

# 19 The Making of an Electronic Facsimile: Berg's Sketches for *Wozzeck*

Patricia Hall

Department of Music  
University of California  
Santa Barbara, CA 93106  
[Zhall@ic.ucsb.edu](mailto:Zhall@ic.ucsb.edu)

## Abstract

This paper describes photographic techniques used in an electronic facsimile of the sketches for Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, a prominent work in the repertory of the mid-twentieth century. By showing various stages of sketches for one scene from this opera, the paper suggests typical uses of an electronic facsimile for a large body of sketches. The archeological nature of the task involves the capture of pencil drafts and paper paste-overs as well as the penetration of lacquer occlusions.

COMPUTING IN MUSICOLOGY 12 (1999-2000), 275–282.

This study describes photographic techniques used in an electronic facsimile of the sketches for Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*. By accessing various stages of sketches for Act I, Scene 2, the paper suggests typical uses of an electronic facsimile for a large body of sketches.

<sup>1</sup> All sketches in this article are reproduced with the kind permission of the Music Division of the Austrian National Library and the Alban Berg Stiftung.

<sup>2</sup> A *Particell* is a reduction of the pitch content into a piano/vocal or two-piano vocal score.

Figure 1 shows Berg's *Particell* for the opening of Act I, Scene 2 of *Wozzeck*.<sup>1</sup> We often assume that the autograph *Particell* will be a fairly finished document—that is, without revisions and other features of a sketch. This leaf, in contrast, is written in pencil. It contains a paste-on at the bottom of the page that conceals an earlier version. In addition, most *Particell* leaves<sup>2</sup> for *Wozzeck* show orchestration sketches in the margin.

The physical condition of the manuscript is also somewhat unusual; the paper is obviously frayed and discolored. (Much of the paper for this scene is actually scavenged from earlier works.) Whether Berg was simply short on manuscript paper, or manuscript paper was in short supply at the end of WWI when he finished this scene, is unclear.

In this electronic facsimile, my goal is to capture the visual image as accurately as possible—to portray the manuscript as it would appear if it were actually before you. This entails, ironically, a simplification of the techniques that are normally used to photograph manuscripts for microfilm or even color images.

I photographed this manuscript in natural light with a Pentax K1000 non-automatic camera and a normal 35mm lens. The manuscript is unflattened so that one can see the natural creases and layout of the document, as well as its relation to the adjoining leaf, if one is present. I used a Kodak non-professional film available in any camera store. I adjusted the angle of the camera to the manuscript, based on the writing implement (light pencil), the paper type (heavily porous and discolored), and the angle and quality of the light source. Because I was asked to photograph in a busy reading room, I mounted the sketches on a music stand using a backing of white poster board. This music stand took up little room and could be easily adjusted.

One of the advantages of an electronic facsimile is that its images can be catalogued by call number, archive, location in the completed musical work, or any number of other useful parameters. This makes it possible, for instance, to instantly access all the sketches that contain material from

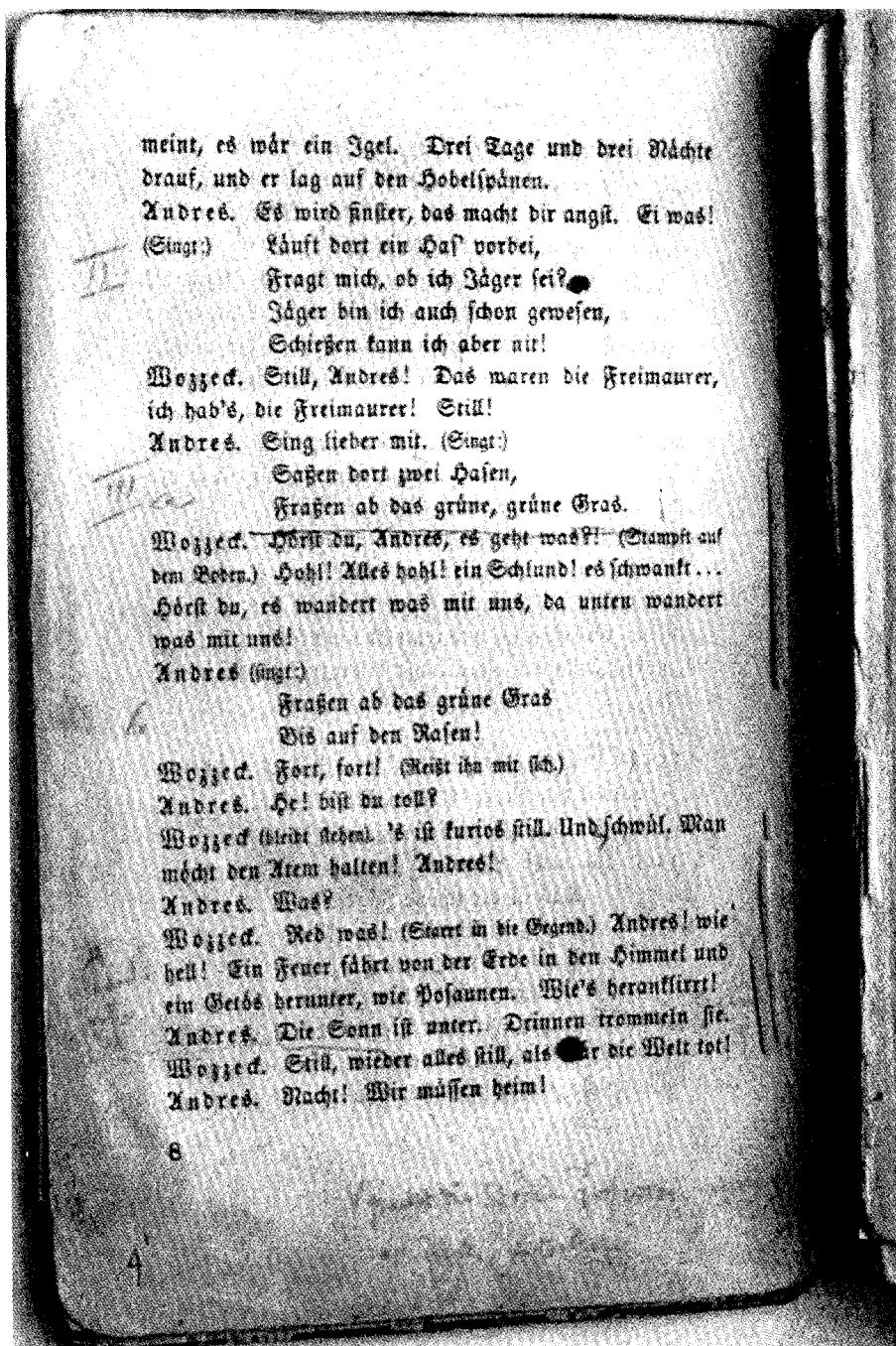
the opening of Act I, Scene 2. I might add that only the sketches in the Austrian National Library have been indexed to any degree, so that finding these sketches would entail considerable time, even if you were in the archive (see the careful study of Fanning 1987).

Figure 1. Vienna: Austrian National Library, Musiksammlung, F21 Berg 14, fol. 13<sup>v</sup>. Used by permission.





Figure 3. Vienna: Austrian National Library, Musiksammlung F21 Berg 128, fol. 4<sup>v</sup>. Used by permission.



Berg's annotations, I, II, IIIa suggest a formal element or organizational principle of the folksong, and we can see this same division in Berg's copy of the Büchner text, which he obviously annotated at the same time.

Here the electronic facsimile allows us to simultaneously compare two sources from a single archive, the Austrian National Library. Since I have photographed every extant sketch for *Wozzeck* in five archives, I could as easily compare a document from Vienna with one from the Library of Congress. Anyone who has had the frustrating experience of comparing an ink or pencil color from one sketch with a source in another country will appreciate this convenience.

A page from one of Berg's copies of the Büchner text illustrates how an electronic facsimile aids in deciphering difficult handwriting. The annotation at the bottom of the page (Figure 3) is initially difficult to see. However, if we magnify it and adjust the brightness level using *Photoshop*, we see that it is Berg's cue for the action, "Packt die Stücke zusammen" (packs the sticks together), which he adds to the finished score. With extremely difficult handwriting, which is unfortunately the norm for Berg, it is even possible to construct a customized handwriting chart for the period of time in which Berg composed *Wozzeck*—complete with variants for each alphabetical letter.

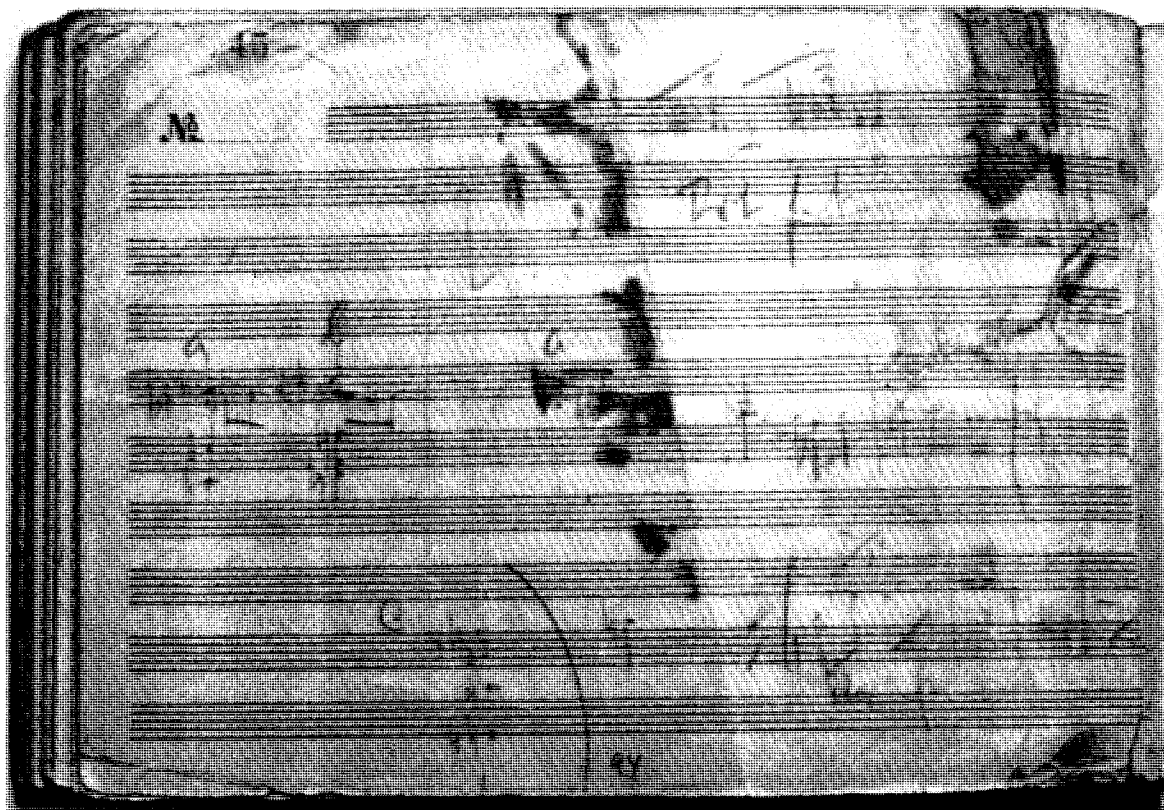
Berg's earliest sketches also elucidate techniques with which Berg consciously organized atonal sonorities and combined them with the medium of tonality.

In his sketches Berg consistently labels the three opening chords of Act I, Scene 2 as A, B, and C (see Figure 4). In his lecture on *Wozzeck*, he even compares them to a tonic, dominant, and subdominant.<sup>3</sup> Here, Berg takes these same chords and constructs a step-wise melodic line—A b-G-F-E—between them. In his sketches Berg characterizes this step-wise progression, which begins with *Wozzeck*'s words "Still, alles still, als wäre die Welt tot" ("Still, everything still, as if the world were dead") as "a funeral march."

In a later sketch, which we might term a continuity draft (Figure 5), Berg implements these primary chords A, B, and C into the actual passage, along with additional sonorities and motifs which he uses in the transition to the next scene. This rather skeletal draft is the last stage of composition (again utilizing pencil on highly distressed paper) before the *Particell*.

<sup>3</sup> For an English translation of Berg's lecture see Jarman 1989.

Figure 4. Vienna: Austrian National Library, Musiksammlung F21 Berg 13/II, p. 94. Used by permission.

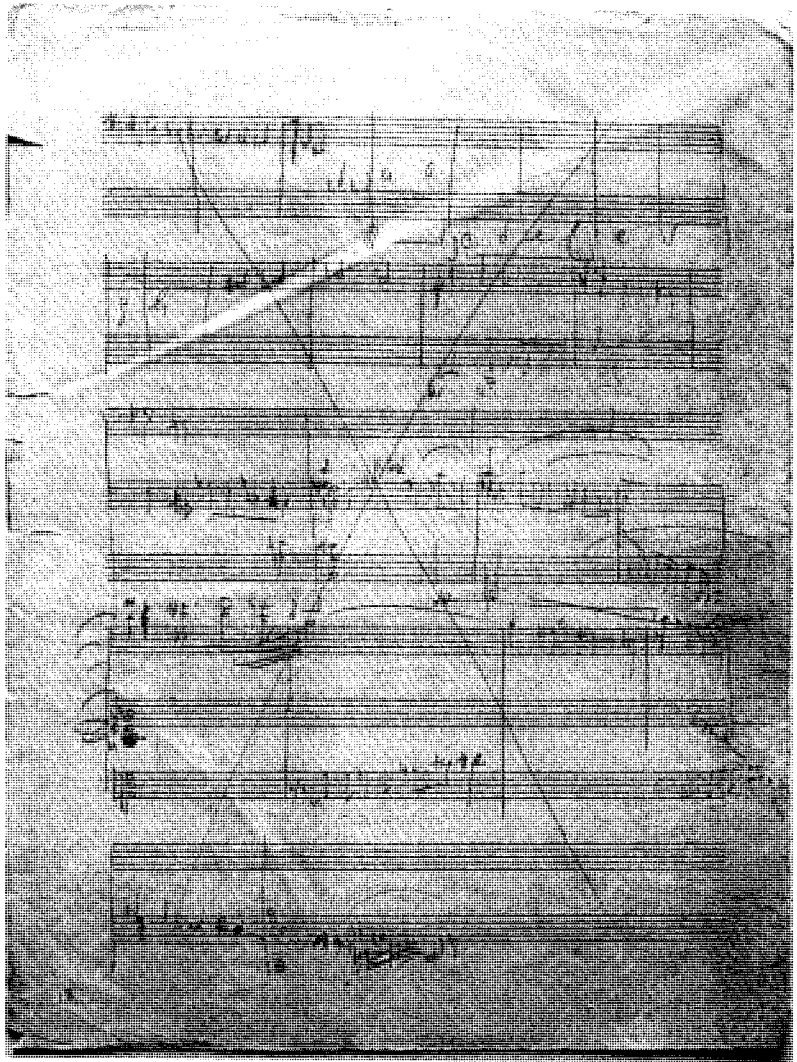


I have not emphasized the concept of preservation, something we might associate more with earlier manuscripts. However, Berg wrote the last act of *Wozzeck* during the German depression, and as the price of paper skyrocketed, its quality degraded accordingly. Woody, highly brittle paper appears in 1920, and it is nearly impossible to study without some damage.

Sometimes the necessity for preservation appears in surprising contexts. Berg sold the *Partitur* of *Wozzeck* to the Library of Congress in 1934 (Grun: 417). It was probably in the 1940s that the leaves were coated with a varnish, which unfortunately occluded over time and made some inks on the manuscript run. It is certainly possible to digitally manipulate the image to minimize the shine of the varnish, but it will never be as legible as it was in Berg's time.



Figure 5. Vienna: Austrian National Library, Musiksammlung F21 Berg 70/III, fol. 12<sup>v</sup>. Used by permission.



## References

- Fanning, David (1987). "Berg's Sketches for *Wozzeck*: A Commentary and Inventory," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 112, 280–322.
- Grun, Bernard, ed. and trans. (1971). *Alban Berg: Letters to his Wife* (London: Faber), p. 417.
- Jarman, Douglas (1989). *Alban Berg: Wozzeck* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), pp. 154–170.