

Stravinsky's *Poétique musicale*: The Composer as *Homo faber*. Antisemitism, *Le Sacre du printemps*, and Adorno's Critique

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ABSTRACT: Stravinsky considered himself a maker, a *Homo faber*, an artisan of the past. He confessed that he liked to compose music more than music itself, and argued that expression was not an immanent character of music. With this paper, I intend to discuss Stravinsky's musical aesthetics (the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures given right after the outbreak of WWII –*Poétique musicale*), depicting and criticising his notion of expression and his view of the musician as mere “executant”. I will also point out some biographical details (the controversial premiere of *Le Sacre du printemps* and Stravinsky's antisemitism) while criticising Adorno's harsh critique of Stravinsky's music.

KEYWORDS: Stravinsky, *Poétique musicale*, *Homo faber*, antisemitism, *Le Sacre du printemps*, Adorno

Introduction

After the explosive premiere of *Le Sacre du printemps*, Stravinsky was considered a revolutionary, adjective that he truly disliked, since he equalled revolution to disruption and disorder, and, for him, music was organisation and order: “*l'art est le contraire du chaos*” (Stravinsky, 2011, p. 69). Stravinsky's son Théodore (1948) said: “*Voilà donc un Russe du XXe siècle, qui passe généralement pour le compositeur le plus 'révolutionnaire' et le plus 'moderne' de notre époque, qui proclame sa proche parenté 'spirituelle et sensorielle' avec Pergolèse, cet Italien du XVIIIe!*” (p. 82).

According to Stravinsky, the composer is a *Homo faber*, a being who *makes* (produces). The artist is in fact an artisan who, through work, technique and imagination, crafts and invents (to invent means to imagine, to search, to find, and to shape). Copland (1959) asserts: “An imaginative mind is essential to the creation of art in any medium, but it is even more essential in music precisely because music provides the broadest possible vista for the imagination since it is the freest, the most abstract ... of all arts” (p. 17).

Stravinsky's famous quote “*L'expression n'a jamais été la propriété immanente de la musique*” (Stravinsky, 1962, p. 63) has its roots in Hanslick's groundbreaking aesthetics: when music seems to express something, that something is only illusory (the expression is thus confused with the essence of music).

Poétique musicale sous forme de six leçons (based on the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures), written by Stravinsky with an enormous –and not so recognised– collaboration by Roland Alexis Manuel Lévy (Roland-Manuel) and Pyotr (Pierre) Souvchinsky, is a clear defense for order, austerity and authenticity in music. Was Stravinsky a revolutionary or, *per contra*, was he an artisan, a *Homo faber*? How did Stravinsky conceive the process of composition? Was he an honest writer and composer? To answer these questions I will focus on the genealogy of *Poétique musicale* (first section of the present paper), Stravinsky’s antisemitism (second section), the first and second lessons of *Poétique musicale* (expression, order, authenticity, and composing) (third section of the present paper), the third and fourth lessons of *Poétique musicale* (the artisan and the language of music) (fourth section), and the fifth and sixth lessons of *Poétique musicale* (Russian music, “executants”, and historical performance practice) (fifth section); I will then focus on the premiere of *Le Sacre du printemps* (sixth section) and I will critique Adorno’s harsh critique of Stravinsky’s music (seventh section of the present paper).

I. The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures and *Poétique musicale*

“The interest of my life, my intellectual life, with my everyday life is to make. I am a maker” (Leacock and Liebermann, 1967).

Six months before the outbreak of WWII, on March 23, 1939, Stravinsky received a formal invitation to give a lecture about the poetics of music at Harvard University¹. This meant that Stravinsky would hold the Charles Eliot Norton Chair of Poetry for the academic year 1939–1940, give lectures and “some informal sessions with advanced students” (Oliver, 1995, p. 138). With this appointment “not a few were taken by surprise. Indeed, what had Stravinsky, the composer, to do with a chair of poetry?” (Kall, 1940, p. 283)². Stravinsky was the first composer to hold the Charles Eliot Norton chair of poetry.

Stravinsky left Paris for New York (by ship) at the end of September 1939. (Oliver, 1995, p. 141). On October 18, 1939, he gave his first lecture; the lectures were all given in French³. Harvard University Press published in 1942 the six lectures in their original French under the title *Poétique musicale sous forme de six leçons*; new editions would appear in 1945 (removing the fifth chapter dedicated to Russian music), 1948 (including again the fifth chapter), and 1952 (with the famous portrait of Stravinsky by Picasso). *Poétique*

¹ “The Charles Eliot Norton Professorship in Poetry was endowed in 1925 (...) The term ‘poetry’ is interpreted in the broadest sense to encompass all poetic expression in language, music, or the fine arts” (Mahindra Humanities Center at Harvard). Several composers, writers, musicians, and film directors have been invited to give the Norton Lectures: John Cage in 1988–89 (*I-IV*), Herbie Hancock in 2014 (*The Ethics of Jazz*, six lectures), and Wim Wenders in 2018 (two lectures: April 2: *Poetry in Motion* and April 8: *The Visible and the Invisible*), among others.

² According to the creator of the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship of Poetry (Chauncey Stillman), “poetry included not only the visual arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture, from the poetic point of view, but also archeology, literature, and music” (Kall, 1940, p. 283).

³ In 1934 Stravinsky had become a naturalised French citizen; in 1945 he would become a United States citizen: “In 1948 *Time* magazine reported that he liked to be known as a ‘California composer’” (Cross, 2013, p. 4).

musicale was translated into English in 1947, into German and into Norwegian in 1949, into Swedish in 1950, into Italian in 1954, into Danish in 1961, into Romanian in 1967, into Polish in 1970, and into Spanish only in 1977 (six years after the death of Stravinsky). Undoubtedly, *Poétique musicale* “constitutes the cornerstone of Stravinsky’s aesthetic philosophy” (Dufour, 2021, p. 332).

The years that surrounded *Poétique musicale* were difficult for Stravinsky⁴: “39 was a tragic year of my life. The first who died was my eldest daughter. After was my first wife. And 3 months [later] my mother. All in the same place, Paris. I left Paris forever” (Leacock and Liebermann, 1967). Nevertheless, these misfortunes did not affect Stravinsky’s work: “*Stravinsky a eu beaucoup de malheur, mais il n’a pas l’a mis dans sa musique*”, stated Tubeuf (Reichenbach, 1981).

The content of *Poétique musicale* was developed by Stravinsky, Roland-Manuel and Souvtchinsky (but not necessarily in that order). Roland-Manuel (Roland Alexis Manuel Lévy) was a Jewish-Belgian-French composer and critic, Ravel’s biographer, and professor of Aesthetics at the Conservatoire de Paris; Pyotr (later, Pierre) Souvtchinsky was a Russian historian, philosopher, and musicologist⁵: his collaboration in the second lecture is enormous, according to Soumagnac, and the lecture dedicated to Russian music was apparently entirely written by him. *Poétique musicale* is a result of “*une action triangulaire dont il n’est pas aisé de démêler les fils entrelacés*” (Soumagnac, 2011, p. 12). Craft (1982), however, argues that, from the 30,000 words of *Poétique musicale*, Stravinsky wrote only 1,500 (and solely as notes): “not a single sentence by him actually appears in the book of which he is the author” (p. 487); Craft states that the text was actually written by Roland-Manuel with Souvtchinsky’s assistance. Dufour (2003) asserts that the solely author of the structure of *Poétique musicale* is Souvtchinsky, and states that Stravinsky stole both as a writer and as a composer: “*«Stravinsky écrivain» usa probablement de la meme «forme rare de kleptomanie» que celle dont il parlait pour ses oeuvres musicales*” (p. 374). Souvtchinsky’s manuscript (three pages written in French, with the title *Thèses pour une Explication de Musique en forme the 8 leçons* (Dufour, 2003, p. 375) clearly shows both the structure and content of *Poétique musicale*. Dufour (2021) clarifies that this does not mean that the lessons were not written by Stravinsky; rather, the process was triangular:

Souvtchinsky suggested the architecture of the text and set forth its main ideas; Stravinsky, an oral intermediary, was at the heart of the process, developing content

⁴ Stravinsky’s daughter Ludmila (born in 1908) died from tuberculosis in November 1938; his wife Yekaterina Nosenko (born in 1881) died (also from tuberculosis) in March 1939: she was sick from tuberculosis and paralyzed from 1914 –Stravinsky and Nosenko married in 1906 and had four children together (in 1940 Stravinsky, who was shamefully unfaithful for 18 years, married in Massachusetts his mistress, Vera de Bosset). Stravinsky also succumbed to tuberculosis in 1937 and was hospitalised during six months in Sancellemoz (Marie Curie had died in Sancellemoz five years before). Stravinsky’s mother, Anna Kyrillovna, died from pneumonia in June 1939, three months after Stravinsky’s wife Yekaterina.

⁵ Even if Prokofiev dedicated to Souvtchinsky his Piano Sonata No. 5 in C Major, Op. 38, Souvtchinsky is, surprisingly, little known. Levidou (2011) points out that “[t]here is no entry on Suvchinskii –or Pierre Souvtchinsky, as he is known in the West– in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*” (p. 602).

and submitting it to Roland-Manuel who acted as a writer, breathing life into the text and strengthening its ideological and aesthetic impact (Dufour, 2023, p. 333)

In sum, Souvitchinsky, Stravinsky, and Roland-Manuel “remained true co-authors of even the final version, with their correspondence showing that they all reread, corrected and approved the published text” (Dufour, 2023, p. 333).

II. Stravinsky’s antisemitism

“[Stravinsky’s] easy tolerance of the Nazi regime was also the result of his reactionary political views during this period, coupled with a prejudice against Jews” (Evans, 2003, p. 532).

The fact that Stravinsky praised Fascism and *tolerated* Nazism (until 1938) is not so known; Stravinsky was a fervent anti-Bolshevik and a great admirer of Mussolini (he performed for him several times), he played in Germany after 1933 and embraced antisemitism (an irrational hatred that culminated in the extermination of six million⁶ Jewish men, women and children). In May 1938 Stravinsky’s music was included at the *Entartete Musik* exhibition in Düsseldorf (which included works of both Jewish and non-Jewish composers and musicologists)⁷. Nevertheless, as Evans (2003) argues, “Stravinsky’s music achieved a relatively secure position in the cultural life of the Third Reich, a position it maintained up to the outbreak of World War II” (p. 526). Since Stravinsky was neither Jewish nor a Soviet supporter, he was a “racially and politically acceptable composer, whose tonally based music displayed suitably ‘national’ characteristics” (Evans, 2003, p. 526). After the Russian Revolution, Stravinsky loathed anything *revolutionary*; indeed, his disgust for the Russian Revolution shaped his views towards Nazism⁸.

Stravinsky used the terms “Israelite” and “Jewish” in a derogatory fashion, as seen in a complaint that he wrote about a 1919 production of *Petrushka*

⁶ Poliakov and Wulf (1987) state: “6 000 000 Juden erlitten den Tod” (p. 226), and give the figure of 5,978,000 (p. 229) given by Jacob Leszczynski in “Bilan de l’extermination” (edited by the World Jewish Congress, June 1946); Friedländer (2008) states: “Between five and six million had been killed; among them almost a million and a half were under the age of fourteen” (pp. 793, 662). Bauer (2001) gives a total of 5,700,000–5,860,000 Jewish victims (p. 368). Rubenstein and Roth (1987) give the number of “six million Jewish lives” (p. 6). According to Yad Vashem, the estimate of the number of Jewish victims is near six million: “More than four million eight hundred thousand of the near six million Jews murdered by the Nazis and their accomplices are commemorated here (...) The names of more than one million of those who were murdered remain unknown” (The Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names).

⁷ “The word is frequently translated as ‘decadent’ or ‘degenerate’, though it derives from the science of genetics, where it means ‘mutant’, and hence was appropriated by the Nazis to signify either ‘racially inferior’ or ‘mentally deficient’. The aim of the exhibition was the defamation of modernism, and the exhibits, many of which were daubed with obscene graffiti, consisted of scores, books, and recordings, the last of which could be switched on by the public at random” (Ashley, 2002, p. 425). Along with Stravinsky, other non-Jewish composers targeted at the *Entartete Musik* exhibition were Hindemith and Alban Berg, among others; the Jewish composers included Schönberg, Kurt Weill, and Ernst Toch, to mention a few; Adorno (whose father was Jewish) was also targeted.

⁸ Taruskin (2009) argues that “amongst Russian composers ... only two famous ones seem *not* to have been anti-Semites” (p. 21): Rimsky-Korsakov and Shostakovich.

(Taruskin, 2009, p. 21): “Stravinsky [was] known to be anti-Semitic” (Fulcher, 1995, p. 467).

Stravinsky was a close friend of Nadia Boulanger, a French Catholic antisemite: “Like other anti-Semites in music, she maintained that Jews could be good performers and teachers but believed that, as a group, they were essentially incapable of the truly creative” (Fulcher, 1995, p. 467)⁹.

Even if “indifference to the plight of German-Jewish musicians [was] consistent [for Stravinsky] with a prejudice against Jews revealed in his correspondence of this period” (Evans, 2003, p. 534), Stravinsky’s shameful antisemitism did not prevent him from having Jewish friends and artistic collaborators, like Roland-Manuel, who was, indeed, Jewish.

III. The first and second lessons of *Poétique musicale*: expression, order, authenticity, composing

“*L’expression n’a jamais été la propriété immanente de la musique*” (Stravinsky, 1962, p. 63).

For Stravinsky, “to talk of musical poetics ... is to study the ‘process of doing’, in the field of music” (Kall, 1940, p. 285). Stravinsky asserted that music did not express anything (feelings, nature, or the composer’s psychological state of mind); he declared that expression was not an immanent characteristic of music, and “outspokenly denied the ‘expressive’ role assigned to music by premodern composers and critics” (Zak, 1985, p. 101). In short, music only expresses itself.

Stravinsky praised discipline and order (the 19th-century conception of the tormented, self-destructive and despairing artist could not be further from him). Authenticity is related to the inner need of the composer, and freedom and limits are connected: “*ma liberté sera d’autant plus grande et plus profonde que je limiterai plus étroitement mon champ d’action*” (Stravinsky, 2011, p. 106).

Hindemith (1949) stated that painting is a spatial art and music is a temporal art: “the aesthetic effect as a whole cannot be comprehended until it reaches a conclusion in a final tone or chord” (p. 157). Stravinsky introduces the notions of ontological time and psychological time developed by Souvtchinsky (thus, some music embraces ontological time, dominated by the principle of similarity, and some music embraces psychological time, dominated by the principle of contrast). Dissonance has always been considered something not complete in itself (but as a transitional element to be resolved in a consonance), but just as the human eye *sees* or *completes* colors in a picture where there are none, the ear can *hear* or *complete* the consonance that must follow the dissonance: “*depuis plus d’un siècle, la musique a multiplié les exemples d’un style où la dissonance s’est émancipée (...) Devenue chose en soi, il arrive qu’elle ne prépare ni n’annonce rien*” (Stravinsky, 2011, p. 86). Stravinsky does not use the word tonality, but *polarity* (there are poles of attraction that are the essential axis of music); he also prefers the word *antitonicity* to atonality.

⁹ This is, unquestionably and indubitably, an absurd antisemitic view, since many Jewish geniuses were/are great composers and musicians, like Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schönberg, George Gershwin, Kurt Weill, Jascha Heifetz, Naomi Shemer, Leonard Cohen, Philip Glass, Bob Dylan, Ofra Haza, Amy Winehouse, and Eden Golan, just to name a few.

Organisation and structure are crucial in the process of composition: “*Composer, pour moi, c’est mettre en ordre un certain nombre de ces sons selon certains rapports d’intervalle*” (Stravinsky, 2011, p. 88). Stravinsky defined music as a pure “organization of tones” (Craft, 1993, p. 66). Musical ideas do not appear solely in the moment of composing: they can appear any time –“sometimes [even] in the bathroom” (Craft, 1993, p. 66).

Stravinsky argues that imitating the great masters is the key to developing the art of composition. But, in truth, composers never imitate; rather, they steal. In Woody Allen’s *Anything Else*, David Dobel (Woody Allen) says to Jerry Falk (Jason Biggs): “Whenever you write, strive for originality, but if you have to steal, steal from the best”.

It can be said that the meaning of life for Stravinsky was to compose: “I like to compose music much more than music itself (...) the activity of composing is everything for me. It’s for what I live” (Reichenbach, 1981). Stravinsky composed in the morning, slowly and methodically, and not more than two or three pages. Stravinsky’s son Théodore (1948) states: “*La composition est pour lui nécessité de nature*” (p. 11). Stravinsky (1962) said: “*Pour moi, comme musicien créateur, la composition est une fonction quotidienne que je me sens appelé à remplir*” (pp. 187–188).

IV. Third and fourth lessons of *Poétique musicale*: the artisan and the language of music

“*Inspiration, art, artiste, autant de mots pour le moins fumeux qui nous empêchent de voir clair dans un domaine où tout est équilibre et calcul*” (Stravinsky, 2011, p. 95).

According to Stravinsky, the great masters of music composed as craftsmen, just as shoemakers make shoes. The artist is a craftsperson who needs to create with balance and calculation; inspiration exists, but it comes *later*, while working, just as appetite comes while eating: “I am a maker”, used to say Stravinsky, “I have to work all the time” (Leacock and Liebermann, 1967).

Which is the language of music? Precisely its notation. Does music express feelings? Not at all, Stravinsky asserts. Does music imitate anything? No. To pretend that music would express or imitate something is, indeed, an incoherent assumption: “*N’est-ce pas ... lui demander l’impossible que d’attendre [que la] musique exprime des sentiments, qu’elle traduise des situations dramatiques, qu’elle imite enfin la nature*” (Stravinsky, 2011, p. 112). For Stravinsky, “it was not so much that music is ‘powerless to express anything’ ... but that ‘music expresses itself’” (Chua, 2020, p. 313); music, indeed, “is ‘powerless to express anything’ other than itself” (Chua, 2020, p. 314).

In art (as in life, as the existentialists argue) we must always choose: “*Procéder par élimination ... telle est la grande technique du choix*” (Stravinsky, 2011, p. 107). Kandinsky (2013) asserts in *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*¹⁰ that the artist has a duty to create: “[*Die Künstler*] deswegen im Leben nicht frei ist, sondern nur in der Kunst” (p. 140). For Stravinsky, that

¹⁰ Originally published in German in 1912, one year before the turbulent premiere of *Le Sacre du printemps*.

duty is also a pleasure: “*Nous avons un devoir envers la musique, c’est de l’inventer*” (Stravinsky, 2011, p. 97).

“*Jedes Kunstwerk ist Kind seiner Zeit ... So bringt jede Kulturperiode eine eigene Kunst zustande, die nicht mehr wiederholt werden kann*” (p. 25), declared Kandinsky (2013). There are artists who go beyond the epoch and who are (as Baudelaire said) beacons that illuminate new paths that others will follow; these first appear as ruptures and then as models to be followed. Stravinsky describes his time as an epoch where continuity no longer exists: to be original is, hence, cardinal.

V. The fifth and sixth lessons of *Poétique musicale*: Russian music, “executants”, and historical performance practice

“I have often said that my music is to be ‘read’, to be ‘executed’, but not to be ‘interpreted’. I will say it still because I see in it nothing that requires interpretation” (Stravinsky and Craft, 1979, p. 119).

The fifth lesson of *Poétique musicale* was, apparently, entirely written by Souvitchinsky, and it is a critique of the clichés of Russian music (a music often solely considered to be oriental and folkloric). The *two* Russias represent two disorders (one revolutionary; the other conservative-reactionary).

In the sixth and last lesson, Stravinsky argues that music should just be “executed” (read, not interpreted). A good musician sees what exactly is in the score and does not stand between the composer and their message.

How to make notation a part of musical practice? Dahl (2023) explains that Stravinsky falls under the rule of “self-explanatory notation” (p. 12), meaning that “notation *is* the musical work’s identity *presented* through the performer’s performance practice” (p. 12).

According to Stravinsky, only “executants” do not betray the work of the composer; “performers”, on the contrary, exaggerate and distort: “Music expresses ‘itself’ because it expresses the score as its object: any subjective agency that by necessity has to squeeze itself between the tautology of the score and its ‘execution’ should be minimal if not invisible” (Chua, 2020, p. 315).

Stravinsky “had a low opinion of orchestral musicians, and an even lower one of conductors” (Hill, 2000, p. 118); he hated those conductors who took over the composer’s work. In both interviews and writings, Stravinsky “expressed the frustration of the creative artist whose work is distorted by an intermediary” (Hill, 2000, p. 118). Stravinsky’s main reason for recording himself (conducting his own music) was to be the reference for “executing” his pieces correctly: “his attitude to the gramophone was that of a creative artist who wanted to establish a correct tradition for the performance of his own music” (Walsh, 1989, p. 538). Stravinsky “was one of the first composers, perhaps the first, to see the opportunity recordings gave of extending his control over his music” (Hill, 2000, p. 118). Nevertheless, it is hard to believe, as Walsh (1989) notices, that anybody “will listen to these recordings to find out how the music should be played, or even how, in broad terms, Stravinsky wanted it played” (p. 538).

Historical performance practice is extremely important. Authenticity is respect for the aesthetics of a particular time and respect for the composer:

“Authenticité ... consiste à exécuter la musique avec les moyens que le compositeur connaissait” (Tubeuf, 2012a, p. 29). Stravinsky describes the betrayal of Bach’s works by performing works intended for less than 35 musicians with 200 musicians, a practice that is still used today with modern orchestras (although, fortunately, it is diminishing). Indeed, some modern orchestras today, in 2024, insist on continuing to perform baroque works with gigantic orchestras. The result is a caricature of Bach, which suddenly sounds like Brahms. Early music needs to be played with the right instruments and the right aesthetics (one can of course play Bach with a saxophone or with a children’s xylophone: it is also music; and precisely because it is music, it can also be beautiful, but it is not Bach); but this is a topic for another paper.

VI. The premiere of *Le Sacre du printemps*

“After the ‘performance’ we were excited, angry, disgusted, and ... happy. I went with Diaghilev and Nijinsky to a restaurant. So far from weeping and reciting Pushkin ... Diaguilev’s only comment was: ‘Exactly what I wanted’” (Stravinsky and Craft, 1979, p. 46).

The public’s response to the historic premiere of *Le Sacre du printemps* is well known. The Paris premieres of the ballets *L’Oiseau de feu* (1910) and *Petrushka* (1911) had been successful: both had been composed for Diaghilev’s *Ballets russes*, with choreography by Fokine and musical direction by Pierné (*L’Oiseau de feu*) and Monteux (*Petrushka*)¹¹. When *Le Sacre du printemps* premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on May 29, 1913, with Diaghilev’s *Ballets russes* (under the direction of Pierre Monteux, and with Nijinsky’s choreography), it caused a huge scandal: “It was full of very noisy public” (Leacock and Liebermann, 1967), recalls Stravinsky. Already at the beginning of the piece, the audience began to scream, and those who loved the ballet and those who hated it began to insult and hit each other. Monteux remained serene and managed to get the orchestra to play the entire piece, between shouts: “He stood there apparently impervious and as nerveless as a crocodile” (Stravinsky and Craft, 1979, p. 46). Stravinsky got up from the fourth or fifth row where he was sitting and went backstage to see Nijinsky, who kept shouting numbers to the dancers¹².

What caused such scandal? Stravinsky’s music or Nijinsky’s choreography? Indeed, only “[I]egend has it that it was the music that incited the audience with its barbaric rhythms and dissonances” (Chua, 2007, p. 59); the truth is that “for dance historians *The Rite of Spring* is not Igor Stravinsky’s concert evergreen, but the steps and stage action of Vaslav Nijinsky’s ballet” (Fink, 1999, p. 299)¹³.

¹¹ Later on, Stravinsky would compose three versions of *L’Oiseau de feu* (Suites of 1911, 1919 and 1945) and a second version of *Petrushka* in 1947.

¹² Nijinsky would dance for the last time in 1919, the year in which he was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

¹³ That night, *Le Sacre du printemps* was only one piece of four that were to be performed. Actually, the public came to listen to the other pieces (*Les Sylphides* –music by Chopin, orchestrated by Glazunov), *Le Spectre de la Rose* by Weber, and the *Polovtsian dances* by Borodin. A year later, in April 1914, Monteux conducted a version purely instrumental of *Le Sacre de printemps* and the concert was a success: “It was such a triumph, you cannot imagine ... The public took me

Be that as it may, Stravinsky valued authenticity so much that he did not seem to care about the scandal one bit.

VII. Adorno's harsh critique of Stravinsky's music

“Ernst Blochs Wort gegen Nietzsche, die ewige Wiederkehr sei eine aus endlosen Wiederholungen schlecht imitierte Ewigkeit, gilt buchstäblich für die Fiber von Stravinskys Musik” (Adorno, 2003, p. 388).

Adorno admired and praised Schönberg's music and was “deeply critical” (Miller, 2022, p. 113) of Stravinsky's music; he especially disliked Stravinsky's Neoclassicism (a music that Adorno felt *untrue*): *“Parallel zu Picasso hat Stravinsky in den frühen zwanziger Jahren den Neoklassizismus lanciert. Anders als Picasso jedoch hat er ihn mehr als drei Dezennien gehandhabt”* (Adorno, 2003, p. 382).

Adorno described Stravinsky's music as empty, monotonous, static, and superficial: *“das ist das Äffende an ihr, das Clownische: immerzu etwas Wichtiges tun, das doch nichts ist, sich anstrengen, ohne daß etwas geschähe”* (Adorno, 2003, p. 388); Adorno argued that Stravinsky's musical form was compulsive repetition, and he even made a parallelism between Bloch's critique of the Nietzschean eternal return and Stravinsky's music.

If something defines Stravinsky's music, it is his brilliant use of rhythm “in terms of displacement, shifts in the metrical alignment of repeated motives, themes, and chords” (van den Toorn, 2004, p. 468); but it was precisely this what Adorno abhorred: “Targeted in [Adorno's] celebrated indictment of Stravinsky's music are, above all, the composer's rhythmic practices, the frequent displacement of accents, and the disruptive effect of displacement on the listener” (van den Toorn, 2004, p. 468). The result, thus, was, according to Adorno, not motion or vitality, but “one of standstill or stasis” (van den Toorn, 2004, p. 468).

Adorno also argued that Stravinsky's music produced a false idea of progress. Truth and authenticity were reflected in the music of Schönberg. Due to Adorno's critique, “Schönberg and Stravinsky were pitted against each other as polar opposites: Schönberg the Progressive, Stravinsky the Regressive” (Andriessen and Cross, 2003, p. 248). Stravinsky never considered Schönberg as a rival and responded to Adorno's attack by defending Schönberg from those who argued that dodecaphony was a cacophony: *“[Schönberg] a adopté le système musical qui lui convenait et dans ce système, il est parfaitement logique avec lui-même et parfaitement cohérent”* (Stravinsky, 2011, p. 70).

Until Stravinsky's use of serialism (which was applauded by Adorno), “it became fashionable to dismiss Stravinsky as a mere neoclassicist (as if Schönberg, too, were not guilty of such a charge)” (Andriessen and Cross, 2003, p. 248). But even if Stravinsky's creative trajectory can be divided into three music style periods: the Russian period (1907–1919), the Neoclassical period (1920–1954), and the serial period (1954–1968) (or into four periods,

and embraced me ... And Diaghilev was furious, because the triumph was not in his ballet, but at the concert” (Leacock and Liebermann, 1967).

according to the different countries where Stravinsky lived and composed¹⁴), his compendium of compositions is completely heterogeneous.

In sum, Stravinsky's musical evolution is "the rich, purposeful, astoundingly fruitful search for a synthesis between the musical culture of the past and the gradually emerging musical forms, both serious and popular, of the twentieth century" (Karlinsky, 2013, p. 358). Stravinsky was, indeed, a composer who saw himself as a mere *Homo faber*, a man who stood between many artistic movements and countries, producing many different styles guided by duty, routine, and authenticity.

Conclusion

According to Stravinsky, the composer is an artisan, a *Homo faber*. The caricature of the anguished artist who writes only by inspiration (a product of Romanticism) is the antithesis of the Stravinskian conception of the composer as a *maker*. The composer can feel *Angst* in life but never in music. Music is not chaos, but order. Discipline and routine are paramount to the composer.

Music cannot be explained, much less translated; for Stravinsky, the *message* of music resides in the work itself, in the notation. Roland-Manuel (1996) states: "*Car si le langage de la musique ... nous touche et [il nous] atteint sans l'intermédiaire des idées et des mots, comment pourrions-nous la traduire en toute autre langue que la sienne?*" (p. 62). Keller and Cosman (1982) point out that when Stravinsky said that his music did not express anything, what he actually implied was "that his music did not convey any of those things which we spontaneously regard as expressible" (p. 53).

However, I personally believe that the *artistic message* of music can be found not *in* the music but *beyond* the music; the power of music lies *beyond* the notes and rhythm, and the power of painting lies *beyond* the colors and shapes. Art is a force that transcends what is written, what is represented, what is drawn and what is performed. And exactly because the strength of art resides not *in* the form, but *beyond* the form, Stravinsky's view on "executants" appears to be incoherent. Musicians are always interpreters because they always put a part of themselves into the music they perform; and that part they put is not biographical, but solely artistic.

It is true that, compared to Early music (Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, and Classical music performed with period instruments and the music aesthetics of the time), 20th (and 21st) century music leaves less freedom to the performer. To illustrate this point, I will describe the beginning of the score of *Le Sacre du printemps*, which has meticulous indications of tempo and dynamics: the Introduction "must be played" with a tempo: $\square = 50$, and *Lento*; everything is indicated (the only freedom resides in the famous *fagotto solo*: "solo ad lib."); the horns (second bar) "must" play *mezzopiano* (mp), the clarinets and the basso clarinet (fourth bar) "must" play *piano* (p), and the solo piccolo clarinet (fifth bar) "must" play *mezzopiano* (mp); the piece begins with *tempo rubato* (first four bars) and continues with *poco accelerando* (5th bar) and *in tempo* (7th

¹⁴ The Russian period (1902–1914), the Swiss period (1914–1920), the French period (1920–1939), and the American period (1939–1971) (according to L'Institut Igor Stravinsky and Fondation Igor Stravinsky, Geneva, chaired by Stravinsky's great-granddaughter).

bar). This example (although too technical) is important to illustrate the task of the Stravinskian “executant”: a musician who needs to add nothing to the score since the score already *says it all*. Nevertheless, Stravinsky admits that, despite all the indications of tempo, dynamics and accents, music always hides secret elements that cannot be defined: “I do not believe that it is possible to convey a complete or lasting conception of style purely by notation. Some elements must always be transmitted by the performer” (Stravinsky and Craft, 1979, p. 121). Where can the musician find the answer to these secrets? According to Stravinsky, in his recordings: “I regard my recordings as indispensable supplements to the printed music” (Stravinsky and Craft, 1979, p. 121). Craft claims that Stravinsky’s recordings are both a help and a hindrance to the “correct” interpretation of his works. There are recordings of the same work where the *tempi* are completely different. Which work to take as a reference? As Hindemith points out, music is born and reborn with each interpretation; there is no single correct, true and final interpretation; each interpretation, as long as it is honest, is true.

Stravinsky’s recordings were intended as a guide and as an indispensable tool for “executants” to “execute” his music. This does not make too much sense, and, paradoxically, his own recordings are not exactly the most listened to today. However, Stravinsky’s own recordings “can certainly be studied for information about the various musical texts” (Walsh, 1989, p. 538) and are an interesting and beautiful tool for musicologists and music lovers.

It is obvious that music exists in two states (potency and act). Stravinsky compares music to theater, but does not mention film, which, like music and theater, also exists in two forms: script and film¹⁵. In music, composer, performer and listener have a strong, complex and inevitable relationship. Copland (2011) declares: “Music begins with a composer; passes through the medium of an interpreter; and ends with you, the listener” (p. 211). We never listen to the composer, but to the musicians who perform the work of the composer: “*Ce n’est jamais Mozart qu’on entend (...) On n’entend jamais que l’exécutants, eux qui ont le pouvoir de traduire dans le son ce que Mozart a mis sur le papier*” (Tubeuf, 2012b, p. 270). And this is precisely what Stravinsky worried about: he envied painters, sculptors and writers because they could communicate their art to the public directly without the need for intermediaries who would, inevitably, distort the message.

Concerning the writing and authorship of *Poétique musicale*, Stravinsky confessed: “I sought the assistance of Souvtchinsky to help draft my texts in Russian and of Roland-Manuel to revise and polish the French” (Soumagnac, 2011, p. 17). Nevertheless, the truth is that he not only got the “assistance” of Souvtchinsky and Roland-Manuel; rather, Souvtchinsky and Roland-Manuel were actually the main figures in drafting *Poétique musicale*. Stravinsky, Roland-Manuel and Souvtchinsky wrote each other several letters where they discussed the lectures; Roland-Manuel and Souvtchinsky met each other to discuss *Poétique musicale*, and Stravinsky and Roland-Manuel worked together in Sancellemoz in May and June 1939; furthermore, their correspondence proves that Stravinsky paid Roland-Manuel and Souvtchinsky for their work.

¹⁵ Stravinsky states that some people read plays at home, but that only a few read scores as an aesthetic experience.

Stravinsky needed “assistants” both in *Poétique musicale* and *Chroniques de ma vie* (written in 1935–1936 with the collaboration of Walter Nouvel). Is it not slightly dishonest that these “assistants” were forever kept in the shadow? The work that Stravinsky, Roland-Manuel and Souvtchinsky did in *Poétique musicale* reminds me of the one that Richard Linklater, Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke did on the scripts of the movies *Before Sunset* (2004) and *Before Midnight* (2013); Linklater, Delpy and Hawke were all nominated for the Oscar for Best Writing, Adapted Screenplay in these two movies. If there were a Best Music Essay category at the Oscars, Stravinsky would have been the only nominee, and both Roland-Manuel and Souvtchinsky would have been left without any nominations.

The generally favourable reputation that Stravinsky enjoyed in Germany after 1933 (contrary to what is commonly believed, that is, that his music was prohibited and rejected) and Stravinsky’s antisemitism have been discussed in this paper. Stravinsky had, indeed, a “negative attitude toward communism and Judaism” (Evans, 2003, pp. 534–535), to say the least, and he did not even bother to hide his antisemitism. Stravinsky considered Mussolini “the saviour of Italy and -let us hope- of Europe” (Evans, 2003, p. 533). His love for order and his hate for revolution (in music and in life) made him an admirer of Fascism. As we can see, aesthetics and ethics belong to different worlds.

Regarding the explosive premiere of *Le Sacre du printemps*, Taruskin (2012) blames Nijinsky for the failure: “It was not Stravinsky’s music that did the shocking. It was the ugly earthbound lurching and stomping devised by Vaslav Nijinsky, the greatest dancer in the troupe but a novice choreographer, that offended the Paris public, for whom ballet was all about swans and tutus and elevation” (para. 3). The public shouted so much that Stravinsky’s music could not be heard; indeed, “it was the choreography that provoked the scandal” (Chua, 2007, p. 59). But Stravinsky never cared about the public’s reaction: all he cared, as a composer and as a *Homo faber*, was about “making” (producing) and authenticity.

Adorno’s critique of Stravinsky’s music, as Paddison argues (2003), had dramatic effects and provided “a rallying cry for the generation of new composers emerging in the immediate post-war years, and who were to become associated both with the rejection of neoclassicism and with the espousal of the multiple serialism of the Darmstadt School” (p. 192)¹⁶. Indeed, Adorno’s critique was exceedingly harsh and exaggerated.

Even if Adorno tried to invalidate Stravinsky’s music, calling his work untrue, empty and clownish, and labeling it monotonous and repetitive, the truth is that rhythm, displacement and disruption in Stravinsky’s music “are more varied and complicated than Adorno cared to admit” (van den Toorn (2004, p. 500). One can definitely agree with van den Toorn when he argues that “Adorno’s approach is unsystematic to the point of being unintelligible ... with the analytical descriptions themselves hemmed in by sweeping philosophical and sociological conjectures often no less fragmentary in character” (p. 469). Although Adorno spent many pages trying to ridicule Stravinsky’s music with his obscure *philosophical* language and weak arguments, Stravinsky’s

¹⁶ Some of the composers who belonged to the Darmstadt School were Pierre Boulez, Luigi Nono, Bruno Maderna, and Stockhausen.

compositions are widely performed today.

Stravinsky was inspired by different movements and different cultures: cubism, madrigals, classicism, jazz, Russia, France, America: “*il a répondu avec sa culture... cosmopolitan, avec sa culture livresque et littéraire*”, asserts Tubeuf (Leacock and Liebermann, 1967), while being completely “*génial et (...) inimitable*” (Tubeuf, 2012c, pp. 599, 603). Stravinsky knew how to be in the artistic revolutions of his century, but without remaining stuck in them: “*Stravinsky is the centre of excitement in twentieth century music –try to imagine it without him!*” (Craft, 1993, p. 7). His fame was, indeed, huge: “During the 1950s and 1960s, Stravinsky became the most filmed, the most marketable, the most ‘documentable’ composer of the twentieth century” (Joseph, 2001, p. 165).

As *Homo faber*, Stravinsky never ceased to produce. Authenticity was of supreme importance to him: “*On ne me verra pas sacrifier ce que j’aime et à quoi j’aspire pour satisfaire aux revendications des gens*” (Stravinsky, 1962, pp. 189–190). Griffiths describes Stravinsky “by nationality Russian, French and American, by affection Venetian, Spanish and Swiss” (p. ix). As a human being, Stravinsky had many flaws (two of the most ugly ones were the mistreatment of his first wife Yekaterina and his antisemitism), but as a composer he was without a doubt the master of rhythm, color, and instrumentation. His work expanded for many decades, and remains rich, genuine, groundbreaking, and magnificent.

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