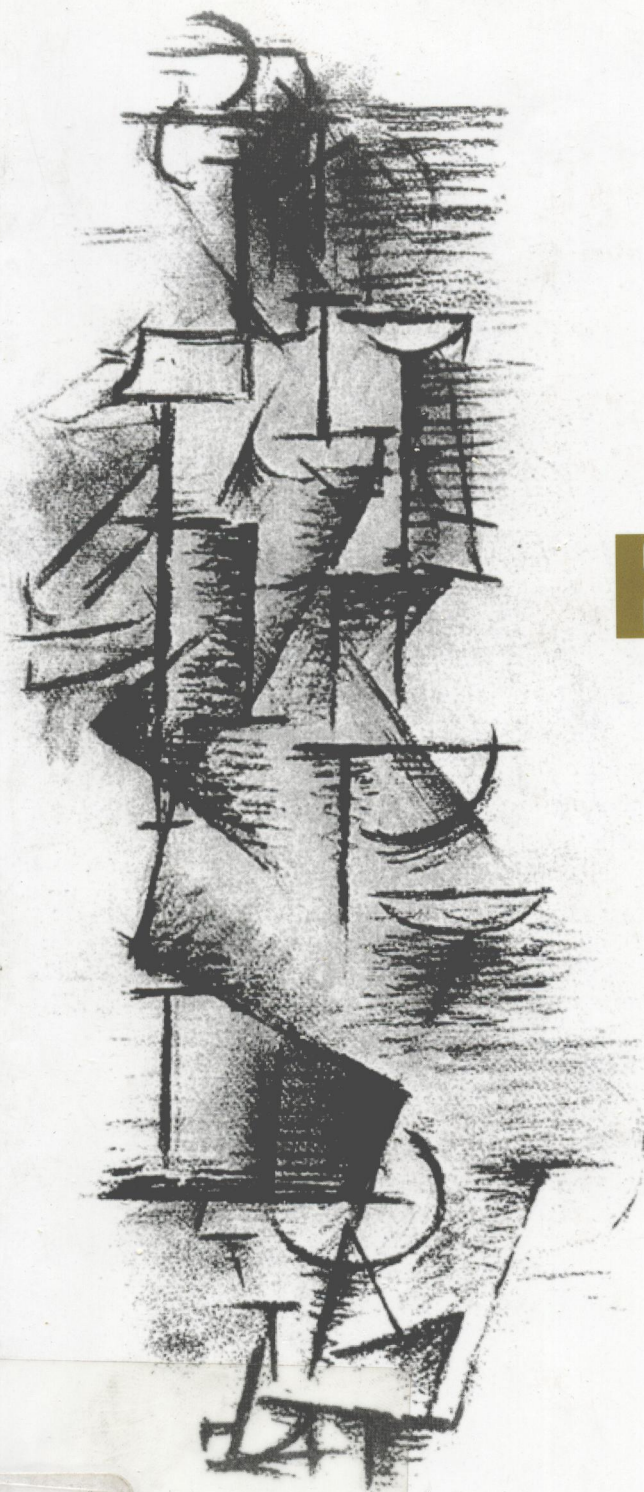


MUSIC IN THE 20TH CENTURY



the
STRAVINSKY
legacy

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insky, I. JONATHAN CROSS

The Stravinsky Legacy

Jonathan Cross

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For Emma, Alice and Rebecca

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PART I

The Stravinsky Legacy

1 Introduction: Stravinsky's modernism

Most histories of early musical modernism have concerned themselves with the same canonical list of works, among the most significant of which usually number Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces and *Erwartung*, Strauss's *Elektra* and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Their shared modernism – be it 'symbolist', 'expressionist', 'primitivist' – can usefully be summed up in the following remarks by Malcolm Bradbury which head an important recent study of early modernism:

What Modernism and Postmodernism share in common is a single adversary which is, to put it crudely, realism or naïve mimesis. Both are forms of post-Realism. They likewise share in common a practice based on avant-garde and movement tactics and a sense of modern culture as a field of anxious stylistic formation.¹

Christopher Butler, the author of that study, elaborates on this by adding that early modern artists shared in 'a general atmosphere of scepticism, which prompted a basic examination of the languages of the arts'.² In music before the outbreak of World War 1, this reaction against the (Romantic) past manifested itself variously by such means as a weakening or abandonment of tonality, a challenge to the 'tyranny of the barline' and a break-up of old forms and linear structures – though in most cases aspects of that Romantic heritage managed to survive in one form or another. After the War, such negativity appeared to turn itself into a shared project of reconstruction or of formalisation of new discoveries, a quest after new kinds of order – in the logic of the twelve-note method, or the security of neoclassicism, or the return to (revised) forms of tonality. And histories of a third phase of musical modernism in the aftermath of World War 2 have similarly stressed the commonality of composers' aesthetic ambitions: for example, in his first version (1981) of an account of the post-1945 avant-garde, Paul Griffiths wrote of 'the comparatively unified effort of the late 1940s and early 1950s, when composers . . . appeared to share similar aims and to some degree similar methods . . .'.³

Such an apparently unified view of the evolution of musical modernism was shared by many of the central participants who were keen to perpetuate an idea of *la grande ligne*, whether in Schoenberg's famous claim that,

in the twelve-note method, he had discovered something that would assure 'the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years',⁴ or in Boulez's 1951 comment that 'since the discoveries of the Viennese School, all non-serial composers are *useless*'.⁵ And what was true for its history was true for the music too: the Viennese School was at pains to point out the continuities within the music itself:

Unity is surely the indispensable thing if meaning is to exist. Unity, to be very general, is the establishment of the utmost relatedness between all component parts. (Webern)⁶

In music there is no form without logic, there is no logic without unity. (Schoenberg)⁷

It was, in part, for this reason that Theodor Adorno ascribed an authenticity to the twelve-note method because it clearly enacted the principle of 'identity in non-identity'. Furthermore, in Schoenberg's music Adorno still found embodied the idea of progress.

But for Adorno the picture of early modernism was more complex than the unitary view sketched above. He did not see a single modernism – or, at least, that modernism was dialectically articulated. Between the music of Schoenberg (which represented, in his view, the progressive, authentic, developmental and free subject) and Stravinsky (which represented the regressive, inauthentic, non-developmental and unfree subject) there was an irresolvable dialectic. Stravinsky's modernism was categorically different from Schoenberg's. From an Adornian perspective, Alastair Williams writes: 'Awareness of the simultaneous existence of heterogeneous social spaces rather blunts the modernist aesthetic of a single advanced historical material. Instead, we are confronted with a sense of multi-layered history; each layer pursuing its own course through time.'⁸ And such a view accords with recent rethinking of the evolution of modernism – witness, for example, the plural form of the title of Peter Nicholls's important study *Modernisms*, which argues for a recognition of the diversity of modernism in reaction to the tendency of *postmodern* thinking to 'caricature' modernism as a 'monolithic ideological formation'. A modernism characterised 'primarily by its commitment to reactionary "grand narratives" of social and psychic order . . . could [now] be seen to constitute only one strand of a highly complex set of cultural developments at the beginning of the twentieth century'.⁹ In this light, only three years from the end of the twentieth century, Arnold Whittall is perhaps right still to be asking the question: what is modernism?¹⁰

If we look at what has happened to music and the arts since 1960, it is inevitable that a reevaluation of modernism should be seen to be

necessary. Leonard Meyer's controversial identification of a situation of 'cultural stasis . . . a steady-state in which an indefinite number of styles and idioms, techniques and movements . . . coexist'¹¹ coincides with a postmodern reading of our present culture: 'the general situation is one of temporal disjunction which makes sketching an overview difficult'.¹² Paul Griffiths's second version of his history of the avant-garde (the very word is dropped from the title of the new book) not only struggles to find any real order in music since 1960 ('We live now with many musical histories, and many musical presents'¹³) but also revises what in 1981 had seemed a fairly simple plot regarding the musical activities of the 1940s and 1950s. Other figures complement the Boulez–Cage axis; space is allocated to the so-called 'classic modernism' of Schoenberg and Carter, and to the historically unparalleled 'elder responses' of Stravinsky, Messiaen, Varèse, Wolpe and Shostakovich. In other words, *la grande ligne*, the 'grand narrative', can no longer hold sway. The most significant shift in Griffiths's new history is the far greater prominence given to Stravinsky, whom in 1981 he had dismissed alongside 'other 12-note composers in America'. In particular, Griffiths is able to bring to our attention the increasing influence Stravinsky has exerted on recent generations of composers, the increasing recognition that Cageian indeterminacy or tonal reaction were not the only alternatives to the Schoenberg–Webern legacy that had been exclusively promoted by such important ideology-shaping institutions of the 1950s as Darmstadt and *Die Reihe*.

Indeed, for many composers now, despite Adorno's critical claims, Stravinsky, not Schoenberg, seems to have suggested some of the most productive ways forward, a fact evident, for example, in Glenn Watkins's extraordinary study of 'music, culture and collage from Stravinsky to the postmodernists',¹⁴ and confirmed in Fredric Jameson's observation that it has begun to seem that 'Adorno's prophetic diagnosis has been realized, albeit in a negative way: not Schönberg (the sterility of whose achieved system he already glimpsed) but Stravinsky is the true precursor of post-modern cultural production'.¹⁵ In 1989, the Dutch composer Louis Andriessen wrote that the 'true influence of Stravinsky has only just begun',¹⁶ and in 1995 he commented that, since the death of Stravinsky, the forward path of serialism (the 'music of the future') has come to seem more of a cul-de-sac ('the dead end of what I may call German Romanticism') while 'that combination of high-brow and low-brow material [in Stravinsky] . . . will point out more possibilities for the future'.¹⁷ Andriessen's is not a lone voice; composers from many generations have acknowledged the importance, the centrality of Stravinsky, to their own and others' work:

[*The Rite of Spring*] has not ceased to engender, first, polemics, then, praise, and, finally, the necessary clarifications. In seventy years, its presence has been felt continuously. (Boulez)¹⁸

I am a disciple of Jung and a lover of Stravinsky. (Tippett)¹⁹

I recall the first time I heard the *Sacre* . . . played live at Carnegie Hall, conducted by Pierre Monteux in the mid-twenties and decided there and then to become a composer. (Carter)²⁰

I think that the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* is one of the great masterpieces of this century . . . and certainly one of the most original, in that it's to do with the juxtaposition of material without any sense of development. . . . If someone said to me, what's the biggest influence on your life as a composer, I would say this piece. (Birtwistle)²¹

But there was one work in particular, Stravinsky's *Canticum sacrum*, which was a musical revelation to me: I must have heard its first performance broadcast from Venice in 1956, when I was 12. I didn't know at the time why it made such an impression, but it's remained a key work of the twentieth century for me. (Tavener)²²

I consider it [*The Rite of Spring*] as a revolutionary piece also for the twenty-first century. (Andriessen)²³

Musicologists, too, have joined in this reevaluation of the received history of modernism. For example, exploring the issues surrounding the alleged conservatism of Stravinsky's neoclassicism, Richard Taruskin makes a timely argument for the *modernity* of Stravinsky's 'antimodernism':

The reinstatement of *plaisanterie* – something made *pour plaire* – within the legitimate domain of art was a serious business for the postwar generation of 'antimodernists', with Satie and now Stravinsky at their head – a generation whose stance now seems, with the advantage of six decades of hindsight, so much more modern than the 'modernism', directly descended from Romanticism, with which it then contended.²⁴

In developing what he has coined 'modernist analysis', Arnold Whittall has also called for a reexamination of the competing tendencies of progressive 'modernism' and traditionalist 'antimodernism' in the work (indeed, within the individual works) of a broad range of 'modernist' composers, including Birtwistle, Carter, Maxwell Davies, Stravinsky, Tippett and Webern.²⁵ He is thus able to distinguish analytically between a number of different musical modernisms: in Maxwell Davies, for instance, he examines the balance between complementary 'floating' and 'focused' tendencies ("integration and disintegration are entwined" in Davies's modernist

language'), whereas he once wrote of Carter's contrasting wholehearted embrace of modernism ('It is Carter who most unambiguously represents the "modernist mainstream" today'), a view which has, however, been subsequently revised in the light of Carter's later works (Whittall now proposes 'a sequence of events which presents the similarity/difference dialogue from ever-changing angles, and with different emphases'.)²⁶ And, in one of a number of notable departures from the inclusive post-War American theoretical/analytical orthodoxy (I am thinking, in particular, of Allen Forte's work on 'atonal' music: 'The inclusion of Stravinsky's name in the list [of Second Viennese composers] . . . suggests that atonal music was not the exclusive province of Schoenberg and his circle, and that is indeed the case'²⁷), Pieter van den Toorn sets up a clear dialectic on technical grounds between Schoenberg and Stravinsky: 'It is . . . in matters having to do with opposition and superimposition, matters affecting all aspects of context, that Stravinsky's music is most appropriately addressed, that it can be distinguished convincingly from, say, much of Schoenberg's, a repertory which, in its vertical or harmonic grouping, tends to invite integration to a far greater extent.'²⁸

Stravinsky's modernism, then, is just one strand among many which constitute the conceptual map of modernity. It is a strand which is many-faceted, thus suggesting a plurality even within itself and making it hard to pin down. It is perhaps only through an examination of the work of later composers, through an attempt to define his legacy, that it becomes possible to identify in greater detail the nature of Stravinsky's own modernism. There is, *pace* Cone, no Stravinsky 'method'. Unlike Schoenberg, Stravinsky had no pupils, nor did he write any works of theory. According to Adorno, this was because the Stravinsky style, 'based on whim', could not be taught, only copied.²⁹ Stravinsky has certainly had his imitators, both in Europe and America (despite the claim of Copland – the 'Brooklyn Stravinsky' and leader of the American Stravinsky 'school' – that 'there remains in Stravinsky's music an irreducible core that defies imitation'³⁰). Yet it is becoming increasingly apparent (as evidenced by the composers quoted above), that, both at the time – preeminently in the music of Varèse – and certainly since World War 2, there has been a growing fascination with Stravinsky's creative provenance. Following the lead of Messiaen, composers have begun to look beyond the attractive surface diatonicism and rhythmic irregularity of Stravinsky's music, and have examined more deeply the ways in which in all his work, Russian, neoclassical and serial, Stravinsky found original solutions to the problems presented by modernism. Stravinsky worked with the defining traits of modernism – *inter alia*, its fragmentation, its discontinuity, its primitivism, its eclecticism, its

pluralism, its oppositions – finding novel ways of balancing these powerfully contradictory elements without their losing their essential identity, their sense of difference. This Carter has described as Stravinsky's ability to achieve a 'unified fragmentation'. He continues:

The idiosyncrasies of Russian folksong and liturgy, of jazz and military band playing, of the parlor parodies of Satie, seemed to have played a role in this, which, once it was developed, furnished a pathway out of Russian folklore into an ever broadening musical world of technique and expression – always marked by what came to be recognized everywhere as the highly original and compelling voice of Stravinsky.³¹

Yeats's (post-World War I) analysis of the modern crisis –

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold,
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world . . .³²

seems to offer a different understanding of modernism from Stravinsky's. *The Rite of Spring*, in its violence and its exploration of unconscious emotions, may invite superficial comparison with the destructive characteristics of expressionism, but it maintains an objectivity in particular through the obvious structuring provided by its block organisation and repetitions, and thus distinguishes itself from the apparently free, subjective expressionism of *Erwartung*. When Cocteau described *The Rite* as 'an organized "Fauvist" work',³³ he touched on the fascinating formalism of *The Rite*, the way in which an overwhelming expression of collective energy is simultaneously released and contained (this 'act of violence against the subject' was, of course, at the heart of Adorno's dispute with Stravinsky: *The Rite* as an 'anti-humanist sacrifice to the collective'³⁴). Things may fragment and the *centre* may no longer hold, but anarchy never ensues. Carter's verdict on *The Soldier's Tale* could stand for most of Stravinsky: 'all the brief, almost discrete fragments, however roughly they connect with each other, end up by producing a work that holds together in a very new and telling way.'³⁵

In *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, Max Paddison has elegantly demonstrated that 'Adorno's philosophy of art is also an aesthetics of modernism'³⁶ through its quest for an understanding of fragmentation in twentieth-century culture; elsewhere Paddison has defined the Adornian 'dilemma of modernism' as 'the predicament faced by the artist caught between, on the one hand, the traditional demands of the art work for unity and integration (the harmonious relationship between part and whole) and, on the other hand, the loss of faith in any overarching unity on both individual and social levels in the face of the evident fragmentation of modern existence'.³⁷ The negation of traditional kinds of synthesis

while preserving aspects of connectedness is thus central to an understanding both of modernism and of Adorno's negative dialectics: 'To change the direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn towards non-identity, is the hinge of negative dialectics.'³⁸ And this, in turn, raises difficult questions for the analysis of modern music, traditionally dependent on theories of unity (stemming, once again, from the dominance of the Schoenbergian/twelve-note theoretical tradition) – a questioning begun by Joseph Kerman and finding its fullest expression to date in Alan Street's seminal article, 'Superior myths, dogmatic allegories'.³⁹ Coming to an understanding of these issues is a necessary aspect of the contemporary (re)interpretation of Stravinsky's music – especially in the neoclassical works where 'connected' surfaces disguise a deeper fragmentation, a deeper discontinuity. Yet these works, too, despite their titular and formal allusions to the connected and developmental genres of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, eschew traditional unities and instead hold together in 'new and telling ways'. So we return to the modernity even of Stravinsky's 'antimodernism' (Taruskin), and to the on-going need for appropriate kinds of 'modernist analysis' (Whittall).

The purpose of the remainder of this introduction is to sketch out, in very general terms, a frame for our enquiry into Stravinsky's modernism. What were the contexts for his modernism? How does it both distinguish itself from and intersect with other modernisms? What is it in Stravinsky's modernism that has informed, influenced and provoked later generations of composers?

Underlying any understanding of Stravinsky's modernism must be an acknowledgement of his Russianness. In his monumental work of scholarship *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* Richard Taruskin has demonstrated categorically that Stravinsky's Russian origins shaped the nature of his (anti-Teutonic) modernism: 'Even as he cultivated the façade of a sophisticated cosmopolitan . . . Stravinsky was profoundly un- and even anti-Western in his musical thinking', and no matter how much he may have professed other allegiances, 'Stravinsky achieved artistic maturity and his modernist technique by deliberately playing the traditions of Russian folk music against those of the provincial denationalized Russian art music in which he had been reared.'⁴⁰ That Stravinsky's Russianness impinges directly on the nature of his modernism is reinforced, from a different perspective, by Paddison's highly perceptive critique of Adorno (to which we shall return in Chapter 7) which indicates how key facets of Stravinsky's modernism – for example, its 'orientalism' and 'primitivism', its objectivity, its static and ritualistic characteristics, its