklore (which Schreker might have known very well), but it has even more implications, as it seems to be related to a motive of the first song from the "Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen" by Gustav Mahler (motive Aa): "Wenn mein Schatz Hochzeit macht". It is very exciting that the use Mahler makes out of this motive – to contrast the sadness

⁴ cf. Gösta Neuwirth: „Die Harmonik des fernen Klangs“ as well as „Bemerkungen zu den Gezeichneten (cf. footnote 1): „Bei Schreker gibt es keine vorbestimmten Definitionen der musikalischen Sprache, sondern alle Elemente des akustischen Bereichs (der früheren oder gegenwärtigen, der trivialen, gehobene usw. Musik, des Geräuschs), der Wirklichkeit insgesamt, können in seine Konzeption einbezogen werden, **um dort die Bedeutung eines Zeichens zu erhalten.**“ (In Schreker there are no predefinition of his musical language, rather all elements of the acoustic sphere (of the past or the present, the trivial, or the intellectual sphere, etc. Music as well as noise), of reality as a whole, can be integrated in his conception, *to become the meaning of a sign.*)

⁵ The motives are fit together in a montage. To keep the characteristics of the motives Schreker does not develop them. Development is restricted to the combination of the motives.

Concerning the structure of this scene cf. Ulrike Kienzle: „Das Trauma hinter dem Traum“ Franz Schrekers Oper „Der ferne Klang“ und die Wiener Moderne © 1998 Edition Argus.

of the character with the happy wedding-atmosphere – is even intensified in Schreker's work, as he is using this wedding-theme to describe a brothel. Other motives are a melody in the clarinets (bar 7) – the perhaps most remarkable theme, as it is easy to hear – which refers to Venetian music, that means it describes the location, and at last some single figures in the strings and the oboes that seem to come from the tradition of gypsy music. What is found here is a sort of hyperdetermination of the motives used here, which are combined to wickerwork of signs. Furthermore these motives describe a sort of multicultural topography: an African drum is confronted with Bohemian or gypsy folklore and all this is placed into the golf of Venice by the melody of the clarinet (later taken over by other instruments)⁶. This first part is repeated in A-major (again with the characteristic second F sharp / e causing a harmony suspending between A-major and F sharp-minor) – so a regular two-part form is found there.

This acoustical tableau is still static, and even results in that suspending harmony, which is not developed. The portrait is more or less atmospheric. It could be said that we are seeing the long shot of the Venetian golf so that the recipient can't discover any (acoustical) details. The attention has no direction yet.

This is changing in the second part of the overture. Schreker introduces four additional musical levels to create a stage-situation that has perhaps never been found before in the history of the opera, and which has no counterpart until today, as far as I know.

At first we can hear some calls in the voices of the female choir (representing the tempting calls of the prostitutes from the "Casa di maschere"), which are heard through the curtain that is still closed. Until now the attention of the recipient has had no direction. The sound of the orchestra out of the orchestra pit has normally not a real direction, but now his attention is attracted to the stage. It can no longer

⁶ Cf. also, Ulrike Kienzle: „Das Trauma hinter dem Traum“ concerning the analysis of this part of the opera.

be said that we are hearing an acoustical long shot because the target is defined. Like the lens of a camera the recipient is attracted through the acoustical landscape towards the "Casa di maschere".

That presence of the stage is even supported with two additional musical levels. The nearer we approach the "Casa di maschere"; the clearer is the acoustical description of the place. Thus we can hear a gypsy music-ensemble – as well as the voices through the closed curtain – that seems to be the background music group there. The unprecise long-shot of the beginning is replaced by a exact image of the "Casa di maschere" which is created in the spectator's imagination by using only musical motives. The recipient is making a journey over topography of musical signs, like a film-sequence the music transports him over the Venetian golf into the "Casa di maschere".

This journey, the continuous approximation, is illustrated in the last two musical levels. Thereby a sort of doubled movement can be found: the approximation of the auditorium to the isle and the approximation of the count's gondola (a character of the opera visiting this isle). This approximation is realized in a way of two imaginary directions of movement, which get closer to each other and meet in the imaginary point of the "Casa di maschere". That process is acoustically realized in a very simple but very effective way: by the use of dynamic and by the manipulation of the direction from which the sounds are coming. The approximation of the auditorium towards the isle is realized with another female choir, singing a German folk-song that stands in contrast with the tempting vocalizes in the first female choir, as the text deals with the suffering and the solitude of the girls in the "Casa di maschere", using a simple, touching, naive tone in the music and in the lyrics⁷. The illusion of approximation is realized by using to techniques: the singing of the choir is heard for the first time very quietly and in

⁷ cf. concerning the semantics and the contents of the text: Ulrike Kienzle *ibid.*

height, during the process of approximation the sound gets louder and louder and the choir gets nearer and nearer to the stage-level. This connection of distance realized through highness and dynamics makes the illusion more perfect. The approximation to the stage-level causes a more concrete sound corresponding to the proximity, while the distance to the stage-level supports the diffuse sound of a very distant choir.

According to this the depiction of the count's gondola is made. Distance and proximity are produced by using the same methods, as in the song of the female choir. As sounding reality, the count's gondola is described by a second additional ensemble that seems to be placed on that gondola, playing Venetian music. Unlike the choir, the distance is not realized by using height but the Venetian music is approaching from beside, which causes an additional spatialisation. As a result we have an acoustical triangle depicted by the triad of the count's gondola, the female choir and the imaginary approximation of the auditorium. So the end of the overture does not only mean the beginning of the action, it also describes the end of a resounding voyage.

2. The excluding stage, the focus and the Off (firstly)

Talking about an exclusive stage I refer to a specific point in the dramaturgy of the opera. Normally, the stage of the opera is a theater stage where the additional level of the music does not exist in a visual way. On the contrary, it could be said that it is one of the interests of opera composers to remove the orchestra out of the field of view of the audience. The idea of an orchestra-pit seems to confirm this idea, which is realized as well and in its most radical form with the covered orchestra in Bayreuth. By this space of sound, connected to the space of stage, the stage is part of a bigger space, which extends into an imaginary sphere. Thus the opera contains a metaphysical, 'auratical' space, which is not existing in the theater; the magic of

an unseen sound coming out of the orchestra-pit – spatially difficult to classify for the audience – plunges the opera into an unreal sphere.

If the music is visible and audible, we normally have genre-scenes such as the pub-scene in “Wozzeck”. Schreker, also uses music on the stage – of course related to those typical scenarios –, but the way he is using stage-music is much more functional and therefore far apart those genre-scenes.

Schreker uses, as described before, the dimension of space and the placing of the musicians like the lens of a camera⁸. This was used in the overture of the second act like a “Tableau musicale imaginaire”. After the curtain fell, Schreker again uses a spatial as well as a dramatical concept to realize a specific depiction of the stage-space. During the overture there was a continuous approximation to the place of action: the “Casa di maschere” realized by the moving of different acoustical levels. After the beginning of the scene we find a dramatic break: the orchestra and all the choirs are silent and only the Venetian music (on the count’s gondola) keeps playing. This music is first heard from off-stage until the gondola arrives on the stage (the island). Everything heard in this passage arises from the stage-space. The focus reaches the highest point. As the recipient was attracted to the stage by using the spatial movement of the music, his attention is drawn, with this use of an exclusive stage, totally towards the stage. The acoustical maze changes into an optical maze realized on the stage.

But the spatial constriction to the stage is going on. The Venetian music is first heard from the Off. The stage-space includes more than what is seen on the stage. It opens itself towards the Venetian golf. The Off can refer to two kinds of space-reception: on one hand it can describe a natural space situated next to the space

⁸ The idea to use the orchestra like a lens of a camera and the resulting opportunities to direct the attention of the auditorium – especially to be able to realize and to structure simultaneous-scenes – has been reflected in the last time only in the opera-works of Hans-Jürgen von Bose.

seen – if the sound submerging out of the Off can be related to something real that will soon arrive in the part seen – or on the other hand to the space itself, its infinity – if the sound from off-stage just shows that the space is larger than we can see⁹. In this scene we can find the first kind of the Off, the Venetian music indicates the count's arrival on the isle. The stage-space is opened into the Off and the process of defining this space has just finished after the gondola is seen on the stage. By using the two music groups on the stage (the Venetian music-group and the gypsy music-group) Schreker realizes something that could be considered as "Kadrierung"¹⁰: The sound-sources – to which peu a peu the orchestra is joining – create the frame of the stage. Now at this part of the second act, the stage is finally defined and we have a classical stage-situation, but not as a regress into a classical way of stage-understanding, but as the end of a process: the creation of a stage-space using the movement of the music in this space.

3. Interior and exterior space, the psychology of the characters and the Off (secondly)

While all the recent concepts of the use of the space in the opera work of Franz Schreker dealt with exterior effects of the use of the space, which could be summarized under the expression of the Tableau, I want to examine as the last point in my considerations the use of the space to describe the interior feelings of the characters, their psychology – where the exterior space is used to describe their interior life. This is perhaps the most important field in Schreker's use of the space. In this brief essay it will not be possible to give more than a short insight into this field. The dialectic of an interior experience and the exterior appearance – one of

⁹ Concerning the two kinds of the Off cf. Gilles Deleuze: Cinema Volume 1 and 2 German Edition: Suhrkamp Verlag 1989 Volume 1 S. 27f Volume 2 S. 300ff.

¹⁰ cf. Gilles Deleuze Cinema Volume 1: "Kadrierung is the definition of a – relatively – closed system, that includes everything existing in the picture – scenery, persons, requisite." Concerning the opera we can add sound-sources.

the most important topics of Schreker's opera-writing – and the depiction of that by using the stage-space should be described and reflected in all his opera-works¹¹.

As an example, I want to use the "Traumerzählung" of Greta (score digit 22 to 35), in which I want to refer to the beginning – the transition from the exterior reality of the "Casa di maschere" to the interior reality of the situation of Greta – and the end – the scene where Greta falls out of her dreams back into reality. In both cases, the use of space is a way to show the character's the inner situation.

The entrance of Greta is very much set in scene. It is prepared with a crescendo in the orchestra, and of the singers on the stage. It is like the entrance of a star. But this is contrasted with a sort of musical collapse after that "apotheosis" after Greta's first words. After this orchestra-tutti, which described the exterior reality, Greta's loneliness is shown by the use of the gypsy-music that is accompanying Greta. The contrast of the violin-tutti and the solo violin in the gypsy music-ensemble describes the desertedness of Greta¹².

What can be found in the beginning of Greta's "Traumerzählung" is the exclusive stage. The world around is described using the gypsy-music, everything that can be heard is shown on the stage, and the exterior space is exactly limited. To show the transformation into the interior reality of Greta's psychology Schreker sets the orchestra in its traditional rights – the description of the characters' inner life. But he combines this with the spatial movement of the sound to realize this transformation from an exterior reality – the "Casa di maschere" – into the inner life of Greta – her belief that the surrounding reality is nothing but a cruel dream. What is important is the doubled-perspective: on one hand the stage is the description of an exterior reality, the milieu of the "Casa di maschere", on the other hand it is a symbol for

¹¹ I want to refer for example to "Die Gezeichneten": the interior space, the "Ateliersszene" the exterior space: The isle "Elysium", which is as well only an exteriorization of the interior life of Alviano, his desire for beauty (cf.: "Das Unbewußte als vielsprachige Rede, ein Gespräch zwischen Gösta Neuwirth, Klaus Zehelein und Hans Thomalla, Originalbeitrag zum Programmheft der Aufführung der "Gezeichneten" an der Staatsoper Stuttgart, © Staatsoper Stuttgart 2001). After all it could be said, that the use of signs in Schreker's compositional grammar has references to the symbolism, where each exterior sign can be used as an interior sign.

Greta's psychological confusion¹³. The transformation from the exterior into the interior reality is exactly described in the score. We have just noticed that Schreker changed from the orchestra-tutti into the music on the stage. The extreme direct and concrete sound- and stage-situation that follows is very earthly. In the following this way of composing is followed back, but the orchestra is using the motives of the gypsy-music. Schreker tries to make this more obvious and writes in the score that the musicians should pretend to go on playing. (until the count stops the gypsy-music). We can find a transformation, the exterior reality is transformed into the interior reality, the orchestra takes the sound of the exterior world to change it into signs describing an interior landscape, the exterior space of the stage changes into the interior space of the characters. Greta's "Traumerzählung" understands the stage-space from another point of view than the recipient until now; for her, it is a symbol of her psychological problems – something unreal. This transformation is shown in the music. The music is moving from the exclusive stage – greatest approximation to the exterior life – into the orchestra, which is normally used in the opera to describe the inner life – greatest approximation to the interior life of the character.

But in the end of the "Traumerzählung", Greta's falling into the hard reality is shown by using the movement of the sound as well. The entrance of Greta can be considered as a focus on the perspective of the recipients. Before her entrance, the stage fell into many small details. Schreker wrote in the score, that the "Casa di maschere" should be realized in a way that everywhere on the stage; small groups of persons should be seen, talking in all directions. The recipient should see a long-shot of this place, and therefore he cannot find a main action. So, Greta's entrance is like a focus. To show the cut between interior and exterior life in the end of the "Traumerzählung", Schreker just goes the way back he used before. But this time, it

¹² The gypsy-music seems to be related to Greta and her inner conflicts, as it is found as well in the scene where Greta and Fritz meet. It seems to show the fate of the two protagonists.

¹³ We can find here the specific use of signs described in Schreker's work (cf.: footnote 5)

is not a slow transformation, but a hard cut; after the focus the long-shot follows immediately, Greta is torn out of her dreams very roughly. Schreker tries to increase this by using the Off: we hear piano-playing and singing from off-stage (cf. score digit 34). In the passage before the two types of Off were explained¹⁴. While we found the use of the first type of the Off before – the sound referred to something that occurred then on the stage – we now have the second type of the Off. Now the Off is a sort of expansion of the space into the unfinished. The sound is not used in its reference to the stage. The sound neither approaches nor departs. It is just existing and showing, that the space includes more than the stage. The long-shot is expanded into the Off and Greta's loneliness and isolation is also expanded into a cosmic dimension. At the same time the dry sound of the piano represents a cruel contrast to the sensitive-emotional orchestra-sound heard before.

What is important here is that Schreker creates an interior space, using musical techniques, that changes the reference to the exterior space; the exterior space is now a sign for the inner life of the characters. Schreker does not only use the conditions of the opera-stage and its spatial options in a very effective way, but also he even uses these conditions as a parameter of expression.

Final remarks

Schreker's music has always been a challenge for an analysis, which mostly tried to get out of the difficulties by ignoring his music or, as the traditional ways of analysis did not work, it was declared to be nothing but worthless film-music. A musical grammar that is not based on motives and their development and that differs from the usage of traditional forms shows the limitations of the traditional musical analysis. Schreker's music should be analyzed in an interdisciplinary way. This music cannot be understood without the theater it is referred to, but even the dramatic

¹⁴ cf. footnote 8

analysis of the texts of Schreker does not work as these texts are made out of the spirit of music.

Schreker's opera-works include nearly all kinds of arts that are used as signs in the imaginary space of his opera. This essay tried to show a detail in this connection: the space and how it is used in Schreker's operas. Of course, it would be necessary to analyze this parameter in the whole context of the opera to have a real insight in these works. But it seems to me that this point of view I tried to find shows the characteristics of Schreker's music in a special way. The creation of a musical space is only possible with Schreker's compositional grammar; only a music that – in a topographical way – understands the musical material as signs can draw these acoustical landscapes Schreker realizes. It is perhaps the inclusivity of this way of composing that is interesting in the post-modern age. The possibilities resulting in such a way of composing are neither reflected nor exhausted yet.

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F. Schreker: „Entstehungsfragen einer Oper“ in „Die Boettcherstraße“ II (Berlin 1930)