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On the record

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Abstract: The score of Kurt Weill's *Zeitoper, Der Zar läßt sich photographieren* (1928), is void at its centre: the musical and dramatic climax, the 'Tango Angèle', only exists as a gramophone recording, played on stage, while the orchestra falls silent. Just as the perennial themes of love and death are relentlessly updated in this farcical opera into their anti-metaphysical modern-day equivalents – sex and political assassination – so the music avails itself of modern media to bring across its McLuhanesque point: the medium is the message. The sound medium matters in two ways: first, the gramophone emphatically teleports the tango – a fashionable and sexually loaded dance – into the realm of opera; second, the recorded performance constitutes its exclusive musical reality. As if to underscore this point, parts and score of the 'Tango Angèle' were lost shortly after Weill produced the recording for the première: only the recording remained. This article reconstructs the nexus between popular music, modern sound media and operatic aesthetics in Weimar Germany: while the recording is an expression of *Zeitoper*'s demand for radical up-to-dateness, the sound of the record, paradoxically, locks it forever in 1928. A relatively obscure work nowadays, *Der Zar* remains perhaps the most far-reaching response to the *Opernkrise* of the mid-1920s, reconfigured here as a crisis of musical writing.

'Music – at this moment?' So asks a Czar who finds himself in an odd situation. During a photo session that is actually an attempt to assassinate him, he is surprised to hear a recording of a tango played on a gramophone. In the midst of this typically convoluted operatic situation, the sudden playing of a tango might seem a mere hiccup. Even the intrusion of a technological apparatus like the gramophone on the operatic stage does not seem too far-fetched in *Zeitoper*, a genre broadly characterised by its commitment to represent everyday events of contemporary life.[1] Yet the tango emanating from the gramophone in Kurt Weill's one-act opera *Der Zar läßt sich photographieren* (1928) marks an extraordinary moment both in this work and, indeed, in operatic history. The instrumental sounds come from a real recording, not from the orchestra pit: the orchestra falls silent while the singers layer their sung dialogue over the recorded jazz band, the Saxophon-Orchester Dobbri as recorded by Weill on 11 January 1928. The recording of the 'Tango Angèle' (as the composer dubbed the instrumental version of the piece) thus functions simultaneously as prop on stage, as sounding music, and as partial score for the scene.[2] At the same time, in a single stroke this perplexing instant of 'phenomenal' music cuts through multiple operatic conventions, compounding musical styles, notational systems, social strata, sound sources and levels of temporality.

[1] See Susan C. Cook, *Opera for a New Republic: The Zeitopern of Krenek, Weill and Hindemith* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1988) and Nils Grosch, *Die Musik der Neuen Sachlichkeit* (Stuttgart and Weimar, 1999).

[2] The 'Tango Angèle' is not in fact the first 'duet' between recording machine and conventional musical forces – that prize goes to Ottorino Respighi, who had in 1925 incorporated a pre-recorded nightingale into the score of his *Pini di Roma*. See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone Film Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, 1999), 98, and Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley, 2004), 108.

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The innovative effect of the scene did not pass unnoticed by the opera's early reviewers, nor has it escaped comment in more recent writings. Weill himself felt that the particular sounds of the tango scene achieved a dramatic 'inward intensification' ('Steigerung nach innen').[3] A recent biographer calls *Der Zar*'s tango scene a 'gateway' to the fusion of popular idioms with a more traditional operatic vocabulary that was to mark Weill's compositional style.[4] In fact, it would be easy to list a number of 'firsts' that Weill achieved with the 'Tango Angèle': it was the first piece of Weill's music to appear on record, and it anticipates the emergence of the admittedly short-lived genre of *grammophonplatten-eigene Musik*, which featured prominently at the festival Neue Musik Berlin 1930.[5]

Any such claims to innovation only become meaningful once this emphasis on the interaction between technology and voice on the operatic stage is situated within a wider landscape. Only now, as musicology increasingly turns to the study of technology, can we begin to appreciate the significance of the gramophone and the 'Tango Angèle'.[6] One important effect of this new fascination with technology is a rekindled interest in the still mysterious genre of *Zeitoper*.[7] Usually defined by its concern with placing on stage the 'everyday', the 'ephemeral' and the 'phenomenal' (the 'Alltägliche', 'Zeitliche' and 'Sachliche'), *Zeitoper* is also distinguished by its exaltation of modern life – especially in the form of *Amerikanismus*, prevalent in Weimar Germany – and its often excessive representation of the attributes of modernity conveyed through both plot elements and compositional style.[8] A full understanding of *Zeitoper*, however, has been obstructed by the fact that its chief proponents – Ernst Krenek, Paul Hindemith and Kurt Weill – all adamantly rejected

[3] Kurt Weill, *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, ed. Stephen Hinton and Jürgen Schebera (Mainz, 1984), 68.

[4] Jürgen Schebera, *Kurt Weill: An Illustrated Life*, trans. Caroline Murphy (London and New Haven, 1995), 85.

[5] Schebera, *Kurt Weill*, 86, and Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 100–10. See also Martin Elste, 'Hindemiths Versuche "grammophonplatten-eigener Stücke" im Kontext einer Ideengeschichte der Mechanischen Musik im 20. Jahrhundert', *Hindemith-Jahrbuch*, 25 (1996), 195–221. Perhaps the best-known piece of *grammophonplatten-eigene Musik* is Ernst Toch's 'Fuge aus der Geographie', though recent performances have forgotten the gramophone-related origin of the piece.

[6] Scholarship on music and technology has exploded in the last few years, in such important books as Kittler, *Gramophone Film Typewriter*, Katz, *Capturing Sound*, Hans Joachim Braun, ed., *Music and Technology in the Twentieth Century* (Baltimore, 2002), and Emily Thompson, *The Soundscapes of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA, 2002).

[7] See Joseph H. Auner, '"Soulless Machines" and Steppenwolves: Renegotiating Masculinity in Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*', in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton, 2000), 222–36; Frank Mehring, 'Welcome to the Machine!: The Representation of Technology in *Zeitoper*', *this journal*, 11 (1999), 159–77; Jürgen Arndt, 'Tango und Technik: Kurt Weills Rezeption des "Amerikanismus" der Weimarer Republik', in *Musik der Zwanziger Jahre*, ed. Werner Keil, Kerstin Jaunich and Ulrike Kammerer (Hildesheim, 1996).

[8] See Richard Taruskin, 'The Golden Age of Kitsch', *The New Republic*, 21 March 1997, 37; Hermann Danuser and Hermann Gottschewski, eds., *Amerikanismus, Americanism, Weill. Die Suche nach kultureller Identität in der Moderne* (Schliengen, 2003); and Cook, *Opera for a New Republic*, 9–26.

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this and similar labels for their operatic works of the period.[9] As these composers' sporadic comments have begun to be taken more seriously, and read in conjunction with their works, a new view has emerged – one that sees *Zeitoper* as a trenchant critique of the work concept and the formulation of its own distinct aesthetics of reception and popularity.[10] Central to this notion of the genre is *Zeitoper*'s pronounced affinity for modern media and its unflinching commitment to up-to-dateness, which is nowhere more keenly pursued than in Weill's *Der Zar läßt sich photographieren*.

1

The presence of a gramophone in the photographer's studio in Weill's *Zeitoper* is as little a coincidence as the fact that the female photographer's name is Angèle. Angels have had a strange propensity to write sounds into records since 1888, when Emile Berliner introduced his invention of the gramophone.[11] At least that is the story told by the famous image of the 'recording angel', which featured on early labels of Berliner's Gramophone Company (see Fig. 1).[12] Berliner's method of sound inscription heralded the second generation of phonography, and eventually supplanted Thomas Edison's older system.[13] The main difference between the two recording techniques concerned the dimension of the sound inscription. In Berliner's system, the sound wave was graphed laterally into the surface of the revolving record disc as a zig-zag line, where Edison's groove had been etched vertically into a rotating wax cylinder to varying degrees of depth. With the loss of this third dimension of phonographic writing, Berliner opened up further wide-ranging changes in phonographic technology.

In its earliest form, Berliner's gramophone was a simple mechanical apparatus with a manual crank-up mechanism which needed to be turned, with as steady a hand as possible, during the entire playing of the record. In this initial manifestation, it may have been technically inferior to Edison's luxurious battery-driven phonograph, but with hindsight it turned out to possess two great marketing advantages

[9] See Grosch, *Die Musik der Neuen Sachlichkeit*, particularly 177–80.

[10] See Grosch, esp. 101–16.

[11] Emile Berliner, 'The Gramophone: Etching the Human Voice', *Journal of the Franklin Institute*, 125/60 (1888). See also James R. Smart, 'Emile Berliner and Nineteenth-Century Disc Recording', in *Wonderful Inventions: Motion Pictures, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound at the Library of Congress* (Washington, DC, 1985).

[12] The 'recording angel' only lasted from 1888 to 1900, when it was replaced by the more famous image of Nipper (of 'His Master's Voice' fame). Intriguingly, the original image showed Nipper in front of an Edison phonograph, Berliner's biggest rival. John Durham Peters traces back the common ancestry of angels and communication media further to St Augustine, in his *Speaking in the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago and London, 2003), 74–7. The Christian tradition looms large behind this connection: its Greek origin, *angelos*, means 'messenger'.

[13] Or rather, returned sonic writing to an earlier form of sound inscription, which had been thought out by Charles Cros as early as 1857, but which had remained a theory. The classic account of the history of the gramophone remains Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph*, 3rd edn (New York, 1977). See also Lisa Gitelman, 'Souvenir Foils: On the Status of Print at the Origin of Recorded Sound', in *New Media 1740–1915*, ed. Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 157–73.

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Fig. 1: 'The Recording Angel', label of *The Gramophone Company* (1888–1900) (courtesy of Michael Sims).

over its predecessor: the gramophone itself was cheap, and its records (or 'plates') were more durable than Edison's phonograph cylinders. Phonograph cylinders were made of wax, and thus only withstood a very limited number of replayings before the groove was worn. By contrast, the sound storage medium that Berliner settled on eventually was the shellac record. Its special new ingredient, shellac, was derived from the resinous secretions of the female *tachardia lacca*, a beetle feasting on the South Asian banyan tree. Shellac proved not only particularly suited to Berliner's method of inscription but also highly resilient, allowing for virtually unlimited playings.[14] Edison quickly saw the light and switched to shellac plates, too, but even his updated system did not meet with the same success as Berliner's gramophone.

Where for Edison's wax cylinders recording was in principle the same as playing (the large sound funnel was used for both sound input and output), in Berliner's system a complex chemical process preceded the replaying of the recording. A richly illustrated article from *Scientific American* of 1896 explained the steps and apparatus involved in the recording process (see Fig. 2). The central image shows the special recording machine in operation, with the sound waves coming from the speaker's mouth being converted into a groove on the zinc disc. For the process of recording, the disc on the turntable was covered in a fatty film, onto which the vibrating stylus engraved the sound wave laterally. To keep the disc dust-free and smooth, it was continuously soaked with alcohol, dispensed from the bottle shown on the right side of the central image. Once the recording was finished, the engraved sound wave was

[14] See particularly Kittler, *Gramophone Film Typewriter*, 59.

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Fig. 2: The recording process of a gramophone record, from *Scientific American* (1896). The individual images depict: 1. Reproducing gramophone. 2. Recording instrument. 3. Record disks. 4. Recording cornet solo. 5. Reproducing sound box. 6. Cross-section of sound box. 7. Sound box in position for use. 8. Details of mechanism. 9. Part of a record. 10 and 11. Motor-driven gramophone.

fixed on the zinc disc by means of an acid bath. From this 'master disc', then, a reverse mould was produced, which served as the 'positive' template for all subsequent shellac imprints. Henceforth, until the emergence of magnetic tape recordings during the Second World War, it became practically impossible to record sounds without special equipment.[15] In two distinct ways, then, the new organic materiality of the mechanical medium fostered a technological advance – a progress

[15] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (London and New York, 2001), 307, and Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 69–70.

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that was, as it were, squeezed out of the beetles – that favoured reproduction over production: Berliner's recording process made it possible to produce unlimited copies of the recorded performance, and each recording could be played repeatedly. In this way, the gramophone opened sound recordings to the mass market. Because it curtailed the recording potential of the new technology, Berliner's gramophone paved the way for the professionalisation of the record industry and opened the floodgates for modern patterns of mass consumption of music. The age of the record industry could begin.

What seemed miraculous in the early history of phonography was the possibility – hitherto totally unimaginable – of capturing and engraving musical sound itself, not just notating a partial representation, as had been the case over the last millennium in various types of neumes, mensural and score notations.[16] With the invention of phonographic writing it became possible to repeat a musical performance across time and space, no matter whether the sounds were written vertically into Edison's wax cylinders or laterally into Berliner's shellac discs. With the separation of the process of recording and engraving sounds, however, from that of replaying of the recorded performance – or, as a Marxian reading would have it, by concealing the means of production – a disconcerting void appeared at the origin of the recorded performance. Worse still, the groove remained stubbornly illegible, resisting all attempts to analyse and decode the sound wave in a systematic way.[17] The sounding script could simply not be read by the naked eye, only felt by needles. Such a runic script, appearing as a product without a discernible cause, would seem to call for a supernatural explanation. This was given figural expression with the plump naked angel writing with a quill who sat in the middle of Berliner's records. Or, as Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht has put it much more poetically, 'gramophones inspire both fear of ghosts and hope for eternal life'.[18]

It was immediately obvious that the shellac disc, with its potential for continued replayings, would have a lasting effect on listening habits, that it might forever change 'music as we know it'. As Marshall McLuhan pointed out, in accordance with his famous dictum 'the medium is the message', the gramophone had a special affinity for jazz and popular music.[19] But even at the time, for some adventurous minds like László Moholy-Nagy and Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, the new technology offered some unheard-of possibilities to sound art, and they soon began theorising ways to write out wave patterns that could then be played as

[16] For an insightful discussion of these issues, see also Thomas Y. Levin, 'For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', *October*, 55 (1990), 23–47, and Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford, 1999).

[17] See Thomas Y. Levin, ' "Töne aus dem Nichts": Rudolf Pfenninger und die Archäologie des synthetischen Tons', in *Zwischen Rauschen und Offenbarung: Zur Kultur und Mediengeschichte der Stimme*, ed. Friedrich Kittler, Thomas Macho and Sigrid Weigel (Berlin, 2002), 313–56. See also Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 105; Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves and Writing Machines*, 132; and Kittler, *Gramophone Film Typewriter*, *passim*.

[18] Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 113.

[19] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 305–6.

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sounds.[20] To others, however, radical ideas such as this 'sounding writing', seemingly without a musical original, confirmed the worst fears of the whole idea of phonography – that the spirit behind the music was missing. Viewed from this angle, the writing angel becomes a visual euphemism of what is actually a demonic absence. Can such spiritless sounds still be called music, or are they merely noise?

In the fictional realm, the hero of Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* (1924), Hans Castorp, finds himself in a quandary concerning the 'richness of euphony', to borrow a phrase from Mann's chapter title. Castorp becomes more and more protective of the sounds that emanate from his beloved gramophone recordings and feels he needs to defend them against the manipulations of the consumptives resident at the Davos sanatorium:

> What would the others have done? They would have desecrated the discs, by maltreating them with spent needles, would have left them lying around in the open on chairs, would have played tricks with the apparatus, by running a noble piece of music at one hundred and ten in tempo and pitch or turning the speed down to zero, so that the outcome turned into a hysterical *tirili* or a sagging moan. . . . They had already done all that. They were sick, and yet coarse. And therefore, after a short while, Hans Castorp took to carrying in his pocket the little key of the cupboard in which the records were kept, so that people had to call on him if they wanted to be played music.[21]

The infinitely repeatable performance becomes a battleground of manipulation, which tested the limits of what was still recognisable as music. The sanatorium's patients double as the consumers of a music no longer protected by a traceable origin or by musical standards, one that could exert control over its reproduction. Even the degenerate state of sickness – which for Mann always signified a state of greater sensual refinement – cannot save these invalids from the temptations of this debased form of music consumption, as mere sonic entertainment devoid of any of the musical values that, supposedly, inhered in the compositions.

In the seclusion of the Swiss Alps – as in the alienated modern world – the recorded performances were all Hans Castorp still possessed. For him these shellac records constituted musical reality, containing as they did the precious last remnants of a world that was no longer accessible except through mechanical reproduction. The strangely manipulated sounds that so delighted the sick inmates around Castorp echoed what had been an inevitable part of the playing of the gramophone in its infancy. In the very early days of gramophones, before it was fitted with an electrical motor, and a handle needed to be turned by hand at all times, a generally wobbly intonation was the norm to all but the steadiest of hands. If these sounds, from 'histerical tirili' to 'sagging moan', retained any remnant of spirituality, they would describe the modern condition of a subject whose place is on the psychoanalyst's couch.

[20] László Moholy-Nagy, 'Neue Gestaltung in der Musik: Möglichkeiten des Grammophons', *Der Sturm*, 14 (1923), 102–6; 'Musico-Mechanico, Mechanico-Optico: Geradlinigkeit des Geistes – Umwege der Technik', *Musikblätter des Anbruchs*, 8 (1926), 363–6; Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, 'Die Mechanisierung der Musik', *Pult und Taktstock*, 2 (1925), 1–8.

[21] Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (Berlin, 1924), II, 306.

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Where the previous modes of musical reproduction – by means of score notation and the conventions of musical performance – had set the limits of what was musically acceptable, this excluded such effects as the ghostly slurs of gramophone intonation, not least because it would have been impossible to inscribe these sounds into the lines and spaces of our notational system. With the inception of the gramophone, these staves were no longer the guarantors of sense and order in music.[22] Just as Berliner's improvement on Edison consisted in the loss of the third dimension, then, so music too seems to have forfeited its dimension of depth with the obsolescence of the vertical gramophone groove. In this situation, Hans Castorp – like a number of German conservative music critics and pundits in the 1920s – felt the need to assume the role of the custodian of this angelic writing.

2

Outside Hans Castorp's seven-year exile in Davos and his experiences with various forms of consumption, and back in Weill's *Zeitoper*, angels write on records in different ways. As a woman of the modern world, the photographer Angèle owns a fashionable studio in Paris. But this angel is false, a devil in disguise: Angèle has been replaced by a look-alike, a member of a gang of terrorists plotting the assassination of the Czar, who is expected for a photo session. The photo session is, quite literally, a shooting session: the cloth draped over the camera hides a loaded pistol with which the false Angèle is planning to assassinate the Czar. Weill was very taken by this device, which had first seen the light as a joke that his librettist, the normally morose expressionist Georg Kaiser, had made during a joint bicycle outing, and in fact constructed the opera around this apparatus.[23] The possibilities for punning seem endless, as even the most cursory glance at the jargon of photography with its telltale metaphors such as 'loading', 'aiming' and 'shooting' reveals.[24]

The blatant nature of the puns suggests that the pistol is actually a redundancy, or a mere stage device that gives manifest expression to an ingrained structural connection. For the art of photography itself has long been associated with death. While examples abound, such as the morbid Victorian ritual of taking death photos, or the widespread religious fear of losing one's soul while being photographed, no one has theorised this association better than Roland Barthes, for whom the photograph constituted a maddening object: it enables us to see something that is false on the level of perception – a perfect image of a situation that in reality no longer exists – but is true on the level of time, in that this image captures what was once a reality.[25] The photograph forms an incontrovertible record of a presence, but

[22] See Kittler, *Gramophone Film Typewriter*, 86 *et passim*.
[23] Weill, *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, 440.
[24] See, for instance, Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, 1977), 14. The German analogues of these puns, which so delighted Weill and Kaiser, must have been along the lines of 'spannen', 'anvisieren' and 'abdrücken'.
[25] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1980), 115.

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of a presence that itself must inevitably pass on. Its grammatical tense, Barthes argues, is the future perfect, a 'you will have been' murmured at the moment the shutter is opened for a split second. The deadly pistol attached to the camera in Angèle's studio therefore does little more than exaggerate the work the camera would have carried out anyway. All the pistol does is to make doubly sure that Angèle's camera works as it should.

The fact that Angèle's camera is aimed at a Czar, a figure incongruous in both the photographic studio and in *Zeitoper*, has given rise to some bewilderment in musicological circles: this aspect of Kaiser's and Weill's plot seems to contradict the embrace of modern life that characterises the genre. However, we need not worry too much whether Weill's moribund Czar is supposed to be a memento of political reality – in the person of the last Russian Czar Nicholas II, who had been executed ten years previously – or a reference to a character popular on German stages from Lortzing to Lehár.[26] Either way, within the generic confines of *Zeitoper* and its devotion to up-to-dateness, the Czar 'is history'; he is an anachronism who needs to die.
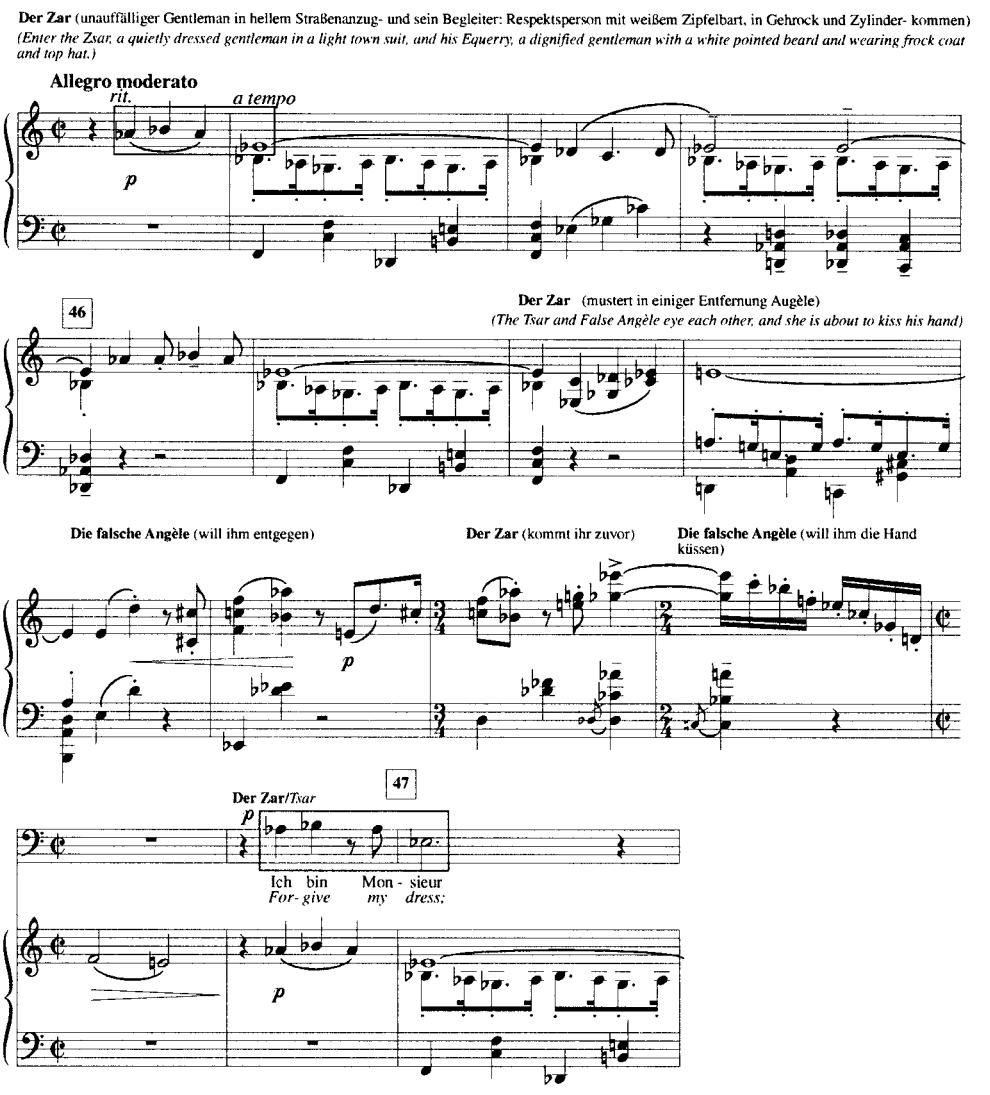
What matters is that the Czar himself resists all such efforts at objectification, whether in political or operatic history – or, indeed, on the negative plate of the photograph. Instead, he tries to be a man in the modern world. He wanders around looking at Angèle's previous portraits, referring to them first as a 'gallery of reality', then tops this off by calling it a 'splendid gallery of the élite of human characters'. His language here, with its subtle move from reality to fiction or self-representation ('human characters'), replays a commonplace in the discourse of photography: befitting photography's double status as technique and as art, the photographic image can serve both as an unimpeachable (and neutral) witness of objective reality and as a penetrating view into its objects, going beyond the façade to bring out inner character.[27] In submitting to a photo session, the Czar hopes to exploit both aspects of this double function of the photograph – as a document of objective reality and a representation of a hidden truth – using them as correlates for the two bodies, politic and natural, which he, like every self-respecting monarch in history, possesses. He is having his photo taken as a celebrity, *qua* Czar, but in so doing he seeks to overcome this public office, to become a real, a modern, person.

His entrance music, a foxtrot, gives musical expression to this double bind: the dotted-quaver figures of the foxtrot parody the stately march topic we would expect to announce a royal entrance (see Ex. 1a). When he begins to sing, he repeats his characteristic four-note motif of a neighbour-note figure and a leap down by a fourth, this time with an added nonchalant retardation of the third note, which again sets off the foxtrot accompaniment. In fact, we had heard the 'real thing', the conventional march topic, earlier in the opera. As Example 1b shows, when

[26] See, for instance, Cook, *Opera for a New Republic*, 129–30, and '*Der Zar läßt sich photographieren*: Weill and Comic Opera', in *A New Orpheus: Essays on Kurt Weill*, ed. Kim Kowalke (New Haven, 1986), 89–90; Heinz Geuen, *Von der Zeitoper zum Broadway Musical: Kurt Weill und die Idee des musikalischen Theaters* (Schliengen, 1997), 167; and Schebera, *Kurt Weill*, 83.

[27] Sontag, *On Photography*, 16–21.

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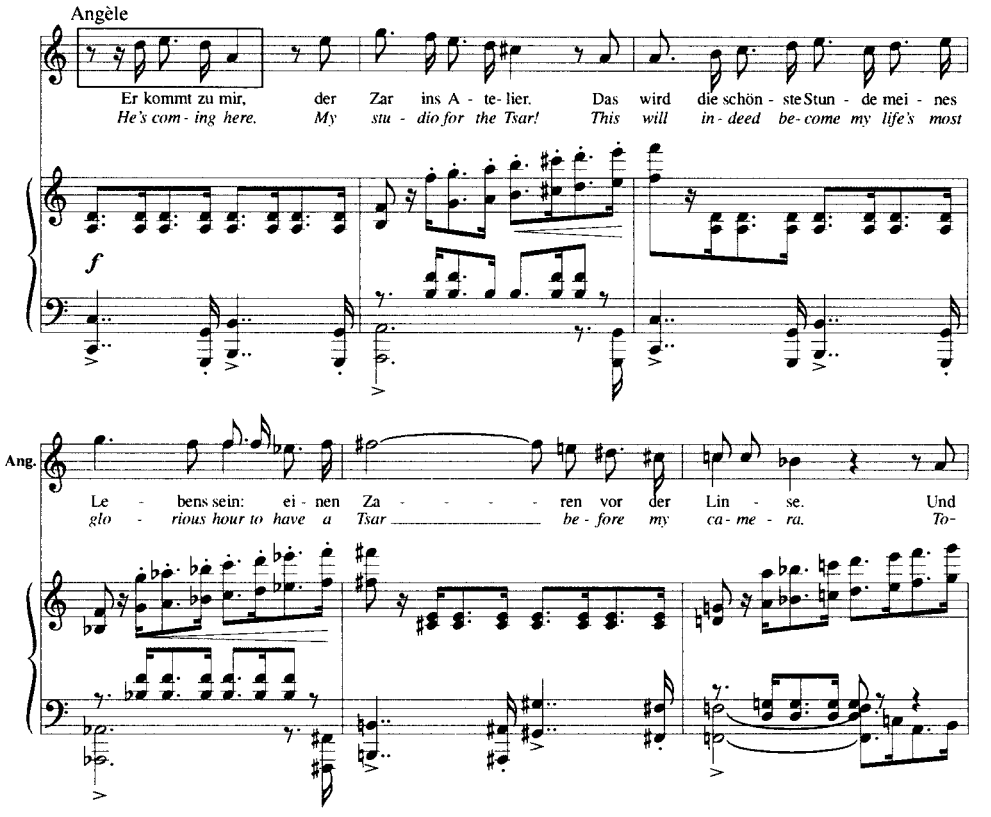


Ex. 1a: The Czar's entrance music, a foxtrot parodying a royal march.

the Czar has himself announced over the telephone to the real Angèle, she sings the same four-note motif, this time starting on D and in rigidly dotted rhythms.[28] The orchestra underscores her expression of awe with an accompaniment permeated by dotted rhythms, the bass line exaggerating the archaic march topic in double dots. Royal march and foxtrot have become interchangeable; expectation and actuality do not quite match up musically. The recognition of the Czar's double nature makes the false Angèle's task considerably harder, as she need only kill the official figure

[28] A similar ambiguity between the topics of march and foxtrot can be found in the opening march from Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale*. The resemblance between these two works was noted in a review of the première by Adorno, in *Die Musik*, 20 (1928), 923.

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Ex. 1b: The Czar's visit is announced by a royal march.

of the Czar, only his body politic, not the person behind the office. Even the Czar philosophically recognises the vicissitudes of his existence, shifting schizophrenically between first and third persons: 'The Czar can rule over everything except his life. I am a principle'.

It is a sign of the times, or rather of the dictate of up-to-dateness, that the Czar expresses his liberated modern selfhood above all through sex: he uses the photo shoot to try and seduce the false Angèle. However, even when breaking free from his public persona, he does not hesitate to use his status to achieve his goal.[29]

In a dialogue, whose ironic tone is typical of Kaiser's libretto, the two principals play ping-pong with their desires:

> Czar: How great is my debt?
> Angèle: It is already too great.

[29] It is no coincidence that the figure of the Czar is modelled on the *bon vivant* Adolphe Menjou, who left his signature moustache style to the world of fashion (see Weill, *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, 440). Like its feminine equivalent, Louise Brook's bob, the menjou signified the urbane sexual self-awareness of the modern man in the 1920s (see Peter Conrad, *Modern Times, Modern Places* [London, 1998], 15).

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Fig. 3: Publicity photo from the 1928 Düsseldorf performance. Berthold Pütz as the Czar, standing to the left of the seated Kurt Weill, sports a fashionable menjou (courtesy of the Kurt Weill Foundation, New York).

C: Because it took me so long to find you?
A: Long, but not too long.
C: I should have come to you sooner but I could not read from your letters that you would be so beautiful.
A: Now you will atone for your failure with a picture.
C: And then the debt is paid?
A: Yes, without a remainder.
C: But what is my commission?
A: For what?
C: That I present the Czar to you. That does not come cheaply. How does one repay princes, Madame?
A: After the shot, Monsieur. If you still have the time.

As a sexually aware man of the modern world – and a virile heterosexual one at that – the Czar ultimately refuses to yield before the camera, whose phallic

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connotations are the flipside of the pistol references. He jumps up and tries to get behind the camera to take a picture of Angèle in turn, as part of his seduction tactic of turning her into a two-dimensional object. Much of the opera is consumed by a tug-of-war about who may take a picture of whom.

The dualism of love and death, opera's perennial theme, is here captured in its most contemporary and least metaphysical form: as gratuitous sex and political murder. Both strands are united in the sabotaged camera – a device whose sole purpose is to capture an image of another person, but which literally brings death to the subject at the same time. The confusion between sex and photography was brought to the fore in an earlier title proposed for the opera: *Der Zar läßt sich* . . . . . followed by nine lascivious dots, the number and spacing of which were of the utmost importance to Weill and Kaiser, and were to be filled in by the audience, depending on their level of education and imagination. And lest there be any doubt, another earlier working title, *Photographie und Liebe*, gives us a clear sense of what the dots stood for.[30]

In the middle of the Czar's and Angèle's chases around the camera, the Czar's equerry bursts in to inform him that a conspiracy has been discovered and that the police are on their way to the studio. The Czar knows that this means his Parisian antics are over. 'I am dead, like Napoleon', he muses, 'isn't that pathetic?'. As soon as Angèle hears this admission, she changes her tack: she turns to the gramophone and puts on what she introduces as the 'Tango Angèle'. (Given what we already know about angels, it seems safe to assume that she etched the music into the shellac disc herself before the shooting session.) The orchestra falls silent during the tango music, while the singers continue their sung dialogue over the sounds of the recorded jazz band, the Saxophon-Orchester Dobbri, which Weill had recorded on 11 January 1928.

With the Czar's admission that he is dead, the false Angèle has, in a way, fulfilled her task, even though the 'I' may not be quite the right one: the Czar's body politic is evidently still very much alive. By putting on the record, Angèle appears to indicate that she is now playing along with the Czar's seduction ploy, that she caters particularly to the Czar's modern, sexually defined subjectivity, which has just been declared dead. In this, it is no coincidence that Angèle would choose a record of a tango: a recent import from Argentina, the tango was a fashionable dance all over Europe in the 1920s, loved above all for the blatant eroticism of its movements. A famous bonmot asked whether one was supposed to dance the tango standing up. As important as the evaporation of any original text and attendant aura at the moment the recording is played is the fact that the use of the gramophone allows music to enter the realm of opera that was emphatically banned from the German high-art musical tradition: the tango, a fashionable dance, the music of everyday life.

In the Weimar Republic, the tango had attained such an overwhelming popular significance that not even the academy could ignore it: a representation of the tango is even included in the tenth volume of the *Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft*, the most

[30] See Kim Kowalke, *Kurt Weill in Europe* (Ann Arbor, 1979), 50.

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Fig. 4: Graphic representation of the tango, from *Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft* (1928).

prestigious German musicological project of the late 1920s.[31] The illustration, reproduced here as Figure 4, may be somewhat censored for academic consumption – the dancers coyly do not touch in the body regions that would seem to matter most – but the very inclusion of the tango in what was then the *summa* of musicological scholarship constituted, at least, a nod to the popularity of the phenomenon. That the tango features only as an image and is mentioned nowhere else in the book seems to suggest, however, that it is not considered an object worthy of serious study. As a direct consequence of this snobbery, the identity of the little man in the background of the picture is forever lost on subsequent generations of musicologists – perhaps his function was only to remind the viewer of the dimension in which the dancers were moving.

[31] Hans Mersmann, *Die moderne Musik seit der Romantik*, Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft 9 (Potsdam, 1929), 12.

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Weimar operas frequently availed themselves liberally of this dance, as in Weill's failed one-act opera *Royal Palace*, which had included his first tango number. Weill was to aim for a similarly jarring effect with another tango only one year after *Der Zar*, in the *Zuhälter-Ballade* (pimp's ballad) that occupies the space of the love duet in his wildly successful *Dreigroschenoper*. But nowhere was the association between tango and sex made more explicit than in Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf* (1927). In the seduction scene (scene 3), the late Romantic orchestral style gives way to tango rhythms as the singer-heroine Anita yields to the sexual advances of the louche violin virtuoso Daniello (see Ex. 2). The tango rhythms, at first played only by the bass drum, may also represent Anita's beating heart, but the precise rhythmic figure is soon taken over by a jazz band, which sets it off sharply from the rich orchestral sounds that preceded it. As if to underscore the eroticism of this moment, the ongoing dialogue changes into salacious French, as Anita and Daniello disappear into his hotel room.

The parallels in Weill's 'Tango Angèle' are apparent, though in *Der Zar läßt sich photographieren* the tango's sound source is even more emphatically separated from the surrounding sounds. On one level, the tango record on the gramophone is, like the pistol inside the camera, a pleonasm, giving an over-determined outward manifestation to a cultural code inherent in the apparatus. Angèle's turn to the gramophone is itself sufficient to mark the change in the dramatic action.[32] The Czar is evidently alert to this when he sings over the sounds coming out of the gramophone: 'Music – at this moment?' He hears the music as an unambiguous sign that Angèle has finally given in to his advances. He lets her lay him down on a nearby divan. She covers him with cushions, and excuses herself, apparently to get undressed.
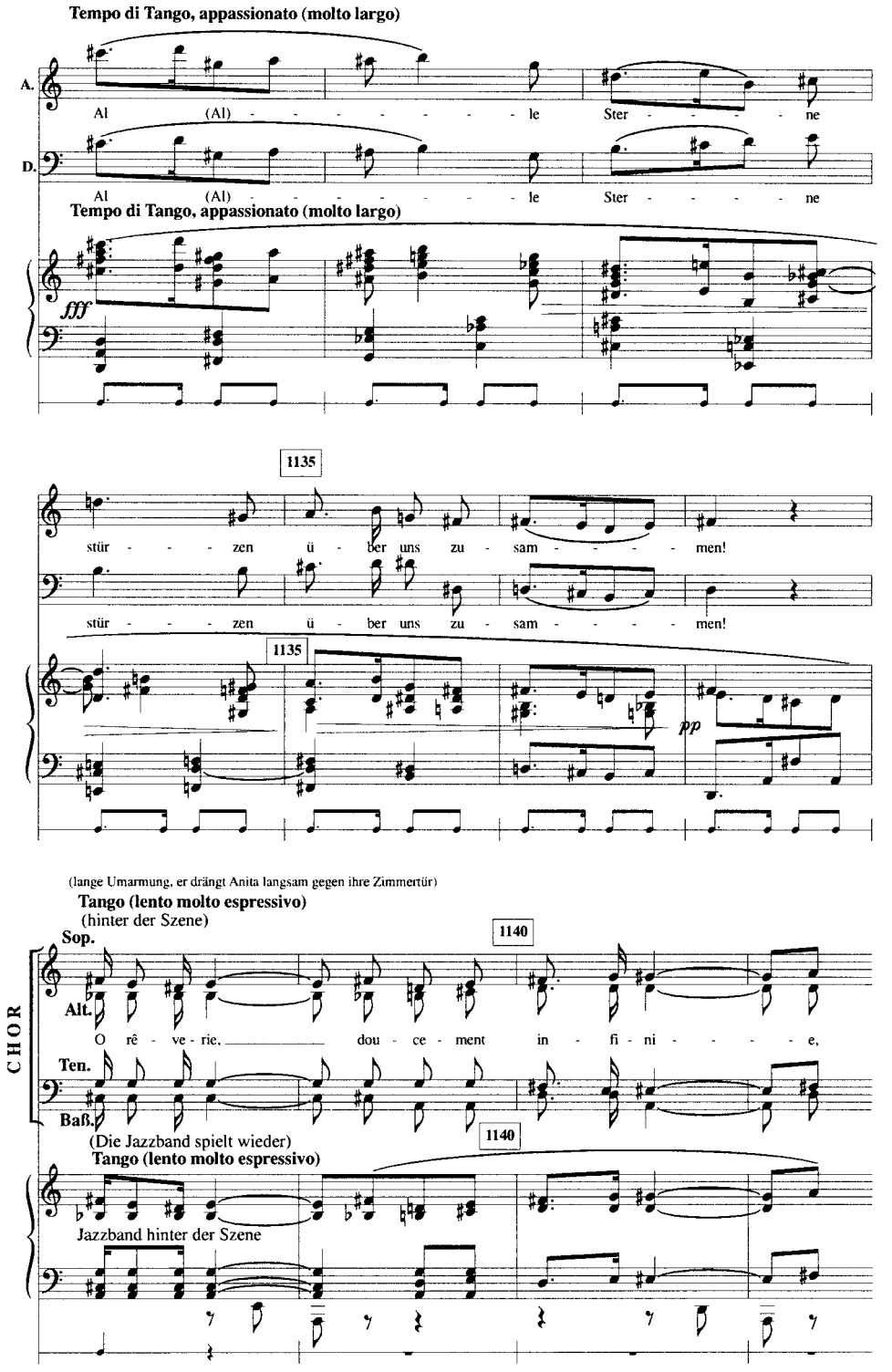
Instead of killing the Czar, however, Angèle – aided by the tango sounds emanating from the gramophone – lets him live. She uses this opportunity to escape from the police, who are closing in on the studio. The assassins disappear with the last sounds of the 'Tango Angèle'. The real Angèle uses the ensuing chaos to resume the position of the photographer. She defuses both the situation and the camera by firing a shot from the hidden pistol, which goes virtually unnoticed amid the hubbub around her. The flustered Czar finally re-emerges from beneath the pillows on the divan. He does not recognise the photographer, but she assures him her changed appearance is only an effect of the light. It is, however, not only the light that has changed: the Czar now resumes his official role as a statesman. The real Angèle presses the trigger of the now harmless camera; the Czar is having his photo taken.

3

A recent technical innovation may have encouraged Weill to incorporate the gramophone into his opera: in 1926 the electric microphone replaced the huge horn-shaped amplifiers that the early recording industry had been using. From that

[32] The feminisation of the gramophone is a well-rehearsed topic. See Stephen Connor, 'The Modern Auditory I', in *Rewriting the Self*, ed. Roy Porter (London, 1997), 217–19.

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Ex. 2: The tango in *Jonny spielt auf*.

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time on, the scratchy sound of records was no longer an essential ingredient of the recorded performance, much to the chagrin of thinkers as diverse as Jorge Luis Borges and Theodor W. Adorno.[33] Where Edison's company had begun as early as 1895 to advertise that its recording technology produced 'real music', it was only from 1926 that the gramophone, like the camera, could convincingly uphold the pretension of being a near-perfect rendition of the original performance.[34] In an extraordinary fragment, published posthumously, Adorno pondered the implications of this technological advance:

> The old, relatively primitive gramophones are preferable to the modern turntables because they do not create the semblance of the original, but only appear as shadows. However, the closer the mechanical reproduction comes to the live performance, the more clearly its untruth emerges – particularly as the 'enlarged', puffed-up and hence indistinct sound. The threshold must have been electrical recording technology. Of course, quantity may turn into quality; that is, imitation might perfect itself so that the category of the original loses its justification.[35]

Adorno is surprisingly calm in a conclusion that directly challenges Benjamin's concept of the aura, and hence much of Adorno's own aesthetic thought.[36] Nevertheless, his analysis, made here in the most general context, applies perfectly to the 'Tango Angèle': the recording itself is the site of musical reality; it no longer captures a particular performance, as an incomplete representation at several removes from some elusive musical essence, but the gramophone recording *is* the music itself. There is no original outside the shellac groove.

Quite literally so, since the parts and the score of the 'Tango Angèle' were lost soon after the recording was made.[37] It may well be the cunning of history that all that survives now is the recording, as if to make the emphatic point that the only notation of the tango that can exist is its angelic etching in the one master disc. Just as the opera's coy original title offers nine pregnant dots in place of a verb to concretise the activity in question, the conductor's score exhibits a void in the notation at the dramatic and musical climax. The music is taken out of the conductor's hands, and handed over to the gramophone on stage.

A recent commentator has suggested that Weill was eager to produce the record of the 'Tango Angèle' separately, with a view to marketing it as a piece of dance music in its own right, so that the operatic audiences would be able to recognise the

[33] See Gumbrecht, *In 1926*, 110.
[34] Emily Thompson, 'Machines, Music and the Quest for Fidelity: Marketing the Edison Phonograph in America 1877–1925', *Musical Quarterly*, 79 (1995), 140.
[35] Theodor W. Adorno, *Zu einer Theorie der musikalischen Reproduktion* (Frankfurt, 2001), 175.
[36] Compare Walter Benjamin's central claim: 'Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be'. 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), 222.
[37] Score and parts seem to have gone missing in early April 1928, after a second recording had been made with the Marek Weber Orchester (Electrola, March 1928). I am grateful to Dave Stein of the Weill/Lenya Research Center for providing me with these details.

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piece within the opera as a familiar number.[38] According to this logic, the tango would have functioned somewhat like a latter-day version of the banquet scene from *Don Giovanni*, with the crucial difference that Weill first had to *create* the recognition factor, and to ensure that the tango had a life independent of the opera. He probably missed that opportunity for the first performance, given that the master recording was only finished some three weeks ahead of the first night, and Weill was still considering having it re-recorded at that late stage. In the course of the twenty-six productions that followed the runaway success of the opera's Leipzig première, however, the tango rose to fame in its own right, and fed back in turn into the opera.[39] To ensure the widest possible dissemination, Weill was also planning to produce independent arrangements of the tango, to be published separately by Universal Edition, but it seems these projects never went ahead.[40] Had Weill been more of a McLuhanian, he would probably have put greater faith in the new medium alone.

4

The story of the recording of the 'Tango Angèle' that Weill tells in retrospect is slightly different and counterpoints his earlier sales pitch. He subsequently explained that he had deliberately kept the sounds of popular music out of the score until this point for dramaturgical reasons:

> Finally I came to the conclusion that such an inward intensification as I envisaged for the escape scene could only be achieved by means of a complete change of the sound colour. In this way I arrived at the gramophone scene, in which I gave a mechanical instrument and dance-like music the task of driving the plot forward. For this 'Tango Angèle', as I called it, I saved up tango and jazz sounds. This self-contained dance number I then orchestrated, after careful studies of the gramophone, for the gramophone disc and had it recorded with Lindström, plc.[41]

Weill has been taken to task for blurring the facts a bit when he asserts that he withheld jazz idioms until the gramophone scene: as we have seen, the Czar's opening theme is a foxtrot allusion, and this music is heard again just before the

[38] See Grosch, *Die Musik der Neuen Sachlichkeit*, 138–9. Weill writes to Universal Edition on 7 January 1928, transcribed in the Weill/Lenya Research Center, explaining this plan. A selection of the correspondence between Weill and UE has been edited by Nils Grosch in his *Kurt Weill: Briefwechsel mit der Universal Edition* (Stuttgart, 2002), here 103.

[39] Weill later preferred the Marek Weber recording, which had a somewhat 'jazzier' sound. See Weill, Letter to UE, 26 May 1928 (Grosch, 125). See Elmar Juchem, ' "Fort vom Durchschnitt": Weill und die Popinterpreten seiner Zeit', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 166/2 (2000), 28–30.

[40] Weill, Letter to UE, 7 January 1928 (Grosch, 103).

[41] Weill, *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, 68. In a letter of 2 February 1928 to UE (Grosch, 107), he likewise emphasises the *use* of the gramophone: 'I would consider it highly advantageous if you could issue a notice to the most important daily newspapers and specialised publications that in the *Zar* the gramophone is used in quite a new fashion as an independent agent [*selbständiger Träger der Handlung*], and that the 'Tango Angèle' has just appeared on *Parlophon* (*Lindström plc*)'.

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'Tango Angèle'.[42] However, it is not the style, but the *sound* of the tango – which for Weill is also a part of the world of jazz – that he refers to.[43] That he should approach Lindström was probably no coincidence: the company had recently developed improved gramophone technology with electric sound reinforcement, the 'pantophone', whose sound quality was sufficient to 'fill a medium-size concert hall', as one reviewer noted approvingly.[44]

The juxtaposition of different sound worlds was in itself part and parcel of Weimar operatic aesthetics. In what is perhaps the most incisive example, the score of Max Brand's *Maschinist Hopkins* (1929) includes an individual number for jazz band, which is scored and bound separately, as well as a languorous tango whose sounding otherness is underlined by the wordless humming chorus that becomes its principal instrument. Weill's innovation, by contrast, goes in a different direction: when he refers to 'a complete change of sound colour', he does not so much mean the saxophones, banjo and solo-violin timbres that form the core of his orchestration of the 'Tango Angèle', but rather the sound source: the use of what Weill calls a 'mechanical instrument', the gramophone itself, as a basis of orchestration.[45] These tango sounds are framed by the shellac disc, and are funnelled into the realm of opera by means of the gramophone.

Just how important this distinction is between stylistic jazz allusion – the Czar's foxtrot entry – and the sound world of jazz that Weill aims to invoke in the 'Tango Angèle' becomes clear in Weill's writings. When talking about dance music, he is careful to distinguish between traditional dance music and jazz (which for him, as seen in the above quotation, also includes the tango). 'The rhythm of our time', he concludes famously, 'is jazz'.[46] The essence of jazz music, however, he goes on to explain, does not consist of 'a syncopated 2/2 bar'.[47] Rather, for Weill jazz is distinguished as rhythmically liberated, harmonically precise, but nevertheless improvised. German dance bands, rooted as they are in a tradition of parlour orchestras and military bands – and of playing from sheet music – proved incapable of recapturing this outlandish sound world.[48]

In a way, then, Weill set himself an impossible task. If the seductive sound world of the jazz band remained beyond the reach of German instrumentalists, how could

[42] Susan Cook makes this point (*Opera for a New Republic*, 138).

[43] In exploring the sexual and racial narratives in the reception of jazz in Weimar Germany, Mark Weiner shows on a broader cultural level how such a conflation was not difficult to achieve. See his *Undertones of Insurrection: Music, Politics, and the Social Sphere in the Modern German Narrative* (Lincoln, Nbr., 1993), 124–34. See also Michael Kater, 'The Jazz Experience in Weimar Germany', *German History*, 6 (1988), 145–58; Susan C. Cook, ' "Jazz as Deliverance": The Reception and Institution of American Jazz during the Weimar Republic', *American Music*, 7 (1989), 30–47.

[44] Cora Auerbach, 'Der Pantophone-Apparat', *Die Musik*, 21 (1929), 360–1.

[45] Weill, *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, 68. Kim Kowalke points out that the 'Tango Angèle' is atypical of the musical style of the tango at the time: see *Kurt Weill in Europe*, 50.

[46] Weill, *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, 299.

[47] Weill, 299.

[48] J. Bradford Robinson, 'In Search of a Shimmy Figure', in *Music and Performance during the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge, 1993), 117–29. Weill insists that while influenced by jazz in the broadest sense, his music does not try to be an imitation of it: see *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, 82.

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he presume to introduce 'tango and jazz sounds' into the opera in the 'Tango Angèle' as performed by the Saxophon-Orchester Dobbri? In a word, he could not. But he could do the next best thing and simulate – rather than imitate – jazz sounds, and exploit their medial affinity. It is in this function that the gramophone and its angelic writing become crucial.

The 'Tango Angèle' is of course anything but improvised, as Weill stipulates jazz should be. As J. Bradford Robinson has shown, among German dance bands jazz music was primarily disseminated via sheet music, and ended up being assimilated in performance into the familiar march and parlour traditions, precisely in the form of the syncopated 2/2 bars Weill decries.[49] The true sound of jazz, by contrast, could only be communicated by record. The 'Tango Angèle' is emphatically set apart from the composed allusions to jazz discussed above – the mock-jazz idiom of the Czar's foxtrot figure – in that, like jazz improvisation, the sounds that emanate from the gramophone evade fixation in conventional notation (compare Ex. 1 and Ex. 3).[50]

Conventional score notation would seem to be complicit with the sounds of the traditional opera orchestra, while both jazz sounds and the gramophone fall outside the usual realm of the operatic tradition. In assigning the 'Tango Angèle' a different sound source, Weill then also alludes to the exotic origins of modern dance music – whether in the Argentine tango or in 'Negro music', which for him both count as jazz.[51]

With this emphatic admission of the sound of popular music on the operatic stage through the gramophone horn, Weill defied the fears of the cultural pundits. Recall Hans Castorp, who jealously guarded the key to the gramophone cupboard so that no mischief could happen to the precious music engraved onto the round black shellac objects. The influential conservative music critic Adolf Weißmann had uttered especially gloomy pronouncements on the future of music in the age of the machine. It is not much of a surprise that Weißmann had few positive things to say about the première of *Der Zar*; he found the gramophone tango 'lame'.[52]

In his 1930s book, *Die Entgötterung der Musik* (The desecration – or 'de-spiritualization' – of music), Weißmann raged against the machine as an attack against the entire German metaphysical tradition. He saw a natural alliance between jazz and the gramophone:

[49] Robinson, 'In Search of a Shimmy Figure', 108–13. This is not to deny, of course, that Weill made significant contributions to this particularly German genre of jazz.

[50] Mark Katz (*Capturing Sound*, 72–84) points to the paradox that jazz, characterised as it is by improvisation and forever changing performances, is also the first genre whose early development was preserved by and whose dissemination was fostered by recording technology, so much so that both become virtually inseparable from one another. For the connection between jazz and recording, see further Weiner, *Undertones of Insurrection*, 121–2.

[51] Weill, *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, 299.

[52] Weißmann, Review of *Der Zar* in *Berliner Zeitschrift* of 20 February 1928. He later changed his tone noticeably, when reviewing the Berlin performance in October 1928 much more positively. Weill showed himself surprised (letter to UE of 17 October 1928), but it is perhaps no coincidence that Hindemith, Schreker and Weill had complained to the head of Ullstein Publishing in June 1928 that they no longer wished to be reviewed in the *Berliner Zeitung* by Weißmann. I am grateful to Elmar Juchem of the Weill/Lenya Research Center for providing me with this and other details.

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Ex. 3: Detail from the *Tango Angèle* in its surviving authoritative notation (courtesy of the Kurt Weill Foundation, New York).

Jazz leaps to the defense of the record: while jazz is itself an embodiment of the mechanisation of music, divested of anything emotional or romantic, it has seemingly been waiting for an apparatus to serve it by securing it supreme proliferation. The dance record, in particular of the American type, which is completely oriented towards mechanical reproduction, is the most complete achievement of musical performance. It can fully replace a jazz orchestra. And the wedding of the work of the machine with the sporty, machine-like dance exercise is a spectacle that is its logical consequence. We delight in the record uniting a few individual players, of which every one contributes his own characteristic part to the whole sound or noise; we delight in a kind of counterpoint of the most primitive kind, gradually petrifying; we delight in the squeaking, moaning, whistling that penetrates us no less sharply than the grotesque sentimentality of the saxophone. This is the triumph of the de-spiritualisation of music, of its machine-like quality.[53]

[53] Adolf Weißmann, *Die Entgötterung der Musik* (Berlin, 1930), 36.

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In Weißmann's polemic, jazzy dance music and the gramophone record gang up on German music: both strive for perfection in the technical and technological realm respectively, and both achieve this at the expense of human subjectivity, which either disappears in the machine or is obliterated behind a physically and erotically charged but unemotional dance music.

Two extremes come together in this unholy alliance: Weißmann figures jazz as the most primitive kind of music.[54] In this, however, it vacillates between assigning it *ur*-musical tendencies, as the musical embodiment of orgiastic urges and pure sensuality, and dismissing it from a position of plain colonialist superiority. Either way, jazz occupies a pre-musical stage, which does not yet require musical notation, simply because there is no order or system in it. The gramophone, by contrast, is no longer music: its direct transcription of sounds without the immediacy of human expression makes it immediately susceptible to the mechanised sounds of modern-primitive jazz. Together, jazz and the gramophone, Weißmann concludes, will drive the spirit out of German music. The sounds that remain, and that so grotesquely delight us, seem to echo those that emanate from Castorp's gramophone in the hands of the comsumptives – except this time these squeaks and moans are the main event of the music, no matter at what speed the record is played.

5

The score of Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf* begins with the instruction, 'Schnelles Grammophontempo', and Weill's conviction that 'the rhythm of our time is jazz' seem like nothing less than a paraphrase of the same sentiment. Yet, when he took it upon himself to articulate explicit positions on such matters, Weill poured nothing but scorn on such gestures:

> People took the 'tempo of the twentieth century', combined it with the much praised 'rhythm of our time', and, for the rest, limited themselves to the representation of sentiments of past generations.[55]

Even the contradictions in these statements reflect the attempt to come to terms with *Zeitoper*'s mandate to bring the ephemeral, everyday and phenomenal onto the operatic stage. It is precisely this mandate, however, that Richard Taruskin has identified as the Heisenberg problem of the genre: *Zeitoper* can be *zeitgemäß* (up-to-date), or it can be *opernhaft* (operatic), but it cannot be both at the same time. To make *Zeitoper* 'safe for Weimarish democracy', as Taruskin puts it, its *zeitgemäß* element had to remain an exotic import.[56]

Operatic scenes that utilise modern media are part and parcel of the genre; usually they are a sure sign of the up-to-dateness of the work.[57] *Jonny*'s Max is enchanted

[54] Weißmann, 22.
[55] Weill, *Musik und musikalisches Theater*, 65.
[56] Taruskin, 'The Golden Age of Kitsch', 37.
[57] The 1929 Baden-Baden Festival for New Music had a session dedicated to Mechanical Music, for which Weill's *Der Zar* had originally been planned. As the composition progressed and grew beyond appropriate dimensions, however, Weill decided to take it out of the context of this festival.

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by Anita's radio broadcast of his aria; Wilhelm Grosz's *Achtung, Kamera!* takes place in front of and behind a film set; Laura and Eduard's divorce in Hindemith's *Neues vom Tage* is heralded by the press as precisely that – 'news of the day'; while in Ernst Toch's exoticist *Der Fächer* the radio emblematises the clash of the modern world with traditional Chinese values. The media craze did not stop at the confines of *Zeitoper*: even the bizarre Omniscient Seashell in Strauss's *Die Ägyptische Helena* was at one point to be transmitted via loudspeaker. Weill's *Zar*, however, goes one step further: where these other *Zeitopern* imitate the effects of the modern media on stage, but still essentially use them as stage props – Anita still sings Max's aria live in the opera house, even though she uses a microphone to achieve the radio effect – the 'Tango Angèle' exists exclusively in a different medium. This is, in McLuhan's words, its message.

This circumstance gives a completely new meaning to the *Grammophontempo* of *Zeitoper*: the gramophone recording allows a window to another time that is not congruent with the time of the performance on stage. The time of the 'Tango Angèle' is always 11 January 1928, forever fixed in the recording. The sound of the jazz band, which at the time was state-of-the-art but now sounds tinny in its mono output, over which the false Angèle and the Czar sing anew every time the opera is performed, is a permanent memento of its bound-up-ness in its own time. The grating background noise of the recording is an integral part of the 'jazz' sound of the tango. If *Zeitoper* does indeed have a Heisenberg problem, then the gramophone scene in *Der Zar* is a wormhole that allows the opera to be in two places at the same time.

The timeliness of Weill's *Zeitoper* turns out to be precisely its of-*its*-time-ness. Where on stage the gramophone record indicates that the Czar will live, in the context of the opera on the whole, the recording, like the camera, confirms that the Czar exists only in the future perfect. Adorno writes:

> There is no doubt that, as music is removed by the phonograph record from the realm of live production and from the imperative of artistic activity and becomes petrified, it absorbs into itself, in this process of petrification, the very life that would otherwise vanish. The dead art rescues the ephemeral and perishing art as the only one alive. Therein may lie the phonograph record's most profound justification, which cannot be impugned by any aesthetic objection to its reification. For this justification reestablishes by the very means of reification an age-old, submerged and yet warranted relationship: that between music and writing.[58]

Where Berliner's gramophone had removed the third dimension of phonographic writing, Weill instead opened its fourth dimension and built the temporality of sound into his opera. At the same time, however, following Adorno's argument, the dead art is only being kept alive in a cryonically frozen state, as sounding writing. In this sense, the Czar's exclamation 'Music – at this moment?' assumes an additional, rather different meaning.

[58] Adorno, 'The Form of the Phonograph Record', trans. Thomas Y. Levin in *October*, 55 (1990), 59.

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Thus it may well be true that the gramophone inspires the fear of ghosts and the hope for eternal life – albeit with the help of cryonics. For the anti-metaphysical genre of *Zeitoper*, however, this was anathema. It may have seemed a logical, indeed a necessary consequence for *Zeitoper* to avail itself of modern sound media not merely as stage props but as an integral element of the operatic score; however, as soon as this happened, with Weill's 'Tango Angèle', the genre pulled the aesthetic rug from beneath its own feet. What the angelic hand on the label of Berliner's gramophone recording writes out, then, is nothing but the sound of the death knell of *Zeitoper*.

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