

“Everything Had to Change”: Nadia Boulanger’s Translation of Modernism in the Rice Lecture Series, 1925

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Abstract

From December 1924 to January 1925 the influential French pedagogue Nadia Boulanger undertook her first concert and speaking tour of the United States of America. The end of January found Boulanger in Houston, Texas, where she had agreed to present three talks as part of the Rice Lecture Series. The stenographer’s transcript of her lectures, which differs greatly from the articles she later published in the Rice Pamphlets, provides the earliest evidence of Boulanger’s nascent trans-Atlantic pedagogical work. Further details reside in Boulanger’s letters home to her mother, offering intimate insight into Boulanger’s impressions of the United States and its contemporary musical traditions. I borrow Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of a “minor language” to theorize how Boulanger adroitly manipulated her status as a foreigner, as a prodigious virtuoso, and as a woman to circumvent American prejudices about women’s involvement in music making and gain access to “authority.” Thus events from Houston 1925 serve both as a means to document Boulanger’s first recorded English lectures and as a case study in her development of a specialized pedagogical language, developed out of an experience with Franco-American translation in the southern United States.

Nadia Boulanger arrived in Houston, Texas on 25 January 1925. She had spent the previous four weeks in the United States conducting her first performance and lecture tour on American soil. A pleasant start in New York, Boston, Washington, and Philadelphia saw Boulanger treated with a degree of celebrity, surrounded as she was by alumni of the Conservatoire Américain, a summer school in Paris for advanced music studies.¹ The East Coast enchanted Boulanger, and she was intoxicated by the unique position she found herself in as a woman escorted into the male-dominated world of the highest echelon of America’s musical institutions.

By the time she arrived in Houston, however, she was worn down. Weeks of filling her days with lessons, performances, and social events had taken their toll, as had the seemingly endless journey by train from New York to Urbana to St. Louis to Houston.² There were far fewer familiar faces in the South, and Boulanger was

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¹ The École des Hautes Études Musicales de Fontainebleau, later known as the Conservatoire Américain, opened its doors on 26 June 1921. The school was the brainchild of General John J. Pershing and Walter Damrosch, both of whom were interested in keeping musical links between the United States and France strong following the First World War. Charles-Marie Widor was named the school’s first director, and Boulanger was engaged by personal invitation from Damrosch to teach harmony, counterpoint, and musicianship. The school operated only in the summers, and students paid \$100 a month to study there. For the history of the École des Hautes Études Musicales de Fontainebleau see Kendra Preston Leonard, *The Conservatoire Américain: A History* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007).

² Letter from Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, 24 January 1925, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France (F-Pn), N.L.a. 282 (36–42).

confronted with the reality that she was not nearly as great a celebrity there as she had been in the Northeast.³ In Houston, moreover, Boulanger faced one of the more daunting tasks of her tour: presenting three large-scale formal lectures—in English.

Boulanger had been invited to participate in the Rice Lecture Series by Edgar Odell Lovett, director of the series and then President of the Rice Institute. The lectures, then in their third season, were underwritten by Ima Hogg, a wealthy and influential patron of the Houston area determined to improve what she considered a provincial and culturally dilettante community.⁴ Boulanger's relative anonymity, and no doubt her gender, translated into an offer—\$1000 for all three lectures—that was \$500 less than the fee offered to any other speaker, albeit more than Boulanger typically commanded for public talks.⁵ Boulanger's tour manager quickly accepted the engagement on her behalf, and topics for the lectures were set at "Debussy," "Modern Music," and "The Music of Stravinsky."⁶

When Boulanger disembarked in Houston, she knew she would have to command an audience in a language other than her own while addressing modern music, an aesthetic world foreign to many in her audience. The stenographer's transcripts of her lectures are some of the earliest texts we have of Boulanger's nascent trans-Atlantic pedagogical work, and letters home to her mother reveal the process by which Boulanger adapted the content of these lectures. Furthermore, the transcripts of the talks she gave on 27, 28, and 29 January 1925 differ greatly in content and in manner from the texts she sent later for publication in the Rice Lecture Pamphlet Series.⁷ This discrepancy may in part be attributed to Boulanger's ghost translator, Howard Hinners, a former pupil who agreed to assist with the subsequent adaptation of her lectures into article form.⁸ But beyond the imposition of

³ At least two Boulanger alumni—Katherine Morgan and Josephine Boudreaux—resided in Houston at the time of Boulanger's visit, a fact oft-repeated by the local press when advertising Boulanger's lectures. See Walter Bailey, "Nadia Boulanger's Three Lectures in Houston," in *Nadia Boulanger in North America: Histories & Legacies* (University of Rochester Press, forthcoming). I am indebted to Walter Bailey for sharing a copy of this essay with me.

⁴ Walter B. Bailey, "Ima Hogg and an Experiment in Audience Education: The Rice Lectureship in Music (1923–33)," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 5/3 (2011): 395–42.

⁵ Bailey, "Ima Hogg," 412. According to Boulanger documents, she was given the first \$500 in advance, and the second \$500 arrived after she submitted the text for publication in the Rice Lectures pamphlet. Nadia Boulanger, "Correspondance avec New York, 1924–1925," (*F-Pn*), Rés. Vm. Dos. 137 (10). On average, documents in this collection show Boulanger charged \$200 for each recital given during her tour.

⁶ Boulanger's contract between the Rice Institute and the office of George Engles, Boulanger's management firm, is dated 3 November 1924. A copy is housed in the Edgar Odell Lovett Papers, Woodson Research Center, Rice University. See also, Bailey, "Ima Hogg," 413.

⁷ The heavily edited version Boulanger returned to the Rice Institute was published as *Lectures on Modern Music Delivered under the Auspices of the Rice Institute Lectureship in Music*, 27, 28, and 29 January 1925, *The Rice Institute Pamphlet* 13/2 (April 1926). Reprinted in Don G. Campbell, *Master Teacher, Nadia Boulanger* (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1984), 99–147. The published articles are also available online: "Igor Stravinsky" (<http://dspace.rice.edu/handle/1911/8735>); "The Twenty-Four Preludes of Claude Debussy" (<http://dspace.rice.edu/handle/1911/8734>); and "French Music, Modern and Ultra-Modern" (<http://dspace.rice.edu/handle/1911/8733>). All quotes in this paper are taken from the stenographer's typescript, which is held by the Centre international Nadia et Lili Boulanger, Paris, France.

⁸ See Léonie Rosenstiel, *Nadia Boulanger: A Life in Music* (New York: Norton, 1982), 181.

Hinners's own voice during the translation process, the stenographer's transcript and Boulanger's letters home clearly reveal that a great deal of "adaptation"—both literal and cultural—took place between what Boulanger intended to tell her audience prior to her arrival in January 1925 and what she finally settled on.

Boulanger's personal quandary is history's gain. Few details exist of her early pedagogical efforts, particularly regarding her development of a discourse sensitive to the dissonances between French and U.S. musical training—and culture in general. Moreover, Boulanger's brand of pan-historical pedagogy had not yet been tested beyond the confines of Paris and Fontainebleau.⁹ Although Boulanger is commonly framed as springing fully-formed from the devastation of World War I to serve as the extraordinary matriarch of the Conservatoire Américain, in truth her commitment to a pedagogical project and her metamorphosis into this *grande dame* was a gradual one, honed over several years, and, as letters reveal, catalyzed by her experiences in Houston. The process by which Boulanger crafted her Rice Lectures provides unprecedented details about her early efforts at public education and the parameters of Franco-American cultural exchange in the mid-1920s as defined by Boulanger.

In 1925, Boulanger's career had only just begun, and so her activity in Houston serves as a prime moment at which to observe her transformation from pedagogical novice to master teacher. Homing in on the specificity of Boulanger's language, and by this I mean both her use of English and her presentation of musical language, presents a means by which we might unpack the process of framing an authoritative voice. It is for this reason that I borrow Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of a "minor literature" to theorize how Boulanger adroitly manipulated her status as a foreigner and virtuoso to gain access to "authority." It was exactly Boulanger's effort to cloak her outsider status through a language that could do nothing but highlight it that opened up a vulnerability she in turn used to persuade. The careful balance between eschewing power and convincing the audience lies at the heart of Boulanger's early success as a public speaker. It also speaks to the inherently fluid nature of cultural development during the modern period, a time when nationality both defined people and yet proved entirely artificial. Trespassing these permeable boundaries and navigating the hybridity of the multinational relationships of the early twentieth century were a fundamental part of the development of music at the time. Thus, on a local level, events from Houston 1925 serve as a means to document Boulanger's first recorded English lectures and as a case study in her development of a specialized pedagogical language, one that arose out of an experience with cultural translation in Houston, Texas. On a broader scale, these events illuminate the intersections among cultures in the United States that so defined the development of modernism in the early decades of the twentieth century.

⁹ See Jeanice Brooks, *The Musical Work of Nadia Boulanger: Performing Past and Present Between the Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Brooks, "New Links Between Them: Modernist Historiographies and the Concerts of Nadia Boulanger," in *Crosscurrents: American and European Music in Interaction, 1900–2000*, ed. Carol Oja, Anne Shreffler, Felix Meyer, and Wolfgang Rathert (Basel: Paul Sacher Stiftung, forthcoming).

Minor Language: Deleuze, Guattari, and Boulanger

Boulanger's work, along with that of other cultural mediators of the early twentieth century, resonates with the theories of the political nature of language proposed by French postmodern philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari propose the concept of a "minor literature," a use of a dominant language by a minority presence.¹⁰ When someone in a marginal position makes use of a dominant language, elements of the original language remain and clash with the dominant discourse. This tension can occur when someone perceived as belonging to an ethnic, gendered, socio-economic, or religious minority addresses a dominant group; Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Sojourner Truth all evoked a minor language as part of their political work. Taking up a dominant language from a marginalized position, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is inherently political, for it highlights the otherness of the speaker and exposes the often tacit power imbalances of a dominant position. There is inherent risk in evoking a minor language, but there can be great reward if one does so convincingly, especially if the act of articulation is reinterpreted as power derived from an exotic viewpoint or if in articulating a minor language successfully one is reframed as an iconoclast, a revolutionary, a visionary. Boulanger's own effectiveness during her Houston lectures and in many subsequent appearances was in large part indebted to her adroit evocation of a minor language when speaking publicly.

Boulanger's English was marked with a heavy French accent and an idiosyncratic grasp of syntax throughout her life. Ever anxious about misspeaking, Boulanger practiced elocution at length before departing for the United States; notes from later speeches for the British Broadcasting Corporation reveal she taught herself the accentuation of particularly difficult English words by annotating them with musical notation (see Figure 1).¹¹

Boulanger's choice to use the English language, despite her limited grasp of its mechanics, clearly marked her as an outsider, and it was a choice that could not be divorced from the power dynamics behind it. Boulanger was not obligated to speak in English. Indeed, of the three French people to speak as part of the Rice Lecture series—Boulanger, Maurice Ravel, and Arthur Honegger—Boulanger was the only one who chose not to speak in her mother tongue. Fluency in a language, the ability to make one's meaning clearly understood, is fundamental to imposing authority. The decision to present one's self through a discourse that could undermine one's efficacy is often a risky one. In Boulanger's case, it put the onus on her to convey her meaning, not on the audience to glean it. It would mark Boulanger from the beginning as a user of a minor language, and she manipulated this to her advantage.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹¹ I am thankful to the BBC Written Archives Centre for access to the Boulanger documents in their collection. Additional work on Boulanger and the BBC can be found in Jeanice Brooks, "Nadia Boulanger and the Salon of the Princesse de Polignac," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46 (1993): 339–442. Boulanger's working notes for her lectures, including those annotated with music notation, are held by her private foundation, the Centre international Nadia et Lili Boulanger.

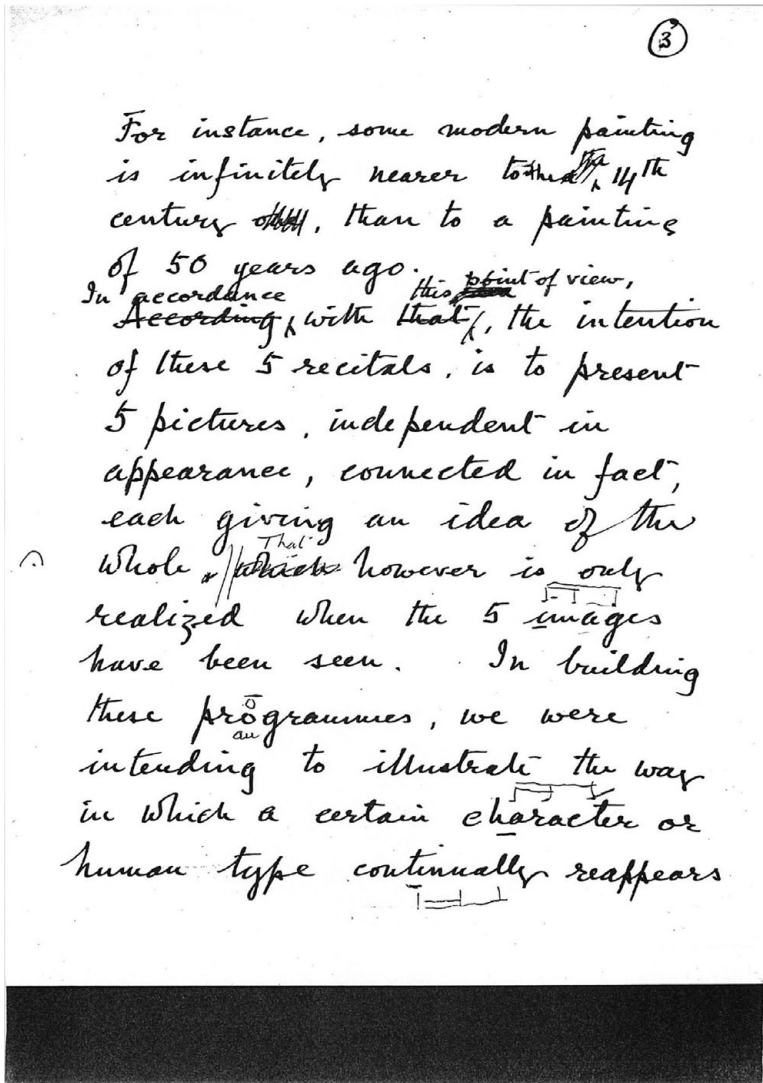


Figure 1. Boulanger's pronunciation notes, "Introduction to Five Recitals of French Music for the British Broadcasting Company," 1936, Paris, France, Centre international Nadia et Lili Boulanger.

It was Boulanger's uniqueness, manifest in her exceptional minor language and exaggerated through her geographical displacement, that opened up the opportunity for hermeneutic authority. In part this emanated from the complex Euro-American power dynamic of the time that valued European interpretations of classical music over those offered by U.S. musicians. But Boulanger's power was both directly related to this dynamic and more subtle, arriving at authority by persuading rather than by commanding, and using any reference to her Frenchness to apologize for her ability to converse in English, rather than to impose authority. When she spoke publicly in 1925, her French accent and mannerisms were often a detriment to her ability to converse in English; she framed herself through her

difference, and in doing so, vocalized a minor language that was tremendously persuasive.

What marginalized Boulanger further was her virtuosity. Boulanger's U.S. tour was at once a speaking and a concert tour. Ambivalent about her professional trajectory until the end of her visit to the United States, Boulanger was still weighing the possibility of a life as a virtuoso. In addition to lecturing, she concertized, perhaps most notably performing the premiere of Aaron Copland's organ concerto with the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Walter Damrosch on 11 January 1925. Although she perhaps lacked the flamboyance necessary to sustain a career on the stage, Boulanger was a remarkably gifted musician.

This virtuosity also translated into her work as pedagogue. Her knowledge of modern repertoire—encyclopedic even at that early stage in her career—her manner of speaking about it, and her insistence that others consider it approachable, understandable, and beneficial, were unique. Even Boulanger's choice of subjects for the Rice Lectures—"French Music," "Debussy," and "Stravinsky"—marked her as a proselytizer. Boulanger advocated for bringing the people to this modern, unknown music, both with her audience in Houston and her lectures in general, drawing the listener into communion with these new and novel sonic possibilities. And it was an approach the stenographer's transcripts from her 1925 lectures allow us to witness first-hand.

The Excitement of America, the Disappointment of Houston

At the beginning of her tour, Boulanger had been intoxicated by her experiences in New York and Boston. Daily letters home to her mother reveal she felt she had finally found a space where she was treated "as she deserved to be treated."¹² Greeted as a celebrity and courted by the press, Boulanger reveled in dinner parties sandwiched into an otherwise saturated performance and lecture schedule. As the guest of conductor Walter Damrosch, she was the only woman allowed into the fanciest of men's clubs, a treat Boulanger enjoyed thoroughly. Loyal alumni arrived at every turn to see she was warmly cared for and not a moment went without entertainment.¹³ At first blush, the United States seemed the antithesis of 1920s France, which Boulanger had criticized as mired in slow-moving, ineffectual reconstruction efforts dominated by conservative, intransigent, and stingy citizens.¹⁴

The longer Boulanger remained in the United States, however, the more she found its people woefully undereducated musically, especially about modern music. As she left the East Coast to travel by train to Houston, the pedagogue began to grow weary of the monotonous landscape and jaded about its inhabitants. Only a month after arriving on American soil, she wrote to her mother during a long, overheated train ride:

¹² Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, 25 January 1925, (*F-Pn*), N.L.a. 282 (43–46).

¹³ Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, 28 January 1925, (*F-Pn*), N.L.a. 282 (18–20)

¹⁴ See especially, Boulanger, *Le Monde musical* (February 1919), 42; (December 1920), 361; and (May 1920), 154.

The industry, the soot, the practicality—one gets the impression everywhere that people are just cogs in a machine. They don't seem, and I do mean the lot of them, ever happy, ever spontaneous—smothered as it were by a discipline that has been uniformly scattered and accepted. Taken individually, they are so kind and generous, but *en masse* . . . to think, to love, to create . . . No, it's simply Eat, Sleep, Produce, and that's all. God knows that I have been well received here, but . . . I wonder sometimes how one could live for a long time [in this country].¹⁵

Originally seduced by American innovation and industry, Boulanger began to question what sacrifices lay behind these accomplishments. Disappointed especially by the architectural and cultural homogeneity in what were otherwise drastically different geographical regions, and by the lack of spontaneity and gaiety she expected of its people, Boulanger found it difficult to acclimate to the noise, the dust, and the constant activity surrounding her. Her arrival in Houston that same day proved disheartening:

It's true these lines are dictated by my disappointment: Houston, two hours from the Gulf of Mexico, I had pictured myself arriving at an exotic city with palm trees, even the perfume of the ocean! [But instead,] the traffic lights, the noise, the stores, the elevators, the industry—it's a suburb of New York. Discouraging for those who had counted on a picturesque voyage. Where then are the still primitive regions of this country? In a few years yet they will have given way to factories, soot, to this pitiful struggle for money.¹⁶

Exposing an internalization of early-twentieth-century French neo-colonialist rhetoric, Boulanger's letter betrays that in coming to the Southern United States she had hoped for the scents of the Orient or of the "savage" northern coast of Africa.¹⁷ After traveling for several days through shifting geography and experiencing the increasingly warmer climate, Boulanger desired unfamiliar vegetation, striking sounds, exotic people. Yet the reality was all too similar to the place she had just left. Perhaps it was at this moment that the thrill of traveling so far and agreeing to such a risky endeavor as presenting three lecture recitals in English began to seem hardly worth the trouble.

In her next letter home, Boulanger related her initial impressions of Houstonians. During her first day there, surrounded by a spring "very different" from that of Paris, she met and worked with two local organists in their "villainous cathedrals," churches she complained that had been built without the faintest sense of proportion

¹⁵ "L'Industrie, le charbon, l'activité pratique—on a l'impression partout que les gens font partie d'un rouage. Ils ne semblent, j'entends la foule, jamais gais, jamais spontanés—étouffés qu'ils sont par une discipline uniformément répandue et acceptée. Pris séparément, ils sont si gentils, si généreux. En masse . . . Penser, aimer, créer. Non, manger, dormir, produire, et c'est tout. Dieu sait que je suis bien reçue ici . . . je me demande comment on vit longtemps ici." Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, 25 January 1925, (*F-Pn*), N.L.a. 282 (43–46).

¹⁶ "Il est vrai que ces lignes sont dictées par ma déception: Houston, 2 heures du Gulf du Mexique, je me voyais arrivant dans une ville exotique, avec des palmiers, presque le parfum de la mer! Les signaux de circulation, le bruit, les boutiques, les ascenseurs, [industrie], c'est un faubourg de New York. Décourageant pour qui en compte un voyage pittoresque. Où donc sont les régions encore sauvages dans ce pays? Quelques années encore et elles auront cédé la place aux usines, au charbon, à cette pauvre lutte pour l'argent." Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, 25 January 1925, (*F-Pn*), N.L.a. 282 (43–46).

¹⁷ For further discussions of contemporary French notions of exoticism, see Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

and that had merely “imitated, copied, and deformed” the gothic style. The organs, however, were lovely. The organists, she lamented to her mother, possessed only rudimentary skills. In her first afternoon in the city, she visited the Rice Institute, an experience that caused her to deplore her own ignorance of chemistry and applied physics.¹⁸

The next day, Boulanger was invited to walk the secret hall of the local Freemason lodge. Although she approved of the architecture she encountered there, she found any man who would renounce religion for such “stupid conventions to which had been attached so many of the most primitive superstitions” to be entirely impoverished.¹⁹ It is possible her impressions were also colored by a growing anxiety over her lectures that were to begin that evening.

The first night, Boulanger found it impossible to proceed as she would have liked. She wrote to her mother days afterward that more precise language and arguments would have left the audience confused.²⁰ If her later published articles are to be believed, Boulanger had intended to speak at length in her lectures about the innovative nature of Debussy and Stravinsky and the technical advancements they offered modernism. To reach her audience, and to have them truly understand—always of fundamental importance to Boulanger—she had to change tack. This would have been a daunting task for Boulanger, whose still-fledgling English was hardly at a level of command that could see her improvise her way through a lengthy lecture. Yet she faced a choice: alienate her audience and risk sounding condescending, or seduce her audience through self-deprecation, humility, and by invoking a minor language. Boulanger chose the latter.²¹

At 8:15 p.m. on 27 January 1925, at the Scottish Rite Cathedral, Boulanger was first introduced to the Houston audience by William Ward Watkin, a professor of architecture and designer of several buildings on campus. A subsequent letter home to her mother indicates that Boulanger thought she was being introduced by the Dean of Music, and someone, she astonishingly related, who was “perhaps

¹⁸ “Lundi, lever très tard, et par ce qui me semble encore un miracle: le printemps, pas le nôtre . . . Puis . . . trouvé 2 organistes dans leurs églises, leurs vilaines églises si neuves, où sans le sens des proportions est imité, copié, et déformé le gothique—gentils orgues. Niveau musical très simple . . . Visite cette splendeur qu’est le Rice Institute. Tout vu, Chemie, Physique-mesure, déploré mon ignorance.” Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, ca. 30 January 1925, (*F-Pn*), N.L.a. 282 (48–55).

¹⁹ “Mardi . . . salle excellente construite par les francs-maçons . . . Traversé la salle des réunions secrètes avec les attribus [*sic*], quelle dérision et combien parait pauvre l’homme qui, ayant renoncé [à] une religion, sacrifie à de stupides conventions [aux]quelles sont d’ailleurs attaché[e]s toutes les superstitions les plus primitives.” Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, ca. 30 January 1925, (*F-Pn*), N.L.a. 282 (48–55).

²⁰ Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, ca. 30 January 1925, (*F-Pn*), N.L.a. 282 (48–55).

²¹ No handwritten notes exist, if indeed Boulanger ever drafted any, for this particular engagement. Boulanger would often extemporize in live talks. For example, the BBC management lamented that forcing Boulanger to adhere to a written script, even when she herself had written it, was near impossible. (See Herbert Murrill, Interdepartmental Memo, 21 October 1949, BBC Written Archives Centre.) One table of biographical data on Stravinsky containing dates only up to 1924, now in the *fonds* Boulanger, most likely played a role in preparing for her 1925 lectures (Boulanger, “Lecture Notes,” n.d. (*F-Pn*), Rés. Vm. Dos. 148), but beyond this, Boulanger most likely either conducted her Houston lectures more or less from memory or else her notes remained with Howard Hinners. Any reference to rewrites comes directly from Boulanger’s mention of said alterations in letters to her mother.

40-years-old (which signifies how young this country is).” Despite being unimpressed by his youth, Boulanger was touched by Watkin’s choice of words, drawn from Damrosch’s recently published text, *My Musical Life*, words for which she “should have paid for with diamonds!”²² Her gratitude seems less spontaneous, however, when one considers that the press releases she provided for the tour quoted Damrosch directly, stating, “Walter Damrosch says of Nadia Boulanger in his book, *My Musical Life*, ‘Among women, I have never met her equal in musicianship and indeed there are very few men who can compare with her. She is one of the finest organists of France, an excellent pianist and the best reader of orchestral scores that I have ever known.’”²³

She would later tell her mother she won her listeners over “immediately.” It was not an “enthusiastic” audience, but they did keep a “respectful vigil, an extraordinary silence, and a growing sympathy.”²⁴ Each subsequent evening, the audience grew larger, and Boulanger communicated her message increasingly well. Walter Bailey argues that Boulanger’s success lay both in her ability to impart “important information about music and musical style” and in the reality that she was a “charismatic speaker.”²⁵ Moreover, he states that Boulanger’s lectures were far more “analytical” than those of previous presenters, and that reviewers lauded her for making “complex music understandable.”²⁶ Although the follow-up essays Boulanger sent for publication in the Rice Lectures Pamphlets suggest she spent a great deal of time unpacking heavy analytical notions such as polytonality and polymeter in these talks, the stenographer’s transcripts reveal Boulanger did nothing of the sort. Turning to her final Houston lecture, dedicated to the topic of Stravinsky and perhaps the most widely reviewed as a great success, reveals exactly how Boulanger brought her “analytical” message to Houstonians, and how, by cloaking it in tempered virtuosity and a heavily exaggerated minor language, she engineered her triumph.

The Rice Lecture on Stravinsky

The exact nature of Boulanger’s idiosyncratic English is evident in the transcript created by the stenographer, whose record of the introduction to Boulanger’s talk

²² “Introduction le soir par le Dean (Doyen) un homme de 40 ans peut-être (comme cela est si significatif de ce pays jeune)—se servant des mots de Damrosch dans son livre, mots que je devrais payer en diamants!” [emphasis in the original] Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, n.d. (likely 30 January 1925), (*F-Pn*), N.L.a. 282 (48–55). Boulanger was right about Watkin’s age. In 1925, he would have been thirty-nine years old.

²³ A copy of the biography Boulanger circulated for her tour remains in the *fonds* Boulanger in Paris. For a representative press release advertising a lecture recital for 22 February, see Nadia Boulanger, “Correspondance avec New York, 1924–1925,” (*F-Pn*), Rés. Vm. Dos. 137 (20). See also Walter Damrosch, *My Musical Life* (New York: C. Scribner & Sons, 1923).

²⁴ “Pas de choses trop précises à dire, personne n’aurait compris, mais . . . gagné immédiatement l’auditoire. Pas d’enthousiasme, un respect vigile, un silence extraordinaire et une sympathie grandissante.” Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, n.d. (likely 30 January 1925), (*F-Pn*), N.L.a. 282 (48–55).

²⁵ Bailey, “Ima Hogg,” 413.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

and the talk proper I quote from in this article word for word.²⁷ Also indicative of the difficulties in conveying her message in these lectures are the extended ellipses left by the typographer when words were unclear and thus undocumented. This happened most commonly when Boulanger named European artists, such as Sergei Diaghilev, or mentioned the title of an unfamiliar modern work. To the stenographer's credit, on the other hand, most titles of Stravinsky works are recorded correctly. Ultimately the transcript bears witness to the multilayered cultural mediation that occurred those evenings.

On the night of her final Houston lecture, Boulanger was introduced by Dr. Radoslav Tsanoff, a Bulgarian-born professor of philosophy at the Rice Institute and Boulanger's senior by only nine months. Faced with the task of introducing someone about to speak about "the great ultra-modern Igor Stravinsky," Tsanoff made clear his embarrassment at the widespread need among those present, himself included, for an "education of our ears." Indeed, he continued, "if God be willing and generous," those gathered there that evening "might gain an understanding." With this flowery and fawning praise, Boulanger took center stage to lecture on one of her most beloved composers, Igor Stravinsky.

She commenced, as she so often did, not so much by distancing herself from the audience, but by inviting them to enter into musical communion with her. Indeed, her opening lines were welcoming and simple: "We have today," she told them, "to speak of Igor Stravinsky." With these words, she delineated the task as an uncomplicated one, and something that could be accomplished simply through a discussion between equals. Already a sense of hierarchies had been diminished. She followed with her typical Stravinskian preamble, presenting a condensed biography of the composer. After speaking of his Russian childhood she shared anecdotal knowledge of both Stravinsky's diminutive frame and the intensity of his will: "The man, small of stature, gives an extraordinary feeling . . . of concentrated strength and power. When he is at the piano, one feels that he can obtain from the instrument what he decides to have." Before even touching upon the music, Boulanger set up the problem of Stravinsky's music as inherently tied to the human, the performative, the accessible. Immediately, she peeled away the mystery from this "ultra-modern" artist.

She then described the qualities of Stravinsky's early music, briefly telling her audience of the influences of Rimsky-Korsakov, Scriabin, Debussy, and Schoenberg on his work. Despite all of the name-dropping, not a single technical word was expressed, nor was a note of music played. Instead, she simply reported:

Scriabine [*sic*] has built his work on a new form of harmony which is tremendously interesting. In a mystical way, Stravinsky has not followed him at all. Stravinsky is not a mystic, but in a practical way of writing, he has for a moment developed this influence—also a little of the influence of Debussy for a certain time, and even from Schoenberg, but all these things were so passing.

²⁷ This transcript is currently held by the Centre international Nadia et Lili Boulanger, Paris, France. I am indebted to Jeanice Brooks and Alexandra Laederich for sharing the document with me.

This list of notable influences is intriguing, particularly the mention of Arnold Schoenberg. The choice to avoid elaborating on the impact had by any of these composers is also a curious one, possibly owing to time constraints or fear of losing her audience—trespassing beyond the parameters she had already established for her minor language. But overall, depicting Stravinsky as influenced by others was a unique strategy, one that Boulanger would capitalize on later in her talk.

The first musical work she explored was Stravinsky's *Fireworks*, though the typescript remains ambiguous about whether she performed at the piano for her audience at this point. What is certain is that Boulanger chose this piece as a means to reinforce the "magnificence" of Stravinsky's instrumentation and "fire of strength." She told her listeners the work contained already that most special of Stravinskian elements: "an insistently recurring, pulsing throb of strenuous rhythm." Stravinsky's unique rhythmic procedures would become a primary theme of the published version of these talks, though Boulanger simply glanced over the idea in the actual lectures.

The subsequent discussion drew specifically from her first-hand accounts of the premieres of Stravinsky's *L'Oiseau de feu* and *Le Sacre du printemps*. Boulanger spoke directly from personal experiences, memories that were at that time still quite fresh, but also with a narrative so thick with adjectives and poetic indulgence it was as if she were telling a sort of fairytale. She proceeded from one work to the other, relaying the tale of Stravinsky's meteoric rise to fame and the strikingly new musical elements he brought with him. When she arrived at 1913 and the premiere of *Le Sacre*, she focused primarily on the feelings the music invoked in others:

The first presentation of *Sacre du Printemps* in Paris was a true battle; one had the impression that the people felt as if they would like to kill; one could not even hear the music quietly; so everybody was, of course, much excited; it was such an impression—well, I don't remember at any time music creating an impression as strong as this one—of screaming; it was an extraordinary atmosphere, which everyone felt. How the people were shocked by this music? It meant the power of the man was treacherous. His listeners, who were capable of listening, loving or hating—but hating in a soft manner, because one of adoring or hating . . . they could not avoid a struggle.

This was not, as the article published later suggested, the point at which Boulanger embarked on a discussion of the debate concerning whether *Le Sacre* is properly considered polytonal—a harmonic description of Stravinsky's music that Boulanger categorically dismissed in the published text. Nor did Boulanger even vaguely approach the innovative rhythmic aspects of the work, which her later article tied to Greek additive rhythmic processes. Instead, this lecture spoke of how to *feel* when confronted with Stravinsky's music. This was a lesson in engagement. She told her listeners that even if one could not aurally decipher a work, they could still avoid an apathetic opinion about it. Ultra-modern music, she insisted, was unavoidably about struggle, about feeling.

Then, in a surprising move that avoided mention of nearly a decade of output, Boulanger shifted her oration to Stravinsky's neoclassical period:

He had . . . obtained such a powerful expression in music, such a strength in his orchestrations, which are tremendously big, that he found he had said in this direction what he wanted to say, and he began to restrain himself. Having allowed himself to always use more

instruments, he began to try to find a power of concentration—I mean obtain the maximum expression with the minimum of means—then he wrote to another partition, or score . . . of bel canto music, which is called *Pulcinella* . . . This opened . . . beautiful possibilities.

Boulanger skipped entirely from *Le Sacre* to Stravinsky as neoclassicist, omitting all intervening compositions. And she knew full well there were additional works, considering Stravinsky had given her an autographed copy of the published score to *Renard* in 1923.²⁸ Boulanger's narrative was simpler and told a better story, yes, but her approach also centered Stravinsky's activity in Paris. By tying his cultural activity to the French capital, Boulanger was in effect suggesting his most recent neoclassical persona was French in nature, or grounded in French traditions. Thus both Boulanger's performance of a minor language—marked particularly by her French accent and public performance of awkward English syntax—and Stravinsky's "French" neoclassicism carried with them the same markers of worth and marginality.

Boulanger then proceeded to explain Stravinsky in neoclassical terms—*her* neoclassical terms—and broached ever so briefly the idea of technical importance behind his music:

When we are before Stravinsky, we must never lose sight of his expression. He is a sculptor before marble, or as a mathematician before a problem. . . . Stravinsky . . . asks of music what music can give him, letting beauty do what it has to do, and genius do what it has to do. He has the strength to get from music what he wants of it, and he solves his problem in the best manner. This seems to me very interesting, and very characteristic of our time.

Here we see an early characterization of Stravinsky as the distanced, cerebral constructor, who bows to the music and is controlled not by emotions but by his own genius. Just two years after the premiere of Stravinsky's *Octet*—a premiere Boulanger glowingly reviewed for *Le Monde Musical*—and one year after the publication of his somewhat scandalous article, "Some Ideas About My Octuor," Boulanger faithfully proselytized about Stravinsky's Apollonian leanings, his disparaging of the overtly emotive in music.²⁹ Moreover, Boulanger taught her audience that this music was a part of the cultural fabric of "our time," using the inclusive language yet again to enfold and implicate her audience in her narrative while still marking herself as an outsider, as a speaker through but not of their dominant language.

Shortly thereafter, Boulanger returned to the idea of the technical in Stravinsky's music, telling her audience:

One question which must be only touched a little is the question of tonality and of rhythm. With respect to these, Stravinsky is a very modern musician, a very ultramodern musician. Even with his dissonance—*about which I am not prepared to talk*—I accord this, that he is after all, a classicist and a traditionalist. [Emphasis mine.]

²⁸ Igor Stravinsky, *Renard* (Geneva: Edition Ad. HENN), Conservatoire National de Musique et Danse, Lyon, France, UFNB MEp STR 524.4. Annotated: "Pour Mademoiselle Nadia Boulanger, Igor Stravinsky, Paris 1923."

²⁹ Boulanger, *Le Monde Musical* (November 1923): 365 and 367; Igor Stravinsky, "Some Ideas About My Octuor," *The Arts* (1924), reprinted in Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 574–75.

Boulanger asserted to her audience Stravinsky's stylistic consistency, both formally and tonally, in spite of what seemed a radical shift in compositional voice between *Le Sacre* and his neoclassical works. Boulanger also feigned a lack of preparedness for proving her argument: a careful sidestepping of the truth that avoided alienating her audience. (Her article clearly reveals that she was prepared to discuss details that night.) As she continued, she ventured ever so carefully into the realm of the moderately technical, telling her audience that Stravinsky's music is always rooted in either a major or a "modern" scale, and reassuring them that his rhythmic inventions (which were always based on the inequality of the beat) could understandably overwhelm a novice listener. But as quickly as she entered into this realm of the technical, as soon as she began to trespass beyond the realm of humility, she backed away, shrouding her virtuosic analytical capabilities once again and turning to inclusive language and a more familiar context:

We are not in the end of this [rhythmic] transformation; we are in the beginning; we become more and more rich; you know it very well, because you have a beautiful example of freedom of rhythm in your jazz, and we have it in the man, Stravinsky, who was very interested in the question of jazz, but who, of course, has treated it in a classic manner. He has done a very artistic thing, which you will also have, because I believe certain of your young musicians with their new principle of syncopation and new music will write beautiful things. This you will see.³⁰

Boulanger could only maintain the cloak of a minor language so long as she enfolded herself as an other *within* the discursive boundaries of the members of her Houston audience. The choice of pronouns and Boulanger's mediation of this topic was therefore fundamental to the success of her oration. This was Boulanger at her most accessible. She at once located herself as an outsider—speaking of "your jazz"—and yet qualified the idea of Stravinsky and music as something "we all have." She positioned herself as an observer and a teacher, speaking of young musicians from the United States and their new "syncopation." She told the audience that innovation would be America's to claim.

Lying beneath the surface was Boulanger's desire to instill in Americans a sense of excitement about where *their* music was headed. By emphasizing the similarities between rhythmic inequalities in Stravinsky's music and syncopation in jazz, she in effect was suggesting that the United States had a role to play in one of the "most modern" aspects of this "modern" music, thus reinforcing a burgeoning sense of U.S. cultural dominance, while at the same time retrenching her own position in the minority. It is this cycle of access to acceptance through reinforcing her own inferiority that Boulanger would hone in public talks for the remainder of her life. She never condescended to her audience, yet she managed to say enough to empower others to feel a part of the modern project, a project best explored in Paris, and centered on a certain stream of thought bubbling to the surface in Parisian circles yet cultivated by an American perspective.

³⁰ Boulanger's encouragement of jazz rhythms in the music of her American students in the 1920s was quite common. For an example of this influence on Copland, see Annegret Fauser, "Aaron Copland, Nadia Boulanger, and the Making of an 'American' Composer," *Musical Quarterly* 89 (2006): 524–54.

The remainder of Boulanger's talk consisted of her performing "illustrations" for her audience. With each excerpt, played at the piano and most likely from memory, Boulanger spoke poetically of staging, of orchestral color, and of the inability of the piano to convey all that she wished that she could. Specific excerpts were lost on the stenographer, whose text simply indicates "(playing)" whenever Boulanger paused to perform. One particularly stunning example of Boulanger's approach occurs as the audience witnessed her futile struggle to convey her excitement about *Le Sacre* in English and represent it properly on the piano with only two hands:

Now I will give you an example of the *Sacre du printemps*, but truly the *Sacre du printemps* is funny. I must say I hardly recognize myself that it is possible, because of the different possibilities of dissonance. . . . With the strength of the man before us, the first impression of the beginning of spring is that all the spring will come to life—naturally you will excuse me, I cannot explain clearly in English, but I always apologize, because I can do something else. . . . The construction of Stravinsky is always so extraordinarily interesting because he has a first theme, a second theme and a third theme. I have only two hands, and I cannot give you a correct impression, for there must be at least two pianos to get the true impression, but I am obliged to do what I can. . . . The idea of realization in the development of Stravinsky is such that you have this, and this, and it becomes always bigger before you, and it is so impressive.

Boulanger highlighted her fumbling use of English, thereby making obvious her use of a minor language. And yet she did this while playing through what her audience would have recognized as an inherently "modern" and difficult work. Indeed, Boulanger realized what was then one of the most complicated orchestral works in existence using a single piano, while speaking analytically—albeit only on a basic level—of themes, ideas, and idiosyncrasies. It was this careful balance between self-deprecation and virtuosity, between highlighting her marginal position while inculcating her highly biased view of Stravinsky and modern music, that Boulanger found tremendously effective from a pedagogical perspective.

As Boulanger's oration continued into its second hour, her English became increasingly broken, and the tour de force of her overall effort is exhausting to imagine. For her final "illustration," Boulanger chose "Tilimbom" (1917), the first of Stravinsky's set of children's songs, *Trois histoires pour enfants*.³¹ By ending with this set of pieces that were beautiful in their melodic obviousness and captivating in their accessibility, she left the audience with a more "human" side of Stravinsky's music—music written for children—and with music that they could arguably find palatable, perhaps even hummable, as they left the auditorium.

Boulanger's closing words framed her as a grateful foreigner, once again conjuring up her sense of self-deprecation and appreciation for the audience's attention, while also implicating them in her own project:

I could not go away without saying to you that the feeling that I have with me in going away tomorrow morning, is a feeling which will never be forgotten by me. You have received me in such a manner that I have impressions that I have been here for a long time, in a place where I have many friends, who have spoken very much of music, for which we accord the same idea, the same love. . . . I brought to you what I could which after all was very little,

³¹ There is no mention of "Tilimbom" in the published version of the Rice Lecture on Stravinsky.

because even when I speak my language I am not sure to have given you something. In your language I know I am disturbing, but I have brought with deep sincerity my love for music, and my love for life . . . I can only thank you, and I assure you I will never forget this marvelous time I had in Houston, where I have seen so many things which are new to me, which are new to us. . . . My purpose in coming to you was to give something, and after all, I feel in going that I have received more than I could give. I thank you tremendously.

Boulanger finished her lectures with grace and with a sense of inclusion, despite marking the “disturbing” nature of her language. She gathered her audience around her with a figurative embrace, calling them not only respectful listeners, but also “friends.” It is both the intimacy of Boulanger’s words and the arms’ distance imposed by her reinforcement of her foreignness that mark her closing paragraph.

And there was only a slight trace of irony to these words. The letter home to her mother the following day showed a satisfied Boulanger. Although still unimpressed by the level of musical literacy in Houstonians, she felt she had accomplished some “useful” work and was “very happy” with the result. Overall, Boulanger considered the trip worth the effort given the gratitude she received and the satisfaction she felt at having introduced so much music to them.³² Reporters reciprocated with warm reviews, and as Bailey argues, Boulanger was “well received because, in addition to imparting important information about music and musical style, she was a skilled and charming lecturer. As a vital advocate for music, Boulanger was an ideal choice for the lectureship, and her visit to Houston can only be viewed as a boon to [the Rice Lecture] enterprise.”³³

A week after her departure, the effects of the tour, and particularly her experiences lecturing in Houston, began to have a far more profound effect on Boulanger. She wrote to her mother:

If I could, what I would like most of all would be to found a school in France. One could do admirable things, having been inspired by what I have been able to do here and which cannot be surpassed from a practical point of view. Student life is almost too good [here]. I was most decidedly *not* born a virtuoso, and, barring a miracle, will not become one. Knowing how to judge one’s limits is a great comfort, and anyone who judges me for it will not be able to shock me. My severity surpasses that of all others, in any case.³⁴

Boulanger returned to her home country determined to abandon her pre-war pursuit of a career as a concert performer and instead focus her attention on building a “new school.”

It was pedagogical work that inspired Boulanger the most and that she felt did the most good for new music. Following her tour of the United States in 1925, Boulanger devoted herself wholeheartedly to activities—whether as conductor, public lecturer,

³² “Quel travail utile accompli ici. Je suis *vraiment* content[e]. Ce n’est pas par le talent que je les ai gagnés, mais par le coeur, et ils m’en ont tant remercié[e] tous et la musique y a tant gagné.” Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, n.d. (likely 30 January 1925), N.L.a. 282 (48–55).

³³ Bailey, “Ima Hogg,” 413.

³⁴ “Non, si je pouvais ce que j’aimerais c’est fonder un(e) école en France. On pourrait faire des choses admirables, en s’inspirant de ce qui a été fait ici et ne peut être dépassé du point de vue pratique. La vie des étudiants est presque trop bien . . . Pourtant, je ne suis décidément pas née virtuose et à moins d’un miracle, ne le deviendrai plus. Savoir juger de ses possibilités est d’un grand secours, et personne en me jugeant, ne saurait me surprendre. Ma sévérité dépassera celle des autres, en tout cas.” Nadia Boulanger to Raïssa Boulanger, ca. 30 January 1925, (*F-Pn*), N.L.a. 282 (48–55).

or classroom teacher—that would allow her to nurture others and teach them how to value the elements of what she considered “good music.”

She had found the extant institutional support for modern music to be universally deficient, though varied in kind and degree depending on location. The solution lay in infrastructure, in guiding public taste, in education. Driven to work with American students and eventually to travel to the United States after frustration about the state of music in her own country, Boulanger returned to France full-circle, deeply committed to founding a school in France, to teaching. And it wasn't so much about teaching skills—although solfège and counterpoint exercises would become inextricably connected to her pedagogical style—nor was it about building a physical school. Her approach focused on teaching critical thinking, about teaching students how to appreciate composers, their works, the new, the undefined, the vulnerable. Within the decade her efforts proved fruitful, and between her work at Fontainebleau, at the *École normale de musique* in Paris, and through private lessons in her Parisian apartment at 36 rue Ballu, Boulanger commanded loyalty from an extraordinary swath of alumni, many of whom remained loyal to her teachings well after leaving her tutelage.

Moreover, while in the United States, Boulanger served at once as an actor and ambassador for a minor language dedicated particularly to celebrating modern French music and the music of Stravinsky. The layers of her relationship to, and manipulation of, a minor language are multiple. The notion of minor language/sound describes Boulanger's use of the English language while speaking in Houston; her virtuosic juxtaposition of musical examples and explanations; and the music she was attempting to explain: the modern, the French, the modern French, and the music of Stravinsky. Boulanger's message, the music she championed, and her language—both musical and verbal—were all marked by a sense of “otherness,” of not belonging, of disruption. But in opening this ruptured space, by representing on myriad levels foreign ideas conveyed through broken English, Boulanger wedged open an interstitial hermeneutic space for herself and, through her legendary charisma and ability to engender empathy, won people over.

The political ramifications were likewise splintered and she accomplished her goals to varying degrees of success. Although Boulanger's professional activity arguably opened doors for women, success on a foreign stage likely did little to improve visibility of French women artists in her home country, nor did it buoy the professional efforts of other French pedagogical experts coming to speak in the United States at the time. The uniqueness that marked Boulanger's presence onstage likewise precluded the likelihood that anyone soon would follow in her footsteps. However, if reviews are to be believed, she succeeded in generating increased empathy for the music she presented, particularly the music of Stravinsky. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the use of a minor language typically benefits not the individual but rather the group for which the individual stands, and in Boulanger's case, though not a victory for her or for women, it was a victory for modern music, and this was a victory with which she was well pleased.

In 2011, George Lewis borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari to call for an examination of American music as “nomadic noise,” and as “inherently multilingual,” with regions viewed as amalgamations of both majority and “minor” languages.³⁵ He advocated for a more global U.S. musicology that “implicitly recognizes the permanence of permeability, the transience of borders . . . that draws its power from dialogue with an American trope of mobility.”³⁶ Lewis’s main concern is the study of contemporary music, but I would argue for applying this approach to the past as well. Viewing American music as an amalgamation of cultural and linguistic intersections illuminates not only the “now” of American music; we can flip this lens to look at American musical traditions of the past. Boulanger is just one example of a “nomadic” historical actor operating in the world of modernist music, and her work highlights the artificiality and futility of isolating modernist musical studies, as Brigid Cohen has so trenchantly argued, along nationalist boundaries.³⁷ Boulanger’s efforts, her mediation and canonical reinterpretation of the work of so many composers, chief among them Igor Stravinsky, did not fall neatly along nationalistic lines—a reality that became increasingly true the more influential and international her reach grew. Her discussion of music *outside* of France was inherently bound to the act of translation through her adoption of the English language; her work on U.S. soil was as much about teaching as it was about translation. The collision of these linguistic and artistic discourses is in large part what marked Boulanger’s efforts, what defined her Houston talks, what drove her afterward to teach, and what continues to have lingering effects on the structure and content of American music.

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³⁶ Garrett et al., “Studying U.S. Music,” 691.

³⁷ Brigid Cohen, *Stefan Wolpe and the Avant-Garde Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Brigid Cohen, “Diasporic Dialogues in Mid-Century New York: Stefan Wolpe, George Russell, Hannah Arendt, and the Historiography of Displacement,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 6/2 (May 2012): 143–73.

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