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Abstract: This chapter critiques Adorno and Taruskin as exemplars of ‘capital H’ and ‘small h’ approaches to music history. Highlighting the anomalous prominence granted to Adorno even as his arch-modernist ideals seemed most at odds with nascent ‘postmodernism’, I note a similar historiographical tension in Taruskin’s *Oxford History of Western Music*. Challenging Taruskin’s ostensibly anti-Hegelian ‘superperiodization’ and ‘quasi-dialectical’ constructs, I let Boulez inspire fresh reading of Baudelaire’s oft-misunderstood framing of modernity.

Running Head Right-hand: Modernism and history

Running Head Left-hand: David J. Code

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Modernism and history

David J. Code

‘I personally recall that world, which you can only imagine was preferable to this one,’ she said. ‘Eras are conveniences, particularly for those who never experienced them. We carve history from totalities beyond our grasp. Bolt labels on the result.’

– William Gibson, *The Peripheral* (2014) **1**

Thus it is the evolution – the fate – of our own thinking that we have seen, for good or ill, inscribing itself into those studies that were intended, above all, to scrutinize a recent past.

– Pierre Boulez, *Penser la musique aujourd’hui* (1963) **2**

Any inquiry into ‘modernism and history’ that begins with the hope of securely framing modernism *in* history will quickly discover the acuity of the image, in my first epigraph, of contingent constructs carved from an ungraspable totality. For even if we sidestep the thorny question of modernism’s elusive historical origins – to which we find numerous, widely disparate answers across specialist and non-specialist literatures alike – what might seem at first like a more secure ending boundary for a distinctly modernist historiography also proves, on closer inquiry, a ‘convenience’ of differing value for different commentators. Within an

accessible 1997 evaluation of the discipline of history around the millennium, for example, Richard J. Evans, while accepting that some of the publications he describes as postmodern ‘would probably not be accepted as such by their authors’, nonetheless finds the label a useful shorthand for his impression that ‘something important has happened to history in the last twenty years or so. The great overarching narratives such as Marxism and modernization theory have collapsed’.³ But with a little further investigation, we find that even this most widely accepted determinant of a (loosely located) late ‘boundary moment’ for modernist approaches to history – that is, the break in postmodernity from any sense of a single, universal ‘master narrative’ – may not quite suffice to fix modernism within a stable and discrete historical era.

For one intriguing instance, written rather closer to that era’s supposed ‘collapse’, Marshall Berman begins the rich study of ‘the experience of modernity’ he published in 1983 under the Marxian title *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* by suggesting, in the face of some ‘bleak’ implications he saw in early postmodern theory, that ‘remembering the modernisms of the nineteenth century can give us the vision and courage to create the modernisms of the twenty-first’.⁴ No doubt those for whom a ‘postmodern’ turn came, instead, with palpable promises of liberation from the many oppressive aspects of modernism’s master narratives might well see in such a notion of ‘modernisms of the twenty-first century’ (which brings to mind the 1980 essay by Jürgen Habermas: ‘Modernity – an Incomplete Project?’) a wholly misguided ‘futuristic nostalgia’ (as it were) for cultural proclivities better consigned, after Leon Trotsky, to ‘the dustbin of history’.⁵ These two cases alone, at any rate, might suffice to suggest that any delineation of ‘modernism in history’ can itself only be inextricably *historical* – the product of ongoing debates within a contentiously shared ‘era’. One practical way to approach the web of contingencies and conveniences that inevitably arises for an essay of this nature is to take

Evans's sense of 'postmodernism in its more constructive modes' as a summons to preface any selection of exemplary cases in modernist music historiography with an 'open acknowledgement of the historian's own subjectivity'.⁶

To that end, I will begin by recalling, on one hand, the suggestion in Carl Dahlhaus's 1983 study *Foundations of Music History* that the idea of a quasi-coherent 'generation' may be one of the more robust historiographical constructs, and on the other, the remainder of that complete sentence in my first epigraph: 'Eras are conveniences, *particularly for those who never experienced them*'.⁷ For if that postmodern 'boundary moment' has any substance at all, it seems crucial to acknowledge that someone of my generation actually 'never experienced' modernism in its 'high' or 'classic' form. Of course the situation has never been simple – indeed a bit more retrospection brings the suspicion that those of us born in the '60s have always experienced a thoroughly hybrid perspective on musical modernism and whatever came after.⁸

At risk of indulging the 'pseudo-dialectical' thinking that Richard Taruskin, in the polemical preface to his *Oxford History of Western Music*, has strenuously challenged in Dahlhaus's *Foundations*, I find that one useful heuristic framing of this hybrid perspective arises from a recognition, at its widest extremes, of a relatively clear opposition between 'music History (capital H)' and 'music history (small h)' – taking the former to mean an approach rooted in some notion of universal historical laws, and the latter an approach driven by relations to contingent, particular historical events. No argument is needed to identify the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, high priest of 'negative dialectics', as by far the most influential practitioner of the former. On the other hand, Taruskin affirms his allegiance to the latter when stating his determination to discard the 'tenets of neo-Hegelian art history' in favour of an

‘investigation of the actual causes of aesthetic and stylistic evolution, which are to be found within rather than outside the histories of social and political affairs’.⁹

Taking these two influential voices as exemplary case studies for inclinations apparent, to lesser degrees, across wide spans of literature, in what follows I will offer a brief sketch of their stated methodological aims, followed by a selective assessment of their treatment of a few specific moments in modern music history. Further exemplifying the ‘subject position’ (as we now say) informing this chapter, I will give particular focus, in the latter phases, to the different accounts of one of my own specialist interests, the music of Claude Debussy – whose longstanding centrality to modern music historiography has found its most startlingly specific formulation in Pierre Boulez’s famous claim (in a 1958 encyclopedia article) that modern music ‘awakens’ in a single piece, the 1894 *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*.¹⁰

Finally, in partial mitigation of the pseudo-dialectical structure that arises from the juxtaposition of Adorno’s ‘History’ with Taruskin’s ‘history’, I will set up some closing thoughts by turning back – as a free-floating ‘third term’ rather than a neo-Hegelian ‘synthesis’ – to some further writings of Boulez himself. If his most infamous remarks now exemplify an authoritarian side of high modernism whose passing nobody could possibly mourn, others, I find, still offer surprising sidelights on the question of cultural bias that seems endemic to modernist music historiography. No doubt Boulez’s extravagant claim for his most illustrious modern French forebear can be deemed, in part, a further instance of the same bias. But at least he was able to admit that his nomination of ‘Mallarmé, Debussy and Cézanne’ as an initiatory constellation ‘at the root of all modernity’ could seem somewhat chauvinistic (*autarcique*).¹¹ And his passing invocation of Baudelaire, elsewhere, captures an alternative dialectical framing of ‘modernity’ that has often been elided in other appropriations of this earlier compatriot, which arguably

retains much potential to inform ongoing reflection about modernism and history far beyond the boundaries of France alone.

Adorno

From the present perspective, the fact that the belated postmodern turn in Anglo-American musicology of the late '80s and early '90s occurred at the very time when Adorno's work was achieving new and increasingly overweening prominence appears a slightly anomalous feature of the historiographical landscape.¹² How, we might be tempted to ask, could this high modernist critic extraordinaire – post-Hegelian priest of 'critical theory', quick to damn all concessions to the 'false consciousness' of the 'culture industry'; influential participant in avant-garde cenacles like the Darmstadt *Ferienkurse*, whose death in 1969 irrevocably bound him to the era *before* most postmodern breakthroughs – claim such status amidst what seem, in any judicious assessment, exactly contrary critical currents?

One simple answer: As an early champion, Rose Rosengard Subotnik, put it in the preface to an important 1991 essay collection, the discovery of Adorno promised a 'reintroduction of moral questions' into a music academy then almost wholly in thrall to 'Empirical' or 'analytic' methods, usually assumed (like the musical subject matter to which they were largely applied) to operate wholly free from ideological or political taint.¹³ But if it is easy enough, now, to understand how refreshing Adorno's extravagantly poetic, morally invested 'Continental' approach must have seemed to many scholars who, chafing within those positivistic limits, were also keen to challenge their ideological neutrality, it is hard not to sense an unsettling tension between the demandingly austere, Frankfurt School notion of musical 'truth

value' and the radically more relativistic 'ethnomusicological' orientation also hailed, across the same generation, for its potential to transform disciplinary practices of musicology. **14**

What is most striking in a present re-reading of the work that emerged alongside Subotnik's during the Anglo-American heyday of Adorno's writing (meaning roughly the decade or two from the early '90s well into the millennium) is the sheer determination of many champions to reaffirm his continuing relevance long after the waning of his direct aesthetic influence, even while granting the substance and significance of much trenchant critique that had also come, over the same years, from many quarters. **15** At one level, the phenomenon bespeaks a quasi-religious reverence best exemplified in a sweeping assertion Subotnik quotes, at one point, from Donald Kuspit: 'To truly do justice to Adorno – to object to him – one must completely submit oneself to him, commit oneself completely to his method, live with it and comprehend its effect on life'. **16** For those loath to submit in this fashion, more productive lines of thought can be glimpsed behind a little terminological echo that crops up in a milder version of the same claim, as offered by British Adornian Max Paddison:

In order to counteract the tendency to become fixated on the individual (and exaggerated) elements which make up his argument, it is important that Adorno be read in the light of his own method, while at every point (and he is constantly changing perspective) the connection has also to be made with the context of his theory as a whole. **17**

Whatever we think of the mystagogical demand to connect 'every point' of his writing with his 'theory as a whole', the confidence with which Paddison, like Kuspit, refers to Adorno's 'method' invites an inquiry of more practical value for these retrospective reflections on 'modernism and history'.

What, then, is the Adornian method? Two or three core tenets, it appears, are most often emphasized as essential to the approach widely celebrated under the banner of ‘critical theory’. First of all, Adorno and Adornians tend to insist that the method rests, at basis, on immanent critique of musical works, developed as freely as possible from covert or unexamined presupposition. Secondly, we are given to understand that this is a thoroughly dialectical method – which means a few things at once. On the broadest level, it proposes an intricately mediated relation between art and society, wherein each evolves, independently, in thrall to the Hegelian ‘objective spirit of history’ – and wherein any ‘authentic’ art must continually strive (and fail) to realize a utopian obligation that places it, by definition, in critical relation to contemporary commodity culture. On the local level of argument, meanwhile, the method requires unending vigilance against reductively monolithic formulations of any given historical concept (thesis) that neglect its inextricable interpenetration by its co-defining opposite (antithesis). Finally, many critics emphasize, as a third strength of the immanent and dialectical method so defined, the ostensible transparency of its own ideological stance, and thus its openness to self-critique. **18**

If the outlines of the method seem clear enough, it is surprising to find how often even avowed Adornians readily grant serious shortfalls in its execution. On the question of immanent critique, for example, Paddison candidly concedes that Adorno’s ‘so-called “immanent analyses” of musical works are disappointingly traditional on a technical level, and do not convincingly bridge the gap between technical analysis and philosophical interpretation.’ **19** As for the famous dialectical sensibility, on the other hand, what Paddison indulgently characterizes as a ‘rather extreme application of Max Weber’s concept of rationalization’ comes into starker focus against the background of Berman’s truly dialectical framing of modernity:

There is a mode of vital experience – experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life’s possibilities and perils – that is shared by men and women all over the world today. I will call this body of experience ‘modernity’. To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformations of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. **20**

Adorno’s complete effacement of one side of this ‘mode of vital experience’ (‘adventure, power, joy, growth’) under doom-laden mantras about the ‘horror of history’ finds incisive diagnosis in one of Berman’s footnotes: ‘In [Georg] Simmel – and later in his youthful followers Georg Lukács, T. W. Adorno, and Walter Benjamin – dialectical vision and depth are always entangled, often in the same sentence, with monolithic cultural despair’. **21**

Such monolithic despair inevitably imparts a distinct slant to Adorno’s views on the kind of art that can possibly be deemed ‘authentic’. To assert – in a typical instance – that ‘new music [. . .] has taken all the darkness and guilt of the world on itself’, leaves little room for any new music that seeks to embrace, however fleetingly, modern modes of ‘adventure’ and ‘joy’. **22** Just as typical is the fuzziness about the human creative acts that conceivably drive this obligatory opposition to history’s horrors and acceptance of the world’s guilt. Attributions of agency to the art and music themselves, rather than to anyone who actually *makes* such things, is characteristic of a historiography that locates the ‘spirit of History’, again and again, in ostensibly objective ‘tendencies of the material’ rather than in any conscious choices on the part of human subjects. **23** To be sure, Adorno occasionally grants a secondary role to creative subjectivity: ‘in immanent reciprocation’, we read in *Philosophy of New Music* (1947), ‘directives are constituted that the material imposes on the composer and that the composer transforms by adhering to

them'.²⁴ But just as common are the many passages that efface human agency entirely under an anthropomorphic framing of grand abstractions: 'music concedes the legitimacy of history and therefore history would like to quash it'.²⁵

It is hardly surprising to find that the contrasting 'small h' approach to music history plays a more negligible role in this method. But it is worth noting one puzzling wobble. If anything is clear in Adorno's modernist historiography, it is the pre-eminent status of Schoenberg's atonal phase – which he is still celebrating in the late essay 'Vers une musique informelle' (1961) as the moment when new music came closest to matching Beethoven's earlier near-attainment of music's utopian potential.²⁶ But similar clarity is notably absent from his account of twelve-tone technique. Beyond his comfortable acceptance, at one point, of the 'didactic' implications in Ernst Křenek's comparison of twelve-tone composition with Palestrina style, and his direct anticipation, at another, of Boulez's famously invidious contrast between Schoenberg and Webern, Adorno allows himself a more fundamental slippage when, after first describing the technique, in *Philosophy of New Music*, as a product of the music's 'proper gravitational vector', he asserts in 'Vers une musique informelle' that 'What stopped the development of the "free musical style", as Alois Haba termed it over thirty years ago, was not anything inherent in the music, as Schoenberg may well have imagined, but sociological and ideological factors.'²⁷ Such haziness about internal and external explanation, touching so central a development in Adorno's favoured music-historical lineage, seems hard to put down, forgivingly, to a rich vein of contradiction.

To turn to my chosen music-historical test case is to find a similar haziness permeating Adorno's few remarks about Debussy. The key passage in *Philosophy of New Music* proceeds entirely as a gloss on a familiar interdisciplinary cliché:

Listening must re-educate itself in order to hear Debussy correctly, not as a process of damming up and release but as a juxtaposition of colours and flashes, as in a painting. The succession merely displays what, in terms of its own meaning, is simultaneous in the way of an eye that wanders over a canvas. **28**

We recognize the casual endorsement of the well-worn 'Impressionist' trope, whose longstanding and widespread acceptance in scholarly and public accounts of Debussy alike may make it all too easy to absorb, as well, Adorno's further claim that 'the development of painting's productive forces [in France] so prevailed over those of music that the latter involuntarily sought refuge in great painting'. **29** What is missing from this odd image of French music seeking shelter in a more developed art form, however, is any acknowledgement that the 'Impressionist' trope itself has only ever been a pure artefact of reception, with little solid basis in immanent musical detail or documented creative affinity.

As a matter of historical fact it was Schoenberg, not Debussy, who at a key point in his development engaged in substantive aesthetic exchanges with an actual painter, Vassily Kandinsky, about the new aesthetic challenges now in view with the advent of atonality and abstraction. (Indeed the exchange hinged, in part, on questions of spatiality in the two art forms – later a key term in Adorno's critique both of Debussy and Stravinsky.) **30** The complete absence of any similar documented interest on Debussy's part has been succinctly noted, back in 1966, by Polish musicologist Stefan Jarocinski:

Contrary to what has often been alleged, there is nowhere to be found in [Debussy's] articles, his correspondence, or even in the recollections of those who knew him best, the slightest proof that Impressionist painting had influenced him to any extent. On the contrary, [. . .] he repudiated the term Impressionism when applied to his music, and employed it himself only in an ironic sense. **31**

No doubt it is still possible for those of a critical-theoretical bent to invoke an authentic, ‘involuntary’ resonance (to borrow Adorno’s term) between disparate artistic materials at similar stages in their respective Histories. But the obvious question arises: Why would such affinity obtain primarily, if not solely, between Debussy’s music and a painterly style that had flourished in the hands of artists exactly one generation older, rather than with any of the many, wildly variegated ‘post-Impressionist’ styles actually in constant, febrile development as he attained compositional maturity in the late 1880s and ’90s? **32**

In truth, although a deeply interdisciplinary sensibility is often deemed another strength of Adorno’s method, it is clear that his sensitivity to actual – immanent – developments in French painting of this time was patchy at best. When, for instance, he invokes ‘the passage from impressionism to pointillism in painting’ to exemplify a sweeping claim that progress in artistic procedures involves ‘a movement towards increasing logical elaboration’, he merely demonstrates, once more, the opportunistic selectivity of this ‘History’. **33** For the ‘pointillism’ of Georges Seurat and Paul Signac *et al.* was only one of numerous post-Impressionist styles, among which many freer approaches (e.g. that of Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cézanne) were to prove at least as influential – recall Boulez’s proto-modernist triumvirate – on subsequent generations. **34** And beyond any quibbling about the most appropriate interdisciplinary affinities (which often becomes something of a mug’s game), Adorno’s casual resort to this central painterly trope of Debussyan reception spawns a blatant disregard for the full range of immanent musical facts. To claim, for example, that in Debussy ‘[t]here is no “end”: the piece stops like a painting one has turned away from’, is to ignore a whole lineage of actual Debussy pieces – from *Pour le piano* (1894–1901), through *La Mer* (1903–5) to all three

late chamber sonatas (1915–17) – whose blazingly rhetorical conclusions render such interdisciplinary generalizations patently absurd.

It would be easier to deem Debussy a relatively minor deaf spot in Adorno's criticism were it not that the painting trope also proved pivotal – as in the supposedly parallel development from Impressionism to cubism – to his more extensive treatment of Stravinsky.³⁵ There is little need to engage in detail, here, with the infamous 'Stravinsky and the Restoration' section of *Philosophy of New Music* – characterized even by Robert Hullot-Kentor, in the preface to his 2006 translation, as 'easily the most reviled and automatically dismissed of anything [Adorno] wrote'.³⁶ But a slightly broader view might serve to test the 'self-critical' strengths occasionally celebrated in this method. For Adorno returned to Stravinsky years later, in the 1962 essay 'Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait', which some acolytes have found an exemplary instance of self-critical reflection.³⁷

That reading seems strange on the face of it given Adorno's bald assertion, early in this essay, that 'I see no reason to retract anything that I wrote in 1947.'³⁸ He proceeds to frame, hypothetically, a 'not implausible objection' he imagines others could direct at his original critique, and a (hypothetical) 'plea for the defence' of Stravinsky he thinks they may be tempted to offer – which includes the (still-hypothetical) charge against him that he imagines they could raise: that 'I violated my own most cherished principles of criticism' (meaning the commitment to immanent analysis). But he answers all such hypotheses with one of his most imperious affirmations of a non-negotiable 'fact' about music:

As a temporal art, music is bound to the fact of succession and is hence as irrevocable as time itself. By starting it commits itself to carrying on, to becoming something new, to developing. What we may conceive of as musical

transcendence, namely the fact that at any given moment it has become something and something other than what it was, that it points beyond itself – all that is no mere metaphysical imperative dictated by external authority. It lies in the nature of music and will not be denied.³⁹

Damning Stravinsky's temporal processes in this light, he transmutes what is indeed an undeniable fact – music must 'carry on' in time – into an arbitrary, monolithic insistence that only one way of 'carrying on' (i.e. 'developing', in the Beethovenian and Schoenbergian sense central to his own education) can ever count as historically 'authentic'.

Hardly a robust instance of self-critique, 'Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait' thus proves a particularly blatant instance of the thoroughgoing Austro-German bias widely acknowledged by Adorno's champions and detractors alike. But familiar and unignorable as this bias may be, his most forgiving readers tend to understate the parochial narrowness of the critical purview it supports. When observing, for example, that Adorno 'seemed to be so identified with his own cultural heritage and its aesthetic values that he was quite blind to the different terms of reference of any non-European let alone non-Western culture', Paddison blithely skates past his more shocking blindness (or deafness) to the music created not in some distant, exotic culture – or even by someone born at a moderate geographical remove, like Stravinsky – but by a composer native to Germany's closest Western European neighbour.⁴⁰ We must no doubt grant (with Paddison) that Adorno was 'constantly changing perspective' – and further exploration will find, for example, that 'Vers une musique informelle' contradicts even the 'cardinal fact' that serves to damn Stravinsky in 'A Dialectical Portrait'. ('It is nowhere laid down that modern music must a priori contain such elements of the tradition as tension and resolution, continuation, development, contrast and reassertion.')

⁴¹ Similarly, the few references to Debussy in the

posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* have lost all clichéd associations with painting. But while nobody would demand dogmatic rigidity as a critical obligation, it is hard not to wonder, in the face of such radical shifts of opinion, what can be said to survive as a solid core of this music-historical method.

The suspicion that, much like the music prophetically evoked in ‘Vers une musique informelle’, Adorno’s method remains a promissory note towards some as-yet unrealised, truly immanent, dialectical and self-critical project only deepens when we read this further frank acknowledgement from Subotnik:

Through a complex process of mediation, which Adorno does not pretend to understand or elucidate adequately, a process involving the artist’s early ways of perceiving reality (through childhood assimilation of societal structures) and the contemporaneous state of artistic materials, techniques and technology (all, like form, stemming from outside the imagination), the essential tendencies of a given historical moment become translated into the formal aspects of great art. ⁴²

In other words, Adorno ‘does not pretend to understand or elucidate adequately’ even the fundamental question – ‘how are we to say that X and Y are related in Z fashion?’ – that, by her own account, had first drawn Subotnik out from the narrowly analytic academic confines within which she had written a traditional ‘life and works’ dissertation and towards this Continental alternative. ⁴³ Paddison’s sense, in the mid-90s, that ‘Adorno’s Critical Theory continues to make us uncomfortable with received notions of music as splendidly autonomous and somehow entirely separate from society and the everyday’ can only seem terribly out-dated now, after a few decades of ‘cultural musicology’. ⁴⁴ Perhaps there is more lasting substance in Alistair Williams’s narrowly methodological claim, a year or so later, that without such a critical theory

(inchoate as it is) ‘modernism’s challenging of traditional aesthetics, its pull away from integration and its quest for theoretical understanding could be understood only by a pale explanation of technique’.⁴⁵ But the choice seems too stark. Technique, in music as in all other arts, has generally been a means to various human ends. Surely there are better approaches to the endlessly fascinating relation between the two than a repeated refurbishment of a mid-twentieth-century model whose narrow cultural bias has long proved inadequate even to a pluralistic sense of Western art music, let alone everything else?

Taruskin

When Taruskin, in the polemical preface reprinted at the start of every volume of his *Oxford History*, deems the work of Adorno ‘preposterously overrated’ and damns all the postmodern ‘new musicologists’ as ‘Adornians to a man or woman’, he clearly stakes a claim to be offering just such a better alternative.⁴⁶ But even without undertaking the thorough investigation needed to determine just which particular Adornian sins can be fairly attributed to any of the disparate scholars occasionally bundled together (happily or not) under the label ‘new musicology’, a careful assessment of the vast survey that follows finds that it, too, proves riven by tensions arising from partly incompatible historiographical paradigms. In this case, in fact, unlike the postmodern reception of the arch-modernist Adorno, the instability seems built into the very foundations.

For one thing (to borrow again from Evans’s millennial reflections), as a ‘multi-volume and “authoritative” synoptic history’, the *OHWM* seems a distinctly belated contribution to a genre whose very ‘idea’ already seemed ‘out of date’ to many historians back in 1997.⁴⁷ This

pervasive tinge of anachronism only deepens with Taruskin's distinctly postmodernistic prefatory claim that, rather than the 'music itself', the 'mediating discourse' will be the main subject of his historical 'story' (in his most extreme formulation: 'the discourse, so often slighted in the past, is in fact the story').⁴⁸ The claim sits uneasily with the relatively traditional, 'narrative' approach he then, by his own description, adopts for this 'attempt at a true history'.⁴⁹ If a key question about the relation between historical discourses and the worldly truths they purport to describe (as has been widely debated after the postmodern turn) seems casually elided here, we might also wonder just how well Taruskin's determination to root such a narrative primarily in 'reception', of the kind that can give rise to 'social contention', really holds up across all the highly technical, enthusiastically erudite music analyses that give the *OHWM* much of its considerable bulk.⁵⁰

Beyond this rebarbative preface alone, the account of musical modernism in Taruskin's last volumes rests on methodological foundations elaborated more extensively in a couple of earlier essays. The first of these, given as a lecture back in 1989 and reprinted with a reflective commentary of 2008, challenges what Taruskin sees as the standard telling of nineteenth- and twentieth-century music history, described in the *OHWM* as part of the broader 'neo-Hegelian' and 'linear' tale that 'the arts steadily progress toward a state of ever more perfect autonomy'.⁵¹ This is not the only one of his sallies against hidebound tradition that carries a strong whiff of the 'straw man'. As he well knows, even arch-progressivists like Adorno and Boulez saw some eras as diversions from the longer-range 'arc of History'; apart from his new dating, to ca. 1923, of the 'true break' between nineteenth- and twentieth-century musical worlds (which can only ever be arbitrarily imposed), his proposed 'zigzag' alternative – i.e. two progressively maximalizing 'zigs' in alternation with two anti-progressive 'zags', one in the interwar years, the other at the

postmodern turn – does not appear as radically unfamiliar as he seems to think.⁵² What is more distinctive is the pair of terms by which he purports to bring the messy variety of musical culture under each vector of this jagged ‘superperiodization’.

Ironically, the key terms in question, as first presented in the essay ‘The Poietic Fallacy’ of 2004 and scattered throughout the *OHWM*, could well be said to infuse this story of musical modernism with the same quasi-dialectical thinking Taruskin finds so execrable in Dahlhaus. Borrowing the well-known distinction between *poiesis* (artistic creation) and *esthesis* (audience reception) first introduced to music by semiotician Jean Molino, he defines the ‘fallacy’ he labels with the first term as ‘the conviction that what matters most (or, more strongly yet, that all that matters) in a work of art is the making of it, the maker’s input’.⁵³ As he sees it, the enthrallment of most previous stories about modernism to this ‘poietic fallacy’ accounts in large part for the oft-noted alienation of ‘new music’ from a wide audience. This charge, in turn, drives his determination to focus this ‘true’ story, instead, on *esthesis* – and thus to write ‘a view of “serious” music that takes adequate account of its function as a communicative medium’.⁵⁴

As an aside, we might note how this programme simplifies the actual practice of ‘History with a capital H’ – within which the agency of ‘the maker’ often proves quite elusive and ambiguous. Much more important, however, is the ease with which the quasi-dialectical opposition of *poiesis* and *esthesis* elides a crucial ‘third term’. Noting that Molino’s original formulation had also included ‘a *niveau neutre*, a neutral level, that analysed the structure of the message itself’, Taruskin suggests that this third or middle term was discarded ‘once it was realized that analysis itself was an esthetic function’.⁵⁵ The realization may indeed be irrefutable. But the problematic label ‘*niveau neutre*’ aside, it hardly follows that the musical phenomena themselves simply do not exist, in their material and sonorous facticity, before

analysis takes place. We may never be able to analyze music in a value-neutral way, but we can easily describe its constituent facts falsely (say, by taking *forte* for *piano*, flute for fiddle, fugue for aria). To believe otherwise is to accept a discursive extreme in postmodern historiography that has been thoroughly debunked (in my reading of Evans) through several late-century debates – and that clearly holds little real attraction for Taruskin, given his frequent appeals to historical ‘fact’ to contradict the discursive misrepresentations of others. **56**

If, all claims to some higher truth aside, the *OHW* inevitably deploys both facts and discourses selectively to buttress prior musical and historical investments, the elaboration of its ‘zigzag’ linear historiography illustrates, above all, the perils of over-schematic musical periodization. Recalling his commitment to tracing the causes of stylistic evolution in the social and political realm, it will come as no surprise to find the First World War identified as the main cause of the first ‘zag’. Long seen to mark a turn to greater objectivity in all the arts, this worldwide cataclysm now comes under Taruskin’s quasi-dialectical scheme as the cause of what he calls ‘the “poietic” bias (the emphasis on the “making” of the composition rather than on its “effect”)’ that increasingly characterized advanced composing-practice after the Great War’. **57**

But what emerges most vividly from the discursive context surrounding this idea of a new ‘poietic bias’ – apart from a sense that its human source seems to float, disconcertingly, between composers and later analysts – is the sheer, unruly variety of the music actually created in this ‘period’.

Perhaps the clearest instance of the instability inherent in any such attribution of a broad stylistic change to a single social and political cause is the discussion, on a single page, of three closely contemporaneous operas by Paul Hindemith. Two, we read, ‘maintained prewar “maximalist” styles (the first “post-Strauss,” the second “post-Debussy”)', while the third

‘showed signs of postwar irreverence for high artistic values’.⁵⁸ Are we to understand the war as the cause of both of these stylistic choices, or just the typical ‘postwar’ one? Perhaps the case of Hindemith, at least, seems relatively easy to resolve – given Taruskin’s sense of increasing emphasis rather than clear caesura – with a look ahead to the greater ‘objectivity’ of his later *Gebrauchsmusik*. But the puzzle of causality becomes more pressing in the account of Alban Berg, a figure at the heart of the neo-Hegelian lineage propounded by Adorno (his one-time student). For Taruskin, Berg’s music offers a rare case of dialectical synthesis:

His expressive aims remained traditionally humanistic, concerned with the representation, and possible transmission, of subjective feelings like erotic love (in the *Lyric Suite*), or grief and consolation (in the Concerto). It was to these ends that Berg sublimated the intellectual curiosity that attracted him to technical tours de force. His obsession with motivic and harmonic asymmetries acted as a useful counterfoil to his representational bent, enabling his music to be at once eclectic and economical in a way that interests analysts, and giving his music, to a perhaps greater degree than that of the other early Viennese atonalists, strong appeal on both the poietic and esthetic planes.⁵⁹

Suggestive as this description of a distinctive compositional accomplishment might be, it seems difficult to explain such a rich admixture of ‘expressive aims’ and ‘intellectual curiosity’ – in two works written in 1926 and 1935, respectively – as the result of a single socio-historical event.

For all the scorn Taruskin pours on the ‘pseudo-dialectical “method” ’ he finds in *Foundations of Music History* (and deceptively distils to a crude question: ‘Is art history the *history* of art, or is it the history of *art*?’) Dahlhaus’s thoughts on the ‘problems of social history’ actually remain directly relevant to the questions that arise from this ‘superperiodization’, which

inevitably throws up works (and entire *oeuvres* – say, by Erich Wolfgang Korngold or Edgard Varèse) that prove exceptions, in various ways, to the ‘debunking, materialist, objective, and antimetaphysical spirit of postwar disillusion’.⁶⁰ Rather than having to say, with a temporal locution typical of *Zeitgeist* historiography, that the ‘decadence’ of Korngold’s ‘sumptuous expressionist drama’ (e.g. *Das Wunder der Heliane*, 1926) was ‘a little old-fashioned in the age of *neue Sachlichkeit*’, it would be better to accept that the ‘age’ itself has only ever been a discursive ‘convenience’ (see again my epigraph) – its label ‘bolted on’ to a ‘totality’ better seen in light of Dahlhaus’s gloss on leading *Annales* historian Fernand Braudel:

The structures [. . .] that coexist at any given time, interacting to constitute or determine an historical circumstance, differ from each other not only in respect of their age, i.e. how far back they extend into the past and the timespan allotted to them, but also in the rate at which they alter. The historian Fernand Braudel spoke of the various ‘rhythms’ of coexisting structures, ranging from the geographic conditions of a culture to the styles of its art. And, to use a musical metaphor, there is cause to doubt whether the overlapping tempos can be reduced to a common underlying metre (though some feel that the succession of generations gives a certain ‘natural rhythm’ to the history of art). There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as ‘Time’ in the singular but only ‘times’ in the plural, the times of overlapping structures in conflicting rhythms’.⁶¹

From this perspective, indeed, Taruskin’s ostensibly event-driven superperiodization could seem, in its more forced applications, just as polemically selective a construct as Adorno’s ostensibly immanent ‘objective historical spirit’.⁶²

The possibility that ‘les extrêmes se touchent’ here can be supported with a closer look at Taruskin’s objections to the ‘capital H’ tale he roundly rejects. In a crucial passage of his preface, he identifies the ‘vice’ that ‘vitiates’ the work of Adorno (and rapidly aged that of the

‘new musicologists’) as the assumption ‘that the meaning of artworks is fully vested in them by their creators, and is simply “there” to be decoded by a specially gifted interpreter’. He continues:

[This] is, all pretenses aside, still an authoritarian discourse and an asocial one. It still grants oracular privilege to the creative genius and his prophets, the gifted interpreters. It is altogether unacceptable as a historical method, although it is part of history and, like everything else, deserving of report. The historian’s trick is to shift the question from “What does it mean?” to “What has it meant?” That move is what transforms futile speculation and dogmatic polemic into historical illumination. **63**

What is strange here is the uncritical assumption that the interrogative shift so described will automatically prevent the historian from granting ‘oracular privilege’ to some other ‘authoritarian discourse’ in service of a different, externally based but no less dogmatic polemic. More bluntly: the ‘historian’s trick’, as Taruskin puts it, remains incomplete so long as his new question lacks a crucial qualifier: ‘What has it meant . . . *and to whom?*’

As it happens, this missing qualifier proves particularly damaging to the account of Debussy in volume IV of the *OHWM*. For a start, it appears that Taruskin, while deciding to relieve this composer of the ‘Ur-modernist’ status he was happy to affirm in a review written back in 1989, has also had second thoughts about his ‘Impressionism’ – a cliché he once treated with apt circumspection, but now (in an exact reversal of Adorno) accepts with little more than a dutiful caveat. **64** He gives no evidentiary justification for this change of mind – indeed none, to my knowledge, exists. It could be that he has simply found, over the years, that the parallel with a supposedly ‘objective’ style of painting (as it has often been understood) fits well with the

claims about a modernist ‘dehumanization of art’ famously propounded in a 1925 essay by Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, which he first draws into his story alongside the early ‘French modernists’ Debussy and Satie and grants fully oracular privilege through many subsequent chapters (see also the introduction to this volume).

Whatever ‘historical illumination’ Ortega might bring to later, more appropriate episodes, Taruskin’s wholesale adoption of his dehumanized hearing of Debussy perfectly illustrates how a prior commitment to authoritarian discourse can enforce a selective disregard for historical and musical facts. It would be hard, for example, to pack more bias and inaccuracy into this single paragraph:

One finds representations aplenty in [Debussy’s] music of the sea, of the wind, of gardens in the rain and balconies in the moonlight, but of humans few unless viewed en masse and from afar (‘Fêtes’ [. . .]), or unless mythical (fauns, sirens), artificial (‘Golliwogg’, his daughter’s Negro doll [. . .]), or already embodied in art (‘Danseuses de Delphes’ [. . .] the first of the *Préludes*, which title evokes not the dancers themselves but the Greek vase on which they are painted).⁶⁵

Even the initial nod to a few ‘nature’ titles (*La mer*, ‘Jardins sous la pluie’) sidesteps a whole contemporary discourse about the interpenetration of artistic representations with the experience of their human perceivers – as in Mallarmé’s stated ideal: ‘peindre non la chose, mais l’effet qu’elle produit’.⁶⁶ The reference to humans ‘en masse and from afar’ in ‘Fêtes’ coolly suppresses the fact that the march episode in question only *begins* at ‘distant’ *pianissimo* – but then approaches, through fifty-four bars of crescendo, to a vividly proximate *fortissimo* with full brass and percussion. Taruskin gives no justification for deeming Debussy’s ‘mythical’ figures any less ‘human’ in symbolic implication than, say, the Rhine maidens and dwarves (*et al.*) in

Wagner's *Ring*, nor for assuming that the stately rhythms of 'Danseuses de Delphes' should be heard to evoke an inert image – what, in truth, would *that* sound like? – rather than the hieratic, choreographed gestures it surely brought to mind. **67**

Against any suggestion that such selective hearing and description remains open to interpretation, I would note the starker omission, here, of all the more overtly 'human' Debussy *Préludes* – from the well-known 'La fille aux cheveux de lin', through 'La sérénade interrompue' (presumably played and heard, and interrupted, by *someone*), to 'La danse de Puck' and 'Minstrels'. (If some such pianistic characterizations are mediated by literary 'artifice', so too, of course, were many in Schumann or Liszt). **68** But this slight widening of the lens does not yet capture the even broader elision behind Taruskin's blithe Ortegan assertion '*but of humans few*'. To focus only on the instrumental music, in service of this polemical generalization, is to ignore or efface the human implications in all of Debussy's vocal music – notably including the several dozen *mélodies* that embodied (often in the triptych form that stands as his signal contribution to the 'song cycle' genre) the most overt and disparate expressions of poetic personae and imagery across his whole career. **69**

This last point brings to mind a telling remark in Gary Tomlinson's 2007 review of the *OHWM*. Beyond challenging the way that Taruskin, posing as a privileged 'medium' of music history, 'appears to want to sustain the illusion that his story was conveyed to him by the traces of the past he examines', Tomlinson also notes a stale air of scholarly familiarity clinging to much of the repertoire selected for close attention. **70** Radical historiographical posturing aside, he suggests, the decisions about what and what not to include (about which Taruskin expresses shocking complacency) seem to him largely to re-enshrine a pre-existing canon of 'the sum of the efforts of historical musicologists across much of the twentieth century'. **71** We have already

glimpsed the insidious effects of such investment in the vagaries of prior musicological interest: it will be forever impossible to free Debussy from the Impressionist cliché so long as we find historical ‘truth value’ in the mere fact that so many scholars have been happy to repeat it. But a more unsettling line of concern can emerge, I think, by considering two other, interrelated questions.

First of all: *Why* have the *mélodies*, one of the genres for which Debussy wrote most often, been granted so little importance in standard music histories that Taruskin can readily overlook their significance for a full understanding of his art? And second, *why* is it that Ortega found it so easy to project the ‘dehumanization’ he heard in 1920s Stravinsky back to Debussy, whose radically different motivations should be abundantly clear from the scattering of the word ‘expressif’ through scores that also bear countless more precisely human indications, from ‘joyeux’ to ‘passionément’ to ‘comme un tendre et triste regret’?

Some answers may emerge with a bit more thought about the missing qualifier in that ‘historian’s trick’ (‘What has it meant . . . and to whom?’). Given that Ortega wrote very little of substance about music, many musicologists will likely first encounter his remarks on Debussy and Stravinsky in the *OHWM*.⁷² In this context, his Latinate name may all too easily suggest a healthy Mediterranean perspective – as in Friedrich Nietzsche’s late rejection of Wagnerian ‘diseases’ for the refreshing clarity of Georges Bizet – behind his hearing of French and Russian modernism.⁷³ The truth is quite the opposite. Ortega’s intellectual and aesthetic proclivities were in fact thoroughly and passionately Germanic. Their deepest roots lie in the neo-Kantian philosophy he studied in Marburg – a town to which he later attributed ‘half of my hopes and nearly all of my intellectual discipline’.⁷⁴ Famously characterized as ‘the man who liked to think of himself as a twentieth-century Goethe’, he was granted a prominent speaking role at the

poet's 1949 bicentenary.⁷⁵ And this 'Germanism', which he saw as the essential ingredient for Spain's claim to a fully European destiny, found ample illustration, for example, in the marked predominance he gave to German writers in a series of translations for The Library of Twentieth-Century Ideas, and in the name of his only son: Miguel Germán.⁷⁶

This pronounced 'Germanist' leaning seems to me to impinge directly on the distorted account of Debussy's music Taruskin offers under Ortega's oracular guidance. For if Adorno was so in thrall to Austro-German 'development' that he could not hear any other approach to musical time as authentic, Taruskin takes from Ortega an equally narrow sense of musical expression, which can only have originated in the decades of discourse that has consistently located the pinnacle of such expression in the compositional lineage of German Idealism. It is only from this unacknowledged, monolithic perspective, I suggest, that it has proven so easy for both to ignore all those *expressif* indications (and sounds) – because Debussy's music expresses 'passion' and 'tenderness' and the like by other means than those long heard to define Western musical 'expression' *tout court*.⁷⁷

The towering irony here – Taruskin, so polemically opposed to Teutonic music-historical imperialism, imports into his hearing of Debussy a Germanic bias that differs only in kind from Adorno's – rests on a larger, even more basic point. Ortega's idea of 'dehumanization', like anyone else's proposed distinction between acts and creations more or less characteristically human, could only ever be inextricably culturally contingent.⁷⁸ Some reinforcement of this point, were it needed, can readily be found in a baldly relativistic invocation of the same idea that appeared, just a few years before Ortega's essay, in a controversial publication by an eminent native Germanist. In this passage from his *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (1918), Thomas Mann first answers one peevish question only to end with another:

What is, then, this development, this progress I have been speaking of? Well, to indicate what it is about, I need a handful of shamelessly ugly, artificial words. It is about the politicization, literarization, intellectualization, and radicalization of Germany. *It aims at her "humanization" in the Latin-political sense, and her dehumanization in the German one.* It aims, to use the favourite word, the battlecry and hosanna of civilization's literary man, at the *democratization* of Germany, or, to summarize everything and to bring it over a common denominator: it aims at her de-Germanization. And I should have a part in all this mischief? **79**

In short, Ortega's ostensibly universal and objective characterization appears here, in words written during the shell-shocked aftermath of the Great War, as a contingent and contested emergence from centuries of debate over the relative values of French *civilization* and German *Kultur*.

This long, internecine struggle clearly complicates any monolithic conception of Western (or even Western European) culture. And some of its more precise relevance for musicological reflections on 'modernism and history' might start to emerge with a slight step beyond the boundaries of Western Europe. As Taruskin points out, the music of Hungarian composer Béla Bartók gave Adorno – who mischaracterized it, with that of the Czech Leoš Janáček, as the 'product of a rural or agrarian society' – yet one more occasion to exercise his 'smug ethnocentric bias'. **80** But the same music inspires Taruskin himself to what seems, in a long view, suspiciously like a blatant double standard. Back in 1989 he caricatured Debussy, primarily on the basis of his writings rather than his music, as someone who demanded 'an absolute demarcation between popular culture and high culture'. **81** Perhaps this 'elitist' charge largely falls away from the *OHWM* because it is impossible to maintain in the same pages as the little example from 'Golliwog's Cakewalk'. Even so, there remains a telling disjunction between

Taruskin's dogged riffs on the 'dehumanized' Debussy and the complex, multi-dimensional humanity he grants the younger composer: 'Bartók was torn, like all educated Magyars, both between the universal and the particular and between the elite and the popular.'⁸²

Even without the suppressed charge of elitism, we might well wonder how *this* Bartók could have felt, on discovering Debussy's 'dehumanized' music, a similar 'impact on his development to his discovery of peasant song itself'. Maybe we are to understand the impact solely in terms of, say, 'the prevalence of seventh chords [. . .] often moving in parallel à la Debussy' – as in Taruskin's account of the *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (1936).⁸³ But (to borrow one of his own terms of critique) the paired reference to Debussy and 'peasant song' carries subtler human implications than such shallow 'techno-essentialism' can allow.⁸⁴ For when Bartók recalled the revelation modern French music had brought to a whole generation of Hungarians hitherto in thrall to Germanic models, he specifically highlighted the different approach to song he found in Debussy, attributing it to his 'facility to reach back to the declamation of the ancient French language'.⁸⁵ He thus identified one inspirational model for his own new, *parlando rubato* style of lyrical expression (as in the middle movement of *Music for Strings*) – which he drew, in significant part, from the distinct accentuations and inflections of his own native tongue.

The unacknowledged cultural relativism lurking behind that deceptively universal claim of 'dehumanization' thus comes into focus, from this perspective, as a deafness to different ideals of musical lyricism. Debussy's *mélodies* all too easily fall away from a story told in Ortega's thrall, because their acute sensitivity to the declamatory nuances of the French language places them at a marked remove from the more melody-dominated song tradition inherited from a different, deceptively universal ideal of *Volkstümlichkeit*.⁸⁶ No doubt the question remains as

to why it has also proven so easy, within this radically selective hearing, to efface all the ‘*expressif*’ aspects of the instrumental music as well. But leaving this further query for another time, I think the surprisingly similar bias here exposed in Adorno and Taruskin might best serve as a pivot towards concluding reflections if we note, in marked contrast, the more finely relativistic perspective offered on this very issue by Boulez – a figure often charged with quite the opposite historiographical impulses.

Within a passing reference to the long debate over the relative value of ‘pure vocality, in the conventional sense’ and song that ‘reproduces as faithfully as possible the inflections of spoken language’, Boulez proposes, at one point, a suggestive parallel between ‘the antinomy of Italian opera and French opera’ during the mid-eighteenth century *Querelle des bouffons* and that of ‘Wagner and Debussy’ much later.⁸⁷ We can question the complete accuracy of this parallel while leaving the basic point intact. In the eighteenth century, as in the early twentieth, the debate was never really about how and how not to be ‘human’ – it was rather about the particular forms of human expression various hearers were willing to validate from their own cultural perspective. On this point at least, Boulez proved a more open-minded listener than either Adorno or Taruskin to the human possibilities of modernist music.

Conclusion: Boulez (. . . und Baudelaire ist auch dabei)

‘Open-minded’ is perhaps not the first adjective that comes to mind for a figure who first enters the *OHWM* under a charge of ‘violence’ and ‘frantically coercive rhetoric’.⁸⁸ Taruskin is referring, of course, to the most infamous of all neo-Hegelian music-historical decrees – as

pronounced by Boulez not once but twice, in slightly different forms. The later version, in the essay ‘Possibly . . .’ of May 1952, is the most plainly coercive: ‘any musician who has not experienced – I do not say understood, but fully experienced – the necessity of dodecaphonic language is USELESS. For his entire work falls short of the needs of his time’.⁸⁹ But in a different essay published a few months earlier, ‘Schoenberg is Dead’ (given the date, the very title – as Taruskin remarks – a ‘shocking provocation’), the similarly intransigent assertion that ‘any composer is *useless* who does not pursue the path of serialism’ brings, with its continuation, a wry aside: ‘(which does not mean that every composer will be useful in the contrary case)’.⁹⁰

The addition may seem trivial – but it actually amounts to a frank admission that Boulez’s coercive bombast rests, at basis, not on any pressing regard for ‘the needs of the time’ but on an irreducibly subjective notion of what he himself, on the authority of his own undoubtedly extraordinary gifts, deigns to find artistically useful. Such slippage from a notionally universal sense of historical responsibility to a narrowly self-congratulatory solipsism has perhaps been all too common across much of modernist historiography. It is relatively easy, for instance, to trace back (in a couple of close variants) into my chosen proponents of ‘History’ and ‘history’.

Consider, for a start, Adorno’s 1950 response to early criticism of his *Philosophy of New Music*:

As a consequence of the philosophy for which I am responsible, [they say], I have implicitly applied to music a concept of objective spirit that asserts itself over and above the heads of individual artists as well as beyond the merits of individual works. *This concept is as foreign today to everyday consciousness as it is self-evident to my own spiritual experience.*⁹¹

On the other hand, Taruskin answers Charles Rosen's critique of the last volume of the *OHWM* (which adduces Cold War tensions as a cause of just about everything in late twentieth-century musical culture) with a similar appeal to subjective experience – now of a worldly, not spiritual, nature:

I believe it is fair to say that the Cold War gave Americans a far greater scare than any of the actual wars our armies fought overseas. (And not even the Civil War threatened massive civilian casualties.) How could anyone's psychic equilibrium remain undisturbed? (Mine was definitely unbalanced: *I could never take seriously plans or promises that had to do with anything that lay more than a few days in the future.*) How could the artistic expressions of such psyches fail to reflect that disturbance?⁹²

In reply, Rosen urbanely deflates this solipsistic hyperbole. 'For me, by contrast', he writes, 'the cold war years were a time of hope and looking forward. I got a Ph.D., made my first recordings and my New York debut, and obtained a two-year Fulbright fellowship to work in Paris'.⁹³ He leaves us to fill in the blanks: however much Taruskin might dramatize his Cold War memories to support an extravagant historiographical conceit, a glance at his publication list will find that he, too, managed to fulfil at least a few long-term plans amidst those unbalancing world-historical disturbances.⁹⁴

He would have done better to recall his own cautions against over-simplistic accounts, for example, of the experience of the composer Karl Amadeus Hartmann under the Nazis. 'One's tendency in retrospect', he writes in the *OHWM*, 'is to imagine life under totalitarianism in terms of stark choices and moral extremes. Real-life conditions are seldom so clear-cut.'⁹⁵ Directly relevant to his own totalizing sense of Cold War culture, this more nuanced view – which

permits him the eminently sensible acknowledgement that ‘people are inconstant and inconsistent’ – can also help forestall any over-hasty ‘demonization’ of Boulez as a quasi-totalitarian enforcer of post-Webernian serial doctrine. In fact, a brief comparative glance to Boulez’s words, alongside Taruskin’s and Adorno’s, on two brilliant ballet scores of 1913 – Debussy’s *Jeux* and Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du printemps* – can begin to suggest who was the more catholic listener to serial and non-serial music alike.

Dutiful caveats forgotten, Taruskin saves his laziest concession to painterly cliché for *Jeux*, which he deems the ‘ultimate masterpiece of “impressionism” ’ based on a few generalities about ‘harmonic and coloristic subtlety’, *piano* dynamics and ‘kaleidoscopically shifting motivic patterns’.⁹⁶ Boulez, by contrast, finds the unique temporal unfolding of this quicksilver work the stimulus to a new, post-architectural formal metaphor:

One must experience the whole work to have a grasp of its form, which is no longer architected, but *braided* [*tressée*]; in other words, there is no distributive hierarchy in the organization of ‘sections’ (static sections: themes; dynamic sections: developments) but successive distributions in the course of which the various constituent elements take on a greater or lesser functional importance.

The passage may bear a techno-essentialist odour, but the inspired poetic image (think of all the hair symbolism in Debussy) nonetheless invites a more temporally imaginative hearing than any impressionistic overview. Still, a yet wider gulf opens between Adorno and Boulez on Stravinsky. Adorno’s non-dialectical hearing leads ultimately to a disdainful sniff: ‘There is something intrinsically amiss with Stravinsky’s music; “il y a quelque chose qui ne va pas”.’⁹⁷

By contrast, in the early pages of his essay ‘Stravinsky Remains’, Boulez poses a reflective question about the interrelation of stylistic strengths and weaknesses:

It is undeniable [. . .] that Stravinsky possesses, to a lesser degree, the sense of development – that is, of sonorous phenomena undergoing constant renewal. Maybe we will judge this a weakness – and indeed it is; but might I be allowed to think that this is also one of the principal sources of that rhythmic force that he found necessary to deploy in order to face up to the difficulty of writing?⁹⁸

He then makes good on Adorno's omission by providing a lengthy and detailed immanent analysis of *Le sacre*, focused above all on the rhythmic dimension so easily denigrated under the other's ethnocentric bias.⁹⁹

While fans of the dialectic may thus be tempted to hail, in Boulez, a mid-century synthesis of Austro-German and Franco-Russian – i.e. Webernian and Stravinskyan – modernist streams, I will take two different, more broadly suggestive aspects of his writings as openings to my concluding reflections. The first concerns the thoroughly Eurocentric bias apparent both in Adorno's 'critical theory' and Taruskin's *OHWM*.¹⁰⁰ Boulez, whose appreciation of intra-European cultural divisions has been noted previously (and whose prominence within a once-imperial power inevitably implies considerable Eurocentric privilege), occasionally offers glimpses, as well, of a yet broader cultural relativism. It may be hard, after the influential challenges of Edward Said and his followers, to read even the most laudatory reference to 'musics of the Near and Far East' as wholly free of patronizing 'orientalism' (not to say crass generalization).¹⁰¹ But when Boulez, in an essay titled after Paul Klee, 'À la limite du pays fertile', recognizes that the 'non-harmonic character' of 'Hindu music' allows it, at once, a greater intervallic and rhythmic complexity than much Western art music, he arguably registers genuine respect for different orders of creative accomplishment.¹⁰² And in his elaborations on

the similar musical openness once shown by Debussy, he pushes beyond such *poietic* concerns to touch on musical *esthesis* as well.

The key passage in ‘La corruption dans les encensoirs’ opens with an apologetic note of over-familiarity, then nods in passing to the crucial point:

We have elaborated quite enough, by now, on the surprise and impact caused in Debussy, during the 1889 Exposition, by the Annamite theatre, the Javanese dancers, and the sonority of the gamelan. Paradoxically, it is the shock of *a tradition codified differently, but just as powerfully, as the tradition of the West*, that precipitates the rupture of the new music with the traditional European elements: we might well ask whether it was not the sheer ignorance that such other conventions could exist that provoked such powerful impressions of liberty.

As the highlighted phrase makes clear, Boulez understands the revelation of non-Western musics to lie not only in their ‘richer scales’, more ‘supple rhythms’, or ‘totally different’ instruments. Rather, as he puts it, ‘it was above all the poetics [*la poétique*] of these far Eastern musics that enforced their corrosive influence’. The close kinship of his *poétique* with Taruskin’s *poiesis* must not confuse the point. For when Boulez invokes, alongside Debussy, the painters Van Gogh and Klee and the poet Paul Claudel – all forced, by various exotic encounters, towards a scepticism about the ‘supremacy of [European] culture’ – he clearly implies that the issue was not just one of technical means, but of the equally powerful expressive and representational effects such artists were able to sense (however dimly) in methods radically different from those whose supremacy had long gone unquestioned. **103**

The familiarity of the story of ‘Debussy and the exotic’, which has only deepened since Boulez’s essay, should not defuse the profound historiographical questions it raises. For if the

notion of a ‘universal History’ – in the Hegelian sense of my ‘capital H’ – has by some accounts proven an uncomfortable import even for the closest neighbours of the Germanic context from which it first arose, how much more problematic must it seem when forced outward, through and beyond the furthest outposts of Europe’s former colonies? **104** In fact, in a further striking irony, the clearest illustration of the perils of ‘conceptual imperialism’ that lurk behind such careless extensions of Eurocentric claims about musical history and experience alike can be found in the very paragraph in which Taruskin most pointedly challenges the presumed ‘universality’ of the German tradition. Compare his first sentence with the last two:

Since Wagner’s time, the German art of music had brought to a pitch of perfection the most consummately developed technique ever devised for representing the idealized experience of subjective feeling in tones. Philosophers and psychologists who have reflected upon the methods, highly manipulative in several meanings of the word, by which composers in the German tradition achieved this representation, have tended to fall under its spell. They have attributed universality to a local, highly specialized idiom. They have cast it in essential terms, as the culminating realization of music’s intrinsic or ‘absolute’ properties. **105**

It is bizarre to find that closing challenge to others’ presumptions of ‘universality’ so soon after Taruskin’s own ringing claim for the ‘supremacy’ – recall Boulez – of German music’s expressive idiom (‘the most consummately developed technique ever devised’). How could anyone support such a claim, given that none of us will ever attain a fully ‘-emic’ receptivity (as the anthropologists might have it) to the ‘subjective feeling’, idealized or otherwise, on offer through the world’s unencompassable variety of musical techniques?

The second guiding thread I will draw from Boulez, finally, might offer a way to balance the marked tilt towards debunking critique that has characterized this essay so far with a more positive – though necessarily provisional – programme for further thought about ‘modernism and history’. Again, the key passage appears in ‘Corruption in the Censers’:

What does [modernism] consist of? It is difficult to answer very precisely.

‘Modernism’, says Baudelaire, ‘is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, one half of art, of which the other half is the eternal and the immutable’.

This paraphrase of Baudelaire’s famous 1863 essay ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ may, again, breathe a deceptive air of familiarity. But in truth, the slightly misleading nature of Boulez’s excerpt proves exemplary of a widespread tendency, in later reception, to read the essay too simply – as if Baudelaire did indeed locate modernism solely in that one, ‘contingent’ half of art, rather than in the dialectical interplay between this ‘fugitive’ element and a countervailing urge towards the ‘eternal’.

Maybe, after the waning of imperialistic ‘Histories’ and ‘histories’ alike, this subtler, dual sense of the modernist aesthetic could still prove of lasting diagnostic (if never prescriptive) value for further historical stories about modernism and its successors.

The exemplary aesthetic range that allowed Baudelaire to include both the little-known sketch artist Constantin Guys and a composer as monumentally influential as Wagner in his pantheon of modernist art can suggest the catholic inclusivity this diagnostic conceit might allow. In other words, if it permits us to ask – not from a *poietic* or *esthesisic* point of view, but in full appreciation of the endlessly rich interplay between the two – how finely any art whatsoever captures the most fugitive social, technological, or personal concerns of its modern moment, it might also invite us to weigh whether, and if so how, it refracts such contingencies through any

of the various concepts human cultures have occasionally invested with eternal value: number or nature; the nation or the folk; the mythic, the ancestral, or the sacred. We need not insist on such interplay in all cases, for the Baudelairean dialectic encompasses its own extremes – say, at one end, the non- or anti-art movements whose attempted subversion of all established sanctions of lasting value distinguishes them from more institutional modernisms as a true ‘avant-garde’, and at the other, perhaps, such rigorously conventional products as can be found within the more stringent reaches of the neoclassical and serial Stravinsky. **109**

It would be tempting to suggest that the same dialectic could even prove illuminating for musical encounters well beyond the post-colonial periphery of Europe, were that not just to court a different kind of conceptual imperialism. For apart from his oracular insights into Parisian modernity, Baudelaire also claims a prominent place, of course, in the history of Western exoticism – indeed, one all too exemplary for its overlap with a closely related proclivity for masculinist, objectifying erotic fantasy. To choose him as my valedictory guide, then, makes it all the more pressing to acknowledge, once more, the ‘subject position’ that has led me, in this chapter, to re-enshrine (even in challenging it) the authoritarian and individualistic historiographical perspective of a white, male, Eurocentric triumvirate – Adorno, Taruskin, Boulez – whose claim to speak, from their own subjective experience, for all of ‘modernism and history’ has long been open to challenge from a widely diverse range of other perspectives.

Maybe that choice of representative voices now seems a sad concession to Dahlhaus’s dispiriting (and fatalistic) suggestion that ‘the canon upon which music historiography is based is transmitted by tradition: historians do not compile it so much as encounter it.’ **110** But it might, more generously, be taken to reflect a (perhaps belated) need to reckon with those domineering voices at the current stage in ‘the evolution of my own thinking’ (see my second, Boulezian

epigraph). Maybe such a reckoning still holds some slight value even for historians much further along with the revisionist projects necessary to secure various ‘Others’ – from Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf through Berthe Morisot, Suzanne Valadon and Sonia Delaunay to Louis Armstrong, Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane – an honoured place alongside Boulez’s three *Belle époque* Frenchmen in the shifting constellations of ‘modernism and history’. It is with an eye to those more diverse vistas (and beyond, to farther-flung modernisms as yet unchampioned) that we could indeed grant the final word to Baudelaire, in the iconic last lines of his great poem ‘Le Voyage’:

Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,

Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu’importe?

Au fond de l’Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau*!

[We wish, the fire so burns in our brain,

To dive deep into the abyss, Hell or Heaven, who cares?

Into the depths of the Unknown to find something *new*!]

111

Notes

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- 1 William Gibson, *The Peripheral* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 282.
- 2 Pierre Boulez, *Penser la musique aujourd'hui* (Paris: Editions Gonthier, 1963), 14. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the French are my own.
- 3 Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History*, rev. ed. (London: Granta, 2000), 291.
- 4 Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1982), 36.
- 5 See Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity – An Incomplete Project?' in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 3–15; and Bertrand M. Patenode, *Stalin's Nemesis: The Exile and Murder of Leon Trotsky* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 193–94, 352.
- 6 Evans, *In Defence of History*, 248.
- 7 Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J.B. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 142. Dahlhaus attributes this idea to Wilhelm Pinder.
- 8 For instance, in my own memory (or reconstruction) of the 1970s and '80s, even as a new pop music canon began congealing around much-mythologized 'revolutionary' accomplishments of the '50s and '60s, much university music education remained rooted in the 'classical' canon – whose ancestry in modernism's 'pre-origins' Lydia Goehr was to theorize only a few years later in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). But I also recall the North American version of the music history curriculum I encountered starting to

draw on alternative ventures like John Rockwell's *All American Music: Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1983), whose call for catholicity of taste offered an opening towards the broader perspectives already long debated, in other contexts, under the rubric of postmodernism.

9 Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 6 vols., rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), vol. 4, xx. Cited hereafter as *OHWM*.

10 Pierre Boulez, *Relevés d'apprenti*, ed. Paule Thévenin (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 336. Cited hereafter as *RA*.

11 Boulez, 'La corruption dans les encensoirs', *RA*, 33–9, 33. There is no exact translation of Boulez's adjective, which invokes a discourse of national self-sufficiency.

12 See, inter alia, Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1996); Alistair Williams, *New Music and the Claims of Modernity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997); and Michael Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy: Adorno on Beethoven's Late Style* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); and Robert Hullot-Kentor's new translation of Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* (Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) [Cited hereafter as *PNM*].

13 Subotnik, *Developing Variations*, 40.

14 For example in *Ibid.*, 14.

15 See for example the later chapters of Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism, and Mass Culture*, which address important critiques from, for example, Simon Frith, Richard Middleton

and Trevor Wishart. Williams tackles the objections of Habermas and Dahlhaus in *New Music and the Claims of Modernity*, 18 and 37.

16 Subotnik, *Developing Variations*, 39. The reference is to Donald Kuspit, 'Critical Notes on Adorno's Sociology of Music and Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33, no. 3 (1975), 322.

17 Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism and Mass Culture*, 83.

18 I glean these core principles from a reading of all the works cited thus far.

19 Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism, and Mass Culture*, 69. See also Subotnik, *Developing Variations*: 'where Adorno does indulge in long passages of technical musical discussion [. . .] his criticism tends to be uninspired' (49).

20 Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism, and Mass Culture*, 115, and Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 15.

21 Berman, *All That Is Solid*, 28n.

22 *PNM*, 102.

23 E.g. *PNM*, 176, fn. 3.

24 *PNM*, 32.

25 *Ibid.*, 87.

26 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle', in his *Quasi una fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992), 273.

27 *PNM*, 151; 'Vers une musique informelle', 274.

28 *PNM*, 138.

29 *Ibid.*, 141.

30 See Arnold Schoenberg, *Wassily Kandinsky: Letters, Pictures, and Documents*, ed. Jelena Hahl-Koch and trans. John C. Crawford (London: Faber and Faber, 1983).

31 Stefan Jarocinski, *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism*, trans. Rollo Myers (London: Eulenberg Books, 1976 [1966]), 91.

32 Here I should note the problematic nature of the ‘generational’ conceit I have taken from Dahlhaus. In fact, both Cézanne and Mallarmé were of the same generation as leading Impressionists Claude Monet and Alfred Sisley (all born ca. 1840); Debussy referred, at a few points, to older artists Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Gustave Moreau (both born in the ’20s); different artistic *oeuvres* rarely evolve in lockstep for any long period of time. But Adorno’s sense of music sheltering under a ‘more developed’ art surely implies some sort of up-to-date affinity with, say, the most recent explorations of figures born from the late ’40s through the ’60s, including Paul Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh, Georges Seurat and Paul Signac, Pierre Bonnard and even Henri Matisse (b. 1869).

33 *PNM*, 63.

34 For a contemporary source that strongly reinforces this point, see the influential early essays of the young ‘Nabi’ painter Maurice Denis (1870–1943), as later collected in his *Théories, 1890–1910, du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique* (Paris: Rouart et Watelin, 1920).

35 *PNM*, 141. See also this typical inter-artistic generalization: ‘The inspiration of Stravinsky’s idiosyncratic attack on culture in the name of culture could be traced back to the strand of sensuousness in Debussy and Ravel, or in comparable figures in painting, such as the late Renoir and perhaps even the decorative elegance of Matisse’ (164). Clearly Adorno has not spent much time considering specific paintings like Matisse’s *Baigneuses avec une*

tortue (1907–8), whose tortured psychology (and sheer weirdness) puts it well beyond most notions of ‘decorative elegance’.

36 *PNM*, 173 n30. Strangely, Hullot-Kentor nonetheless finds in this essay a useful critique, before the fact, of postmodernism.

37 See e.g. Paddison, ‘Stravinsky as Devil: Adorno’s Three Critiques’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. Jonathan Cross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 192–202.

38 Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait’, in his *Quasi una fantasia*, 145–75, 147.

39 *Ibid.*, 150. On p. 199 of ‘Stravinsky as Devil’, Paddison simply drops Adorno’s hypothetical framing of the prior remarks in order to read them as straight ‘self-criticism’.

40 Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism, and Mass Culture*, 113.

41 Adorno, ‘Vers une musique informelle’, 282.

42 Subotnik, *Developing Variations*, 19.

43 *Ibid.*, xvii. Later, Subotnik refers to the ‘complex system of structural analogues’ between music and society by which Adorno tries ‘to maintain some semblance of interconnectedness and meaning in modern culture’ (49). The hedging language no doubt reflects her recognition that such ‘analogues’ and isomorphisms (e.g. between ‘polyphony’ and the actions of individuals in a free society, or between ‘static’ musical temporality and an historically non-progressive culture, see *PNM*, 18 and 40) rarely if ever rise above the lowest of ‘low hermeneutics’ (as later critiqued by Carolyn Abbate in her ‘Music: Drastic or Gnostic?’ *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004), 505–36).

44 Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism, and Mass Culture*, 132.

45 Williams, *New Music and the Claims of Modernity*, 37.

46 *OHWM*, xiii.

47 Evans, *In Defence of History*, 175.

48 *OHWM*, xv.

49 *Ibid.*, xi.

50 The question becomes acute at the many points where Taruskin deems some music or other ‘an analyst’s delight’ (or the like) – as if his own version of that delight can be presumed the same for everyone. The limits of that presumption become clear when, for example, he acknowledges ‘the arduousness and tediousness’ of his analysis of Boulez’s *Structures Ia* (1951) and suggests that ‘the reader is forgiven for skimming’. *OHWM*, e.g. vol. 4, 320 and vol. 5, 36.

51 See Taruskin, ‘*Et in Arcadia Ego*; or, I Didn’t Know I Was Such a Pessimist until I Wrote This Thing’, in his *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 1–24. [Cited hereafter as *DM*]. In his 2008 commentary, he writes ‘although I now find the account far too schematic and insufficiently nuanced [. . .] it does provide the general framework around which I have structured my detailed treatment of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (though without the zigzag terminology)’ (19).

52 See Dahlhaus’s admission that it is hard to conclude ‘whether the “nineteenth century” in European music history ended in 1889, 1908, or 1924 (i.e. whether the deciding factor was the advent of modernism, the transition to atonality, or the collapse of expressionism)’, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 335. See also Adorno: ‘since the

heroic decade, the period around World War I, it has as a whole been a history of decline, of involution to the traditional'; *PNM*, 9. Boulez refers at one point to 'that indescribably disjointed period 1920–30', and he asserts the historiographical point even more plainly in his encyclopedia entry on 'Counterpoint': 'the essays in linear writing that proliferated madly between 1914 and 1940 [. . .] are of an appalling poverty, while also originating from a completely false historical point of view'; see his 'Moment de Jean-Sébastien Bach', *RA*, 9–25, 12 and 'Contrepoint', *RA*, 286–94, 291).

53 Taruskin, 'The Poietic Fallacy', in *The Danger of Music*, 301–29, 305. The essay's title reflects its debt to a 'scurrilous little tract' (*OHWM*, xvi) by David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970). Readers might wish to see how many such 'fallacies' they can spot in the *OHWM* itself (I stopped once my list included 'the Baconian fallacy', 'the fallacy of declarative questions', 'the fallacy of the insidious generalization', 'the fallacy of narration', 'the fallacy of causation', and 'the fallacy of the universal man'). While the more insidious of such things are no doubt best avoided, others make me wonder whether Fischer's contentious term 'fallacy' might occasionally be replaced with the gentler 'compromise', given that every historian will have to 'select, measure, and classify' what they study (as Dahlhaus observes in *Foundations*), and present it, if not necessarily in a traditional narrative, at least in some similarly arbitrary discursive form.

54 Ibid., 329.

55 Ibid., 305.

56 See Evans: 'As historians, we clearly cannot recover a single, unalterably "true" meaning of a dispatch simply by reading it; on the other hand, we cannot impose any meaning we wish

to on such a text either. We are limited by the words it contains, words which are not, contrary to what the postmodernists suggest, capable of an infinity of meaning. [. . .] The fact is, as Dominick LaCapra sensibly remarks, that historical research is a dialogue between two kinds of significances – the historian’s and the document’s; *In Defence of History*, 106. Perhaps predictably, one of the debates he discussed focused on the Holocaust: ‘Auschwitz was not a discourse. It trivializes mass murder to see it as a text. The gas chambers were not a piece of rhetoric’ (ibid., 104). The stakes may be lower for music, but the historians’ responsibility to a reality beyond their own discourse is surely the same. For one of many instances where Taruskin affirms this point himself – and also, incidentally, reinstates *poiesis* over *esthesis* – see his challenge to erroneous discourse about the ‘arch-Romanticism’ of Pyotr Chaikovsky: ‘in fact no nineteenth-century composer retained a more thoroughly eighteenth-century outlook on his craft’; *OHWM*, vol. 4, 141.

57 *OHWM*, vol. 4, 686.

58 Ibid., 528. The works in question are *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (1919), *Sancta Susanna* (1922), and *Das Nusch-Nuschi* (1921).

59 *OHWM*, vol. 4, 719.

60 Although his chapter title – ‘The Significance of Art: Historical or Aesthetic?’ – opens him to challenge in light of Fischer’s ‘Fallacy of Question Framing’ (see earlier), Dahlhaus never puts this question so crudely in his text. The italics Taruskin borrows appear in a declarative sentence: ‘Music history fails either as *history* by being a collection of structural analyses of separate works, or as a history of *art* by reverting from musical works to occurrences in social or intellectual history cobbled together in order to impart

cohesion to an historical narrative'; *Foundations*, 19–20. In this form, it more clearly reflects its origin, with all of these historiographical reflections, in the practical difficulties encountered in writing *Nineteenth-Century Music*. It also seems, rather than a 'senseless binarism' (as Taruskin puts it), a practical opening to evaluative questions still fruitfully addressed to any work of music history – from Subotnik's 'life and works', Ph.D thesis to the *Oxford History* itself.

61 Dahlhaus, *Foundations*, 141–42.

62 It also gives rise to some strange contradictions. For example, at one point we read of the widespread 'ban on pathos' after the Great War, which led to a change in performance style 'of all European classical music, regardless of age or origin'. But a few pages later, we find that the exclusion of strings from a concerto accompaniment of 1923–24 'was characteristic of Stravinsky at this time. Strings were too "humanoid" and "expressive" for his taste (especially as they were played then, with lots of throbbing vibrato and lots of *portamento* or sliding pitch)'. *OHWM*, vol. 4, 475 and 491. If the 'ban' in question was indeed caused by the war, surely we need some explanation for its delayed enforcement?

63 *OHWM*, xiii.

64 In the 1989 review of an edition of Debussy's letters, titled 'The First Modernist', Taruskin notes 'many misleading attempts to pigeonhole him as an impressionist or a symbolist' (*DM*, 199). In the *OHWM*, after an account of 'Nuages' (*Nocturnes*, 1899) largely in thrall to the Impressionist cliché – and graced by a reproduction of Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* (1872) – he admits that 'drawing connections between Debussy and the impressionist painters was itself an exercise in impressionism, ringed with caveats (including the composer's expressed discomfort with the idea)' (vol. 4, 86).

65 *OHWM*, vol. 4, 78. I excise some identifying details that seem unnecessary here.

66 Letter to Henri Cazalis of 30 October 1864, in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes*, eds.

Henri Mondor and Georges Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 307. For a more public and famous variant of the same idea see the ‘definition’ proposed by Émile Zola in his 1866 article ‘Les Réalistes du Salon’: ‘a work of art is a corner of creation seen through a temperament’; Émile Zola, *Écrits sur l’art*, ed. Jean-Pierre Leduc-Adine (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 125.

67 In truth, the inspiration is usually attributed to a sculptural fragment, not a vase.

68 Similarly, like many Romantic forebears Debussy summons an imaginary landscape in the prelude ‘Les collines d’Anacapri’ by evoking the music of its human populace, through pervasive tarantella rhythms and a broad tune marked ‘*Comme une chanson populaire*’.

69 See my ‘The Song Triptych: Reflections on a Debussyan Genre’, *Scottish Music Review* 3 (2013), www.scottishmusicreview.org/index.php/SMR/article/view/44 (accessed 18 August 2017). Taruskin does include a lengthy discussion of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, whose references to Debussy’s sense of the intense ‘humanity’ of Maurice Maeterlinck’s play seem hard to reconcile with his Ortegan conceit.

70 Gary Tomlinson, ‘Monumental Musicology’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 132, no. 2 (2007), 349–74, esp. 353 and 356.

71 *Ibid.*, 350. Taruskin asserts that ‘Inclusion and omission imply no judgment of value here. I never asked myself whether this or that composition or musician was “worth mentioning”, and I hope readers will agree that I have sought neither to advocate or denigrate what I did include’; see *OHWM*, xi. The fact that he opts to devote a few pages to the little Satie-esque ‘Sarabande’ from *Pour le piano*, and then say almost nothing

about much more substantial works like the faun *Prélude* or *La Mer*, clearly shows how impossible it is to separate questions of inclusion and omission from those of judgement and value.

72 See for example this dry observation in Franz Niedermayer, *José Ortega y Gasset*, trans. Peter Tirner (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1973): ‘The Charleston and jazz music worried him; Ortega has frequently succumbed to the temptation of writing music criticism’ (53).

73 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner: Ein Musikanten-Problem* (Leipzig: C. G. Neumann, 1888).

74 Quoted in Niedermayer, *José Ortega y Gasset*, 21.

75 See Rockwell Gray, *The Imperative of Modernity: An Intellectual Biography of José Ortega y Gasset* (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 206 and 332, and also Niedermayer, *José Ortega y Gasset*, 75. Niedermayer later quotes a characterization of Ortega by ‘the brilliant Basque Eugenio Imaz’ as ‘the man from Málaga who fancied he had a German soul’ (115).

76 According to Niedermayer, of the ‘several hundred volumes’ in this collection, ‘about seventy-five percent’ were by Germans (44).

77 Here, then, is some wider intellectual-historical context for Tomlinson’s apt critique: ‘Debussy’s turn away from Germanic, post-Wagnerian orchestration cannot easily fit into the narrative of an Ortegan dehumanization that Taruskin pursues. His orchestration, that is, was anti-Germanic, like his unglued harmony; but instead of pointing away from emotionalism it carved out a new brand of affective warmth, distinct from German

approaches – one that would be exploited, soon and repeatedly, not only by later French composers but also in film scores’; ‘Monumental Musicology’, 356.

78 Inflammatory as it may be to admit it, the model that springs insistently to mind here is Wagner’s anti-Semitic dismissals of Felix Mendelssohn.

79 Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, trans. Walter D. Morris (New York: Ungar, 1987), 46–7. The first emphasis added.

80 *OHWM*, vol. 4, 421.

81 Taruskin, ‘The First Modernist’, *DM*, 200.

82 The piano piece ‘Golliwog’s Cakewalk’ (from *Children’s Corner*, 1908) is only the most famous of Debussy’s many riffs on popular culture, which extended from the ‘music hall’ preludes ‘Minstrels’ and ‘Général Lavine, Eccentric’ through the Dickensian caricature ‘Hommage à S. Pickwick, esq. P. P. M. P. C.’ to numerous pieces based on French folk song or the rhythms of Spanish and Italian folk dance. For Bartók, see *OHWM*, vol. 4, 444.

83 Both remarks are in *OHWM*, vol. 4, 380.

84 Taruskin takes the term ‘techno-essentialist’ from Christopher Williams, to criticize the theoretical approach to music as ‘a machine made of notes’; *OHWM*, vol. 4, 195). He often courts the same criticism himself, not least by treating Debussy’s ‘Nuages’ primarily as an example of formal organization by symmetrical pitch structures, rather than an instance of suggestively unfolding orchestral poetry.

85 Béla Bartók, *Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (London: Faber and Faber, 1976). The quoted words are in ‘Hungarian Peasant Music’, 304–15, 306; see also the reference to the ‘musical recitation’ found in *Pelléas* and ‘some of [Debussy’s] songs which were based

on the old French *recitativo*', in 'Harvard Lectures', 354–92, 386. On the 'absolute hegemony of German music' in Hungary before 'Debussy appeared', see 'The Influence of Debussy and Ravel in Hungary', 518.

86 To bring this point into relief, recall the reports of Ludwig Wittgenstein's fondness for whistling the tunes of Schubert's *Lieder* along with someone else's piano accompaniment. The same wordless exercise would be pointless (and ridiculous) for the vast majority of Debussy's mature *mélodies*. See e.g. Scott Messing, *Schubert in the European Imagination*, vol. 2 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 79.

87 Boulez, 'Trajectoires: Ravel, Stravinsky, Schoenberg', in *RA*, 241–64, 257.

88 *OHWM*, vol. 5, 19.

89 Boulez, 'Éventuellement . . .', in *RA*, 147–82, 149.

90 Boulez, 'Schoenberg est mort', in *RA*, 265–72, 271.

91 *PNM*, 165. Emphasis added.

92 Richard Taruskin, 'Afterword: Nicht blutbefleckt?' *Journal of Musicology* 26, no. 2 (2009), 282–83. Emphasis added.

93 Charles Rosen, 'Music and the Cold War', *New York Review of Books*, 7 April 2011, 42.

94 According to the *New Grove*, Taruskin published his first article in 1970, and finished his Columbia PhD in 1975 – well within the years overshadowed by the doctrine of 'mutually assured destruction' and (grimly) enlivened by a great deal of 'nuclear apocalypse' pop culture; Paula Morgan, 'Taruskin, Richard', *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/47125 (accessed 21 September 2017).

95 *OHWM*, vol. 4, 772.

96 *Ibid.*, 567.

97 Adorno, ‘Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait’, 150.

98 Boulez, ‘Stravinsky demeure’, in *RA*, 75–145, 77–8.

99 As always, one can admire the thoroughness and insight of such an analysis while questioning some its particular methods. For a study that offers a different account than Boulez of a very small span of *Le sacre*, while challenging the equally monolithic interpretations (in very different terms) of Adorno and Taruskin, see my ‘The Synthesis of Rhythms: Form, Ideology, and “The Augurs of Spring”’, *Journal of Musicology* 24, no. 1 (2007), 112–66.

100 Alongside Tomlinson’s critique of this aspect of the *OHWM* in his ‘Monumental Musicology’ (esp. 366–68) see also Susan McClary, ‘The World According to Taruskin’, *Music and Letters* 87, no. 3 (2006), 408–15, where she challenges his neglect even of such significant Western music as most of ‘that produced or deeply influenced by African Americans’ (412).

101 The reference is to Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978) and the whole subsequent literature it spawned, notably including Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993).

102 Boulez, ‘*À la limite du pays fertile*’, in *RA*, 205–21, 210. Needless to say, the artistic respect comes without any truly ethnomusicological sense of music and its sustaining cultures.

103 The whole preceding paragraph is redacted from ‘La corruption dans les encensoirs’, *RA*, 38. There is some irony in the fact that Debussy’s recognition of these alternatives only

arose through his experience of the self-congratulatory colonialist enterprise of the *Expositions Internationales*.

104 For one suggestive source for the idea that cultural differences extended to disparate historiographical inclinations see Gertrude Stein's little novel, *Paris France* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), 11–12 and 38–9.

105 Taruskin, 'The Golden Age of Kitsch', *DM*, 245–60, 250. This essay is puzzling to read against Taruskin's 'zigzag' superperiodization. When he explains the decline of opera in the early twentieth century with a single word, 'talkies', and then elaborates by noting that '[f]ilm, in short, could keep the promise of romanticism, and preserve its flame more effectively than opera, which had been the romantic art par excellence' (246–47), the question must surely arise: what did the volcanic emergence, in the '30s, of the century's most influential and 'romantic' audiovisual entertainment medium have to do with the supposedly ironic and objective 'spirit of the age'?

106 Boulez, *RA*, 37.

107 See e.g. T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); T. J. Clark and Anne M. Wagner, *Lowry and the Painting of Modern Life* (London: Tate Publishing, 2013); and the catalogue of the 2007 exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London and the Castello de Rivoli, Museum of Contemporary Art, Turin, *The Painting of Modern Life: 1960s to Now*, ed. Ralph Rugoff (London: Hayward Publishing, 2007). In the essay itself, see the early claim that '[t]he beautiful is made up of an eternal and invariable element, of which the quantity is extremely difficult to determine, and of a more relative and circumstantial element which will be, so to speak, one after the other or all at once, the fashions, morals

and passions of the present epoch'. Later, Baudelaire further underlines that first, 'eternal and invariable' element when praising Constantin Guys for his demonstration of the principles necessary 'in order that all *modernity* is worthy to become antiquity'. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), vol. 2, 683–724, 685 and 695.

108 For a more recent echo of the same sort of dialectical image, see Michel Foucault's characterization of the modern (post-Nietzschean and -Mallarméan) human being as an 'empirico-transcendental doublet' in the later chapters of *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

109 On the first of these extremes see for example Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), and Taruskin, 'Optimism Amid the Rubble', *DM*, 37–42, 39.

110 Dahlhaus, *Foundations*, 97. To be fair, on the same page he also acknowledges that '[f]or an historian to "receive" a predetermined canon [. . .] in no way excludes the possibility of his criticising that canon'.

111 'Le Voyage' is the final poem of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, 129–34, 134.