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“Ein hypermoderner Dirigent”: Mahler and Anti-Semitism in *Fin-de-siècle* Vienna

K. M. KNITTEL

Hans Schliessmann's famous set of drawings entitled “Ein hypermoderner Dirigent,” or “An ultramodern conductor” (plate 1), has become the standard image of a dynamic and energetic Mahler on the podium. Reproduced in almost

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A shorter version of this paper was read at the Minneapolis meeting of the American Musicological Society in October 1994. Part of the research for this project was completed while participating in an NEH Summer Seminar for College Teachers directed by Walter Frisch in 1994. I would like to thank Professor Frisch and the participants in his seminar “Music and German Modernism, 1895–1915” for their many useful comments and criticisms. Professor Michael P. Steinberg's seminar “Modernity and Modernism” initially sparked my interest in the overlap between antimodernism and anti-Semitism, and I am grateful to him for his expertise. I would especially like to thank Sander Gilman for his help, time, and support throughout this project. For those familiar with his work, my debt to him will be obvious.

every Mahler book and biography,¹ these caricatures usually appear without any accompanying explanation or information regarding the artist. The well-known problems of extracting an unproblematic cultural “meaning” from any image are compounded when we realize that Schliessmann's “ultramodern” portrait is hardly the only view we have of Mahler as conductor. An unsigned silhouette of Mahler (plate 2), for example, suggests a calmer, more restrained manner, more in the style of Schliessmann's silhouettes of other conductors (plate 3). How are we to read these apparently contradictory images of Mahler's conducting style?

One commonly offered explanation is that Mahler's style changed over the course of his

¹For example, Kurt and Herta Blaukopf, *Mahler: His Life, Work and World*, trans. Paul Baker et al. (London, 1991), p. 151 (enlarged edn. of *Mahler: A Documentary Study* [New York, 1976]).



Plate 1: Hans Schliessmann, "Ein hypermoderner Dirigent (1901)," originally publ. in *Fliegende Blätter* (March 1901) (Blaukopf, *Mahler: A Documentary Study* [New York, 1976], plate 194).

life, either because he grew older and more mature or because he consciously attempted to modify it. For example, it is generally believed that the diagnosis of Mahler's heart condition—just prior to his arrival in America—severely curtailed his lifestyle and thus his conducting habits.² Another explanation could be that there

²Otto Klemperer, in his reminiscences about Mahler as a conductor, made the following claim: "When [Mahler] was younger, he is said to have conducted with enormous passion. I heard him only a few years before his death, and then he was very economical in his movements, though not so economical as Richard Strauss. He had been told by doctors that he had a bad heart and so he was very careful" (*Conversations with Klemperer*, comp. and ed. Peter Heyworth [rev. edn. London, 1985], p. 30). See also Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, trans. Basil Creighton (New York, 1946), p. 123; and Harold C. Schonberg, *The Great Conductors* (New York, 1967), pp. 232–35.



Plate 2: Unsigned, Mahler silhouette, n.d. (Blaukopf, 1976, plate 197).

existed a standard "style" of representing conductors, and that the calmer, contradictory image simply exemplifies that style. I am convinced, however, that the many images and descriptions of Mahler as an "energetic" and "modern" conductor represent implicit references to Mahler's Jewishness. As we shall see, in Mahler's Vienna charges of nervousness and overt references to gestures and movement were anything but neutral observations; rather, they were part of a complex network of stereotypes that—as Sander Gilman has persuasively argued—defined the Jew's body as different. To evaluate the reactions to Mahler within this environment we must first understand these stereotypes and how they were utilized.

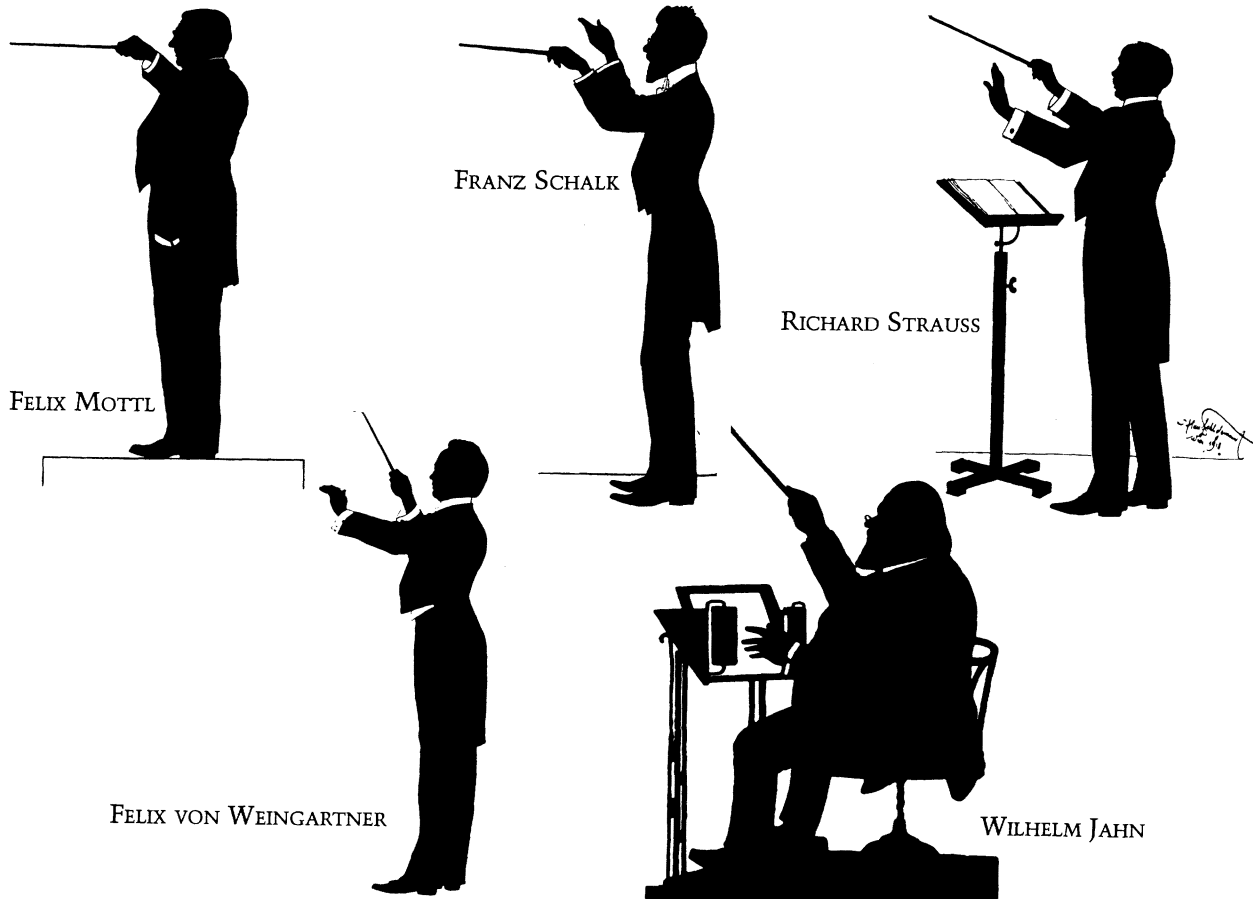


Plate 3: Schliessmann's conductors, various dates
(Blaukopf, *Die Wiener Philharmoniker: Wesen, Werden, Wirken eines Grossen Orchesters*
[Vienna, 1986], pp. 179, 42, 100, 180, 172).

I

It has been widely recognized both that the Vienna in which Mahler lived was virulently anti-Semitic and that much anti-Semitic criticism was directed specifically at Mahler, criticism that ultimately influenced his decision to accept the directorship of the Metropolitan Opera in New York.³ But such anti-Semitism was

not always expressed overtly. In nineteenth-century Europe, the term *Jew* was not a religious category but a racial one: being Jewish had nothing to do with belief and everything to do with fundamental difference. In *The Jew's Body*, Gilman has recently concluded that "no aspect of the representation of the Jewish body . . . whether fabled or real, is free from the taint of the claim of the special nature of the Jewish body as a sign of the inherent difference of the Jew."⁴ Thus any reference to one or more of these accepted differences would have been understood as "Jewish." As Peter Gay has similarly pointed out, for anti-Semites the Jew "appeared to con-

³On Viennese anti-Semitism in general, see Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews 1867–1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1989), esp. pp. 188–206; Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1980); and Leon Botstein, *Judentum und Modernität: Essays zur Rolle der Juden in der deutschen und österreichischen Kultur, 1848 bis 1938* (Vienna, 1991). Henry-Louis de La Grange (*Gustav Mahler: chronique d'une vie*, 3 vols. [Paris, 1979–84]) includes a number of concert reviews from Mahler's years in Vienna, many of which are overtly anti-Semitic.

⁴Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York, 1991), p. 38.

centrate . . . all the qualities that . . . Germans found most unmanageable and most unsettling," and anti-Semitism became "an irrational protest against the modern world." For the German reader and writer, "Jewishness" was accepted as "the central category of 'racial' difference," and, as Gay suggests, "the point of the caricature was . . . not to sum up actual characteristics, but to identify a convenient target for inconvenient emotions."⁵ The power of this image lay in the unquestioning way in which it represented the "reality" of the Jewish people.

Examples of this caricature are easy to find, from the greatest literature to the lowest humor magazines. The most obvious aspects of the caricature are those physical characteristics that were thought to be "Semitic." The main character in Oskar Panizza's 1893 novella *The Operated Jew* is Itzig Faitel Stern, a Jewish student, who desires to become a German. Panizza's story provides us with a virtual compendium of anti-Semitic stereotypes. Stern's appearance is of central importance—his slightly yellow skin, his eyes, his curly black hair, and his lips and nose:

Itzig Faitel was a small, squat man. His right shoulder was slightly higher than his left, and he had a sharp protruding chicken breast [*einer spitz zulaufender Hühnerbrust*], upon which he always wore a wide heavy silk tie ornamented by a dull ruby and attached to a breast-plate. . . .⁶

Itzig Faitel's countenance was most interesting. . . . An antelope's eye with a subdued, cherry-like glow [*ein Gazellen-Auge von kirschen-ähnlich gedämpfter Leuchtkraft*] swam in wide apertures of the smooth velvet, slightly yellow skin of his temples and cheeks. Itzig's nose assumed a form which was similar to that of the high priest who was the most prominent and striking figure of Kaulbach's painting "The Destruction of Jerusalem." . . .⁷ His lips were fleshy and overly creased; his teeth sparkled like

pure crystal. . . . If I may also add that my friend's lower torso had bow-legs whose angular swing was not excessive, then I believe that I have sketched Itzig's figure to a certain degree. Later I'll talk about the curly, thick black locks of hair on his head.⁸

Panizza's description of Stern—and the story itself—is a particularly repugnant example. Yet although extreme, it nonetheless reflects a general belief at the end of the nineteenth century that the Jew was not just different, but visibly different—and the aspects of his difference were marked on his body for all to see. Similarly, the anthropologist Francis Galton attempted to capture "the Jewish physiognomy," in particular, the "cold, scanning gaze"—Stern's "antelope's eye with a subdued, cherry-like glow"—with a series of multiple exposure photographs published in 1885. These famous photographs, cited by many social scientists of the time (including Sigmund Freud), were thought to capture the "essence" not merely of Jewish external features but also of the (different) nature of the Jew. Many commentaries on the photographs pay close attention to the eyes: Hans Günther in 1922 discussed the "sensual," "threatening," and "crafty" nature of the gaze.⁹ That the Jew supposedly had different eyes than the Gentile is reported as early as the seventeenth century—as in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which mentions the "goggle eyes" of the Jew.¹⁰ That gaze—the "evil eye"—was said to reflect the pathology of their souls.¹¹

⁸Oskar Panizza, *Der Operirte Jud'* (*The Operated Jew*) in Jack Zipes, *The Operated Jew: Two Tales of Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1991), pp. 47–48 (pp. 47–74); original story publ. in Panizza, *Visionen: Skizzen und Erzählungen* (Leipzig, 1893). The story was reprinted in 1914 and again in 1919; see Zipes, p. 127. See also Peter D. G. Brown, *Oskar Panizza: His Life and Works* (Bern, 1983).

⁹Hans F. K. Günther, *Rassenkunde des jüdischen Volkes* (2nd edn. Munich, 1931; 1st edn. 1922), pp. 210–11, 217.

¹⁰Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (cited in Gilman, *The Case of Sigmund Freud: Medicine and Identity at the Fin de Siècle* [Baltimore, 1994], p. 44).

¹¹See Gilman, *The Case of Sigmund Freud*, pp. 42–64, and "The Image of the Hysteric," in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, ed. Gilman et al. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993), esp. pp. 406–17; the belief in potential pathology is Francis Galton's. That the Jew possessed the evil eye can be found in S. Seligmann, *Der Böse Blick und Verwandtes: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Aberglaubens aller Zeiten und Völker*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1910–11), I, 86.

⁵Peter Gay, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans: Masters and Victims in Modernist Culture* (New York, 1978), pp. 20–21; Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, p. 96 (citing Theodor Fritsch, *Handbuch der Judenfrage* [Leipzig, 1935], p. 408); Gay, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans*, p. 20.

⁶See Exod. 28 on the clothing for Aaron as High Priest.

⁷Wilhelm von Kaulbach (1804–74), *Der Zerstörung von Jerusalem*; the figure of the high priest is in the direct center of the painting (Fritz von Ostini, *Wilhelm von Kaulbach* [Bielefeld, 1906], plate between pp. 20 and 21).

The (often unspoken) source of the perceived difference was the circumcised penis, which was thought both to define the Jew and to mark him as different; it became the locus of anxiety. The variety of cultural meanings ascribed to circumcision were many: it was seen as a mark of tribal identity, as both a protection against and a cause of disease (specifically syphilis) and as the source of powerlessness. Circumcision was often linked to castration, a link that Freud discusses in the case of Little Hans, among others: "If—says the child—I can be circumcised and made into a Jew, can I not also be castrated and made into a woman?"¹² Otto Weininger made this fear concrete by stating that the Jewish mind is closely associated with that of the woman, an association visible in the form of the male Jew's body.¹³ Indeed, many commentators insist on "feminine" aspects of the Jewish body, from the characteristic "break" in their voice to the softness or "unsoldierly" nature of their bodies.¹⁴ Carl Jung claimed that male Jews are feminized: "[They] have this peculiarity in common with women; being physically weaker, they have to aim at the chinks in the armor of their adversary."¹⁵

¹²Gilman, "The Construction of the Male Jew," in *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 49–92. The stereotype does in fact most often concern the male, not the female, Jew (pp. 49–51). See also pp. 56–69. Freud cites this fear as the "deepest root" of anti-Semitism; cited on p. 77.

¹³Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter: Ein prinzipielle Untersuchung* (Vienna, 1903).

¹⁴Walter Rathenau, "Höre Israel!" in *Schriften* (2nd edn. Berlin, 1981), pp. 89–93; he uses the term *weibliche Rundlichkeit der Formen* on p. 92. The essay was originally published in *Die Zukunft* on 6 March 1897. Günther cites Rathenau on p. 251 of *Rassenkunde des jüdischen Volkes*, adding the adjective *unsoldatisch*. The linking of (male) Jews to women is a common theme throughout the period. An extensive discussion of this link is provided in *Jews and Gender: Responses to Otto Weininger*, ed. Nancy A. Harrowitz and Barbara Hyams (Philadelphia, 1995). Gilman also discusses this theme in *Freud, Race, and Gender*, chaps. 1 and 2. He discusses the claims that a high number of Jews were homosexuals and the surprisingly common belief that male Jews menstruated (pp. 77–98 and 12–48). On the quality of the Jewish voice as related to being homosexual, see also Gilman, "Strauss and the Pervert," in *Reading Opera*, ed. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton, 1988), pp. 306–27.

¹⁵Carl G. Jung, *Collected Works*, ed. Herbert Read et al., trans. R. F. C. Hull, 20 vols. (London, 1957–79), X, 165; Jung is of course reacting specifically to Freud and psychoanalysis. Jung came to believe that the latter was a tainted project because of its origin in a "feminized psyche."

In unserer Oper

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Mahler and
Anti-Semitism



werden die Freya und der Wotan bald so aussehen!

Plate 4: *In unser Oper*, 1901 (orig. Kikeriki)
(Hans Christoph Worbs, *Das Dampfkonzert*
[Wilhelmshaven, 1982], p. 259).

Such physical stereotypes constituted an image that would have been immediately recognizable, even when the word *Jew* was not mentioned. In Thomas Mann's 1905 story "The Blood of the Walsungs," for instance, his twins exhibit these characteristics, yet they are never explicitly identified as Jews: "They were very like each other, with the same slightly drooping nose, the same full lips lying softly together, the same prominent cheek-bones and black, bright eyes."¹⁶ In a like manner, a Viennese cartoon from 1901 criticized Mahler's directorship of the Hofoper (plate 4). Here Freya and Wotan have dark curly hair, prominent noses, large lips (Wotan has *payoss* and a hat).

¹⁶"Sie waren einander sehr ähnlich. Sie hatten dieselbe ein wenig niedergedrückte Nase, dieselben voll und weich aufeinander ruhenden Lippen, hervortretenden Wangenknochen, schwarzen und blanken Augen" (Thomas Mann, "Walsungenblut," *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, vol. I [Frankfurt am Main, 1987], p. 423 [*Death in Venice and Other Stories*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York, 1989), p. 290]).

The caption reads: "In our opera Freya and Wotan will soon look like *this!*"

In addition, the image or caricature is one that functioned as the marker of ultimate difference—and often ultimate evil. But that marker never had a single meaning; often its use seems paradoxical to us today. For example, Margaret Notley has pointed out that Brahms or the genre of chamber music could be culturally coded as "Jewish" in criticisms of their perceived "rational" or "unfeeling" qualities.¹⁷ Yet the cartoon "Darwinistische Entwicklungslehre" from about the same time showed a Jewish caricature (complete with skullcap, dark curly hair, prominent nose, and shofar) evolving into Richard Wagner (plate 5)—often identified as the *opposite* of Brahms. Here although the artist has depicted Wagner as a Jew—ironic in the face of Wagner's vehement and public anti-Semitism—the whole enterprise is consistent with the function of the image of the Jew. This image was not the unique property of hostile anti-Semitic factions of Viennese politics or society. As George Mosse has argued, the ubiquity of the image helps to explain the subsequent "surrender to National Socialism's anti-Semitism by even the more respectable elements of the population." He emphasized that the stereotypes of Aryan versus Jew "did not seem at all absurd to many respectable members of the community who embraced them. Such racial attitudes, ridiculous to most Western intellectuals, had in fact been prepared by popular novelists for more than a century before National Socialism came to power."¹⁸

The stereotyped Jewish image involved more than physical attributes: the Jew's essence, defined by difference, made itself visible in a variety of ways. One of them was language. The belief that Yiddish was an inferior or unpure form of German lay behind Wagner's references to language in his 1850 essay "Das Judentum in der Musik." According to Wagner, "The Jew talks the modern European languages merely

¹⁷Margaret Notley, "Brahms as Liberal: Genre, Style, and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna," this journal 17 (1993), 107–23.

¹⁸George Mosse, *Germans and Jews: The Right, The Left, and the Search for a "Third Force" in Pre-Nazi Germany* (New York, 1970), pp. 34, 34–35.

Darwinistische Entwicklungslehre.

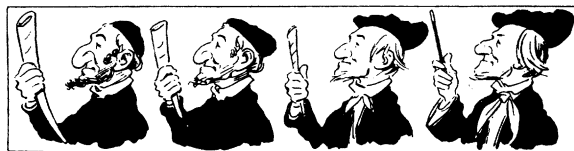


Abb. 432. Wie aus Roof Wägeles, Schofarbläser in Leipzig, allmählich — Richard Wagner wurde. Von Ed. Zajackowski aus dem „Floh“.

Plate 5: "Darwinistische Entwicklungslehre," n.d. (Karl Storck, *Musik und Musiker in Karikatur und Satire: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Musik* [Oldenburg im Grossherzogtum (1911?)], plate 432).

as learnt and not as mother tongues" and this "must necessarily debar him from all capability of therein expressing himself idiomatically, independently, and conformably to his nature."¹⁹ So too Panizza's Stern speaks a "mixture of Palatinate Semitic babble, French nasal noises, and some high German vocal sounds." As Panizza's Stern "meowed, rattled, bleated and also liked to produce sneezing sounds,"²⁰ Wagner claimed that the Jew's speech was "a creaking, squeaking, buzzing snuffle."²¹ For Wagner, the problem was aesthetic: "When we hear this Jewish talk, our attention dwells involuntarily on its repulsive *how*, rather than on any meaning of its *what*." Hitler would later claim that the Jews' language is meant to conceal, not to express, their thoughts.²²

The Jew's body was also different in the ways that it moved. Günther, author of *Rassenkunde des jüdischen Volkes* (1922), claimed that observers can often recognize Jews merely by observing them walk.²³ To return to Panizza's description of Stern: "Itzig always raised both

¹⁹Wagner, "Judaism in Music," in *Prose Works*, vol. III, trans. and ed. William Ashton Ellis (New York, 1966; orig. publ. in 1894), p. 84.

²⁰Panizza, *The Operated Jew*, p. 50.

²¹"Ein zischender, schrillender, summsender und murksender Lautausdruck" (Richard Wagner, "Judaism," p. 85).

²²Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, 1943), p. 307; Gilman discusses the concept of the Jews' "hidden language" extensively in *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore, 1986).

²³Günther, "Bewegung und Gebärden der Juden," *Rassenkunde des jüdischen Volkes*, pp. 248–49.

thighs almost to his midriff so that he bore some resemblance to a stork," and it often "appeared as though he were veering down the sidewalk . . . in a diagonal direction."²⁴ These differences were marked on the body: Panizza described Stern as having "bow legs," and it was also widely believed during the nineteenth century that Jews were predisposed to flat feet. Although the condition of flat or crooked feet may be related to the devil's "cloven hoof," the specious condition served to bar Jews from the armed forces—and thus from being considered true citizens. Just as criminals and epileptics were said to have a gait that marked them as degenerate, so were the Jews said to have a "Jewish" gait.²⁵

These two markers of difference—language and movement—were often linked. Among others, Günther stated that the "gestures of the Jews [when they speak] are always conspicuously different than those of occidental peoples," and he noted that "the arm movements of many Jews are . . . recognizable," that "the upper arm clings more to the body, while the lower arm with its movements accompanies the speech in a lively way." Günther claimed that one could observe "pure" Jewish movement only in special environments, such as the stage:

The movements of Jewish actors appear entirely "pure" only in pieces of Jewish authors in a Jewish environment. I have almost never seen on the German stage so consistent and unified, performances effectively so "true to type," as in the Jewish Theater in Vienna, where pieces of Jewish authors are mostly performed in Yiddish, and where, at the same time, the very gestures of the performers are particularly persuasive in that they allow Jewish peculiarity to be seen down to the very details.²⁶

²⁴Panizza, *The Operated Jew*, pp. 49, 48.

²⁵Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, esp. chap. 2, "The Jewish Foot," pp. 38–59 and 48–49.

²⁶"Den abendländischen Völkern sind von jeher die Bewegungen und Gebärden der Juden als andersartig aufgefallen." "Die Armbewegungen vieler Juden sind dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß der Oberarm bis zum Ellbogen mehr am Leibe haftet, während der Unterarm mit seinen Bewegungen das Sprechen lebhaft begleitet." "Ganz 'rein' erscheinen aber die Bewegungen jüdischer Darsteller wohl doch nur in Stücken jüdischer Verfasser aus jüdischer Umwelt. Ich habe auf deutschen Bühnen fast nie so geschlossenen und einheitlichen, so 'stilecht' wirkende Aufführungen

He also referred the reader to another source, *Die Juden in der Karikatur* of Eduard Fuchs, which shows the "attesting pictorial evidence."²⁷ Many of Fuchs's caricatures exhibit the position described by Günther: turning the palms either outward or upward while holding the arms close to the body was considered "Jewish" (plate 6). Günther claimed further that even Jews who show "almost no 'Jewish' movements" may be recognized by the deliberate or forced nature of their movements or by "a certain tense attentiveness of themselves."²⁸ Like a Yiddish accent, Jewish movement could not be hidden; the body would inevitably reveal its difference.

Being Jewish meant being visible; conversion appeared to offer a solution, yet it could not erase bodily signs. In Panizza's story, Stern tries to become a German but fails. Not only does he bleach and straighten his hair, but he also has his bones broken and reset, wears a corset to minimize his "Jewish" movements, takes speech therapy to remove all traces of his Yiddish accent, and even attempts to purchase a German soul. In the end, the experiment is a failure, and Stern lies "crumpled and quivering, a convoluted Asiatic image . . . a counterfeit of human flesh."²⁹ The Jewish response to this story illustrates the extent to which even Jews had internalized the biological immutability of race. In Salomo Friedlaender's rebuttal, "The Operated Goy," written in 1922, the protagonist, the anti-Semitic Count Rehsok, desires to become a Jew in order to win the

gesehen wie im Jüdischen Theater in Wien, wo Stücke jüdischer Verfasser meist in jiddischer Sprache aufgeführt wurden und wo eben die Gebärden der Darsteller, indem sie zugleich jüdische Eigenart, bis in Einzelheiten ausgestaltet, erkennen ließen, von besonderer Überzeugungskraft waren" (Günther, *Rassenkunde des jüdischen Volkes*, pp. 248, 252, and 249–50).

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 248; Eduard Fuchs, *Die Juden in der Karikatur* (Munich, 1921).

²⁸"Bei den meisten Juden, die gar keine 'jüdischen' Bewegungen zeigen, läßt sich bei aufmerksamer Beobachtung eine gewisse Gezwungenheit und Überlegtheit des Auftretens erkennen, eine gewisse angespannte Achtsamkeit auf sich selbst" (Günther, *Rassenkunde des jüdischen Volkes*, p. 250).

²⁹Panizza, *The Operated Jew*, p. 74.

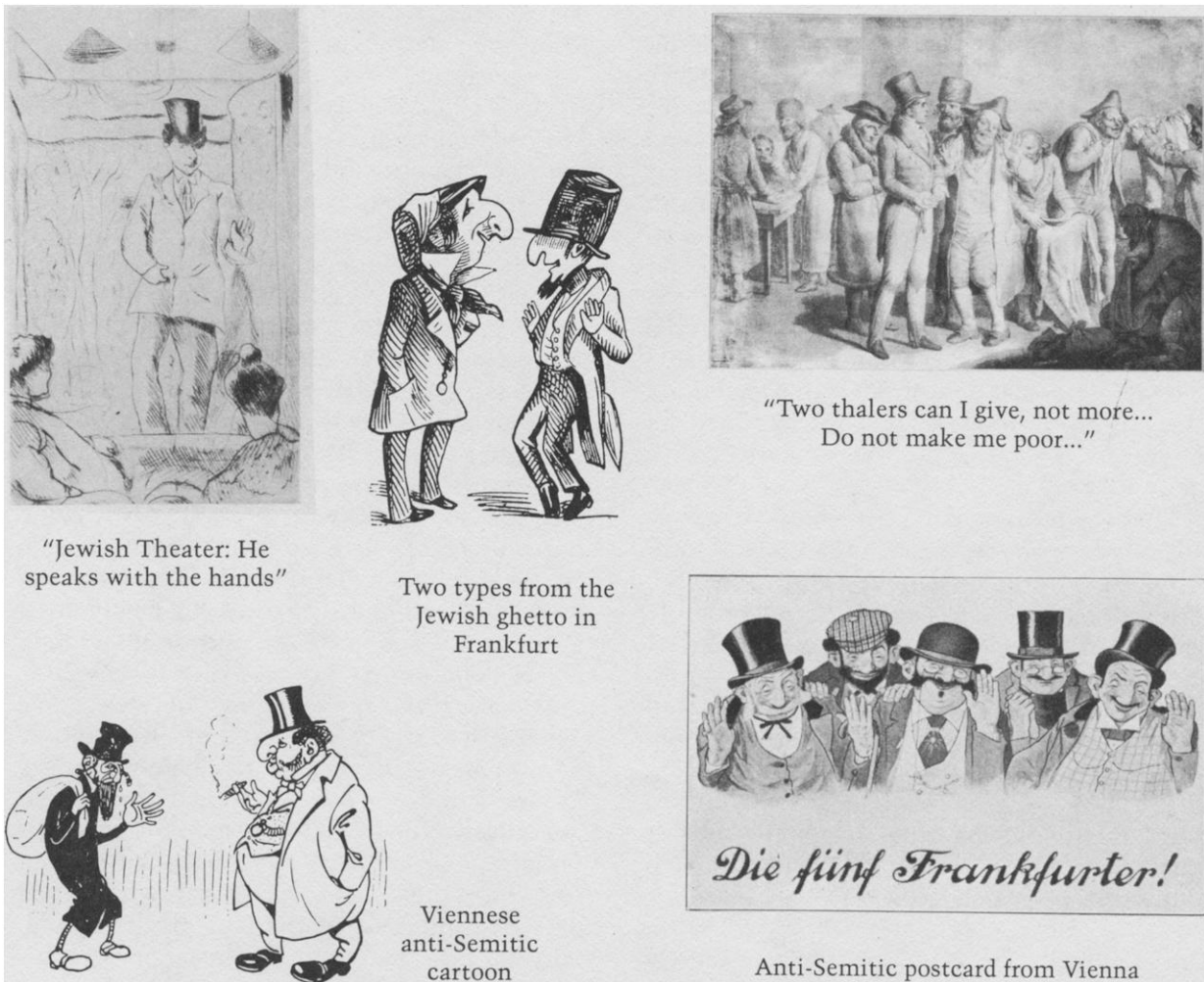


Plate 6: Anti-Semitic cartoons
(Eduard Fuchs, *Die Juden in der Karikatur*
[Munich, 1921], plates 259, 118, 112, 214, and 216.)

love of the beautiful Rebecca.³⁰ Rather than denouncing the racial and biological definition of race, though, Friedlaender's Count simply undergoes the reverse of Stern's operations: his bones are made crooked, his nose is given an artificial hump, his feet are made flat, he learns Yiddish with all its accompanying gestures. In short, his conversion (including circumcision)

is not enough for Rebecca: she demands that he *look* like a Jew. For Friedlaender as for Panizza—or more generally, for both philo-Semites and anti-Semites—racial difference was real, and it was biologically based.

The Jewish body had traditionally been viewed as both a site and cause of disease, but at the end of the nineteenth century medical science solidified a link between race and nervous disorders.³¹ Thus "Jewish" movements became

³⁰Mynona (Salomo Friedlaender), "Der operirte Goy: Ein Seitenstück zu Panizzas operirtem Jud'," trans. from the Yiddish and publ. as "The Operated Goy" in Zipes, *The Operated Jew*, pp. 75–86. *Rehsok* is of course *kosher* backward (*Reschok/Koscher* in the original).

³¹Gilman, "Madness and the Jews," in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), pp. 150–52.

visible signs of the wild, uncontrolled movements of the hysteric. By the last quarter of the century, the view that Jews were predisposed to nervous illness was common. Freud's teacher, Jean-Martin Charcot, insisted in 1888 that "nervous illnesses of all types are innumerable more frequent among Jews than among other groups,"³² and by 1906 Alexander Pilcz cited no fewer than fourteen writers who claimed a Jewish disposition for nervous disorders.³³

Physicians agreed that modern life was responsible for the rise in nervous diseases, and this link between disease and modernism was not limited to the European sphere. In 1881 the American doctor George M. Beard coined the term *neurasthenia*, or "nerve weakness," to cover the maladies supposedly caused by the modern acceleration of life. Neurasthenia was thought to be the first indication of a progressive degeneration of the nerves that could eventually lead to "brain-collapse, insanity, or death."³⁴ By this point, it would seem, nervousness had been widely accepted as a sign of modern life: "The modern differ from the ancient civilizations mainly in these five elements—steam power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the mental activity of women," wrote Beard. "When civilization, plus these five factors, invades any nation, it must carry nervousness and disease along with it."³⁵ In its American context, a diagnosis of neurasthenia, a disease limited to those who worked with their minds, became an indicator of status or superiority. Beard himself termed it "this distinguished malady" and claimed not only that it was a particularly American disease but also that it was a sign that America was indeed the superior civilization.³⁶ In its

European—and specifically Viennese—context, however, neurasthenia was more typically taken as a sign of degeneracy and inferiority. Not surprisingly, those most at risk were the Jews, whose reputed predilection for money, high-tension careers, and concentration in urban (decadent) areas supposedly led to higher numbers of mental illnesses.³⁷

The link between Jews and the larger concept of the modern was particularly intense in the German-speaking lands, at least among the antimodernists. According to the historian Jeffrey Herf, it was the relatively late onset of complete modernization in Germany and Austria that "lay behind the intensity of its antimodernist revolt. Compared with England and France, industrialization was late, quick, and thorough." The unease regarding modernity was articulated by political conservatives, who often manipulated artificial dichotomies such as *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, binaries in which *Kultur* was to be valorized and *Zivilisation* demonized. Here *Zivilisation* was associated with capitalism and, with it, abstraction, the intellect, chaos, exchange value, circulation, and the merchant. Contrasted with this was *Kultur*, with its emphasis on the concrete: feelings and emotions, form and order, use

³²Jean-Martin Charcot, lesson for 23 October 1888 (cited in Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender*, p. 94).

³³Alexander Pilcz, *Beitrag zur Vergleichenden Rassen-Psychiatrie* (Leipzig, 1906), pp. 28–29.

³⁴Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), p. 2.

³⁵George M. Beard, M. D., *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York, 1881), p. 96 (quoted in Lutz, *American Nervousness*, p. 4).

³⁶Lutz, *American Nervousness*, p. 6; and Beard, *American Nervousness*, pp. vii–viii; and Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, esp. pp. 191–216. Lutz points out that those of African descent were thought not to be plagued by this disease—since they were considered unproductive and lazy

as a race, prone to dreaming rather than working, and thus were not susceptible to a disease affecting only those who had an entrepreneurial spirit. See his "The Blues and the Double Consciousness of Henry James and W. E. B. Du Bois," in *American Nervousness*, pp. 244–75. His reading of "Coon Songs" is particularly interesting in this context. Indeed, Jackson Lears has argued that the manipulation of neurasthenia was a specific attempt on the part of the elite (in America) to ascertain their superiority, and he sees it as a function of the basic antimodernist stances of these individuals who occupy positions in the elite. See Lears's chap. in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History 1880–1980*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (New York, 1983), pp. 3–38.

³⁷Gilman, "The Madness of the Jews," in *Difference and Pathology*, pp. 150–62, and *Freud, Race, and Gender*, pp. 93–168. See also Jan Goldstein, "The Wandering Jew and the Problem of Psychiatric Anti-Semitism in Fin-de-Siècle France," *Journal of Contemporary History* 20 (1985), 521–52. The Jew's concentration in urban areas was also cited as the cause of their "flat feet": it was thought that living in the cities exacerbated the "misuse of the foot" (Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, pp. 48–49).

value, production, and the entrepreneur. Thus Herf states:

Reactionary modernism, especially the nazified versions of the tradition, identified the Jews with capitalism in a more all-encompassing sense than that implied by the distinction between production and circulation. It viewed the Jews as the symbol of the Enlightenment as a whole, of the rationalization of society, and of capitalism's effort to reduce life to economic categories. Modern anti-Semitism translated this cultural protest against capitalism into racial-biological categories.³⁸

Although the concentration of Jews in the cities was often cited as the reason for their predisposition to diseases, the Jewish religion itself was also attacked as a "modern"—and thus potentially diseased—religion. In *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (1911), Werner Sombart claimed that "the Jewish spirit" (*Geist*) was responsible for the elevation of the economy over all else. According to Sombart, Judaism was intellectual rather than spiritual because "it came into being on a deliberate plan, by clever deductions, and diplomatic policy" rather than by faith alone: in other words, the Jews' relationship to God resembled a business contract, not a mysterious relationship. Sombart systematically attempted to show "how individual customs, conceptions, opinions and regulations of the Jewish religion influenced the economic conduct of Jews," to try and show that the Jews were responsible to a large degree for the perpetuation of capitalism.³⁹

The Jews thus came to serve as prominent symbols of the modern world: they were stereotyped as rational, quantitative, abstract, without mystery, and their unique position as rootless outsiders in Western societies only helped to further this identification.⁴⁰ The as-

sociation between Jews and the modern, however, could work in both directions, often paradoxically. Richard Strauss, for example, was occasionally labeled a Jew for his involvement with "modern" music, and Gilman has suggested that his turn away from modernism after *Elektra* and *Salome* may have been to escape that label.⁴¹ The extent to which Jews were associated in Vienna with modernization and disease can be seen from the works of the psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing. In his *Text-Book of Insanity* (1879)—which was immediately translated into several languages—Krafft-Ebing cited eight different general conditions that can contribute to mental illness: civilization; nationality, climate, and seasons; sex; creeds; civil condition (married versus single); age; occupation and circumstances of life; and imprisonment. The increase in mental illness

lag behind advanced civilization and yet to be too far ahead of it: they are both clever and stupid, similar and dissimilar. They are declared guilty of something which they, as the first burghers, were the first to overcome: the lure of base instincts, reversion to animality and to the ground, the service of images. Because they invented the concepts of kosher meat, they are persecuted as swine" (Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [New York, 1991; orig. English edn. 1972], p. 186). Another aspect of this dichotomy is the distinction between the Western, assimilated Jew and the Eastern "oriental" Jew, which was prevalent at the turn of the century. See, for example, Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, pp. 270–86; and Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison, Wisc., 1982). This was an image that was manipulated both by Jews and Gentiles and in which the Eastern/Western hierarchy was not fixed.

⁴¹See Gilman, "Strauss and the Pervert," pp. 306–27. The Viennese writer Arthur Schnitzler wrote that "if you didn't know which, Mahler or Richard Strauss, was the Jew, you would certainly think that the erotic, exuberant sensuality, the unbridled oriental imagination, the taste for extraneous effect and . . . the skill [Strauss] applies to the economic exploitation of his talent were properly Semitic characteristics. In contrast, one takes Mahler, a man of mystic ruminations . . . the chaste *Wunderhorn* singer . . . the folk-based composer . . . idealistic . . . the perfect type of German artist" (cited in Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Chronique d'une Vie, III: Le Génie Foudroyé (1907–1911)* [Paris, 1984], p. 366 [trans. in Norman Lebrecht, *Mahler Remembered* (New York, 1988), p. xxii]). Adorno makes a similar but more veiled claim in his essay on Strauss, where he links Strauss's "nervousness" to Freud's idea of the "neurotic" and also to the modern style of music. See Adorno, "Richard Strauss," trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber, *Perspectives of New Music* 4 (1965), 14–32, and (1966), 113–29, esp. 114–15.

³⁸Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 5, 226–27, 231. "Reactionary modernism" for Herf is the paradox presented by the Nazis, who were simultaneously antimodernists and worshippers of technology.

³⁹Werner Sombart, *The Jews and Modern Capitalism* (*Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* [Leipzig 1911]), trans. M. Epstein (New York, 1969), pp. 206 and 214ff.

⁴⁰Oddly, the Jews were seen as being simultaneously progressive and backward. "And so [the Jews] are thought to

in modern times is due to "increasing civilization . . . [that] creates refined and complicated conditions of life, and thus leads to greater struggle for existence."⁴²

But not all were equally at risk. In a section on "creeds," Krafft-Ebing claimed that "statistics have been collected with great care to show the percentage of insanity in the various religious sects, and it has been shown that among the Jews and certain sects the percentage is decidedly higher." The cause was an "insufficient crossing of the race and increased inbreeding."⁴³ It was not only Gentiles that saw the Jew as neurasthenic. In 1902 the Jewish physician Martin Engländer produced a book on the predisposition of Jews for certain illnesses, and here he cited Krafft-Ebing's extensively;⁴⁴ from a slightly different point of view, Freud's early work can be seen as an argument against the idea that hysteria was a racial disease.⁴⁵ Jewish physicians, however, tended to blame social conditions—the "2000-year Diaspora" and the struggle for existence—in an attempt to distance themselves from the charge of inbreeding.⁴⁶

Thus, at the turn of the century, the Jews were seen—even among themselves—to be more likely to suffer from mental illnesses. Whether it was believed to originate in the striving toward emancipation or to reflect the drive for power and money, the conclusions were the same: Jewish illness was caused by modernity. Within such a context, no charge of nervousness should be viewed as neutral. Just as certain descriptions of the body or language

must be regarded as coded references to race, so too must certain references to nervousness or modernity.

II

I am proposing neither that Vienna was remarkable in its anti-Semitism, nor that all Vienna was a nest of racial hatred, nor that all varieties of anti-Semitism were conceptually or morally equivalent. The general image I have outlined, however, was ubiquitous; it was a common thread that ran through all invocations of "the Jew." The Jew was believed to be different, visibly so, and those differences centered on his body. It is the idea of *difference* that I want to emphasize here, for the insistence on Jewish difference is precisely what seems to have affected contemporary reactions to Mahler's conducting style. Almost all accounts presented Mahler as a vibrant presence on the podium. Given the omnipresence of the Jewish stereotype, however, it is precisely the insistence on ungainly or unusual gesture that should call into question the "reality" that these descriptions represent.

Mahler himself, of course, had converted to Catholicism and had been baptized on 23 February 1897—but he had no illusions about what his "official" conversion meant in Vienna. In a discussion regarding the appointment of young conductors at the Hofoper, Mahler said (in regard to Leo Blech): "It won't work, unfortunately, even if he has been baptized as you say. For the anti-Semites, I still count as a Jew despite my baptism, and more than one Jew is more than the Vienna Court Opera can bear." Similarly in regard to the possible appointment of Bruno Walter: "I can't engage him because he is a Jew. Admittedly by race only, as he has long since been baptized a Protestant. But unfortunately, it is the race that matters."⁴⁷

How race mattered can be seen from the many reports of Mahler's awkward conducting. For example, William Ritter, a Swiss writer who corresponded with Mahler for several years before finally meeting him in 1906, described a

⁴²Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Text-Book of Insanity, Based on Clinical Observations: For Practitioners and Students of Medicine*, trans. Charles Gilbert Chaddock, M. D. (Philadelphia, 1905; orig. German edn. 1879), p. 139 (quote). Krafft-Ebing published a more comprehensive study of nervousness, several years later, entitled *Nervosität und Neurasthenische Zustände* (Vienna, 1899).

⁴³Krafft-Ebing, *Text-Book*, p. 143.

⁴⁴Martin Engländer, *Die auffallend häufigen Krankheitserscheinungen der jüdische Rasse* (Vienna, 1902).

⁴⁵Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender and The Case of Sigmund Freud*. Gilman's thesis is that in attempting to make hysteria a universal disease (rather than one centered on race) Freud creates a gendered one, in which women are seen as most at risk.

⁴⁶Engländer, *Die auffallend häufigen Krankheitserscheinungen*, p. 17. For a discussion of inbreeding and how Jewish physicians attempted to mitigate this charge, see Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, pp. 286–97.

⁴⁷Ludwig Karpath, *Begegnung mit dem Genius* (Vienna, 1934) (trans. in Lebrecht, *Mahler Remembered*, pp. 107, 105–06).

1908 rehearsal of the Seventh Symphony in Prague. During the finale, according to Ritter, Mahler "threw himself about like a madman, seated, standing, dancing, leaping like a jack-in-the-box, in all directions at once, conducting to the right, to the left, in front, behind, completely oblivious of me and giving me several hefty kicks in the kidneys." Ritter contrasted Mahler's overwrought gestures with Alma's "Viennese gracefulness."⁴⁸ Similarly, the Viennese writer, Hermann Bahr, claimed in 1914 that "all [Mahler's] movements were peculiar, sudden, and abrupt, as the impulse seized him."⁴⁹ And in 1926 Wilhelm Kienzl, the Austrian composer, wrote that "as a conductor, [Mahler] had something demonic about him. Just as E. T. A. Hoffmann might have imagined his Kapellmeister Kreisler, with all his quirks."⁵⁰

Such accounts not only single out Mahler's gestures as being different, but also often ascribe sinister or hidden meaning to them. One of the most vehement attacks on Mahler was an article published on the eve of his directorship of the Vienna Philharmonic in the *Deutsche Zeitung* and entitled "The Jewish Control of the Vienna Opera." Although the anonymous author (the article was apparently written by several disgruntled members of the orchestra) claimed that Mahler was improving many things, the article nonetheless hardly presented a flattering picture:

It cannot be denied that the present Director of the Court Opera has done some good as a new broom. We must give him due credit for securing the performance of Wagner's operas without cuts and doing his best to do these operas justice in performance.

⁴⁸William Ritter, "Souvenirs sur Gustav Mahler," *Revue musicale Suisse* 101/1 (1961), 29–39 (trans. in Lebrecht, *Mahler Remembered*, pp. 199, 198).

⁴⁹Hermann Bahr takes this description from an English novel of 1842 by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Zanoni*. The character is Gaetano Pisani, and Bahr quotes in the original English (*Essays* [Vienna, 1962], pp. 275–78; cited in Lebrecht, *Mahler Remembered*, p. 100).

⁵⁰"Als Dirigent hatte er etwas Dämonisches; so mag sich E. Th. A. Hoffmann seinen Kapellmeister Kreisler mit allen seinen Schrullen vorgestellt haben" (Wilhelm Kienzl, *Meine Lebenswanderung, Erlebtes und Erlauschtes* [Stuttgart, 1926], pp. 150–51; trans. in Lebrecht *Mahler Remembered*, p. 61). Many commentators compare Mahler to Hoffmann's Kreisler, including Bruno Walter, Max Steinitzer, and Hermann Bahr.

... Herr Mahler's manner of conducting is not above criticism. . . . It often happens that Herr Mahler's left hand does not know what the right is doing. . . .

Mahler's left hand often jerks convulsively, marking the Bohemian magic circle, digging for treasure, fluttering, snatching, strangling, thrashing the waves, throttling babes-in-arms, kneading, performing sleights of hand—in short it is often lost in a *delirium tremens*, but it does not conduct.⁵¹

Here Mahler is described as out of control, a conductor whose "left hand does not know what the right is doing." Many of the actions that are ascribed to his left hand—the "sinister" hand—are implicitly anti-Semitic: "digging for treasure" and "snatching." "Throttling babes-in-arms" may well allude to the Jews reputed killing of Christian infants for ritual purposes.⁵² "Fluttering" may be an attempt to feminize Mahler, to emphasize the unmasculine nature of his body and movements. The "sleights of hand" imply that Mahler's intentions had a hidden meaning—a chill foreshadowing, perhaps, of Hitler's claims that the Jews attempt to deceive.

Max Graf, a Viennese music critic, wrote several descriptions of Mahler on the podium. One of the most striking, a late recollection written in 1945 during Graf's sojourn in America, described Mahler as "demonic."

From the personality of Gustav Mahler, who was a demonic man, streams of nervous energy emanated, and pervaded stage, orchestra and audience at the

⁵¹"Die Linke Mahlers in konvulsivischen Zuckungen markiert oft den böhmischen Zirkel, sie scharrt nach Schätzen, sie tremoliert, sie hascht, sie sucht, sie erwürgt, sie kämpft mit dem Wogen, sie erdrosselt Säuglinge, sie walkt, sie schlägt die Volte—kurz, sie befindet sich oft im Delirium tremens, aber sie dirigiert nicht" (E.Th., "Die Judenherrschaft in der Wiener Hofoper," *Deutsche Zeitung*, 4 November 1898 [cited and trans. in Kurt and Herta Blaukopf, *Mahler: His Life, Work and World*, pp. 136–37]). According to de La Grange, "Two days before the first concert some of the musicians showed their hostility in the particularly unpleasant form of an anonymous article" (*Mahler*, vol. I [New York, 1973], p. 486).

⁵²R. Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven, 1988), and *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Madison, Wisc., 1991). Although of medieval origin, the belief that Jews used the blood of Christian infants was still widely held even into the twentieth century—there was a notorious blood libel trial in Kiev as late as 1912, for example.

Vienna Opera. Long before Mahler appeared in the orchestra pit, the audience became excited. When the house grew dark, the small man with the sharply chiseled features, pale and ascetic-looking, literally rushed to the conductor's desk. His conducting was striking enough in his first years of activity in Vienna. He would let his baton shoot forward suddenly, like the tongue of a poisonous serpent. With his right hand, he seemed to pull the music out of the orchestra as out of the bottom of a chest of drawers. He would let his stinging glance loose upon a musician who was seated far away from him, and the man would quail. Giving a cue, he would look in one direction, at the same time pointing his baton in another. He would stare at the stage and make imploring gestures at the singers. He would leap from his conductor's chair as if he had been stung. Mahler was always in full movement like a blazing flame. Later he became calmer. Evidently he controlled himself, which only augmented his inner tension. . . .

All these singers [Kurz, Slezak, Schmedes, Gutheil-Schoder] blindly followed the dictates of the genial musician who had formed and trained them. Mahler clung to this ensemble with great love. I can remember how disturbed he was, when he had Gutheil-Schoder sing the Eva in *Meistersinger*, and read the unfavourable criticisms about her. He sat sunken down behind the mountain of newspapers, like a wicked dwarf, and nervously chewed his fingernails—something he was accustomed to do in moments of stress.⁵³

Graf's description invokes several aspects of the Jewish caricature—the "glance" or "stare," the smallness of stature, and the unappealing gestures. When Graf asserts that as the gestures grew superficially calmer they actually "augmented Mahler's inner tension," one might recall Günther's belief that, in attempting to mask their movements, the Jews revealed themselves as Jews. The image of Mahler as a "wicked dwarf" invites the comparison to Wagner's Mime—a character who not only desired the love of Siegfried (as Mahler does of his ensemble) but also displayed anti-Semitic traits. Mahler himself claimed that Wagner's Mime was "intended to ridicule the Jews" and said further, "I know of only one Mime and that is

myself . . . you wouldn't believe what there is in that part, nor what I could make of it."⁵⁴

Another eyewitness account of Mahler's style is provided by Willibald Kähler, the opera conductor at Mannheim who assisted during the preparation of Mahler's Third Symphony at Heidelberg and Mannheim in February 1904. Having rehearsed the chorus and orchestra prior to Mahler's arrival and then having observed the rehearsals under Mahler, Kähler insisted not only that Mahler's movements were odd, but also that he was trying to overcome them:

At the first rehearsal the orchestra naturally had to get used to Mahler's way of conducting. In the first half-hour the general nervousness reached such a pitch that no one was capable of blowing an untroubled note or of drawing the bow in a relaxed manner. Soon, however, he had the orchestra under control: the sharp instinct of good orchestral players told them that here was someone for whom the matter in hand was all that counted. Mahler rehearsed with incredible precision, fascinating each player with his glance. He did not rest until each phrase corresponded entirely with his intentions. He repeatedly called to the wind players: "In the long-held notes breathe where you like, but never at any price on a downbeat!" . . .

Whereas Mahler's stick technique in the rehearsals had been somewhat violent and often excessively vivacious, in the performance the great moderation of his gestures was surprising. It struck me that while conducting he almost continually gripped the left lapel of his dress-coat with his left hand. When asked the reason for this, he said that this was his means of compelling himself to relax as much as possible.⁵⁵

Like Graf, Kähler called attention to both Mahler's glance and his attempt to disguise his own tendency for excessiveness. Mahler strove to "compel himself" to relax and could only do so by siphoning off that violent energy into his lapel. In short, despite Mahler's attempts to control his movements, he nonetheless reveals

⁵³Max Graf, *Legend of a Musical City* (New York, 1945), pp. 204–06.

⁵⁴Paul Lawrence Rose, *Wagner: Race and Revolution* (New Haven, 1992), p. 71; Rose details the ways in which Mime can be read as an anti-Semitic caricature.

⁵⁵Willibald Kähler, *150 Jahre musikalische Akademie des Nationaltheater-Orchesters Mannheim 1779–1929* (Mannheim, 1929), pp. 64–65 (trans. in Lebrecht, *Mahler Remembered*, pp. 165–66).

his difference. Again this essential difference gets in the way of the music: the implication is that, despite Mahler's obvious talent, his nervousness hindered him from being an effective conductor. Mahler ultimately could not control the orchestra himself—the players were forced to rely on their "instinct."

Each of these descriptions placed Mahler in a category by himself, and his gestures were the visible aspects of his difference. The emphasis is particularly striking when Mahler is compared to other conductors. In 1900 Graf contrasted Mahler's "intense and impassioned" style with Hans Richter's "strong and manly" conducting, claiming that Richter had "more roast beef and less nerves in his body." Although Graf claimed that he saw "these two men not as opposites but as counterweights, who complement one another in an extraordinary and perfect manner," he nonetheless characterizes them in terms of masculine (Richter) and feminine (Mahler)—readily mappable onto the concepts of "German" and "Jew."⁵⁶ Similarly, the contralto Ernestine Schumann-Heink claimed that Richter was "always quiet, easy, without any fuss or strain," whereas Mahler was "thin and nervous and sensitive."⁵⁷ And the anonymous article of 1898 from the *Deutsche Zeitung* also contrasted Mahler's energetic and animated style with that of Richter, his rival. Where Mahler was uncontrollable, Richter was a model of control: "How much better is the style of conducting of our own

Hans Richter, who is certainly no less inspired by the Wagnerian Muse than Mahler. The majestic calm, every movement to the point, not a single insignificant or unnecessary gesture. It is Richter's restraint that reveals the master."⁵⁸

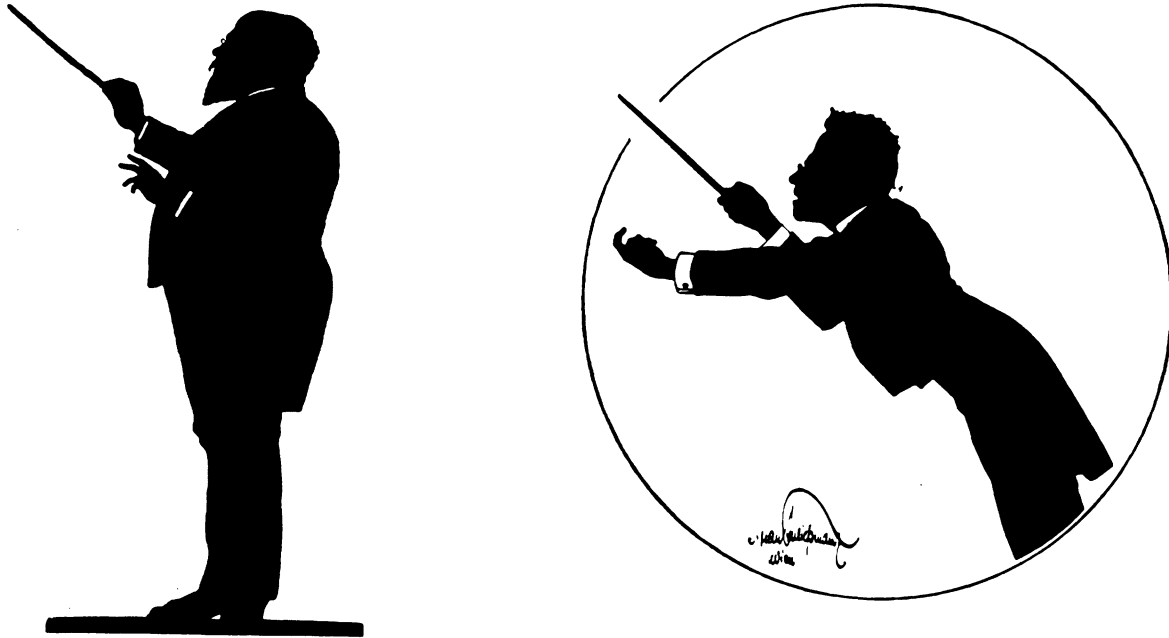
Schliessmann's silhouettes of Richter and Mahler make these descriptions visible (plates 7 and 8). Richter is presented with his back straight, his arms close to his body, his head perfectly in line with his back. His gesture is delicate and subtle; he allows no unnecessary movements to mar the presentation or to focus attention away from where it should be—on the music. On the other hand, Mahler leans forward, his arms are outstretched in a large gesture, and his head is thrown back. Mahler appears to be coaxing the music from the orchestra: note especially the finger, crooked menacingly ("digging for treasure"?), and the right fist, clutched tightly around the baton (Graf's "poisonous serpent"?). Even within the usually static genre of the silhouette, Mahler is presented as a kinetic force. Schliessmann made a number of silhouettes of conductors who either worked at the Hofoper or conducted the Vienna Philharmonic (plate 3). Compared to these images, Schliessmann's cut of Mahler seems anomalous, as all the other conductors are presented in the Richter manner—that is, in almost identical, static poses.

A similar contrast in conducting styles can be seen in Hans Böhler's matching caricatures of Mahler and Strauss (plates 9 and 10). Strauss is a "German" conductor: with his left hand at his side and making a small gesture with his right hand, he appears calm and unruffled. Mahler is again leaning forward, and his hand is clenched in a threatening fist as he grimaces at the orchestra. His weight has been shifted to one foot, and even his coattails are in motion. Notice also Mahler's equally nervous music stand, which appears less solid and has different "feet" than Strauss's: like Mahler, it is pitched forward, and the music is scattered about. Roman Rolland reported in 1908 that Mahler was "extraordinarily highly strung, and caricature silhouettes have popularized his re-

⁵⁶Max Graf, *Wagner-Probleme und andere Studien* (Vienna, 1900), pp. 124–26 (cited in Blaukopf, *Mahler: His Life, Work and World*, pp. 132–33). Another interesting aspect to Graf's comparison is in terms of repertoire. Richter is seen as the great Beethoven conductor, whereas Mahler can conduct Mozart's operas and *Tristan*. Mahler is capable of "intense and impassioned exaltation" in the case of the Wagner opera, and "delicate and witty serenity" with the Mozart. Richter, however, is not capable of the "innermost depths of passion and excitement" that *Tristan* demands, but he can conduct those works which demand "spiritual power and energy." The dichotomy again seems gendered, and thus potentially racial. In his later work *Legend of a Musical City*, Graf states that Mahler was "a modern musician with the temperament of his period" and claims that Mahler was able to conduct *Tristan* "with the same modern temperament, making vibrant, intense, hysterical climaxes of the period of Charcot and Freud" (pp. 206–07).

⁵⁷Mary Lawton, *Schumann-Heink: The Last of the Titans* (New York, 1928), pp. 358–60.

⁵⁸E. Th., "Die Judenherrschaft in der Wiener Hofoper," in Blaukopf, *Mahler: His Life, Work and World*, p. 137.



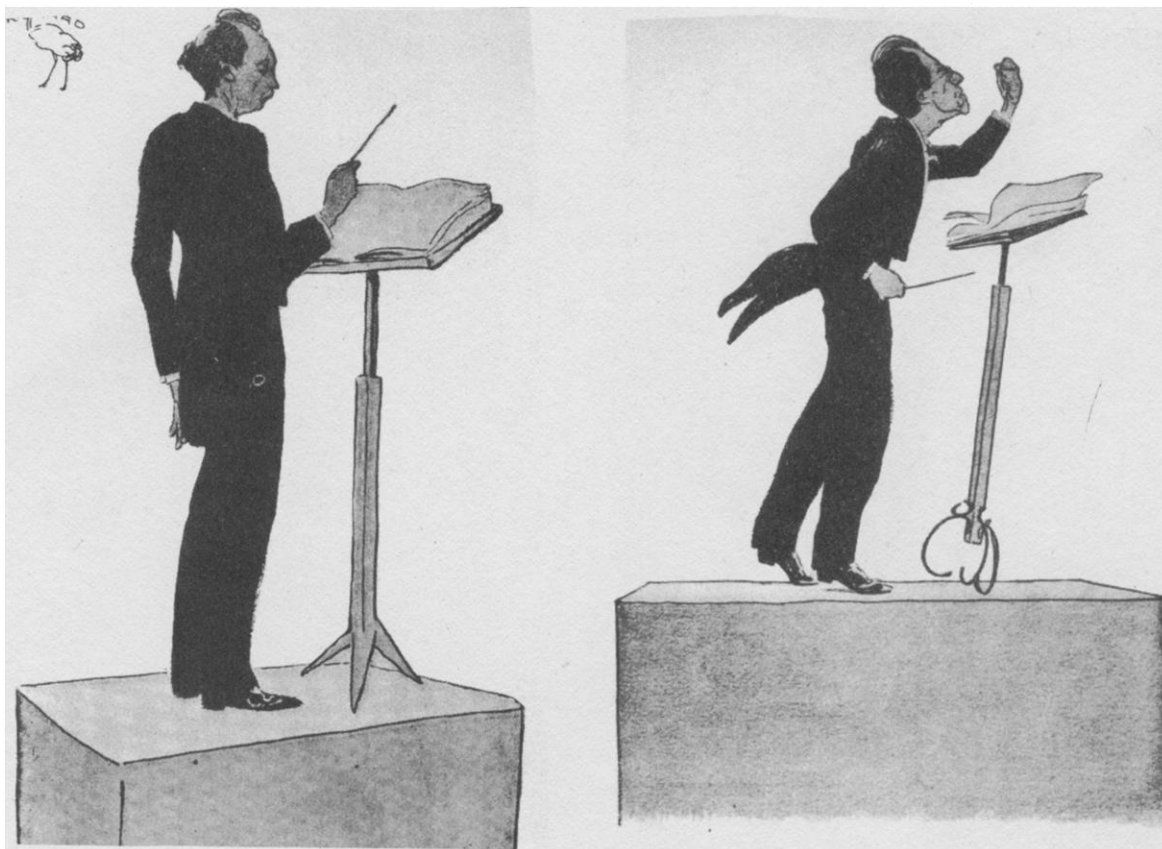
Plates 7 and 8: Hans Schliessmann, silhouette portraits of Hans Richter and Mahler (Blaukopf, 1976, plates 151 and 152).

semblance to an epileptic cat on the conductor's podium."⁵⁹ Given the cultural context surrounding the charge of nervousness, particularly in Vienna, it is difficult to ignore the potential that these famous caricatures have in suggesting an anti-Semitic content. To return to our starting point (plate 1), Schliessmann's popular drawings show seventeen images that, taken together, depict the constant motion of Mahler's conducting. Mahler's body is contorted, and his facial expressions convey extreme tension. Many of the poses seem unaesthetic or forced. And the title tells us that this conductor is not only modern but he is "hypermodern," and the implication would seem to be that the nervous people populating the "hypermodern" world are more likely to be Jews.

Similar characteristics can be found in the

silhouettes by Otto Böhlér (plate 11): Mahler's body is again contorted into a variety of different positions, and his hands gesture wildly this way and that. In one of the most striking images—dominating the set from above—Mahler's "gaze" is emphasized as his glasses create the spectral illusion of staring eyes. A similar effect is achieved in Emil Orlik's charcoal drawing of 1902, which also uses Mahler's glasses to make the impression of a stare (plate 12). Moreover, Böhlér's set implies that Mahler's movements cannot be contained or described by conventional methods—Mahler is so excessive that he slips off the page. Otto Böhlér produced other panels of conductors, most notably of Hans Richter and Pietro Mascagni, which provide a foil against which to consider the Mahler panels (plates 13 and 14). In both of the Richter and Mascagni images, Böhlér encourages the viewer to read through the images as one would read a book: in both, the silhouette at the top left shows the conductor mounting the podium, and the last image in the lower right, with flowers and wreathes, shows the concert's end. The narrative arrangement creates a sense of

⁵⁹"Il est d'une nervosité excessive, et des caricatures, en ombres chinoises, ont popularisé en Allemagne sa mimique de chat convulsé, au pupitre de chef d'orchestre" (Romain Rolland, "Musique française et musique allemande," in *Musiciens d'aujourd'hui* [Paris, 1908], p. 185; trans. in Blaukopf, *Mahler: His Life, Work and World*, p. 187).



Plates 9 and 10: Hans Böhler, Strauss and Mahler
(Storck, plates 383 and 70).

order and purpose. Unlike the Mahler images, the other two examples by Böhler present conductors with straight backs and arms, and, in each case, even the most extravagant gestures fit into the narrative design. In the Mahler panels, although the image in the top left shows Mahler mounting the podium, the narrative is not sustained and the illusion created by the images on the outer edges is that we catch Mahler *in medias res*. (Mahler is seated, presumably because Böhler shows him conducting at the Hofoper.) In each of these images, Mahler is shown stretching or contorting his body. Moreover, without the implied narrative sequence, these images seem overwrought, out of place.

Many such caricatures of Mahler exist, but that of Fritz Gareis can serve as a final example that, although slightly more elaborate than a silhouette, conveys the same excessive and awk-

ward movement (plate 15). Nothing is straight here: Mahler's back is bent, both his arms and legs are contorted at odd angles, even his clothes seem to be misshapen. His glasses slip down his nose, he seems to be kicking over the music stand, and sheets of music fly everywhere. The gesture over his head seems purposeless: if anything, it serves to make him look even more ridiculous.

III

These are only a few of the accounts—both pictorial and verbal—that could be brought forward to suggest Mahler's conducting style. These descriptions of Mahler's excessive gestures and movements have almost always been taken as an accurate reflection of reality. But although the literature has assumed that Mahler was an energetic conductor, there are many accounts that suggest something quite differ-

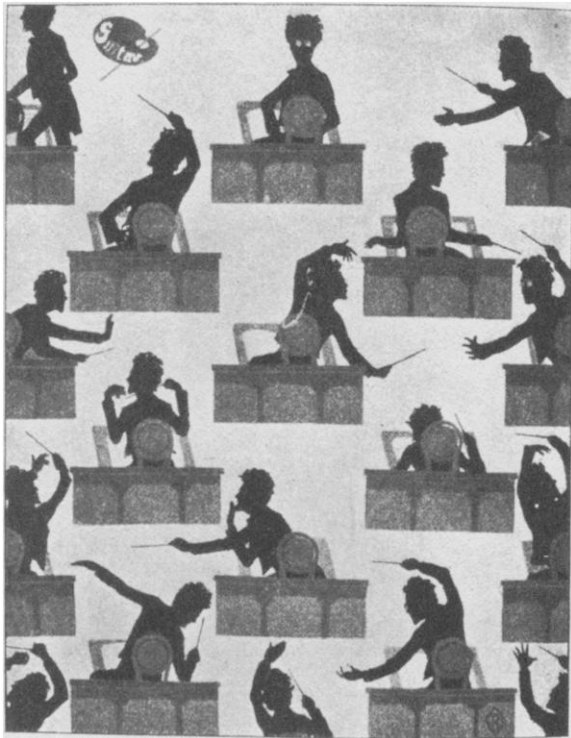


Plate 11: Dr. Otto Böhler, silhouettes of Mahler, n. d. (Storck, plate 381).

ent. Consider, for example, Herman Klein's description of Mahler conducting the *Ring* at Covent Garden in 1892:

The second time I met him he invited me to a rehearsal of *Tristan* at Drury Lane Theater (now thrown open exclusively for the German representations, which were in great demand); and then it was that I began to realize the remarkable magnetic power and technical mastery of Mahler's conducting. He reminded me in many ways of Richter; he used the same strong, decisive beat; there was the same absence of fussiness or superfluous action, the same clear, unmistakable definition of time and rhythm. His men, whom he rehearsed first of all in sections, soon understood him without difficulty. Hence the unity of idea and expression existing between orchestra and singers that distinguished these performances of the *Ring* under Mahler as compared with any previously seen in London, apart from the enhanced excellence accruing from extra rehearsals, new scenery, and improved stage lighting.⁶⁰

⁶⁰Herman Klein, *The Golden Age of Opera* (London, 1933), pp. 163–64.



Plate 12: Emil Orlik, charcoal drawing of Mahler, 1902 (95 *Köpfe Emil Orliks* [Vienna, 1920], unpaginated).

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Klein was the music critic for the *Sunday Times* and a loyal Wagnerian. Within the context of what we have been examining, his account is of particular interest because he compares Mahler to Richter and finds them similar. He refers to the "same strong, decisive beat" and—most provocatively—"the absence of fussiness or superfluous action, the same clear unmistakable definition of time and rhythm." The emphasis here is not on gesture or movement, but rather on Mahler's superior musical interpretations. Most interesting, Klein's description from 1892 predates Mahler's arrival in Vienna in 1897.

Several years later, in 1902, a Russian commentator compared Mahler to Arthur Nikisch:

Mahler's external demeanor even exceeds Nikisch in lack of movement; for all their precision his gestures are extraordinarily restrained, almost imperceptible. The performances are directed with great concentration and application of intellectual power, which is maintained at a constant level of intensity. Only occasionally does it appear that this tension is



Plate 13: Dr. Otto Böhler, silhouette panel of Richter (Christopher Fifield, *True Artist and True Friend: A Biography of Hans Richter* [New York, 1993], p. 261).

relaxed; this is connected with the conductor's penchant for slow *tempi*. One cannot help remarking, moreover, that almost every *decrecendo* is also a *ritardando*. On the whole Mahler proved an interesting artist and had great success. . . .

Mahler transmits Mozart's enchanting G minor Symphony in a very life-like, bright, strong and energetic performance, without a trace of mannerism. . . . Mahler presented a Mozart out of costume, which gave him as it were a new character and once again confirmed Mahler's ability to concentrate our attention on the inner content and meaning of the music he is performing.⁶¹

Nikisch, of course, was famous for his almost static podium style. Unlike the critics cited above, the anonymous author implies that

⁶¹Unsigned, *Russkaya muzykal'naya gazeta* 10 (1902), 302–03; review of a concert in St. Petersburg in March 1902 (cited in Blaukopf, *Mahler: His Life, Work and World*, pp. 162–63).

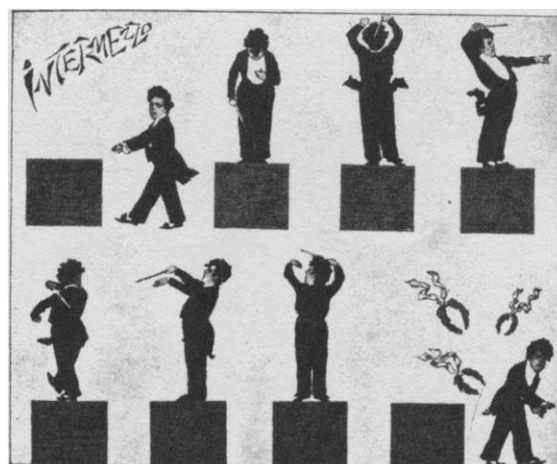


Plate 14: Dr. Otto Böhler, silhouette panel of Mascagni, n. d. (Stork, plate 379).



Plate 15: Fritz Gareis, caricature, n. d. (Egon Gartenberg, *Mahler: The Man and His Music* [New York, 1978], plates between pp. 182 and 183).

Mahler's conducting did not interfere with the presentation of the music—the tension here is musical tension, not that of the conductor. Another eyewitness, Otto Klemperer, whose conducting career was strongly supported by Mahler, claimed that Mahler's conducting gestures were absolutely natural, simple, and convincing.⁶² This alternative view of Mahler is illustrated by the unsigned silhouette with which we began (plate 2). Here Mahler is Richter-like, with a straight back, and his arms only slightly outstretched, a position that indicates only minimal motion. His gestures seem restrained and subtle. Nothing draws attention to excessive or unsightly movement.

Many commentators have suggested these contradictions imply a stylistic change on Mahler's part. Kurt Blaukopf, for example, claims that the anonymous Russian writer from 1902 "is one of the earliest pieces of evidence of the change in Mahler's style of conducting." Max Graf, as we have seen, also claimed that Mahler "grew calmer" as he grew older.⁶³ Bruno Walter and Harold Schonberg similarly reported that Mahler experienced a change in conducting style, as did Hans Pfitzner, who states that Mahler "taught himself in the course of his life the greatest restraint at the rostrum."⁶⁴ The commentators have not questioned the truth of the descriptions of Mahler, but have rather attempted to smooth the contradictions over by presenting a narrative that implies that Mahler's podium style changed over the course of his life: either because he matured as he grew older, or perhaps, as Pfitzner suggests, because he desired to change. But none of the commentators is able to show when such a change was supposed to have taken place. Even Alma's claim that Mahler was "very different" in New York due to the loss of his child and his

heart condition has recently been called into question.⁶⁵ A linear narrative is in fact impossible to sustain: Klein's account, as we have seen, is from 1892, five years before Mahler even arrived in Vienna, and almost ten years before the anonymous Russian commentator cited by Blaukopf. Given the anti-Semitic atmosphere in Vienna and the virtual equation of modernity with nervousness and Jewishness, these contradictory accounts suggest that Mahler's actual podium style might have had little to do with the criticism leveled at him. Indeed, it seems likely that the expectations of how a Jew would conduct interfered with the way Mahler was seen by the press.

As tempting as it is to speculate, we can never know either how Mahler wished to appear or how he actually did appear. The images that have come down to us are probably distorted through a questionable lens—the world of anti-Semitic Vienna, where ideas of nervousness, modernity, and Jewishness were conflated. This is not to say that Mahler never gestured, perhaps even excessively. All conductors gesture—they must. Yet even if we were to discover a film of Mahler conducting and were thus able to determine the extent of his mannerisms, that visual evidence alone could not explain the emphasis on Mahler's gestures or the essential difference that was ascribed to them. Perhaps because of their visibility, conductors have always been a focal point for criticism. But although many conductors during this period (including Richter, Strauss, and others) were criticized for their tempos and inability to reveal the composer's intentions, Mahler's difference is centered in his body, not in his musical interpretations.⁶⁶

⁶²Unpublished letter to Jean Matter, dated 29 April 1972 (trans. in Lebrecht, *Mahler Remembered*, pp. 202–03).

⁶³Blaukopf, *Mahler: A Documentary Study*, p. 232; Graf, *Legends*, p. 204.

⁶⁴Bruno Walter, *Gustav Mahler*, trans. Lotte Walter Lindt (New York, 1958), pp. 98–99; Harold Schonberg, *The Great Conductors*, p. 229. "Gustav Mahler, ein vorbildlicher Dirigent, und einer der heftigsten Willensmenschen, die ich kannte, hatte sich im Laufe seines Lebens zur größten Ruhe am Pult erzogen" (Hans Pfitzner, *Werk und Wiedergabe* [Augsburg, 1929], p. 139; trans. in Blaukopf, *Mahler: His Life, Work and World*, p. 163).

⁶⁵La Grange, "Mahler in New York: The Truth Behind the Legend," presented at the symposium "Mahler in America: 1907–1911" at Carnegie Hall, 19–20 November 1994.

⁶⁶Schonberg, *Great Conductors*. See pp. 174–75 (von Bülow), 178 (Richter), 185–86 (Mottl), 239–41 (Strauss). More work remains to be done on the history of conducting in the nineteenth century. In particular, more extensive research on the conducting careers of both Hermann Levi (as a Jew) and Hans von Bülow (as someone described as nervous) would provide a better backdrop from which to view the "peculiarities" of Mahler's style. The reception in Vienna of Leonard Bernstein—as a conductor whose podium style was criticized as excessive, at least in America—might also provide an angle from which to consider the reactions to Mahler.

For a decade Mahler was perhaps the most important musician in Vienna—he directed the two major musical organizations, made sweeping changes, and doubtless improved the quality of the musical productions at the Hofoper. But despite his obvious talent, clear musical results—and even despite that he had converted—Mahler’s Jewishness inevitably caused

anxiety in many influential Viennese circles. That anxiety may have found an outlet in the language of medical pseudoscience, a language that saw Jews as different in body, mind, and essence. Given the *fin-de-siècle* context, we need to question what the Viennese saw. Did they see Mahler the musician? Or did they see Mahler the Jew?

