Schoenberg/Wittgenstein

“Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”
— Wittgenstein (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus)

“Inexpressible, many-sided idea, will you let it be so explained?
Shall Aron, my mouth, fashion this image?
Then I have fashioned an image too, false, as an image must be.
Thus am I defeated! Thus, all was but madness that I believed before,
And can and must not be given voice. O word, thou word, that I lack!”
— Schoenberg (Moses und Aron, Act II)

“I wanted to write that my work consists of two parts: of the one which is here, and of everything which I
have not written. And precisely this second part is the important one.”
— Wittgenstein (letter to Ludwig von Ficker)

What are the limits of language? Are there inexpressible thoughts? What does it mean to represent an
idea? This course will explore these and related questions in Wittgenstein’s early language philosophy and
Schoenberg’s music aesthetics. We will examine the compositional, ethical, and aesthetic convergences
between Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and Schoenberg’s Moses und Aron—two famously
intractable works that illuminate each other while casting light on the project of modernism/modernity
itself. Schopenhauer’s conception of Vorstellung and Kraus’s Sprachkritik are essential touchstones for
Schoenberg/Wittgenstein. Benjamin and Freud open up lateral perspectives on naming, truth, and the
enchantedsof language.

Readings

Primary

———. Philosophy of New Music. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis: University of
Benjamin, Walter. “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man.” In Walter Benjamin: Selected
Kraus, Karl. Dicta and Contradicta. Translated by Jonathan McVity. Urbana: University of Illinois Press,
———. The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation. Translated by Patricia Carpenter
Schopenhauer, Arthur. The World as Will and Representation, Volume 1. Translated by Judith Norman,
Wittgenstein, Ludwig. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. Translated by C. K. Ogden [and F. P. Ramsey].


