

# Did He Mean It?\*

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**Abstract:** The program note I want to gloss concerns the Symphony in Three Movements, which was composed over the years 1942 to 1945 and first performed, on 24 January 1946, by the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra under the composer's baton. In 1963 Stravinsky seemed to have had a change of heart that rendered him willing to admit what he had formerly denied, even if he still needed to cloak the admission in paradox. Is it evidence that (to recall a book of outdated centennial essays) Stravinsky the musician never really meant what Stravinsky the modernist averred? We'll never know. Meanwhile, we'll go on performing and interpreting Stravinsky's music the way not he but we need to hear it. As long as we do that, his work will live.

**Keywords:** Stravinsky, *Poétique musicale*, program notes, performing style, Symphony in Three Movements, *Concerto per due fortepiani soli*

## I

*Dialogues and a Diary*, the fourth of the six books jointly authored by Stravinsky and Robert Craft, was the last in which some of the contents were still cast in the format that the first book called “conversations,” now given (as “dialogues”) a more Platonic—and a more honest—designation, since the books—all of them—were wholly and stylishly literary rather than colloquial. Some of the dialogues in this

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fourth volume, issued in 1963, were really program notes for use in Stravinsky's concert tours and recordings, in which a "question" from Craft served merely as a sort of preface to a little essay cast in Stravinsky's first-person voice. In the two remaining books in the series, these essays would be called, frankly, "program notes" and the dialogue conceit would be dropped. I say all this, perhaps unnecessarily, as a reminder of the questions surrounding the authorship of any and all published words attributed to Stravinsky.

The program note I want to gloss concerns the *Symphony in Three Movements*, which was composed over the years 1942 to 1945 and first performed, on 24 January 1946, by the New York Philharmonic–Symphony Orchestra under the composer's baton.<sup>1</sup> Craft's prefatory "question" was this:

You have at times referred to your *Symphony in Three Movements* as a "war symphony." In what way is the music marked by the impression of world events?

Stravinsky's "answer" is laid out in seven well-organized paragraphs, of which this is the first:

I can say little more than that it was written under the sign of them. It both does and does not "express my feelings" about them, but I prefer to say only that, without participation of what I think of as my will, they excited my musical imagination. And the events that thus activated me were not general, or ideological, but specific: each episode in the *Symphony* is linked in my imagination with a concrete impression, very often cinematographic in origin, of the war.

This paragraph both is and is not a mystification. The useful part is the acknowledgment that the correspondence between the music of the *Symphony* and what is usually called the extramusical is to be found in concrete imagery. That sounds very Russian, in fact. *Konkretnost'* and *obraznost'* (imagery) were among the official desiderata of socialist realism, and Stravinsky's *Symphony* has often struck me as a counterpart or companion piece to Shostakovich's Seventh, the mother of all war symphonies, which Stravinsky, along with millions of his newfound fellow Americans, heard on July 19, 1942, when the American première, by the NBC Symphony under Arturo Toscanini, was broadcast nationwide.<sup>2</sup> Stravinsky never had a good word to say about that piece, or about Shostakovich, but I think it likely that it was one of the impressions that may have excited Stravinsky's musical imagination without the participation of what he thought of as his will.

1. Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, "Symphony in Three Movements," in *Dialogues and A Diary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 83–85.

2. As recorded in Vera Stravinsky's diary; *Dearest Bubushkin: The Correspondence of Vera and Igor Stravinsky, 1921–1954, with Excerpts from Vera Stravinsky's Diaries, 1922–1971*, ed. Robert Craft (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 125.

The strained locution that I just parodied is one indication of the squeamishness with which Stravinsky always approached the question of musical representation or expression. And of course saying that the Symphony “both does and does not ‘express my feelings’” is pure haze and alibi—doubletalk in the most literal sense. What interests me is why Stravinsky painted himself into this corner. Earlier he had always simply denied the representational aspect of his music (or any music, come to that) when queried, to the point of outright lies about, for example, the *Scherzo fantastique* and the ballet *Les Abeilles*, which was based on it.<sup>3</sup> We know now from posthumously published letters that the piece was inspired by, and very concretely referred to, Maurice Maeterlinck’s *La vie des abeilles*, but Stravinsky would not admit that in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

About the Symphony in Three Movements he issued similar denials at first, as in a letter to the man who commissioned it—Bruno Zirato, the Managing Director of the New York Philharmonic—who wanted to give the Symphony the subtitle “La Victoire.” “It is well known that no program is to be sought in my musical output,” Stravinsky insisted. “Sorry if this is desappointing [sic] but no story to be told, no narration and what I would say would only make yawn the majority of your public which undoubtedly expects exciting descriptions. This, indeed would be so much easier but alas. . .”<sup>5</sup> Pressed, he contributed a grudging “Word” to the Philharmonic program book for the 1946 première, allowing that the symphony had been in some sense prompted “by this our arduous time of sharp and shifting events, of despair and hope, of continual torments, of tension, and, at last, cessation and relief.”<sup>6</sup>

Stravinsky recommended the composer Ingolf Dahl, a Los Angeles neighbor (and co-translator of the *Poétique musicale*) who had played the work over with him many times, as one who could furnish acceptable program notes, and for the most part Dahl confined himself to properly yawn-making technical observations. But Dahl warmed a little to the Victory theme at the end by proclaiming that “one day it will be universally recognized that the white house in the Hollywood Hills in which this Symphony was written and which was regarded by some as an ivory tower, was just as close to the core of a world at war as the place where Picasso

3. See Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 40: “I wrote the Scherzo as a piece of ‘pure’ symphonic music. The bees were a choreographer’s idea.”

4. See his letter to Rimsky-Korsakov, dated 18 June (Old Style), 1907: “I am . . . composing a fantastic Scherzo, ‘The Bees,’ about which I’ll tell you. . .” in *I. F. Stravinskii: stat’i i material’i* [Articles and materials], ed. L. S. Dyachkova and B. M. Yarustovsky (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1973), 441.

5. Quoted by Joseph Horowitz from the original in the New York Philharmonic archives; “Stravinsky, the New York Philharmonic, and Program Music,” *Unanswered Question: Joe Horowitz on Music* (blog), March 29, 2010 ([http://www.artsjournal.com/uq/2010/03/stravinsky\\_the\\_new\\_york\\_philha.html](http://www.artsjournal.com/uq/2010/03/stravinsky_the_new_york_philha.html)).

6. As edited for printing and quoted in Eric Walter White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 391; Stravinsky’s original wording, in another letter to Zirato also posted by Horowitz in his blog: “During the process of creation in this our arduous time of sharp shifting events, time of despair [sic] and hope, time of continual torments, of tention [sic] and at last cessation, relief, my [sic] be all those repercussions have left traces, stamped the character of this Symphony.”

painted *Guernica*.<sup>7</sup> Possibly because Picasso had joined the French Communist Party and was offering his services as painter of doves to the Soviet-dominated postwar peace movement, this comparison provoked a reproachful response from Stravinsky. There may have been other reasons as well. The film composer David Raksin seized on Dahl's program note in a little war of words he was waging with Stravinsky, who, after many unsuccessful attempts to sell his music to the Hollywood studios, had hypocritically derided "film people" as having "a primitive and childish concept of music."<sup>8</sup> Raksin retorted that by endorsing Dahl's program note, at which "many of us were greatly surprised," Stravinsky had shown that "he is not unaware of the significance of his music" as war propaganda.<sup>9</sup> Stravinsky now complained to Dahl that "if passages from the program notes are used to imply extramusical connotations in my work, I have to disclaim any responsibility for such interpretations."<sup>10</sup>

But in 1963 Stravinsky seemed to have had a change of heart that rendered him willing to admit what he had formerly denied, even if he still needed to cloak the admission in paradox. Beginning with the second paragraph, the program note in *Dialogues and a Diary* gives an astonishingly frank and detailed account of the Symphony's hitherto forsworn "connotations":

The third movement actually contains the genesis of a war plot, though I recognized it as such only after completing the composition. The beginning of that movement is partly, and in some—to me wholly inexplicable—way, a musical reaction to the newsreels and documentaries that I had seen of goose-stepping soldiers. The square march-beat, the brass-band instrumentation, the grotesque crescendo in the tuba—these are all related to those repellent pictures.

What is inexplicable to me is Stravinsky's resort to the word inexplicable. In fact, the music could well have come from the soundtrack to a newsreel depicting marching soldiers. The next paragraph is one that I really wish Stravinsky had not published; or—should I say—the one that I both do and do not wish Stravinsky had not published:

Though my visual impressions of world events were derived largely from films, they also were rooted in personal experience. One day in Munich, in 1932, I saw a squad of Brown Shirts enter the street below the balcony of my room in the Bayerische Hof and assault a group of civilians. The civilians tried to protect themselves behind sidewalk benches, but soon were crushed beneath these

7. Quoted in Anthony Linick, *The Lives of Ingolf Dahl* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008), 175.

8. "Igor Stravinsky on Film Music: As Told to Ingolf Dahl," *Musical Digest* 28/1 (September 1946): 4–5 and 35–36, here 35.

9. David Raksin, "Hollywood Strikes Back: Film Composer Attacks Stravinsky's 'Cult of Inexpressiveness,'" *Musical Digest* 30/1 (January 1948), 5–7.

10. Letter of February 9, 1948; quoted in Charles M. Joseph, *Stravinsky Inside Out* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2001), 129.

clumsy shields. The police arrived, eventually, but by then the attackers had dispersed. That same night I dined with Vera de Bosset [who in 1940 became the second Mrs. Stravinsky] and the photographer Eric Schall [*recte*: Schaal] in a small Allee restaurant. Three men wearing swastika armbands entered the room, and one of them began to talk insultingly about Jews and to aim his remarks in our direction. With the afternoon street fight still in our eyes, we hurried to leave, but the now shouting Nazi and his myrmidons [I looked it up—it means a loyal follower of Achilles] followed, cursing and threatening us the while. Schall protested, and at that they began to kick and hit him. Miss de Bosset ran to a corner, found a policeman, and told him that a man was being killed, but this piece of intelligence did not rouse him to any action. We were then rescued by a timely taxi, and though Schall was battered and bloody, we went directly to a police court where, however, the magistrate was as little perturbed with our story as the policeman had been. “In Germany today, such things happen every minute,” was all he said.

Eric Schaal (1905–1994) eventually fled Germany for America, where he became famous as a photographer for *Life* magazine. One of his best known pictures was a publicity photo of Sergey Rachmaninoff’s hands that appeared first in the magazine and later on the cover of a 78-RPM record album containing a reissue of Rachmaninoff’s own recording of his famous Second Piano Concerto.<sup>11</sup> I find Stravinsky’s wholly unwarranted digression here embarrassing, in view of his private but intense anti-Semitism, which is now well known and for which the evidence continues to accumulate. If you will permit me an unwarranted digression of my own, I very recently received a letter from a friend, a Russian musicologist who now lives in Basel and of course regularly visits the Paul Sacher Stiftung, where she recently made a study of Stravinsky’s personal collection of Russian books. One of the books she found there was a copy of Modest Chaikovsky’s biography of his brother, the famous composer, which includes copious extracts from Chaikovsky’s letters. All the passages that insult Jews—and there are quite a few in the original Russian text—were underscored.<sup>12</sup> Well, that is neither here nor there, but in 1932 Stravinsky was very much a sympathizer with the fascist cause.<sup>13</sup> The story about Eric Schaal was gratuitously interpolated, it seems to me, as a preemptive alibi to assuage Stravinsky’s unease, when discussing his “war symphony,” about his prewar European past.

For America had changed him. As Stravinsky’s house guest in 1947, Nicolas Nabokov heard him say, “As far as I am concerned, they can have their Marshals

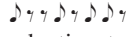
11. With Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra (Victor DM-58, recorded in 1929).

12. They were omitted from the abridged translation by Rosa Newmarch (Modeste Tchaikovsky, *The Life and Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, first published in 1905) and have never been available in English.

13. To mention just one item from a rapidly growing literature, see Joan Evans, “Stravinsky’s Music in Hitler’s Germany,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 56/3 (Fall 2003), 525–594.

and Fuehrers. Leave me Mr. Truman and I'm quite satisfied."<sup>14</sup> Could this change be linked, somehow, with the change in Stravinsky's attitude toward musical representations? Both changes could be described as lessened intransigence. It is something to ponder, and to return to.

But first let us finish with Stravinsky's program note. These are the next three paragraphs:

. . . In spite of contrasting episodes, such as the canon for bassoons, the march music [in the finale] is predominant until the fugue, which is the stasis and the turning point. The immobility at the beginning of the fugue is comic, I think—and so, to me, was the overturned arrogance of the Germans when their machine failed. The exposition of the fugue and the end of the Symphony are associated in my plot with the rise of the Allies, and perhaps the final, albeit rather too commercial, D-flat sixth chord—instead of the expected C—tokens my extra exuberance in the Allied triumph. The figure  was developed from the rumba in the timpani part in the introduction to the first movement. It was somehow associated in my imagination with the movements of war machines.

The first movement was likewise inspired by a war film, this time a documentary of scorched-earth tactics in China. The middle part of the movement—the music for clarinet, piano, and strings, which mounts in intensity and volume until the explosion of the three chords at No. 69—was conceived as a series of instrumental conversations to accompany a cinematographic scene showing the Chinese people scratching and digging in their fields.

The formal substance of the Symphony—perhaps Three Symphonic Movements would be a more exact title—exploits the idea of counterplay among several types of contrasting elements. One such contrast, the most obvious, is that of harp and piano, the principal instrumental protagonists. Each has a large *obbligato* role and a whole movement to itself and only at the turning-point fugue, the *queue de poisson* [abrupt end] of the Nazi machine, are the two heard together and alone.

The juxtaposition of piano and harp came about in a peculiar way that Stravinsky does not report. Although he had been forthcoming enough about the outer movements of the symphony to cause himself discomfiture, his program note contains nothing about the slow middle movement. It was originally written on spec to accompany a movie, one that became very famous when its star, Jennifer Jones, won the Academy Award for best actress. The movie was *The Song of Bernadette* (1943), based on a novel by Stravinsky's Hollywood neighbor Franz Werfel. The music that became the second movement of the Symphony in Three Movements was meant to accompany the scene in which the title character sees an apparition of the Virgin Mary that led to the founding of the shrine at Lourdes.

14. Nicolas Nabokov, "1949: Christmas with Stravinsky," in *Stravinsky: A Merle Armitage Book*, ed. Edwin Corle (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1949), 123–168, here 143.

Like all the music Stravinsky wrote for the Hollywood studios, it was rejected; Alfred Newman wrote the eventual soundtrack score. It was the addition of this harp-heavy Hollywood reject to the symphony's first movement, with its piano obbligato, that gave Stravinsky the idea of combining piano and harp in the finale. To those who know Russian music, the combination has a very famous precedent in Glinka's opera *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, where it is used to evoke the sound of gusli, the ancient Russian bardic psaltery that had fascinated Stravinsky during his "Swiss" period, and that he had already imitated with the Hungarian cimbalom in several works, notably *Renard* and some preliminary versions of *Les Noces*.

I suppose it was the fact that the imagery in the second movement was unrelated to the war, and therefore irrelevant to Craft's ersatz prefatory "question," that kept the information I have just related out of Stravinsky's program note. But I thought it worth imparting, for it shows that the second movement, too, was full of concrete imagery. One can, I think, tell when listening to it just where the Virgin Mary appears: at the music for the four solo violins and two solo violas, accompanied by the harp, at one measure before [124].

But we are even now not quite finished with Stravinsky's program note. There is a coda. After spilling the beans about the War Symphony's surprisingly concrete imagery and its sources, Stravinsky suddenly tries to take it all back. "But enough of this," he blurts:

In spite of what I have said, the Symphony is not programmatic. Composers combine notes. That is all. How and in what form the things of this world are impressed upon their music is not for them to say.

Sorry, too late—you've already said it. This bizarre retraction, as if Stravinsky all at once remembered that he was Stravinsky, with a long inventory of pronouncements behind him that he had just contradicted, will fool only those who wish to be fooled. It is all too obvious from what Stravinsky here divulged that he believed what most of us believe: that yes, composers combine notes, but no, that is not all. The anti-expressive pose had always been just that—a pose. Even the original gauntlet, thrown down by the composer (or his ghostwriter, Walter Nouvel) in *Chroniques de ma vie*, Stravinsky's (originally) two-volume autobiography of 1935–1936, a sentence that paid-up Stravinskians can recite by heart, was carefully hedged:

[M]usic is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to *express* anything at all.<sup>15</sup>

Did you remember that in the original text the word "express" is italicized (as is the word "expression" in the next sentence, where we read, "*Expression* has never been an inherent property of music")? The italics imply that these words

15. Igor Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* [1936] (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), 53. The original French: "la musique, par son essence, est impuissante à *exprimer* quoi que ce soit."

were chosen from among alternatives. It must have been as obvious to Stravinsky as it is to me that if he had written “represent” instead of “express,” the assertion would have been too absurd to persuade anyone. And the insertion of the word “inherent” in the second sentence is also a hedge, because one can make the same claim about words, which also represent not inherently but only in the way that music does, which Stravinsky calls “an illusion, . . . simply an additional attribute which, by tacit and inveterate agreement, we have lent it, thrust upon it, as a label, a convention—in short, an aspect that, unconsciously or by force of habit, we have come to confuse with its essential being.”<sup>16</sup>

So what else is new? The sounds you will make if you read these words aloud will convey more than mere sounds to you only because, long before you and I ever came into contact, we made a tacit and inveterate agreement to thrust upon them, as a convention, connotations that are quite separable from their essential being as sounds. If I were speaking or writing Russian, it would make a difference only if you and I had not made the tacit and inveterate agreement we would have made if you had learned that language. If I were making arbitrary noises or combining written letters at random, there would be no tacit and inveterate agreement between us, hence no meaning, no matter how full my heart. There used to be a newspaper feature in the United States called “Ripley’s Believe-It-Or-Not,” consisting of facts the editor asserted as incredible but true. It was of course a favorite object of parody. One parody I’ll never forget was by the comedian Ernie Kovacs in *Mad* magazine, and it went, “Gottfried Günther, famous Bavarian linguist, spoke two hundred and twelve languages. None of them could be identified.”<sup>17</sup> Now there’s a would-be Stravinskian.

But no, not really. Gottfried Günther’s “speech” lacked not only meaning but also syntax, which Stravinsky’s music never lacks. Meaning and syntax are related as complementary sign systems, with meaning pointing outside the sounds to their agreed-upon referents, and syntax pointing from sound to sound. The argument about music is not, and has never been, between expression and pure, neutral, non-signifying sound, but among the many alternative ways of characterizing the relationship between music and the world of objects, emotions and ideas: “express,” as opposed to “evoke,” or “suggest,” or “connote,” or “symbolize,” or “transmit,” or “stimulate,” or some other verb, in addition to “represent.” Among these alternatives, “represent” probably makes the most modest claim, and I doubt whether anyone today would seriously propose, as Stravinsky stops well short of doing, that music is inherently incapable of representation. The legitimate arguments concern what and how music represents, not whether.

16. *Ibid.*, 53–54.

17. *Mad*, no. 33 (June 1957). See <http://thatmansscope.blogspot.com/2011/11/none-of-which-could-be-identified.html>



Except where Stravinsky refers to his own feelings, the only feelings he or anyone can properly *express*, the description of the Symphony in Three Movements as a war symphony entails representation, not expression. Even feelings can be represented without being expressed, as any opera composer knows, and if we allow that the extra exuberance at the Allied triumph in 1945 was not Stravinsky's alone, then the commercial chord at the end could be classed as a representation, whether or not it is also an expression. The continued squeamish pretense of denial at the end of Stravinsky's *explication de texte* is all the more striking when you consider that in the book of "conversations" that immediately preceded *Dialogues and a Diary*, Stravinsky had already gone out of his way to disavow "that over-publicized bit about expression (or non-expression)," although he still rather wanly claimed to "stand by the remark."<sup>18</sup> It was only the reduction of music to a verbal paraphrase that he now purported to reject, which puts him, actually, in the company of Schumann, who, while praising Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, nevertheless deplored the limiting specificity of the program ("all of Germany gladly returns it to Berlioz: such signposts always smack of something unworthy and pretentious").<sup>19</sup> Stravinsky's program note for the Symphony in Three Movements actually demonstrates the pitfall that Schumann deplored: after reading it, a listener's imagination is no longer free. The explicitness of programs is a constraint that Romantics of Schumann's stripe resisted.

Schumann would have been pleased, however, to hear Stravinsky (in the same passage from *Expositions and Developments*) say that "Music is suprapersonal and surreal and as such beyond verbal meanings and verbal descriptions." This put him in the company of the German theorists of what eventually came to be known as absolute music.<sup>20</sup> Just what you might have expected from a Stravinsky who was suddenly eager to forge retrospective links with the post-Expressionists of Vienna. But then—again—he spoils it all by reducing it to a lame tautology: "Music expresses itself"—to which, in a filmed interview, he once quaintly added, "eloquently."<sup>21</sup> By now the obstinate clarity of the interwar Stravinsky's pronouncements has been hopelessly muddled by ambivalence.

After years of dealing with Stravinsky's prevarications and distortions, and his many striking but shallow and careless aphorisms, I had become so fed up with Stravinsky as a publicist in his own behalf that it was only the promise of a free trip to a conference in Berlin, for which I thank Albrecht Riethmüller, that got me

18. Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 114–115.

19. Quoted in Jonathan Kregor, *Liszt as Transcriber* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 72. The original in German: Robert Schumann, "Hector Berlioz: Épisode de la vie d'un artiste," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 3/13 (August 14, 1835), 50: "So weit das Programm. Ganz Deutschland schenkt es ihm: solche Wegweiser behalten immer etwas unwürdiges und Charlatanmäßiges."

20. See Sanna Pederson, "Defining the Term 'Absolute Music' Historically," *Music and Letters* 90/2 (May 2009), 240–262.

21. *Stravinsky: Once at a Border*, film by Tony Palmer (1982).

to agree to reopen the question of Stravinsky and expression.<sup>22</sup> Nor was I alone in my exasperation. A recent excellent study of Stravinsky's formal processes by Gretchen Horlacher contains a little passage of a kind that has become *de rigueur* in writing about a composer who issued so many contradictory words to so many interlocutors for so many undisclosed purposes. Having made various claims, and proposed various hypotheses about Stravinsky's techniques of superimposition and intercutting, Horlacher did as many writers do and looked to the composer's own writings for corroboration. "Stravinsky's writings are sprinkled with references to counterpoint and polyphony (both in his music and that of others), suggesting that he was comfortable with such descriptions [as I have been making]," she wrote. But then, as if in reflex, she added:

It is not always easy to evaluate the significance of the composer's remarks for a variety of reasons; Stravinsky's statements are often contradictory or self-serving, and it would be simplistic to assume he held a single opinion over the years. Moreover, the authorship of much of "his" writing has been questioned.<sup>23</sup>

Surely, however, you can guess the next word in Horlacher's text. It was "None-theless," of course, signaling that despite all caveats, quoting from Stravinsky's voluminous writings—where you can find support for virtually any assertion—is inescapable and irresistible. And so it is, and here I am, doing it too.

Why?

Neither in Horlacher's case nor in mine is it a matter of simple opportunism, the way it is for the many writers who still utter *pro forma* caveats before passing along their favorite nuggets from Solomon Volkov's *Testimony*, the faked oral memoirs of Shostakovich.<sup>24</sup> Both she and I, and of course many others, are now more likely to critique the words we quote from Stravinsky than echo them. But still we quote. And still I ask, why?

The best answer comes from Pierre Souvtchinsky, the *éminence grise* behind Stravinsky's *Poétique musicale*, a text from which I will soon be quoting *in extenso*. Thanks to the recent spadework of Myriam Soumagnac, Svetlana Savenko, and especially Valérie Dufour, we now know a great deal about the authorship of these lectures, and how little input Stravinsky actually had into their conception and elaboration, to say nothing of the elegantly written text in a language

22. This paper began life as the keynote address at a conference, "Stravinsky: Between Emotion and Objectivity," sponsored by the Freie Universität, Berlin, in January 2012.

23. Gretchen Horlacher, *Building Blocks: Repetition and Continuity in the Music of Stravinsky* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 137.

24. *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich as Related to and Edited by Solomon Volkov* (London – New York: Harper and Row, 1979). To sample the controversies that have surrounded this book, one may consult *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

Stravinsky spoke quite imperfectly.<sup>25</sup> The chief revelation was that the lectures were sketched out in their entirety by Pierre Souvtchinsky before Stravinsky made the outline from which his ghostwriter, Alexis Roland-Manuel, worked, and that Souvtchinsky wrote the fifth chapter, or “lesson,” the one on Russian music, virtually in its entirety in Russian, and the published text was translated by Stravinsky’s son Sviatoslav (Soulima) and only edited (if that) by Roland-Manuel. In a letter of thanks after Stravinsky had signaled his acceptance of the fifth lesson as drafted, Souvtchinsky wrote how glad he was “that at last things will be said that no one has yet dared say aloud. And what good fortune, and what a *coup*, that you, yes you, are the one who will say them.”<sup>26</sup> The irony is delicious, no? Edgar Bergen here congratulates Charlie McCarthy. But he was right to do so.

Knowledge that the words Stravinsky uttered in Harvard’s New Lecture Hall on six evenings spaced throughout the 1939–1940 academic year did not come from Stravinsky gives scholars a new mandate to determine where they did come from, and of course we are working on that. But the fact that the words came out of Stravinsky, that is, out of his mouth, gave them an energy and lent them an authority no other mouth could have furnished. They have been echoing around the world now for three-quarters of a century, reinforced by endless exegesis and paraphrase. They are still the most uncritically accepted twentieth-century words about music (with Adorno’s a distant second), and so they can never be ignored or evaded; they must be dealt with. But (as Stravinsky loved saying) *marquez bien!* Because Stravinsky uttered them Stravinsky is responsible for their energy and influence, and so it hardly matters now whether Stravinsky was the one who actually strung them together. He is responsible for the work they have done. And in a sense, therefore, the question I have posed in my title is a trivial one. It does not matter whether Stravinsky meant them inasmuch as he did intentionally propel them into the world where they have done their enormous cultural and social work—work that continues right up to the present moment.

If we think that that work has been harmful to some degree, if we would like to see it to some extent undone, our best recourse is contextualization. To situate Stravinsky’s attitudes and utterances in history, or rather in histories—intellectual, aesthetic, political, social, and cultural, including the history of Stravinsky’s career—is to relativize them, which is already a gain. And one of the questions such situating helps us answer is the question of motive. What did Stravinsky hope to

25. Valérie Dufour, “La *Poétique musicale* de Stravinsky : Un manuscrit inédit de Souvtchinsky,” *Revue de Musicologie* 89/2 (2003), 373–392; eadem, “Stravinsky vers Souvtchinsky: Thème et variations sur la *Poétique musicale*,” *Mitteilungen der Paul Sacher Stiftung* 17 (March 2004), 17–23; Svetlana Savenko, “P. P. Suvchinskiy i ‘Muzikal’naya poëtika’ I. F. Stravinskogo,” in *Pyotr Suvchinskiy e yevo vremya*, ed. Alla Bretanitskaya (Moscow: Kompozitor, 1999), 273–282; Myriam Soumagnac, “Préface,” in Igor Stravinsky, *Poétique musicale sous forme de six leçons* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), 11–55.

26. Letter of May 25, 1939; quoted in Savenko, “P. P. Suvchinskiy i ‘Muzikal’naya poëtika’ I. F. Stravinskogo,” 275.

gain from espousing the fairly untenable postulates with which he was so irrevocably associated that he could not shake them even when he may have wished to do so, and which, thanks to that irrevocable association, have been upheld regardless and continue to affect our musical and intellectual environment? To all of which I now would add the question that at present interests me most of all: what made him change his mind—if indeed he did, or needed to?

## II

Can we ever know whether anyone means (or intends) anything? That is not exactly the question that the famous “intentional fallacy” addresses,<sup>27</sup> but to presume that we can know these things would be to propound another sort of intentional fallacy. Nevertheless, as with nearly every other epistemological project, the impossibility of its final achievement has not deterred and should never deter attempts to get a little nearer to the unreachable goal. On what sort of evidence would an answer to my titular question depend? How might we assess its reliability?

Stravinsky’s investment in objectivity and his deprecation of emotional expression are usually associated with the widespread aesthetic reaction to the First World War, in which the *loci classici* are writings by such authors as Ortega y Gasset (“The Dehumanization of Art”), T. S. Eliot (“Tradition and the Individual Talent”) and, perhaps most intensely and pertinently, the somewhat earlier writings of T. E. Hulme that were collected and published after the author’s death (on the battlefield) under the title *Speculations*.<sup>28</sup> Parallels between these writings and the famous written and oral statements attributed to Stravinsky are very easily drawn and generally conceded, even if actual smoking guns have not been found. One of the early letters from Stravinsky to Robert Craft, for example, has, as a postscript, this: “What is *Speculations* by T. E. Hulme, have no idea?”<sup>29</sup> It is easy enough to guess what elicited that sentence: Craft had spotted the obvious parallels and asked Stravinsky whether he knew the book. Apparently not. It is not even possible to establish Stravinsky’s acquaintanceship with the sources on which his ghostwriters drew, such as Jacques Maritain, Paul Valéry, or the many so-called

27. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” *The Sewanee Review* 54/3 (July–September 1946), 468–488; reprinted in Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3–20, and endlessly anthologized thereafter. The interpretive fallacy the essay does address is that of invoking intentions not evident in or inferable from a given text but only in other authorial documents (sketches and drafts, letters, interviews, direct interrogation, whatever) or otherwise obtained information as a key to interpreting the text.

28. José Ortega y Gasset, “The Dehumanization of Art” (1925), in *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*, trans. H. Weil (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 3–56; T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” [1919], in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1975), 36–44; T. E. Hulme, *Speculations*, ed. Herbert Read (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1924).

29. Stravinsky, *Selected Correspondence*, vol. I, ed. Robert Craft (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 330.

Eurasianist and proto-Eurasianist writers on whom Souvtchinsky drew both in the fifth lesson of the *Poétique*, which he actually wrote, and in the outline he drafted for the whole. And while it is very easy to establish Alexis Roland-Manuel's reliance on Paul Valéry's series of university lectures on aesthetics when it came to ghostwriting the *Poétique musicale*, we can be fairly sure that Stravinsky did not know this book at first hand, or he would not have committed the *faux pas*, at a soirée chez Nadia Boulanger shortly before sailing to America, of reading the first lecture aloud to a small audience that included Valéry, who was not particularly amused to recognize his words and thoughts.<sup>30</sup>

But if we cannot account for Stravinsky's general ideas in terms of specific borrowings, we can easily find reasons to attribute to Stravinsky the motives usually invoked to account for the post-Great-War objectivist turn. One of these was the aristocratic or (to give it its more recent and more contentious name) the elitist impulse—the desire to preserve high art as a socially exclusive realm (or, as Ortega put it in *The Dehumanization of Art*, an art “for ‘quality’ and not for *hoi polloi*”).<sup>31</sup> Stravinsky's writings have always striven to scare off or embarrass the masses. His most forbidding aesthetic manifesto of all was the one accompanying one of his friendliest, most diverting compositions, the *Octuor* of 1924. Surely, to pick one typical passage, no one who read this—

Form, in my music, derives from counterpoint. I consider counterpoint as the only means through which the attention of the composer is concentrated on purely musical questions. Its elements also lend themselves perfectly to an architectural construction.

This sort of music has no other aim than to be sufficient in itself. In general, I consider that music is only able to solve musical problems; and nothing else, neither the literary nor the picturesque, can be in music of any real interest. The play of the musical elements is the thing.<sup>32</sup>

—would ever have guessed that the composition under discussion included a funny set of character variations sporting a waltz and a circus march, let alone that it ended with some kind of Charleston or shimmy. Forty years or so later, in an interview filmed at the University of Texas, Stravinsky blurted, “Emotion in music is for geeerls!”<sup>33</sup> Everybody laughed, girls included; but the meaning was clear enough—Stravinsky's *geeerls* was an even snootier version of Ortega's *hoi polloi*.

30. Stravinsky, *Selected Correspondence*, vol. II, ed. Robert Craft (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 511.

31. Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art*, 12.

32. Igor Stravinsky, “Some Ideas About My Octuor” (*The Chesterian*, 1924); reprinted in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, eds. Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Schirmer, 2008), 390.

33. David Oppenheim, producer, “CBS News Special: Stravinsky,” narrated by Charles Kuralt; first aired 3 May 1966.

In one of the latest ersatz conversations ghosted by Craft, devoted to the *Requiem Canticles* (1966), the last of Stravinsky's major works, the composer is quoted defending himself against the charge of "aestheticism," which he paraphrases as "the self-sufficiency, or as it may be, the selfishness, of an artist who refuses to come out and play." "Whether or not the description fits me," the text continues, "I suspect that its use against me derives from very different terms: for instance . . . my lack of sympathy with the use of music as an advertisement for extra-musical causes, even the greatest symphony, as I see it, being able to do very little about Hiroshima."<sup>34</sup> On one level that is a remarkably trite defense of moral indifference, the degraded estate to which aesthetic autonomy, too zealously defended, will inevitably descend. On another, it is a more justifiable defense against the subversion or distortion of artworks in the interests of propaganda, a process that may be imposed by political authorities through coercion or co-option, or else at times self-imposed to avoid trouble or, more rarely, to game the system.

The reference to Hiroshima may well have been a tacit rebuke to Penderecki, whom many suspected (as it turned out, not wrongly) of exploiting the memory of a horrific event to advance his career; the example of Alfred Schnittke's early oratorio *Nagasaki* is also relevant here, although Stravinsky could not have had knowledge of it.<sup>35</sup> His notorious dismissal of Britten's *War Requiem* was probably motivated in part by a similar indignation.<sup>36</sup> One also thinks of the fate of Shostakovich, or of Stravinsky's old comrade Prokofiev, not to mention his own probable fate had he remained in the land of his birth, where (as he commented one day, no doubt with Zhdanov in mind) "every *tchinovnik* can tell you what to do."<sup>37</sup> What happened to poor Shostakovich after the reign of the *tchinovniki* had ended and his works became fodder for furious political contests over their "message" may have been even worse. To disavow all expressive content would at least discourage co-option and political exploitation. Stravinsky may well have felt that in his Symphony in Three Movements he had veered too close for comfort toward an accommodation with propaganda, especially after Ingolf Dahl had compared it with Picasso's *Guernica*, and that may help account for the special squeamishness we have observed in his attitude toward that exceptional work. A self-protective

34. *Bravo Stravinsky*. Photographs by Arnold Newman, Text by Robert Craft, Foreword by Francis Steegmuller (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Company, 1967), 112; reprinted with minor changes in Igor Stravinsky, *Themes and Conclusions* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 98.

35. On Penderecki, see Ludwik Erhardt, *Spotkania z Krzysztofem Pendereckim* (Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1975), where it was first revealed that Penderecki's *Tren ofiarom Hiroszimy* (*Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*, 1961) was originally titled 8'37" à la Cage and only given the politically fraught title that made it (and him) famous at the suggestion of the director of the Polish Radio, after it had been rejected by the state publishing house; on Schnittke, see Peter J. Schmelz, "Alfred Schnittke's Nagasaki: Soviet Nuclear Culture, Radio Moscow, and the Global Cold War," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 62/2 (Summer 2009), 413–474.

36. See Stravinsky, *Themes and Conclusions*, 26–27.

37. Nabokov, "Christmas with Stravinsky," 142. *Tchinovnik*, in pre-revolutionary Russian, meant a civil servant (who was always referred to by his rank, or "tchin"), or, more commonly, a bureaucrat.

instinct, as well as an exigent sense of propriety, surely lurked behind his objectivist hyperboles.

But no matter how much we may speculate about reasons and motives, they cannot in and of themselves provide an answer to the titular question, which I continue to regard as an important one in the case of a figure with such colossal authority. Public words are meant for public consumption and are calculated for public effect, and we can no more judge an artist's sincerity from public words alone than we can judge a politician's sincerity by his campaign slogans. We learn what politicians really believe only after they are in office and no longer seeking re-election; and it is from their deeds rather than their words that we learn (by which time it is often too late). So from here on I will look to Stravinsky's musical deeds as the test of his words.

The Great War and its consequences affected Stravinsky in very personal ways. The Bolsheviks expropriated his family's property, impoverishing him. That gave him a White émigré outlook, in contrast to the aristocratic liberalism with which Stravinsky greeted the so-called February revolution of 1917, which had forced the Tsar to abdicate in favor of an aristocratic liberal regime (known historically as the Provisional Government (*vremennoye pravitel'stvo*) because it lasted only a few months). Resentment of the Bolsheviks impelled Stravinsky's politics far to the right, where (as we have seen) he nurtured the class prejudices that fed the zesty elitism of his neoclassicist years. But more immediately, his economic insecurity turned him into a working musician in a way he had never foreseen. He now had to earn money by performing, and also by recording his works. These activities are the deeds we need to examine first. They led to documentation galore, of course, but bear in mind that Stravinsky's professional career as a performer, mainly of his own works, coincided with the onset of his neoclassicism and with the beginnings of his career as a writer of aesthetic manifestos. His performances and his pronouncements were mutually illustrative. Stravinsky the performer was the "dehumanizing" Stravinsky, whatever the music he was performing.

To understand what Ortega called dehumanization we need to remember that it was a transcendental ideal. Dehumanization implied the superhuman, not the subhuman. What is shed when art is dehumanized is not the *menschliches* but the *allzumenschliches*, as Nietzsche would have said. Emotions, being transient and often uncontrollable, are reminders of our transience and helplessness as humans. Art can aspire to a permanence that is denied to life. It offers a space where (having first, as if paradoxically, submitted to limits) man can be master. The evidence of that masterly control, Hulme wrote, was the "dry hardness which you get in the classics."<sup>38</sup> Its musical symbol was uniformity—of rhythm and tempo above all. To achieve the kind of streamlined, relentless rhythm that Stravinsky

38. T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism" [1911], in *Speculations*, 126–127.

wished to implement as a performer, and that he demanded of others, was literally a superhuman task. And that must be the reason why of all the major composers of the twentieth century Stravinsky was the most enchanted by mechanical reproduction, beginning with the pianola, a mechanism that almost all other composers actively despised. Even Robert Craft has expressed bafflement at “Stravinsky’s infatuation with the instrument,” it being (in Craft’s eyes)

one of the inexplicable eccentricities of his career—not the delight in the novelty of the machine reflected in the *Etude* [for pianola of 1917], . . . nor even his profligate expenditures of time and labor in transcribing his music for this dodo (since he earned substantial sums of money thereby), but in his musical enthusiasm for it.<sup>39</sup>

It is a measure, perhaps, of the change that had taken place in Stravinsky that he should have become enamored of the pianola as a recording device (or, even more than a recording device, a means, as he once put it, of “reconstituting” his music)<sup>40</sup> after writing an opera, *The Nightingale*, on the subject of a tale by Hans Christian Andersen that explicitly glorified natural music over artificial.<sup>41</sup> That change in outlook is precisely what makes his *pleyelisation* of *The Rite of Spring* such a precious document—though not a document of that work’s proper performance practice, even if that is the way it has been used in recent decades.<sup>42</sup> When you compare the piano roll of the “Danse sacrale” with recordings of the piece up to the 1940s (definitely including Stravinsky’s own recordings), you realize that the primary beauty of the pianola for Stravinsky lay not, or not only, in what he emphasized to interviewers, namely its possession of eighty-eight fingers with textural and contrapuntal potential to match,<sup>43</sup> but rather its boundless stamina. The “Danse sacrale,” as Stravinsky wrote it, was surely meant to be borderline unplayable. The lurchy, insecure early orchestral performances, which constantly lose speed and then regain it, communicate the deadly dance’s exhausting violence, and particularly the lethal strain that it is meant to convey, in a way that the postwar piano roll altogether transcends. The strain on the orchestral musicians parallels, or even recreates, the strain on the Chosen One; listening, you feel that

39. Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 164.

40. *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* (December 8, 1928) quoted in *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, 164.

41. Daniel Albright argues emphatically that Stravinsky never shared Andersen’s outlook on the content of his tale, in a book that borrows its title from a remark of Baudelaire’s (“J’aime mieux une boîte à musique qu’un rossignol”) that Stravinsky happened to quote—à propos Messiaen, whose music he (or Craft) wished that day to despise—in one of his very late “interviews” (first published in *Commentary* magazine; see D. Albright, *Stravinsky: The Music Box and the Nightingale* [New York: Gordon and Breach, 1989], 23). This seems to me a prime example of reading the neoclassical Stravinsky’s aesthetics back onto his earlier work.

42. See Benjamin Zander, “Righting *The Rite*” at <http://benjaminzander.com/recordings/boston-philharmonic/rite-of-spring/review/128>

43. In *The New York Times Magazine* (January 18, 1925) Stravinsky praised the pianola’s “unplumbed possibilities” for “polyphonic truth”; quoted in *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents*, 164.



buffeting force. The piano roll is enormously exciting and bracing, but in a wholly other way. Nothing is difficult for the pianola; like an inhumanly capable athlete, it shows itself impervious to strain. The fact that conductors like Benjamin Zander and Robert Craft himself have taken the piano roll as the ideal for the piece and, John-Henry-like, have tried to beat the machine at its own game, only shows to what extent we have lost touch with the original, protest-inciting meaning of *The Rite*—just as Stravinsky would have wanted us to, I have to think, beginning in 1920, when he let it be known that *The Rite* was “*une œuvre architectonique, et non anecdotique*.” For an idea of dehumanized neoclassicism in music, nothing can beat the mechanized “Danse sacrée.”

Though never achieving such élan in his own performances of *The Rite*, Stravinsky obviously took the pianola as the ideal to which he aspired in his own piano playing. The works he wrote to serve as his own performing vehicles, the *Concerto* of 1924, the *Sonate* of 1925, and the *Sérénade en la* of 1926, already show the influence of the pianola in the uniformity of their rhythm, with seemingly endless strings of isochronous subtactile note values (what Stravinsky liked to call monometric rhythm). You could say, as many did, that they were reminiscent of Bach’s keyboard works (at least the looks of them), but their principal import (like Bach’s in those days, come to think of it) was as the conveyor of mechanized transcendence. This comes through in Stravinsky’s impressively relentless playing of the “Rondoletto” from the *Sérénade en la* on the original 10” 78-RPM French Columbia disc for the sake of which the piece had been commissioned;<sup>44</sup> but it emerges with greatest, indeed crushing, force in Stravinsky’s *pleyelisations*, especially that of the *Concerto*, which spectacularly conveys the pianola’s superhuman steadiness, even when played back on a faulty instrument as it is in a recording that may be sampled on YouTube.<sup>45</sup>

Stravinsky could never equal as a real-time pianist that utter uniformity—no human pianist could—but his attempt to do so could still produce an overbawling effect; and that is how Stravinsky, never a virtuoso, was able to impress real virtuosos with his playing, including Prokofiev—who grudgingly admitted that “Stravinsky has delivered himself of a horrifying piano sonata, which he himself performs not without a certain chic”<sup>46</sup>—and Bartók, who fell reluctantly and ambivalently under its spell for a while. Stravinsky elicited their astonishment by turning himself, as far as was humanly possible, into a walking pianola. Both the powerful impression and the ambivalent reaction to it emerge from a description Bartók’s second wife, herself a pianist and a frequent duo-partner with the

44. Reissued on vinyl LP as Angel Seraphim 60183 and on CD in the set *Stravinsky: The Recorded Legacy* (Sony Classical, BMG 88697 103112, 1991).

45. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ssi4HE64Deo&feature=results\\_video&playnext=1&list=PLB-F93ACED1338FF5F](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ssi4HE64Deo&feature=results_video&playnext=1&list=PLB-F93ACED1338FF5F)

46. Letter to Nikolai Myaskovskiy, in S. S. *Prokof'ev i N. Ya. Myaskovskiy: Peregipska*, ed. M. G. Kozlova and N. R. Yatsenko (Moscow: Sovetskiiy kompozitor, 1977), 195.

composer, sent in a letter to her mother-in-law after hearing Stravinsky play the Concerto in Budapest in March 1926:

Monday was Stravinsky's concert. Now I know quite exactly what the new direction is. Imagine, Mama, for yourself such a music, in which there is absolutely no room for feelings, in which you can find no part that causes tears to come to your eyes. You know bare rhythm, bare hammering, bare some-kind-of-timbre. I can say that the whole thing, as it is, really carries one away. Stravinsky is a magnificent genius, and we very, very much enjoyed the evening: truly one gets caught up in his miraculously beautiful-timbred machine music, music of pulsating rhythm—but if Béla would make such music, then for Béla I would not be able to be the artist that I am and always will be. Because this music is not my homeland. Mine is Béla's music, where there is also the profound pulsating rhythm, the timbre, but where the feelings live and are, and which has soul.<sup>47</sup>

We can pursue the Bartók-Stravinsky dialectic for a while, since Bartók's playing can also be sampled in recordings. What kind of pianist was he? Here is how today's foremost Bartók scholar, László Somfai, answers the question:

It is a unique situation that one of the greatest composers of our century was also an extraordinary concert pianist who was intimately familiar with the Vienna-Budapest tradition of interpreting common-practice music around the turn of the century and who furnished detailed performing instructions for the whole *Well-Tempered Clavier* by Bach, nineteen sonatas by Haydn, twenty sonatas by Mozart, twenty-seven sonatas and five other piano works by Beethoven, as well as pieces by Couperin, Scarlatti, Schumann, and Chopin.<sup>48</sup>

“Intimately familiar with the Vienna-Budapest tradition of interpreting common-practice music”: in other words, a pianist of exactly the kind Stravinsky's playing implicitly opposed and purported to supersede. That is what produced the uneasiness Mrs. Bartók expressed in her letter. That uneasiness bore magnificent musical fruit in the guise of Bartók's First and Second Concertos, the First composed later in the same year, 1926, as the concert where he heard Stravinsky, and the Second five years later. Both are haunted by Stravinsky, and the First is haunted, quite specifically, by Stravinsky's Concerto for Piano and Winds. It is the closest Bartók ever came to Stravinsky's mechanized style, but he did not and could not go all the way. Bartók always used tempo variation for expressive purposes, and even his First Concerto has what Somfai calls “Hungarian culmination

47. Ditta Pásztorly Bartók, letter to Paula Voit Bartók, 18 March 1926, trans. David E. Schneider in his study “Bartók and Stravinsky: Respect, Competition, Influence, and the Hungarian Reaction to Modernism in the 1920s,” *Bartók and His World*, ed. Péter Laki (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 184.

48. László Somfai, “Nineteenth-Century Ideas Developed in Bartók's Piano Notation in the Years 1907–14,” *19th-Century Music* 11/1 (Summer 1987), 73–91, here 75.

points,” where the tempo is slowed for emphasis and the music takes on a patently national coloration (“my homeland...”) of a kind that Stravinsky’s universalistic neoclassicism unequivocally abjured.

Stravinsky uses sectional contrasts of tempo in his Concerto. Its first movement, for example, has a slow introduction that is reprised at the end, and also a cadenza marked *più mosso* right before the reprise. These contrasting tempos are juxtaposed without transitions, however, and sound like mechanical gear shifts. Bartók’s Concerto, in keeping with “the Vienna-Budapest tradition of interpreting common-practice music,” is full of accelerandos and ritardandos, explicitly rejected, along with crescendos and decrescendos, in Stravinsky’s manifesto on the *Octuor*:

I have excluded from this work all sorts of nuances, which I have replaced by the play of . . . volumes.

I have excluded all nuances between the *forte* and the *piano*; I have left only the *forte* and the *piano*. [ . . . ]

The play of these volumes is one of the two active elements on which I have based the action of my musical text, the other element being the movements [i.e. tempi] in their reciprocal connection.<sup>49</sup>

The article by Somfai containing his characterization of Bartók the pianist consists mainly of a description of Bartók’s editing practice. That practice, for Bartók as for any other musical editor in what Somfai called the Vienna-Budapest tradition, was largely a matter of indicating in specific notation the conventional nuances that went without saying in any idiomatic rendition. But even after the editor had finished making explicit what composers and seasoned performers held (presumably) to be implicit, it remained Bartók’s assumption, the usual assumption of pianists in the tradition, that (to quote from Somfai again) “musical notation was by nature inadequately precise,” or, more strongly, that even the most detailed notation can only be a “shorthand.”<sup>50</sup> That was Bartók’s reason for wishing to document his own performance practice in recordings—but never pianola rolls, which could not (he thought) transmit the unnotatable nuances.

Stravinsky’s attitude toward notation, of course, differed completely. In the Octet manifesto of 1924 he wrote that once the composer had fixed the two crucial performance constraints for the composition, the performer had nothing more to add:

These two elements, which are the object for the musical execution, can only have a meaning if the executants follow strictly the musical text.

This play of movements [i.e. tempi] and volumes that puts into action the musical text constitutes the impelling force of the composition and determines its form.

49. Stravinsky, “Some Ideas About My Octuor,” 389.

50. Somfai, “Nineteenth-Century Ideas Developed in Bartók’s Piano Notation,” 90; on the characterization as shorthand see idem, “Critical Edition with or without Notes for the Performer,” *Studia Musicologica* 53/1–3 (March 2012), 113–140, here 113.

A musical composition constructed on that basis could not, indeed, admit the introduction of the element of “interpretation” in its execution without risking the complete loss of its meaning. [. . .]

A work created with a spirit in which the emotive basis is the nuance is soon deformed in all directions; it soon becomes amorphous, its future is anarchic and its executants become its interpreters. The nuance is a very uncertain basis for a musical composition because its limitations cannot be, even in particular cases, established in a fixed manner.<sup>51</sup>

These pithy sentences from 1924 already foreshadow *in nuce* the sixth and final *leçon* of the *Poétique musicale*, “De l’exécution,” that notably snooty and dogmatic sermon on performance, which, precisely because its terms had been set fifteen years earlier in the Octet manifesto, is the one chapter from Stravinsky’s Harvard lectures in which I believe the ideas enunciated by Stravinsky and sent into the world with the massive force of his authority were in fact Stravinsky’s own ideas. He meant it (at the time).

The *leçon* starts by affirming the primacy and the adequacy of notation, not even making allowance for the distinction, still recognized in his manifesto of 1924, between music conceived on the basis of nuance and music based on invariable tempi and volumes:

Having been fixed on paper or retained in the memory, music exists already prior to its actual performance, differing in this respect from all the other arts, just as it differs from them, as we have seen, in the categories that determine its perception.<sup>52</sup>

From this follows the crucial distinction between execution and interpretation, culminating in what is probably the most oft-quoted sentence from the Harvard lectures (italicized below):

[T]he language of music is strictly limited by its notation. The dramatic actor thus finds he has much more latitude in regard to *chronos* and intonation than does the singer who is tightly bound to *tempo* and *melos*.

This subjection, that is often so trying to the exhibitionism of certain soloists, is at the very heart of the question that we propose to take up now: the question of the executant and the interpreter.

51. Stravinsky, “Some Ideas About My Octour,” 389–390.

52. Igor Stravinsky, *Poétique musicale, sous forme de six leçons / Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons* [bilingual edition], English transl. Arthur Knodell and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 161 as translated by Knodell and Dahl; the original French (facing on page 160): “Fixée sur le papier ou retenue par la mémoire, elle [la musique] préexiste à son exécution, différente en ceci de tous les autres arts, de même qu’elle s’en distingue, comme nous l’avons vu, par les modalités qui président à sa perception.”

The idea of interpretation implies the limitations imposed upon the performer or those which the performer imposes upon himself in his proper function, which is to transmit music to the listener.

*The idea of execution implies the strict putting into effect of an explicit will that contains nothing beyond what it specifically commands.*

It is the conflict of these two principles—execution and interpretation—that is at the root of all the errors, all the sins, all the misunderstandings that interpose themselves between the musical work and the listener and prevent a faithful transmission of its message.<sup>53</sup>

Stravinsky defends the fundamentalist doctrine of textual literalism with moralistic and even pseudobiblical locutions:

The sin against the spirit of the work always begins with a sin against its letter and leads to the endless follies which an ever-flourishing literature in the worst taste does its best to sanction.<sup>54</sup>

And:

Between the executant pure and simple and the interpreter in the strict sense of the word, there exists a difference in make-up that is of an ethical rather than of an aesthetic order, a difference that presents a point of conscience: theoretically, one can only require of the executant the translation into sound of his musical part, which he may do willingly or grudgingly, whereas one has the right to seek from the interpreter, in addition to the perfection of this translation into sound, a loving care—which does not mean, be it surreptitious or openly affirmed, a recomposition.<sup>55</sup>

53. *Ibid.*, 160–163: “Le langage musical est strictement limité par sa notation. L’acteur dramatique se trouve ainsi beaucoup plus libre à l’égard du *Chronos* et de l’intonation que le chanteur, lequel est étroitement soumis au *tempo* et au *mélòs*.”

Cette sujétion, dont s’impatiente si souvent le cabotinage de certains solistes, est au cœur de la question que nous nous proposons de traiter maintenant : celle de l’exécutant et de l’interprète.

La notion d’interprétation sous-entend les limites qui sont imposées à l’exécutant ou que celui-ci s’impose à lui-même dans son exercice propre, qui revient à transmettre la musique à l’auditeur.

La notion d’exécution implique la stricte réalisation d’une volonté explicite et qui s’épuise dans ce qu’elle ordonne.

Le conflit de ces deux principes—exécution et interprétation—est à la racine de toutes les erreurs, de tous les péchés, de tous les malentendus qui s’interposent entre l’œuvre et l’auditeur, et qui altèrent la bonne transmission du message.”

54. *Ibid.*, 164–165: “Le péché contre l’esprit de l’œuvre, commence toujours par un péché contre la lettre et conduit à ces éternels errements qu’une littérature du pire goût et toujours florissante s’ingénie à autoriser.”

55. *Ibid.*, 164–165: “Entre l’exécutant purement et simplement pris comme tel et l’interprète proprement dit, il existe une différence de nature qui est d’ordre éthique plutôt que d’ordre esthétique et qui pose un cas de conscience : théoriquement, on ne peut exiger de l’exécutant que la traduction matérielle de sa partie qu’il assurera de bon gré ou de mauvaise humeur, alors qu’on est en droit d’obtenir de l’interprète, outre la perfection de cette traduction matérielle, une complaisance amoureuse—ce qui ne veut pas dire une collaboration subreptice ou délibérément affirmée.”

And finally:

[H]ere we are back at the great principle of submission that we have so often invoked in the course of our lessons. This submission demands a flexibility that itself requires, along with technical mastery, a sense of tradition and, commanding the whole, an aristocratic culture that is not merely a question of acquired learning.

This submission and culture that we require of the creator, we should quite justly and naturally require of the interpreter as well. Both will find therein freedom in extreme rigor and, in the final analysis, if not in the first instance, success—true success, the legitimate reward of the interpreters who in the expression of their most brilliant virtuosity preserve that modesty of movement and that sobriety of expression that is the mark of thoroughbred artists.<sup>56</sup>

These remarks link Stravinsky's ideas on performance to the social, political and ethical principles that underwrote them. Occasionally, however, Stravinsky descends from this lofty philosophical perch and deigns to make more specific and even practical recommendations. These are particularly interesting and useful, because they are the ones that can be actually tested against practice:

Thus it follows that a *crescendo*, as we all know, is always accompanied by a speeding up of movement, while a slowing down never fails to accompany a *diminuendo*. The superfluous is refined upon; a *piano, piano pianissimo* is delicately sought after; great pride is taken in perfecting useless nuances—a concern that usually goes hand in hand with inaccurate rhythm. . .

These are just so many practices dear to superficial minds forever avid for, and satisfied with, an immediate and facile success that flatters the vanity of the person who obtains it and perverts the taste of those who applaud it.<sup>57</sup>

Here, of course, Stravinsky directly indicts not only the Heifetzes and the Horowitzes, and not only the Medtners and the Rachmaninoffs, but even Bartók—which may shock those who think of Bartók as Stravinsky's fellow modernist,

56. *Ibid.*, 168–171: “Et nous voici revenus au grand thème de la soumission que nous avons si souvent évoqué au cours de nos leçons. Cette soumission exige une souplesse qui requiert elle-même, avec la maîtrise technique, un sens de la tradition et, brochant sur le tout, une culture aristocratique qui n'est pas entièrement susceptible d'acquisition.

Cette soumission et cette culture que nous exigeons du créateur, il est bien juste et naturel de l'exiger aussi de l'interprète, [qui] en trouver[ait] d'ailleurs la liberté à l'extrême de la rigueur et, en dernière analyse, sinon en première instance, le succès—la vrai succès, récompense légitime des interprètes qui, dans l'expression de la plus brillante virtuosité, conservent cette modestie du geste et cette sobriété de l'expression qui est la marque des artistes de race.”

57. *Ibid.*, 164–165: “Moyennant quoi le *crescendo* commande toujours, comme on sait, l'accélération du mouvement, tandis qu'un ralentissement ne manqué jamais d'accompagner le *diminuendo*. On raffine sur le superflu ; on recherche délicatement le *piano, piano pianissimo* ; on se fait gloire d'obtenir la perfection des nuances inutiles—souci qui va généralement de pair avec un mouvement inexact...

Autant de pratiques chères aux esprits superficiels, toujours avides et toujours satisfaits d'un succès immédiat et facile qui flatte la vanité de celui qui l'obtient et pervertit le goût de ceux qui l'applaudissent.”

but is consistent with Bartók's reaction to Stravinsky's concerto, and Somfai's description of Bartók's relationship to performing tradition. The correlation of loudness and tempo of which Stravinsky complains was indeed a central tenet of the Vienna-Budapest tradition of interpreting common-practice music.<sup>58</sup> Along with a wealth of *nuances inutiles*, the disparaged correlation is not only to be observed in Bartók's recorded performances, it can also be found prescribed in Bartók's didactic editions of classical repertoire.<sup>59</sup>

Stravinsky's opposition to the practice was unusual in a European. The nonaccelerating crescendo was something that many musicians associated with America, and with *Amerikanismus*—the crass industrialized modernism from which "old Europe" recoiled. A bit later, in 1948, in an article called "On Being American" which attempted to arbitrate among various nationalistic and antinationalistic factions in the United States, Virgil Thomson wrote, in his capacity as the chief music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, that

Two devices typical of American practice are the nonaccelerating crescendo and a steady ground rhythm of equalized eighth notes (expressed or not). Neither of these devices is known to Europeans, though practically all Americans take them for granted.<sup>60</sup>

But as Thomson ought to have known (and surely did know when not engaged in polemics), these were both salient characteristics of Stravinsky's music, which was coordinated in its shifting meters by what nowadays one calls a sub-tactile pulse, nothing other than Thomson's more clumsily defined "steady ground rhythm of equalized eighth notes (expressed or not)." Adorno certainly knew this, and it became an important stipulation in his bill of indictment against Stravinsky in *Philosophie der neuen Musik*. Someone else who definitely disapproved of it was Schoenberg, living in 1948 only a couple of miles from Stravinsky in another suburb of Los Angeles. Schoenberg may very well have read Thomson's column, and therefore may have been reacting to it directly when he wrote the little squib that follows, which was discovered among his papers after his death. He wrote it in English—his English—but the text as published and quoted here was edited by Dika Newlin:

Today's manner of performing classical music of the so-called "romantic" type, suppressing all emotional qualities and all unnotated change of tempo and expression, derives from the style of playing primitive dance music. This

58. For persuasive confirmation of its reality based on evidence from sound recordings, and a feisty defense of its integrity, see Will Crutchfield, "Brahms, by Those Who Knew Him," *Opus 2/5* (August 1986), 12–21, 60.

59. Cf. Somfai, "Nineteenth-Century Ideas Developed in Bartók's Piano Notation," Examples 1., 3., and Plates 1–4.

60. Virgil Thomson, "On Being American," *New York Herald Tribune*, January 25, 1948.

style came to Europe by way of America, where no old culture regulated presentation, but where a certain frigidity of feeling reduced all musical expression. Thus almost everywhere in Europe music is played in a stiff, inflexible metre—not in a tempo, i.e. according to a yardstick of freely measured quantities. Astonishingly enough, almost all European conductors and instrumentalists bowed to this dictate without resistance. All were suddenly afraid to be called romantic, ashamed of being called sentimental. No one recognized the origin of this tendency; all tried rapidly to satisfy the market—which had become American. One cannot expect a dancer who is inspired by his body and narcotized by his partner to change tempo, to express musical feelings, to make a *ritardando* or *Luftpause*.

Music should be measured—there is no doubt. As an expression of man it is at least subject to such change of speed as are dictated by our blood. Our pulse beats faster or slower, often without our recognizing it—certainly, however, in accommodation to our emotions. Let the most frigid person be asked a price much higher than she expected and feel her pulse thereafter! And what would become of the lie-detecting machine if we were not afflicted by such emotions? Who is able to say convincingly “I love you,” or “I hate you,” without his pulse registering? . . .

Why is music written at all? Is it not a romantic feeling which makes you listen to it? Why do you play the piano when you could show the same skill on a typewriter? . . .

Change of speed in pulse-beats corresponds exactly with changes of tempo.<sup>61</sup>

Stravinsky would have accused Schoenberg of lacking respect for typewriters as well as pianolas, and behind that, perhaps, proper respect for skill. But unlike Schoenberg, Bartók was a supremely skilled performer well protected from snobs by his reputation as a composer and a scholar, and we are fortunate in being able directly to compare Stravinsky and Bartók as performers not only in theory but also in practice, because both of them applied their theories of performance practice not only to their own compositions, where we might be deterred by the prospect of comparing apples and oranges, but also to the standard repertoire. Both of them recorded works by Mozart, where neither made any pretense of “historical” performance because both were convinced that their ideas on performing were transhistorically valid—or, to put it as many might prefer today, both are equally to be reprimanded for anachronistically universalizing a performance style originating in a century other than Mozart’s (Bartók’s in the nineteenth, Stravinsky’s in the twentieth) and inappositely applying it. And that, of course, is what makes their recordings such precious documents.

Nor need it preclude enjoying or admiring the results. In the case of Bartók, the details we are most likely to admire, it seems to me, are precisely the ones that

61. Arnold Schoenberg, “Today’s Manner of Performing Classical Music” [1948], in *idem, Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 320–321.



could never have been notated, and are thus beyond the Stravinskian pale. Bartók was a master of agogics. In a snatch, happily preserved in a broadcast recording, from Mozart's Concert Rondo in A major, K. 386—in which Bartók was accompanied by the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra under Ernő von Dohnányi at a concert that took place on October 26, 1936—the discrepancy between Bartók's rhythm and that of the orchestra's is very noticeable.<sup>62</sup> While soloists today might restrain themselves so as to maintain uniformity, there being little chance of an ensemble tutti achieving "ensemble" in nuances such as those Bartók applied to the solo part, Bartók evidently thought of such concerns the way Emerson, or any other Romantic, would have thought of them: as the sort of "foolish consistency" derided in Emerson's essay on self-reliance as "the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines." Self-reliance, submission's very antipode, was not among the Stravinskian virtues.

Or consider the rondo finale of Mozart's Sonata for two pianos, K. 448, broadcast by Béla and Ditta Bartók on April 23, 1939 (the famous composer at the second piano). The tempo is a real performer's tempo, very impressive for its speediness; but that does not preclude *des nuances inutiles*. The one I would focus attention on, in one of the episodes, is a response to a simple *sforzando* as marked in the score. We know what Stravinsky would have said about the slight but telling broadening of tempo with which Bartók made the *sforzando* an emotional as well as a temporal nuance. As he put it at Harvard only a few months later, such a thing was "*un péché contre l'esprit de l'œuvre.*" Refusing to distinguish such a sin from "*un péché contre la lettre,*" he would have consigned it to a place among "*ces éternels errements qu'une littérature du pire goût et toujours florissante s'ingénie à autoriser*"—a literature to which I guess this essay counts as a contribution.

Did he mean it? We know by now that we can never know that for sure; but we *can* ask whether Stravinsky practiced what he preached. And to answer that question we can listen to another Mozart work for two pianos, in which instead of two Bartóks the performers were a pair of Stravinskys. In November 1935, Stravinsky and his son Sviatoslav, who went professionally by the name Soulima, unveiled Igor's just-completed *Concerto per due fortepiani soli* at a series of concerts, followed by a concert tour, in which the new work was preceded by a curtain-raiser in the form of Mozart's Fugue in C minor, K. 426. They recorded the Concerto, with the Mozart Fugue as an album filler (to occupy an otherwise empty sixth 78-RPM side) in 1938. (Again, the famous member of the team plays the second piano part.) The recording is no longer the great rarity it once was, having now been more once than reissued on CD and even posted

62. Like the rest of the Bartók performances discussed here, this recording was included in the enormous centenary collection *Bartók plays Bartók* (Hungaroton, LPX 12334-38, 1981).

(intermittently) on YouTube.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, if you have not heard it, you cannot imagine it.

Stravinsky the pianist can be accused of many things, but not hypocrisy. The man did indeed practice what he preached, striving toward an absolutely unyielding tempo and maintaining what the *pianoleur* Rex Lawson, mocking common misconceptions about the pianola, called “terrace dynamics with only one terrace.”<sup>64</sup> The subject is articulated only one (somewhat ghastly) way, with a dry, undifferentiated staccato one recognizes immediately as “Stravinskian,” and the changing textures are not reflected by any unnotated changes in touch, even right before the end when, as often happens in Mozart fugues, the fugue forgets that it is a fugue and the subject is heard as a melody, homophonically accompanied and extended. Nothing in the rendition changes to match even so radical a change in *facture*. The very end is the most remarkable stroke of all; the players don’t quite manage to maintain tempo with the same inhuman rigidity as before, but it is evident that they intended to do so, and come appallingly close.

Such a performance is hardly enjoyable in the same conventional way that Bartók’s Mozart is enjoyable. Having played it for audiences many times, I have seen listeners gape at it in open-mouthed amazement bordering on horror. Carl Schachter, the eminent theorist, told me after a talk I’d given at Queens College in New York that even though he had taught the piece numberless times and knew it by heart, when he heard the Stravinskys play it he got lost and could not follow its shape. But even he, recoiling from it and objecting vociferously, endured it not with boredom but with revolted fascination, and confessed afterwards to a certain awe in its presence. As the letter from Ditta Bartók has already testified, this kind of performing, if one has the stomach for it, makes a formidable impression.

What makes the impression so strong? Stravinsky read a little speech before playing the Concerto with Soulima, and continued to give the speech even later, in America, for example in concerts he gave in March 1940 when his playing partner was Adele Marcus (1906–1995), later a famous Juilliard pedagogue and a pupil of Alexis Kall, a friend of Stravinsky’s youth who preceded him in Los Angeles. The speech (always given in French, no matter where) tied Stravinsky’s performance practice not only to the quasi-ethical strictures familiar from the *Poétique musicale*, but beyond that, to a time-honored aestheticist discourse going all the way back to its founder, Immanuel Kant. Here is the peroration:

The limited time I have at my disposal prevents me from giving you a technical analysis of my concerto. As for extramusical commentaries, I hope you will

63. It has been reissued at least twice on CD: in Sony Classical’s omnibus 22-disc set *Stravinsky: The Recorded Legacy* and on *Igor Stravinsky: Composer and Performer*, II (Andante, RE-A-1100, 2003); on YouTube (as of July 2014) at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPOLj41Kjno>

64. Rex Lawson, “Stravinsky and the Pianola,” in *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, ed. Jann Pasler (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 286.

not expect them from me. I would be truly embarrassed at furnishing such a thing.

There are different ways of loving and appreciating music. There is, for example, the way that I would call self-interested love, the kind that demands from music emotions of a general sort—joy, sorrow, sadness, something to dream about, escape from ordinary life. That would be to deprecate music by assigning it a comparably utilitarian purpose. Why not love it for itself alone? Why not love it the way one loves a picture, for the beautiful quality of the painting, the beautiful design, the beautiful arrangement of its parts? Why not admit that music has an intrinsic value, independent of the feelings or images that, by analogy, it might evoke, and could only distort the listener's judgment? Music needs no assistance. It is self-sufficient. Don't look for anything in it beyond what it contains.

Nothing is more difficult than talking about music. One can only do that usefully by keeping to the technical and professional plane. As soon as one abandons this terrain, one leaps into boundless space and starts to babble. A great Romantic, Robert Schumann, who wrote a great deal and thought deeply about music, and whom one could never accuse of aridity or pedantry, came to the conclusion that in music one can prove nothing.

"Science," he said, "relies on mathematics and logic, poetry on words, and the plastic arts on nature, but music is an orphan who has neither mother nor father. And in the mysteriousness of its origin," he added, "may reside the secret of its allure."

After that, it would be best for me to stop speaking and sit down at the piano.<sup>65</sup>

What, then, makes the Stravinskys' performance of Mozart's fugue so appallingly, intimidatingly impressive? One factor, surely, is its commanding negation of everything that is usually meant by the colloquial term "musicality," or even "musical" as conventionally or casually applied to a person or a performance. The

65. Igor Stravinsky, "Quelques confidences sur la musique," Conférence de M. Igor Stravinsky faite le 21 novembre 1935 à 2 h. 45, répété le même jour à 5 h. et le 22 novembre"; *Conferencia*, Journal de l'Université des Annales, 15 December 1935; reprinted in White, *Stravinsky*, 539: "Le temps limité dont je dispose m'empêche de vous donner une analyse technique de mon concerto. Quant à des commentaires extramusicaux, de moi, vous n'en attendez pas, j'espère. Je serais vraiment bien embarrassé de vous en fournir.

Il y a différentes manières d'aimer et d'apprécier la musique. Il y a, par exemple, la manière que j'appellerai l'amour intéressé, celle où l'on demande à musique des émotions d'ordre général, la joie, la douleur, la tristesse, un sujet de rêve, l'oubli de la vie prosaïque. Ce serait déprécier la musique que de lui assigner un pareil but utilitaire. Pourquoi ne pas l'aimer pour elle-même ? Pourquoi ne pas l'aimer comme on aime un tableau, pour la belle peinture, le beau dessin, la belle composition ? Pourquoi ne pas admettre la musique comme une valeur en soi, indépendante des sentiments et des images que, par analogie, elle pourrait évoquer, et qui ne sauraient que fausser le jugement de l'auditeur ? La musique n'a pas besoin d'adjuvant. Elle se suffit à elle-même. N'y cherchons donc pas autre chose que ce qu'elle comporte.

Rien n'est plus difficile que de parler musique. On ne peut le faire utilement qu'en se plaçant sur le terrain technique et professionnel. Dès qu'on abandonne ce terrain, on plonge dans le vague et . . . l'on divague. Un grand romantique, Robert Schumann, qui a beaucoup écrit et profondément réfléchi sur la musique et qu'on ne saurait en aucune façon accuser d'aridité ou de doctrinarisme, finit par déclarer qu'en musique rien ne peut être prouvé. 'La science,' dit-il, 's'appuie sur les mathématiques et la logique, la poésie sur la parole, les arts plastiques sur la nature, mais la musique est une orpheline dont personne ne saurait nommer ni le père ni la mère. Et c'est peut-être dans ce mystère de son origine,' ajoute-t-il, 'que réside l'attrait de sa Beauté.'

Après cela, il vaut mieux me taire et me mettre au piano."

meaning of that term is famously elusive, but it certainly has to do with what, just as loosely, we call “natural” in music making. To perform “naturally” or “musically,” I would suggest, means to adhere to what are considered good standards in a manner that appears effortless and intuitive. What that really means, I would further suggest, is an easy and ingratiating adherence—at best an exceptional and inspiring adherence—to conventional (read: traditional) norms. In that sense musicality is inherently unreflective and conservative. So if one of the cardinal or even tautological traits of “modernism,” as an attitude, is opposition to conservatism, the challenge to unreflective habits or the intransigent rejection of conventional norms, we might expect self-avowed modernists to oppose “musicality.” And, sure enough, enough modernists have gone on record mocking the notion (“that blissful state of cretinism,” in Paul Zukofsky’s much-quoted phrase), to confirm our expectations.<sup>66</sup> Aaron Copland, thought a modernist in his youth but roundly outstripped in his maturity, corroborated the point in a slightly different way when he remarked wistfully to an interviewer that:

It worries me a little bit that one doesn’t meet up now with the kind of composer we used to think of as being “musical.” If you said of someone, “He is terribly musical,” that was the highest compliment you could pay. Nowadays, to stress the “musicality” of a composer would seem to be somehow pinning a bad name on him or making him seem lesser or limited or not so interesting.<sup>67</sup>

Bartók’s Mozart performances exude musicality in the highest degree. Stravinsky’s Mozart performance excludes and implicitly derides it. It is not at all an effortless performance—not at all intuitive, not at all natural. It is very much “on purpose,” self-conscious in the highest degree, and obviously fights every “normal” or “natural” inclination. In the spirit of our titular question, it is definitely “meant.” Stravinsky has obviously chosen his path deliberately, whereas Bartók beautifully and skillfully applies default assumptions that are by definition unconsidered reflexes, or at least should sound as if they were. That sense of high determination and resolve, of going resolutely against the grain, lends an aura of extraordinary authenticity to Stravinsky’s performance, even when it inspires revulsion (as it certainly does in me). Here, of course, we enter a realm of paradox, because the concept of authenticity has been so much abused in connection with musical performances. The subject can easily turn into a morass,<sup>68</sup> so let us content ourselves merely to

66. Paul Zukofsky: “The Performer: Revitalization or Stagnation?” *Perspectives of New Music* 3/2 (Spring–Summer 1965), 172–174, here 173.

67. Aaron Copland, in Edward T. Cone, “Conversation with Aaron Copland,” *Perspectives of New Music* 6/2 (Spring–Summer 1968), 57–72, here 70. Note that Copland’s remark appeared in the same journal as did Zukofsky’s, a few issues later, perhaps even in response.

68. For an attempt to navigate it, see R. Taruskin, *Text and Act* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), in which these questions, including an evaluation of the same performances of Mozart by teams of Bartóks and Stravinskys, is placed in a large context of performance practice and its theories.

note and briefly reflect on the way in which the commercial releases of the Mozart recordings we have been considering have been described by annotators. The annotations to the complete edition of Bartók's piano recordings, both published and private, that formed part of the Centenary Edition of Bartók's recorded legacy, were the work of Professor Somfai, who noted of the duo Sonata that

Many critics today would describe the Mozart sonata performance as unacceptably aggressive and fast, as romantic in some of its parts. It is true the *Allegro con spirito* is passionate, in parts rich in choleric outbursts; and the *Molto Allegro* finale even has a biting character. Then there are the problems due to the performing style of the times. Thus Bartók undertakes the slower tempo of the secondary subject with complete conviction. Whatever a purist might think, or someone who favors historic authenticity, this is a great performance.<sup>69</sup>

Meanwhile, the annotator of the Stravinsky performance, issued on CD by the Andante firm in 2003, also makes apologies:

Only an authenticist pedant would complain at the thoroughly Stravinskian staccato with which Mozart's fugue subject is announced. This is an uncommonly rare and precious example of Stravinsky creatively interpreting the music of another composer. What might his Beethoven have been like?<sup>70</sup>

Do we really want to know? The irony, or paradox, appears when one reflects on the changing consensus that has emerged over the last three decades in the course of debate about historical performance practice. It is now pretty widely conceded that the style advocated by what the Andante annotator disparagingly called "authenticists" was based precisely on the objective approach to which Stravinsky lent the authority of his name in the 1920s and 1930s. This is the style against which Bartók was presumed by the Hungaroton annotator to have transgressed; and yet the consensus among historians now is that Mozart's playing, and eighteenth-century playing in general, very likely exhibited much more of the tempo fluidity and nuance that we find in Bartók's playing than it did the uniformity of Stravinsky's approach. Over the last three decades it seems to have emerged, to the satisfaction of most investigators, that the assumption under which many or most early music performers used to labor—to wit, that the post-nineteenth century style of performance exemplified or advocated by Stravinsky had a pre-nineteenth century counterpart, with the nineteenth-century "romantic" style as a de-

69. László Somfai, trans. Rudolf Fischer, "Marginal Notes to the Piano Recordings in the Bartók Archives," booklet accompanying Hungaroton LPX 12334-38 (1981), 29.

70. Michael Oliver, "Neo-Classical Stravinsky," booklet essay for *Igor Stravinsky: Composer and Performer*, II (Andante, RE-A-1100, 2003).

viation—was a misapprehension for which there is no confirming evidence. On the contrary, such evidence of actual eighteenth-century practice as exists favors tempo variation rather than what Paul Henry Lang once called the “steady, relentless tempo” of the imagined eighteenth century.<sup>71</sup> In other words, the anti-romantic backlash was not a restoration of pre-romantic style. Bartók’s playing may have some historically Mozartean precedent; Stravinsky’s surely has none.

But it nevertheless possesses conviction, which is the philosopher’s rather than the musicologist’s definition of authenticity, implying the sovereign assertion of one’s identity. That conviction is what gave Stravinsky’s playing the enormous authority that it once enjoyed, and enabled Stravinsky and his advocates to sell it as a transhistorically valid approach to performance of all music, with huge repercussions on the performing style of the twentieth century.

But just as Stravinsky’s ideas about composing and its relationship to expression and representation changed over the years, away from the intransigent positions expressed in the *Autobiography* and the *Poétique* toward the more conciliatory and conventionally “musical” attitudes of Stravinsky’s American years, so did his ideas about performance (and so, of course—and analogously?—did his ideas about politics). For this we have lots of evidence, not only in what Stravinsky said (“Leave me Mr. Truman and I’m quite satisfied”), but also in what he did. A particularly valuable testimony is a memoir by Soulima Stravinsky, co-perpetrator of the duo-piano Concerto and Mozart Fugue performances. In an interview that was published shortly after Igor Stravinsky’s death, Soulima recalled of his father:

. . . I know that he himself evolved not only in his music but in his concept of interpretation. . . . [H]e was then [i.e. at the time of the Concerto and Fugue recording] much more strict in his statements about interpretation. He had a great mistrust of most conductors and performers; it is the more surprising that his printed piano music has so few indications of how to play it. He was afraid to put in anything. He said, “If I put in a crescendo, they will give me too much, so I’d better put nothing.” . . .

When we were separated during the war I had no contact with him, and I had several years in which to mature. I was no longer a young student. I had played a lot and had developed my own opinions; I still played his music of course, but I revised it completely. I knew I was doing something that people liked more. I applied not the techniques of, say Chopin to Stravinsky but what I knew about sensitive playing. And I must tell you about one instance when I had a reward. After many years of life in different countries, we got together again, and in a Town Hall concert [in New York] I played his music, in a quite different way. It was much more human, more elaborate, more evaluated. I didn’t tell him I had reworked it. He was delighted. He said, “You never played my music better! Don’t change anything.” So I knew I was going in the right direction.<sup>72</sup>

71. See Taruskin, *Text and Act*, 253.

72. Ben Johnston, “An Interview with Soulima Stravinsky,” in “Stravinsky: A Composers’ Memorial,” = *Perspectives of New Music*, 9/2–10/1 (Spring–Summer, Autumn–Winter 1971), 15–27, here 15–16. That Town

In answer to the question, “You feel then, that [your father’s] interpretations of his own music are the authoritative versions?” Soulima said:

I would say so. In orchestral performances, it is beyond question. As for piano, I would say he gave an excellent idea of what he wanted, but perhaps you could add something more which he didn’t because he did some recordings at a time when he still held very strict opinions as to rhythm.<sup>73</sup>

There are many ways to interpret Soulima’s answer (and many ways to interpret his acceptance of the word “interpretation” rather than “execution” in his interlocutor’s question), but among them, surely, is the construal that assigns primary importance to the word “still” in Soulima’s last sentence, implying an end—from which emerges the point that I think needs much more purposeful consideration from scholars. The influential ideas we associate with Stravinsky, like anyone’s ideas, were temporary ideas—the *mot juste* would be the Russian *kon’yunkturniy*, meaning “pertaining to a certain moment”—that have to be interpreted in the light of the various temporal and geographical environments to which Stravinsky reacted; hence that, like anyone’s thoughts, they have to be situated in the proper context, and, consequently, no longer held to be timelessly valid, even with respect to the man who formulated them. Does that sound so obvious as not to be worth the saying? I might have thought so too, but several years ago, in 2009, when I was invited to Harvard (by the Slavists, I should point out) to give an *explication de texte* of the fifth *leçon* in the *Poétique musicale* (the one on Russian music), I learned that at Harvard, where of course the lectures originated, they were still being preached by some members of the music faculty as a gospel.

By 1971, Soulima could even say that he regretted that “there was not enough ‘romanticism’ in the way I played his music.” And by 1982, the year of Stravinsky’s centennial, John McClure, Stravinsky’s producer for Columbia Records, and the man who probably worked more closely with Stravinsky the conductor than anyone else, did not hesitate to call Stravinsky’s pronouncements about tempo “baloney.”<sup>74</sup> In Stravinsky’s own late performances, the romanticism seeps back. There is a filmed rehearsal of the ballet *Apollo* (or *Apollon musagète*) in which Stravinsky very carefully strives to make all kinds of nuances—the very sort of thing he chastised as unethical in the *Poétique musicale*. And he not only makes them, he reacts to them with his face in a way that seems to convey delight that he was able to elicit such expressive playing.<sup>75</sup>

Hall concert included a performance of the Concerto for Piano and Winds that was recorded by RCA Victor and issued in 1949 as LM 7010.

73. *Ibid.*, 18.

74. *Stravinsky: Once at a Border*, film by Tony Palmer (1982).

75. Snatches are available on YouTube at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5TEg8bFC3A&list=PL3DC6D7CC42C1AC68&index=11> and

We are back to our starting point, the elderly Stravinsky's lessened intransigence. Was it just regression toward the mean, the inevitable eventual triumph of default modes (in this case, "musicality") the moment one lowers one's guard? Is it evidence that (to recall a book of outdated centennial essays) Stravinsky the musician never really meant what Stravinsky the modernist averred?<sup>76</sup> We'll never know. Meanwhile, we'll go on performing and interpreting Stravinsky's music the way not he but we need to hear it. As long as we do that, his work will live.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTAvIORDCnU>

76. Cf. the title of the book referenced in note 63 above.