3 Stravinsky in context

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Stravinsky as context

The eloquent conclusion of Richard Taruskin's monumental study of *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* has quickly become the most widely quoted, generally accepted declaration of Stravinsky's significance for twentieth-century compositional practice:

> To the extent that terms like *stasis, discontinuity, block juxtaposition, moment* or *structural simplification* can be applied to modern music – a very great extent – and to the extent that Stravinsky is acknowledged as a source or an inspiration for the traits and traditions they signify – an even greater extent – the force of his example bequeathed a *russkiy slog* [Russian manner] to the whole world of twentieth-century concert music. To that world Stravinsky was not related by any 'angle.' He was the very stem.[1]

Taruskin's purpose is to assert that once, in *Petrushka*, 'Stravinsky at last became Stravinsky'[2] by transforming his own defining Russian context, he could be seen as 'one of music's great centripetal forces, the crystallizer and definer of an age', whose 'work possessed a strength of style, and his oeuvre a unity, that could accommodate an endless variety of surfaces'.[3] It is a powerful argument, and its appeal might even have been strengthened by Taruskin's subsequent emphasis on the deplorable morality of Stravinsky's sympathy for fascism and anti-semitism – a general lack of democratic fervour that allegedly infiltrates even the exuberant rituals and ultimate sublimity of *Les Noces*.[4] Just as a warts-and-all Wagner can be deemed even more fundamentally central to the cultural life of the nineteenth century if the canker at the heart of the later music dramas is conceded,[5] so an 'all-too-human' Stravinsky (to complement that modernist Stravinsky who 'stressed the ritual at the expense of the picturesque'[6]) has a redoubled claim to provide the ultimate frame of reference for all that matters most in the music of the modern age. Yet is it really credible that any one composer should merit such lofty pre-eminence? Is it not in the nature of twentieth-century music that it has many different stems?

The need to complement the Stravinskian *russkiy slog* with other stimuli, other traditions, when seeking to account for the richness and variety of twentieth-century music, is acknowledged by many commentators. For

example, Jonathan Cross concludes that 'it is important to remind ourselves that Stravinsky and modernism are not synonymous – it is, at the very least, inappropriate to view the entire century through Stravinsky-tinted spectacles'.[7] But not only are Stravinsky and modernism not synonymous. It cannot be the case that the purely formal factors to which Taruskin refers in his grand peroration represent the whole Stravinsky. Taruskin's emphasis on features of structural design seems to imply that the expressive, transnational consequences of such procedures are relatively unimportant when it comes to defining Stravinsky's musical identity, the source of his greatness and influence. Yet, as the later stages of this essay will argue, it is difficult to consider such aspects of Stravinsky's creative world as his relation to long-established genres like lament and tragedy, or his concern with the aesthetic polarities symbolised by Apollo and Dionysus, in ways that give a *russkiy slog* any kind of unchallenged priority.

A very different 'stem' for essential aspects of twentieth-century modernism is celebrated by Schoenberg in his essay 'National music' (1931). Here the emphasis is on continuity with past masters of art music, something utterly different from that 'whole, bizarre notion of inventing a new, hypermodern style out of the fragmented elements of an antique folk music' which Stephen Walsh attributes to Stravinsky at the time of *Renard* (1915–16).[8] The 'teachers' celebrated by Schoenberg were Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Wagner, Mahler, Strauss and Reger. 'My originality comes from this: I immediately imitated everything I saw that was good.' But, crucially, imitation promoted transformation: 'If I saw something I did not leave it at that; I acquired it, in order to possess it; I worked on it and extended it, and it led me to something new.' And Schoenberg ended the essay with an eloquent plea for recognition as a progressive legitimised by his sensitive and creative relation to the past. 'I am convinced that eventually people will recognize how immediately this "something new" is linked to the loftiest models that have been granted us. I venture to credit myself with having written truly new music which, being based on tradition, is destined to become tradition.'[9]

The tendency to regard the two distinct traditions – the Russian and the Austro-German – as enforcing a polarisation between Stravinsky and Schoenberg has played a significant role in twentieth-century musical historiography.[10] But the main point of this essay is that – at least after 1918 – the two traditions promoted shared aesthetic attitudes to modernism. To put it another way, the importance of Stravinsky within the 'whole world' of twentieth-century composition is enhanced when we not only consider him in relation to Russian traditions – central though those undoubtedly were, especially in the earlier years – but acknowledge Viennese, Austro-German

traditions as well, and the ways in which these also explore the fundamental modernist continuum between extremes of connection and disconnection. (That further off-shoots from the central tree of modernism appear later in the twentieth century is not directly relevant to the discussion that follows.)

Conversations and comparisons

It is tempting to conclude that Stravinsky sought to divert attention from the predispositions, especially with respect to compositional genres, which he shared with modernists from other musical traditions, by the apparent clarity and openness of his comments on those predispositions. Some sense of his awareness of ways in which German and Russian polarities might converge can therefore be read into his treatment of aesthetic topics at a time when neoclassicism was making the subject of associations between old and new a very immediate one.

The possible relevance to Stravinsky of Nietzsche's ideas about the conflict between Apollonian discipline and Dionysian anarchism – first mentioned in his ghosted *Autobiography*[11] – can be downplayed if those ideas are regarded merely as a means of reinforcing proto-modernist precepts (especially about structural discontinuity and textural stratification) which Stravinsky inherited from the Russian past. Nor does the mere mention of Nietzsche as the source of the Apollo/Dionysus metaphor justify any claim that Stravinsky's music begins to display explicitly Germanic expressive qualities as a result. There would always be a stylistic gulf between Stravinsky's Russian way of ritualising exotic, symmetrical modality by passing it through those 'fragmented elements of an antique folk music',[12] and the Germanic impulse to intensify, at times to expressionistic extents, the increasingly chromatic tendencies embodied in that Bach-to-Reger tradition to which Schoenberg referred. What is intriguing, when comparisons between Stravinsky and his German contemporaries are attempted, is the very allusiveness and ambiguity of relations between their different approaches to parallel generic, expressive contexts: yet, as we shall see, there are technical similarities, as well as stylistic disparities, in the way these composers deal with archetypal emotional states such as loss and regret.

In the *Poetics of Music* lectures (1939), Stravinsky was content with the lofty assertion that Schoenberg was 'a composer evolving along lines essentially different from mine, both aesthetically and technically'.[13] More considered comparisons between himself and his Austro-German contemporaries had to wait until those later years when the role of oracle or sage (as opposed to active antagonist or collaborator) came more naturally. But the Stravinsky–Craft enterprise, offering the composer the chance to

'comment on the popular notion of Schoenberg and Stravinsky as thesis and antithesis',[14] was little more than a disingenuous premise to set up the idea that 'the parallelisms are more interesting'.[15] After tabulating a series of thirteen alleged 'differences' between himself and Schoenberg (including such evidently absurd over-simplifications as 'Stravinsky: diatonicism / Schoenberg: chromaticism'), *Dialogues* focuses on the 'more interesting' parallelisms. These include 'the common belief in Divine Authority', 'the common exile to the same alien culture, in which we wrote some of our best works', and the point that 'both of us are devoted to The Word'. It is difficult to see how any of these parallels, not least those indicating Stravinsky's belief that his attitude to serial composition owed more to Schoenberg than to Webern, are anything more than a mischievous attempt to reinforce the 'arbitrary' thesis/antithesis notion they are apparently meant to undermine. Such uneasiness could well have its origins in Stravinsky's irritation with the kind of arguments about convergence with Schoenberg promoted by critics as early as 1914. In a review of that year, N. Y. Myaskovsky declared:

> the foundations of his harmony apparently have much in common with the harmonic thinking of Arnold Schoenberg. The latter, of course, is a German, is far more intricate, the texture of his work is considerably more complex and refined, but on the other hand Stravinsky has the edge in his powerful blaze of temperament. One circumstance deriving from this parallel is absorbing: travelling different paths – Schoenberg from Wagner, touching Mahler in passing; Stravinsky from Rimsky Korsakov and Scriabin by way of the French – the two have come nevertheless by almost identical results.[16]

Having quoted these comments, Taruskin cannot resist a footnote observing that 'justification (or condemnation) of Stravinsky's music by superficial comparison with Schoenberg's has been a persistent strand in twentieth-century critical and analytical thinking',[17] a pretext for repeating his hostility to Allen Forte's account of the atonal components of *The Rite of Spring*.[18] The possible existence of 'superficial' comparisons of Stravinsky and Schoenberg does not automatically justify the rejection of all comparisons – especially less superficial ones. Even so, it is only after 1918 that the varieties of convergence between Stravinsky and his Austro-German contemporaries considered here become salient.

Taruskin would probably claim that Pierre Boulez's views are no more adequate than Forte's. Boulez discusses the sense in which, though Stravinsky and Schoenberg had very different attitudes to tradition, 'the result is the same: both composers reinstate dead forms, and because they are so obsessed with them they allow them to transform their musical ideas until they too are dead. Their musical invention has been virtually reshaped by

old forms to the point where it suffers and dries up.'[19] For Boulez, as for Taruskin, it is matters of form which are decisive, and – for Boulez, at least – there can be no possibility of worthwhile musical expression being built on such flawed foundations. (It is worth noting the sediment of a Cageian experimental aesthetic in Boulez's draconian polarisation of forces in musical history. For Cage, no less than for Boulez, neoclassicism was a betrayal of the progressive impulse, not the fulfilment of something fundamental to modernist aesthetics.[20])

For Boulez, there is no doubt that, after such early masterworks as *Erwartung* and *The Rite of Spring*, both Schoenberg and Stravinsky allowed consciousness of History to inhibit the continuation of true progressiveness. Boulez could find no validity in a neoclassical modernism that played off old against new, despite his willingness to concede that, in Berg's case, 'a sense of continuous development with an enormous degree of ambiguity'[21] is to be admired rather than deprecated. Boulez asserts that 'Stravinsky also largely deprived himself of the resources provided by the evolution of the musical language, and he therefore found himself on a more primitive plane of invention with virtually no access, more importantly, to the formal complexities characteristic of the late-romantic period.'[22] This inability to discover any ambiguity, any complexity, in Stravinsky's music after the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (at least until the serial years), and therefore to find any relevance for such works as context for post-war 'new music', tells us more about Boulez's own creative hang-ups than Stravinsky's. But it also demonstrates the incompleteness of concepts of modernity which deal solely with matters of form: as if, in the case of *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, its significance were wholly coextensive with its anticipations of Stockhausen's 'Momentform'.[23]

It can certainly be argued that, in his suppression of Dionysian, expressionist qualities in his more Apollonian neoclassical works of the 1920s and 1930s, Stravinsky was at his most distant from the Schoenbergian mainstream, in which the two complementary qualities – Apollonian order with regard to form, Dionysian intensity with regard to expression – strove to achieve a sustainable equilibrium. Schoenberg's avoidance of the explicitly chant-like or chorale-like materials often used by Stravinsky was a vital element in his preservation of an expressionist dimension during the interwar decades, and Apollonian serenity is extremely rare. Perhaps Schoenberg comes closest to its spirit in 'Verbundenheit', the sixth of the *Pieces for Male Chorus*, Op. 35, composed in 1929,[24] just at the time of Stravinsky's own most wholehearted 'sacrifice to Apollo'.[25] Even when such obvious differences of emphasis are acknowledged, however, it is important to realise that very different expressive qualities can be embodied in similar compositional techniques and textures, and it is through such technical similarities

that a degree of shared expressive atmosphere between Stravinsky and his contemporaries can be sensed.

A modern *espressivo*

Given Stravinsky's fabled capacity for appropriating elements of other composers' principles and procedures, it is always instructive to analyse his expressions of lack of empathy. None is more understandable – or relevant to my present argument – than this:

> If I were able to penetrate the barrier of style (Berg's radically alien emotional climate) I suspect he would appear to me as the most gifted constructor of form of the composers of this century. He transcends even his own most overt modelling. In fact, he is the only one to have achieved large-scale development-type forms without a suggestion of 'neo-classic' dissimulation. His legacy contains very little on which to build, however. He is at the end of a development (and form and style are not such independent growths that we can pretend to use the one and discard the other) whereas Webern, the Sphinx, has bequeathed a whole foundation, as well as a contemporary sensibility and style.[26]

The fact that so much music composed since 1960 refutes Stravinsky's sweeping claim that Berg's legacy 'contains very little on which to build' is powerful evidence for the partial nature of Stravinsky's own importance to music since his death. The 'otherness' of Berg clearly struck deeply, and in another comment Stravinsky was more specific about his personal resistance. He singled out the 'direct expression of the composer's own feelings' in the 'orchestral flagellation' of *Wozzeck*'s 'D minor' Interlude, declaring that 'what disturbs me about this great masterpiece and one that I love, is the level of its appeal to "ignorant" audiences'. In one of his most artfully revealing comments on his own expressive ideals, Stravinsky continued as follows: 'Passionate emotion' can be conveyed by very different means than these, and within the most 'limiting conventions'. The Timurid miniaturists, for example, were forbidden to portray facial expression. In one moving scene, from the life of an early Zoroastrian king, the

> artist shows a group of totally blank faces. The dramatic tension is in the way the ladies of the court are shown eavesdropping, and in the slightly discordant gesture of one of the principal figures. In another of these miniatures, two lovers confront each other with stony looks, but the man unconsciously touches his finger to his lips, and this packs the picture with, for me, as much passion as the *crescendo molto* of *Wozzeck*.[27]

As I have argued elsewhere, Stravinsky could hardly have been expected, in the 1960s, to recognise that the alternative modernity of Berg (compounded of constructivism and expressionism) might provide a no less valid legacy than his own devotion to 'the most limiting conventions'.[28] Others had similar problems of perception, and the fact that Boulez (for one) advanced from reservations about Berg, which parallel Stravinsky's, to an acceptance of Berg's importance as an authentically modern voice provides further support for the view that Stravinsky's would be one legacy among several within a late-century context of pluralities and polarities. At the same time, however, this contextualising of Stravinsky invites consideration of the degree to which his own music undermines assumptions about its incompatibility with Austro-German modernism. To this extent, the composer was perfectly correct in suggesting to Craft that the similarities ('parallelisms') between himself and Schoenberg were 'more interesting' than those 'thesis/antithesis' oppositions.

From polarity to convergence

In addition to reminding us that 'Stravinsky and modernism are not synonymous', Jonathan Cross notes the dangers of proposing an 'opposition between the non-developmental, non-narrative objectivity of Stravinsky and the subjective, Expressionist continuity with the Romantic tradition in Schoenberg'.[29] But no less problematic is any implication that Stravinsky himself, after 1914, lost all contact with subjectivity, continuity and other remnants of traditions very different from those with which his later style was most directly concerned. It is not the case that, after *The Rite of Spring*, Apollo entirely eliminates Dionysus, or that (neo)classicism promotes synthesis at the expense of continuing, unresolved dialectic. Rather, the Stravinskian context – the ways in which his compositional style evolved over more than half a century between *Petrushka* and *Requiem Canticles* – intersects with those of other composers, and is not absolutely, inherently different. The reasons for this circumstance are complex, and much to do with that pervasive aesthetic polarity between divergence and convergence in relation to tonal, harmonic centres which is outlined in the *Poetics of Music*.[30] Although *Poetics* appears to confine the relevance of polarity to the realm of purely musical 'language', its role is no less salient when matters of form and genre are brought into play.

It has long been a commonplace of twentieth-century music histories to note that the pre-1914, avant-garde formal initiatives of such compositions as Schoenberg's *Erwartung* and Webern's sets of orchestral pieces, Op. 6

and Op. 10, were not followed up with significant determination until the appearance of a new avant garde after 1945. But it is one thing to note the extent to which, between 1918 and 1945, Stravinsky, Bartók, Hindemith, Schoenberg, Berg and others dedicated themselves to preserving the formal attributes of traditional genres – symphony, concerto, string quartet and so on – leaving it to Webern and Varèse to carry more radical attitudes forward; it is something else to demonstrate that these 'conservative' attitudes had lost all contact with the progressive modernism that preceded them. They had not. Not only do Stravinsky's various vocal and instrumental works – even those called symphony or concerto – 'remake the past' in ways that help to define their inherent modernity; they allude to past modes of expression (and with as much pleasure as anxiety) in ways that reinforce their generic links with tradition, at the same time as they proclaim, stylistically, their distance from tradition.

Broken chords and lyric tragedy

While an essentially 'linguistic' study of this phenomenon in Stravinsky could focus on such continuity-establishing factors as the presence of broken chords or outlined triads – comparing the ending of *Petrushka* with the Postlude from *Requiem Canticles*, for example – a generic traversal of the same ground will highlight the composer's resourceful exploitation of allusions to dance and song, and to contrasts between dynamic and lyric *topoi*.

Stravinsky believed that melody was 'the summit of the hierarchy of elements that make up music',[31] and the Stravinskian melodic style never abandoned that element of formality which remained his greatest defence against the fierce explosiveness of Germanic Expressionism. Stravinskian lyric expressiveness is never more formal, or more deeply felt, than in the context of lament. Nevertheless, it is when sorrow and regret are presented in ways that distance them from the formalised ceremonies of the liturgy that 'order' – which, Walsh declares, was 'the watchword in his life and in his music'[32] – is most forcefully challenged.

No composition is more crucial in demonstrating the range of Stravinskian lyricism than *Oedipus Rex*, and Walsh's commentary on the opera-oratorio suggests what some of the useful terms for a comparison with other dramas might be: he writes, for example, of the work's opening as 'a gesture of panic and despair', and of its final stages that 'the atmosphere is one of terror and theatrically real catastrophe, not the commemorative or prophylactic disaster of the Stations of the Cross or the Burial Service'.[33] As Walsh demonstrates, such features are not inconsistent with the use of chant-derived thematic material, not least because at the opening of

Oedipus such material can be felt to establish a further allusion, to Verdi. But the emotional language of Walsh's interpretation – 'the numbed anguish of the plague-ridden Theban people', 'the image of Oedipus's moral blindness could hardly be more poignant',[34] coupled with references to the composer's achievement of 'a more disturbing irony', and to the 'dramatically telling picture of self-assurance gradually undermined by the Truth'[35] – offers ample evidence of the vital respects in which this work invites interpretation and understanding in terms no less relevant to music dramas whose style and aesthetic context could not be more different. Most striking of all is Walsh's discussion of the first scene of Act 2, with Jocasta's aria brilliantly conveying 'the richness and complexity of the drama of great souls brought low by human frailty', and of 'the fear and even panic', the 'sense of suppressed violence', of Jocasta's duet with Oedipus.[36]

If all this does little more than underline the sense of Dionysian forces at work in what is often categorised as a stylised and statuesque ritual, it serves its purpose. The nearest Stravinsky comes in *Oedipus* to the luminously restrained, Apollonian lyricism he employs in several subsequent works is the famous moment of the King's acknowledgement of the terrible truth, 'Lux facta est', with its descending B minor arpeggio. Walsh neatly touches on the sense of multiple meaning – ambiguity, enrichment? – at this moment,[37] and this is an important nuance, since the 'sacrifice to Apollo' which can be found in *Oedipus*'s immediate successor, the ballet *Apollon musagète*, does not involve replacing tension and divergence, with resolution and convergence along the lines of the kind of simplistic tabulation employed in *Dialogues*. Rather, the tensions and divergences are less Dionysian, less assertive, less disruptive. It was the ending of *Apollon*, not that of *Oedipus*, which was provocatively described by the composer many years later as the nearest he ever came to the truly tragic:

> if a truly tragic note is sounded anywhere in my music, that note is in *Apollo*. Apollo's birth is tragic, I think, and the Apotheosis is every bit as tragic as Phèdre's line when she learns of the love of Hippolyte and Aricie – 'Tous les jours se levaient clairs et sereins pour eux' – though, of course, Racine and myself were both absolutely heartless people, and cold, cold.[38]

Tragic or not, that ending certainly reshapes those very ambiguities – between D major and B minor – which embody the terrible enlightening truth in the opera-oratorio. The ending of *Apollon musagète* will be discussed in more detail later on. For the moment, it is enough to observe that these passages in *Oedipus* and *Apollon* both indicate the degree to which certainty, tinged with sorrow, summons up a musical expression in which celebration and lamentation co-exist.

Those comments from *Dialogues* suggest above all that, for Stravinsky, 'tragic' implies a state of unknowing innocence, a peculiarly human kind of vulnerability in which hope and optimism, both destined to be confounded, are at their most pure. If this is so, then I would be encouraged to reinforce my own reading of a tragic dimension in the otherwise barbaric 'Sacrificial dance' of *The Rite*, a reading scorned by Taruskin as missing the main point of this musical celebration of the 'subhuman'.[39] I would also see this aspect as evidence of the way in which Stravinsky's still very Russian music can be aligned with wider aesthetic as well as formal concepts in the still-evolving vortex of musical modernism. By the time we get to *Oedipus* and *Apollon musagète*, of course, the modernist context is very different from what it had been in 1912, and to compare the ending of *Oedipus* with that of *Wozzeck* – the most powerful near-contemporary Austro-German demonstration of the tragic vulnerability of innocent optimism – is certainly not to discover startling evidence of absolute stylistic or formal convergence. The parallelism is in the shared generic allusion, and the reliance of both composers on the particular emotional impact of ostinato. Seekers after similarity might also be struck by the role of G as a concluding centre for both *Wozzeck* and *Oedipus*, although Berg's post-tonal stratification is very different from Stravinsky's more homogenous modality.

This comparison, blending formal and hermeneutic aspects, highlights the open-ended play of difference and similarity that such interpretative discourse facilitates. The similarities of *Affekt* between the two works, and the degree to which the spirit of loss and regret is conveyed through focus on ostinato, do not override the complementary differences of texture and style, or of dramatic context. Neither differences nor similarities are absolute, but interdependent, interactive.

Forming laments

To the extent that Stravinsky, even at the height of his neoclassical phase, does not shy away from such representations of loss and regret, he shares fundamental aesthetic contexts with Schoenberg, Berg, Janáček, Bartók and Britten – to name only the most obvious near-contemporaries. It is not that Stravinsky stands for different things; rather, he expresses similar things in different ways. In my judgement, it is his capacity for what Walsh, in connection with the 'Lacrimosa' from *Requiem Canticles*, terms 'intense lyrical outpouring'[40] that does most to establish significant links between Stravinsky and other composers who have nothing to do with Russia and its specific musical traditions. At the same time, however, consideration of this topic takes us back to what is most personal to Stravinsky, namely the very

individual way in which his view of 'the spirit of lamentation' is inextricably bound up with 'monotony – the sense of perpetual recurrence . . . and the simple inevitability of the cycle of birth, life and death'.[41] On this matter, Walsh's comparison of *Les Noces* and *Threni*, brief though it is, is especially important.

Most other scholars, working from within the established traditions of theory-based analysis, have shared Taruskin's preference for what amounts to an essentially formal context (though normally without the detailed perspectives on the music's Russian aura which are Taruskin's speciality). For example, both Martha Hyde and Chandler Carter make stimulating observations, but they do not extend beyond the refinement of our understanding of Stravinsky's modernist techniques. Hyde, writing about the start of the slow movement of the Octet, homes in on a central Stravinskian characteristic, that 'allusion to a dominant-tonic cadence' which is allusive rather than actual simply because

> octatonic structures intrude and block an authentic tonal cadence; octatonicism here remains superimposed over a D-minor tonality, both octatonicism and tonality maintaining their identities despite their superimposition. The inevitable ambiguities this superimposition creates are essential features of the theme. The clash of diatonic and octatonic elements creates an equilibrium that resists fusion or synthesis.[42]

Similarly, Carter, in his telling analysis of the 'Duettino' from Act III, scene 3 of *The Rake's Progress*, demonstrates that 'the subtle play and inherent ambiguity between the tonal and the non-tonal can be sensitively gauged without dismissing or ignoring the role of either'. Such music demands 'a pluralistic analytical approach . . . to unlock the mysteries and delights of works in which play with style substitutes for play within a style'.[43]

Both Hyde and Carter have much more to say about these topics, but a quite different way of exploring modernist ambivalence is found in the following:

> In surprising ways [the work] seems to *remember* and then abandon the musical language of its historical antecedents. Passages that employ harsh, strident dissonance give way to ones that evoke the sweetness of tonality, only to reemerge and begin the process again. Passages where the shape of musical phrases have only the most tenuous connection to [the composer's] precursors give way to ones whose phrase shapes have clear connections to the past . . . In sum, within the [work] a radically new musical discourse confronts a host of historical references.[44]

This statement could obviously be applied to a wide range of twentieth-century works, but the fact that Michael Cherlin is writing about

Schoenberg's String Trio of 1946 naturally raises the question of whether the kind of analytical contexts he establishes for this composer might also prove relevant to Stravinsky. Cherlin develops a pair of rhetorical tropes – *imperfection* and *distraction* – in order to bring an expressive dimension to bear on the 'old/new' dialectic of his initial formulation. '*Distraction* . . . describes the ways in which an anticipated musical trajectory, such as phrase completion or thematic continuation, is disrupted, and the dramatic and emotional sense of that disruption as well. *Imperfection* . . . conveys a sense of incompletion, which in our context is the result of a *distraction*. Thus the two tropes, distraction and imperfection, work as a pair, with the former leading the latter.'[45]

Cherlin believes that these tropes 'generalize well and can be used to inform interpretations of most of Schoenberg's music, as well as that of other composers'.[46] This is undoubtedly true, and it is clear that their propensity for generalisation is due in large part to their comprehensiveness. Both *imperfection* and *distraction*, as defined above, embody oppositions, while also – from a more Stravinskian perspective – acknowledging the Schoenbergian tendency to give Dionysus priority over Apollo. It would indeed be absurd to argue that the technical parameters and expressive qualities of such 'distraction' and 'imperfection' as we might detect in Stravinsky are identical to Schoenberg's. Yet Chandler Carter's discussion of 'subtle play . . . between the tonal and non-tonal' is evidence of strategies that link the two composers, and the specific consequences of the type of rhetorical play discussed by Cherlin, creating (in Schoenberg's String Trio, and many other pieces) 'an equilibrium that is suggested and negated throughout the work',[47] is very much the kind of modernist dialogue in which Stravinskian and Schoenbergian qualities begin to converge.

Marking the genre

Full exploration of the analytical consequences of this topic would therefore proceed from form to rhetoric. In the area of form, Cherlin's comment, with respect to Schoenberg's Trio, that 'the evocations of tonality, built into the tone row, imply and then deny closure',[48] might seem to rule out parallels with any of Stravinsky's works before the mid 1950s. Yet we need only recall Hyde's analysis of the Octet movement, or look at other discussions of Stravinskian closure which observe the inherent ambiguity of the processes at work (as in Rehding's study of the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*[49]), to be aware that the basic principle of calling tonality (as a means of ensuring satisfyingly unambivalent completion) into question is fundamental in

both instances, however different the atmosphere or style of the works cited. It is nevertheless precisely to that difference of atmosphere, of style, that the rhetorical or hermeneutic analysis must most decisively address itself. For Cherlin, the expressive character of Schoenberg's Trio is determined, in large part, by the way the composer treats one particular generic allusion, to the waltz. Building on what is known about the autobiographical impulse behind the Trio – Schoenberg's near-death from a heart attack and his avowed intention of embodying this experience in the composition – Cherlin argues that the musical imagery in general, and the waltz allusions in particular, reflect the recognition of an ultimately plural if not ambiguous sense that, in the ultimate human struggle between life and death, both states can be associated with peace and fulfilment. 'With the emergence of the waltz, the listener first apprehends the potential for repose and balance that the returning fragments will cumulatively suggest as the work unfolds'; and it is 'the contrast of those fragments with the other musical material in which they are embedded' that 'brings the tropes of distraction and imperfection into particular relief'.[50]

Cherlin believes that 'Schoenberg's music exemplifies the kind of art that gains density of meaning through conflicting forces'.[51] To the extent that those forces have no need to move from coherent equilibrium to integration, synthesis or unambiguous closure, Schoenberg's 'kind of art' is modernist; and so is Stravinsky's. Nevertheless, Schoenberg makes use of old/new dialogues to explore aspects of more lyrical, more regular, more traditionally tonal and romantic allusions as set against the expressionistic disruptions of music that places such allusions into the most powerful relief. Stravinsky (at least after *The Rite of Spring*) uses old/new dialogues in a more restrained, Apollonian fashion. Yet in a work contemporary with the Schoenberg Trio – the ballet *Orpheus* – the culminating progression from the violent 'Pas d'action', in which 'the Bacchantes attack Orpheus, seize him and tear him to pieces', to the serene 'Apotheosis' in which Apollo 'appears . . . wrests the lyre from Orpheus and raises his song heavenwards', shows that the contrast between Dionysian disruption and Apollonian order is still palpable. Though Stephen Walsh argues of *Orpheus* that 'even its violent episodes are played with restraint', and that 'the killing and apotheosis of Orpheus stand for the taming and ordering of those orgiastic elements which music took over from the Dionysian rituals of primitive culture', Daniel Albright discusses the work in terms of its 'desperation, ecstasy' and 'madness'.[52] Even if 'expressionistic disruptions' are replaced with 'objective' mechanistic patterning, this is set against a kind of lyric expression, and a concern to allude to matters of life and death, as potent in its way as Schoenberg's, or Berg's.

Conflicting forces

Writing of the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, Stephen Walsh says that the work 'had distilled the ethnic style into a kind of pure formal essence, of which it really did seem true to say that "the play of musical elements is the thing"'. Walsh refers to 'Stravinsky's image of a music that ruthlessly excludes anecdote and nuance, a music which, so to speak, proves the primacy of form by refusing to admit anything not demonstrably (and in the most primitive sense of the word) "formal"'.[53] The distillation which the *Symphonies* represents does not exclude certain very palpable generic allusions – to song, dance, celebration, lament – whose presence, far from the accidental results of the composer's failure to enforce his own logic of abstraction, are essential aspects of the music's integration of form and content. Even in the *Symphonies* we can sense Apollo constraining Dionysus, not ensuring his total absence, and this remains Stravinsky's governing 'tone' thereafter. If *The Rite of Spring* is Stravinsky's most explicit demonstration of a conjunction between Dionysus and modernism, then such later works as *Orpheus* exemplify, not so much a whole-hearted rejection of modernism, as a refined and complex conjunction between modernising and classicising impulses.

In the light of the comments about the Apollonian principle that occur in Stravinsky's *Autobiography*, we might expect the ballet *Apollon musagète* to offer unambiguous illustrations of the composer's preference for 'studied conception over vagueness, the rule over the arbitrary, order over the haphazard'.[54] In spirit, the ballet's concluding movement, 'Apothéose', in which Apollo is led by the Muses to Parnassus, is indeed worlds away from the corybantic frenzy of *The Rite of Spring*'s 'Sacrificial dance'. Yet, as the *Poetics* confirms, Stravinsky's understanding of Apollonian classicism did not require him to abandon the techniques of polarisation, and of dialogue between convergence and divergence, which had served the Dionysian spirit of *Petrushka* and *The Rite* so well. Apollo's demand, the lectures state, is that 'for the lucid ordering of the work . . . all the Dionysian elements which set the imagination of the artist in motion must be properly subjugated before they intoxicate us, and must finally be made to submit to the law', with the consequence that 'variety is valid only as a means of attaining similarity'.[55] This would appear to rule out modernist multiplicity, and yet the music of *Apollon musagète*, while obviously much smoother in rhythm and more consonant in harmony than that of *The Rite*, as well as less 'nationalist' in melodic character, indicates very clearly that Stravinskian similarity need not mean *stability*, in the sense of traditionally classical unity and resolution.

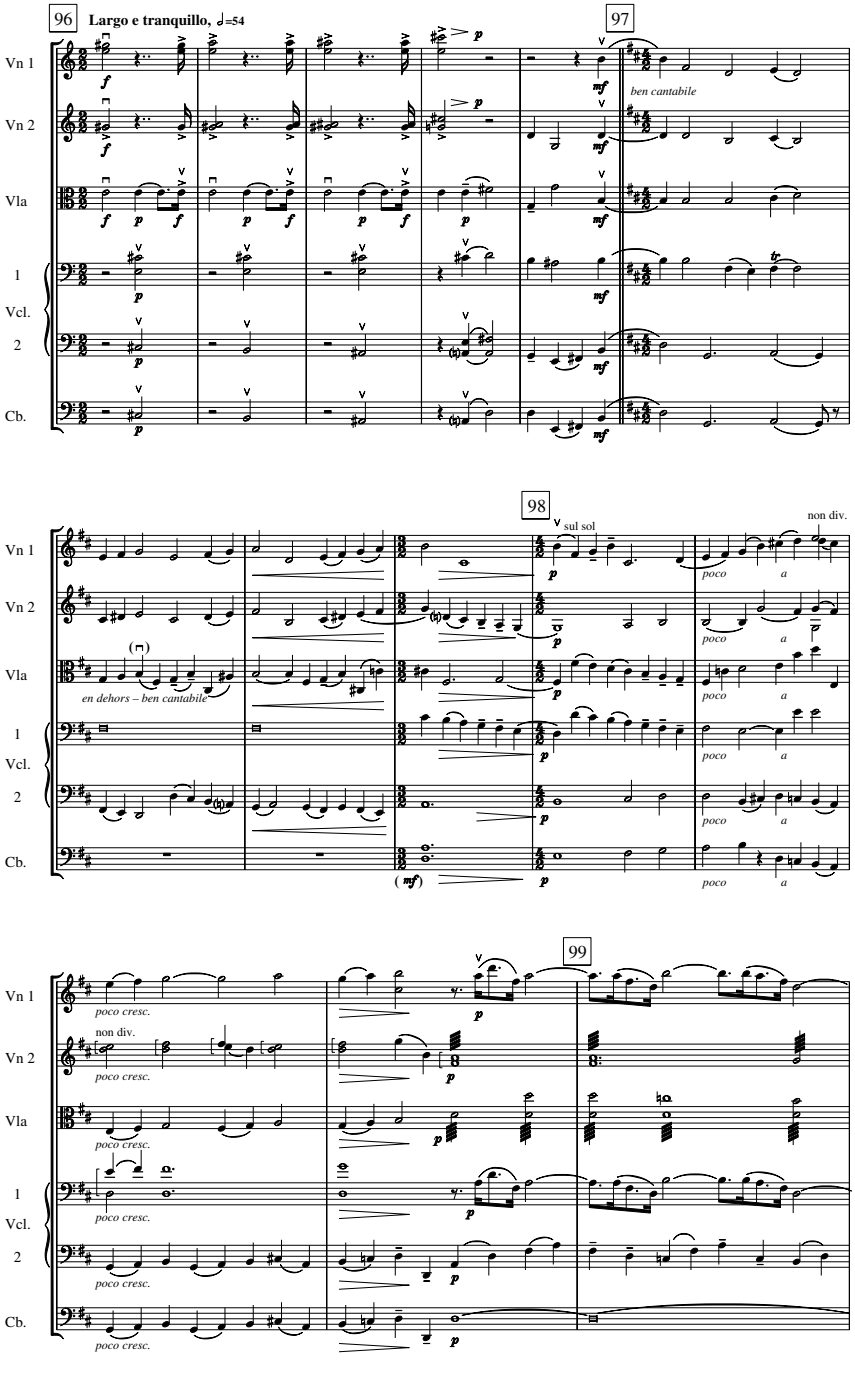
Polarity in the 'Apothéose' (Ex. 3.1) is represented most basically by the tonal centres of D and B which are both implied by the two-sharp key signature, and it is as unsatisfactory to interpret what happens as a clear-cut

progression from D major to B minor as it is to argue that the two tonics are irreconcilable opposites. The final chord, certainly, is one of B minor, but the context in which it occurs renders its status as tonic less stable than would be the case if that context were more conventionally diatonic.

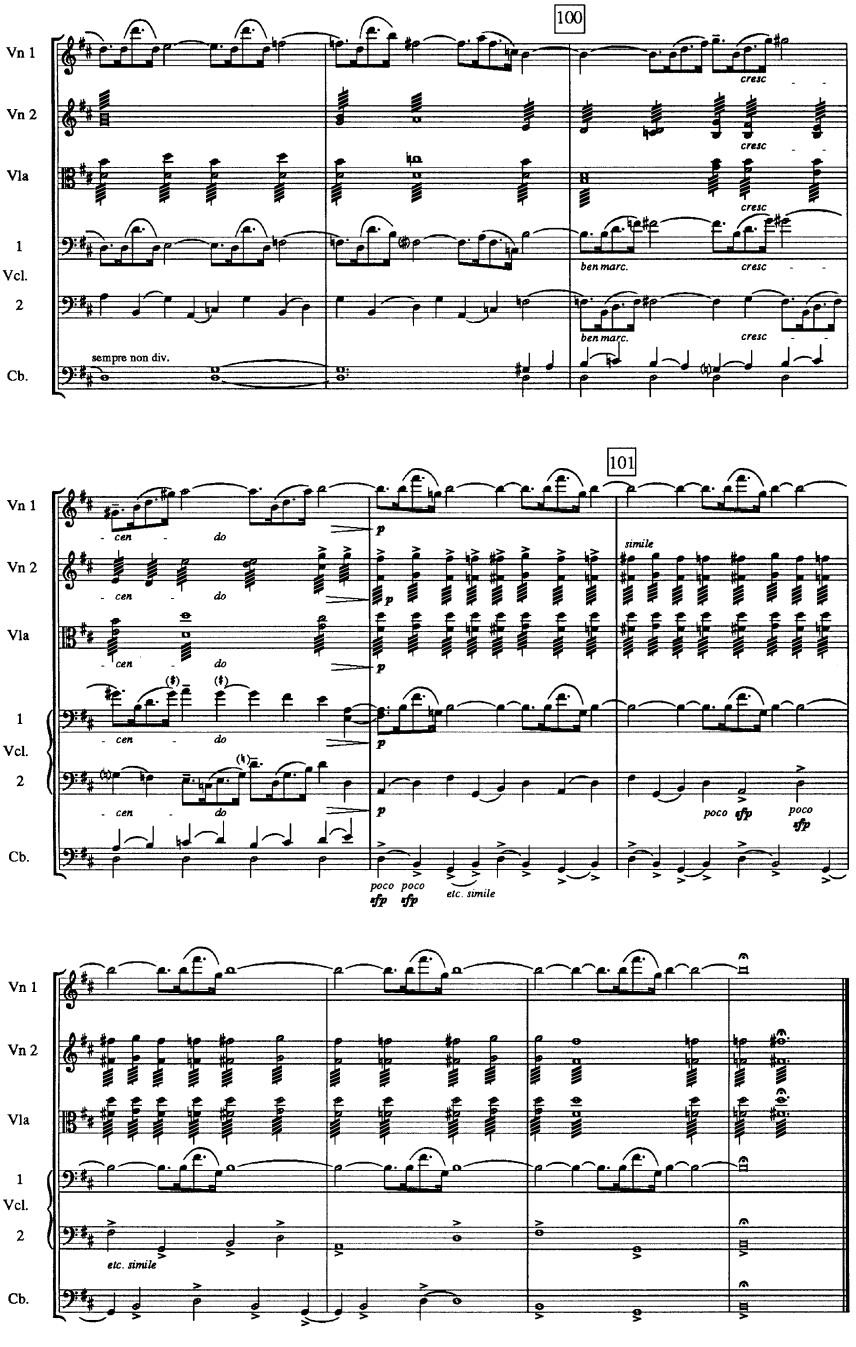
Another, no less important aspect of the dialogue between convergence and divergence here is the interaction, and also the preserved separation, between the various textural strata. This is of considerable importance to the character of the final section of the 'Apothéose', from one bar before fig. 101. In the upper stratum, the first violins, doubled two octaves lower by the first cellos, repeat the final motivic unit of the main melody, whose lyric character is fundamental to the grave serenity of the musical atmosphere – Stravinsky's uniquely 'cool' spirit of tragic vulnerability and loss. This motive decorates the central B with notes which, if considered as arpeggiating a chord, create a sense of dissonance, even though, separately, both F♯ and G find consonant support in the lower voices. The lowest stratum (which could be subdivided) comprises the ostinatos in second cello (with its initial six-beat pattern) and in double bass (with its initial four-beat pattern). Although these lines finally converge on an agreed progression from G to B, they spend most of the six bars in question offering distinct perspectives on their shared Ds and Bs. The second cellos retain the D-supporting As and F♯s, while the basses have only a G which, in a conventional diatonic context, would support D as tonic more strongly than B. The third, central stratum, in second violins and violas, begins in step with the four-beat ostinato in the bass. While its principal pitches – D and F♯ – have obvious relevance to the prevailing polarities, the linear unfolding of the actual ostinato figures, in which the upper and lower neighbours of F♯ are prominent, contributes significantly to the special, destabilised harmony. This third stratum also supports the opposition between symmetric (B/F♮) and asymmetric (B and F♯) features at the end, something to which Stravinsky could have recourse even when his music was not officially octatonic.

So far this analysis has followed through the implications of a Taruskin-style formal stock-taking. But switching to a more Cherlinesque view of rhetoric allows us to note the expressive force of the contrast between the 'mechanistic' ostinatos of the lower strata and the fined-down lyrical melody of the upper stratum. The mood is not as ritualistically funereal as in several other Stravinsky finales – for example, that of *Requiem Canticles*, discussed below – and there are less explicit generic allusions behind this processional music than for the earlier movements of the ballet. But it would be wholly inadequate to speak of 'a kind of pure formal essence', in which 'the play of the musical elements is the thing'[56] and we willingly exclude – joyfully or otherwise – the kind of nuances of expression which derive from the associations which the music sets up with those precedents and precursors

Ex. 3.1 *Apollon musagète,* 'Apothéose'



Ex. 3.1 (*cont.*)



it cannot hope to escape. It was, after all, this closing section of *Apollon musagète* that provoked the greatest admiration in some of the composer's most sceptical critics. For Boris Asaf'yev, 'the hymn is itself justification for the whole work. Listening to it, one forgets the motley mosaic and eclecticism of the other pages of the score';[57] and Prokofiev declared that, 'on the very last page of the work . . . he has shone and managed to make even his disgusting main theme sound convincing'.[58] As Walsh notes, 'in *Oedipus Rex* and *Apollo*, neoclassicism was openly making its peace with the irrational, with passion and fear, and, at the end of *Apollo*, with a mysterious, otherworldly purity that Schloezer was quick to see as an intimation of the sacramental.'[59]

Schloezer's view was that, after *Apollon musagète*, Stravinsky 'can no longer give us anything but a Mass'.[60] Nevertheless, one does not have to reach for association with the genres of sacred music to find a sufficiently resonant context for an ending whose processional solemnity reaches back through features of the Serenade in A and Piano Concerto to memories of the majestic, march-like transitions in *Parsifal*. The models of Stravinsky's two earlier B-centred conclusions – *The Firebird* and *Les Noces* – establish a link between that tonality and solemn processional music, though both are far more conclusive in their cadencing than the 'Apothéose'. There is indeed a 'sacramental' quality to the 'mysterious . . . purity' of *Apollon*'s ending: and this might even be felt to reinforce the fundamental quality of separation between celebrants (dancers) and spectators. It is the spectators' sense of loss which the sorrowing quality of the music depicts, while at the same time it represents the transfiguring apotheosis of Apollo and his attendant Muses. However, given the particular spirit that Stravinsky associated with the dithyramb – as most explicitly in the finale of the *Duo concertant*, which is more Apollonian than Dionysian – it is perhaps this elusive yet numinous genre which fits most closely with the qualities to be heard in *Apollon*'s 'Apothéose'.[61]

This analysis, as far as it goes, only hints at the kind of topics that could be involved in an appropriately detailed study of those musical elements which connect Stravinsky to his contemporaries. For example, the fining-down of thematic content, supported by various ostinatos, in the 'Apothéose' suggests the closural technique defined by Schoenberg as 'liquidation',[62] and the *dolce* ending of Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 3 (1927) – contemporary with *Apollon* – is by no means remote in technique or character from the Stravinsky work, despite its twelve-note basis. Both the thematic fining-down and the ostinato-based accompaniment effect an ending which is far from decisively closural in the traditional, classical sense.

Such similarities are far from invariable, of course, and the ways in which these composers create endings that are more decisive than dissolving (Schoenberg's Variations for Orchestra, Stravinsky's *Symphony of*

Psalms) also reinforce differences of tone and spirit. As already pointed out, Schoenberg's contrapuntal propensities ensured that he only rarely fined down his textures to the chorale-like simplicity which was so important to Stravinsky. Although the wistful mood of the Third Quartet's ending is comparable to the regretful sublimity of *Apollon*'s 'Apothéose', for an instance of Schoenberg's ability to embody expressions of loss and sorrow in ways quite different from Stravinsky's, one need look no further than the overtly emotional ending of *Moses und Aron* (Act 2).

Cherlin's consideration of that 'density of meaning through conflicting forces' in Schoenberg is no less relevant to a music of preserved polarities rather than resolving synthesis, like that of *Apollon*. It is nevertheless worth repeating my earlier comment at this point: 'what is intriguing, when comparisons are attempted between Stravinsky and his German contemporaries, is the very allusiveness and ambiguity of relations between their different approaches to parallel generic, expressive contexts'.[63] Nor do 'allusiveness and ambiguity' diminish when Stravinsky's later, twelve-note compositions are brought into the picture.

Ritual and regret

The similarity/difference relation of Stravinsky to Schoenberg is arguably never more resonant than in Stravinsky's last twelve-note movement, the Postlude to the *Requiem Canticles*, and the specific allusions to lyrical and ritual celebration that it embodies. Much interest has already been shown in the generic and semiotic aspects of this music, especially its associations with chorale and dirge. But it is no less salient to suggest that, even in this relatively simple structure, the funereal character of the music has binary rather than singular connotations. In particular, I do not hear the sustained horn line as especially integrative or supportive. To me, it has an almost romantic tone, an echo of lyric lament against the impersonal, ritual bell sounds, and we can hear both the opposition and the interaction, a specifically modernist sense of order as structurally relevant to the circumstances Stravinsky had established in this work. Some will prefer the interaction, even perhaps to the extent of feeling that the movement resolves in favour of a single, F-based sonority. Others will prefer the preserved equilibrium between incompatible strategies, promoted by the mediation of the chords in harp, piano and flutes.[64]

The Postlude is the ultimate demonstration of Stravinsky's rejection of Austro-German *espressivo* in all its fractured and frantic glory. The blend of the lyrical and ritualistic in the Postlude, its combination of a sense of regret with quiet celebration of eternal Christian truths, recalls that concluding, 'cold' apotheosis of *Apollon musagète* which, for Stravinsky, best

represented his own personal sense of the tragic spirit, and the feature which, above all, defined his distance from Schoenbergian rhetoric. The post-expressionist trope of 'imperfection and distraction' might therefore appear to have little power here. Yet that basic sense of tension between the centrifugal and the centripetal which underpins Cherlin's reading of Schoenberg's language in the String Trio is a factor in Stravinsky's Postlude as well, as the horn's outlined F minor triad unfolds against the atonal processional chords. Once again, comparable techniques serve radically different styles of expression. So, while it will not do to fine down the complex and intriguing interactions between these composers to a slogan like Mikhail Druskin's – Stravinsky's 'ideal was . . . "unstable stability", as opposed to Schoenberg's which might equally be described as "stable instability"'[65] – the rewards of considering the two in terms of what they share as well as of what divides them are undeniable.

This chapter has argued that it is valuable to consider Stravinsky in a context that does not focus exclusively on his Russian past, or his personal, self-determined 'present', but on the possibility of dialogues, between him and other major composers, that point to a shared nexus – flexible, multivalent, interactive – of 'topical' and generic associations. There is a no less fundamental sense of composers coming after Stravinsky building on features directly relevant to those dialogues: composers like Carter, Maxwell Davies and many others, whose debts to Stravinsky seem to facilitate an engagement with that wider ethos of stylistic attributes in which what is opposed yet complementary invites and stimulates further exploration – amounting, it might even appear, to a late-century mainstream. And even with composers for whom Stravinsky's tone of voice seems to have little relevance – Ligeti, Kurtág – connections can be traced by way of comparable generic concerns, with lyric lamentation, for example. Like the Table of Comparisons with Schoenberg in *Dialogues*, such 'connections' might be felt to offer little more than a rudimentary sense of difference. But they are important nevertheless as a means of guarding against any tendency to categorise composers solely by means of their 'individual' traits within an otherwise open-endedly 'plural' culture. In the end, Stravinsky is a great composer because he survives these comparisons with his individuality enhanced, and not because his individuality renders comparisons irrelevant.