

Jonathan Cross

MODERNISM AND TRADITION, AND THE TRADITIONS OF MODERNISM

Abstract: Conventionally, the story of musical modernism has been told in terms of a catastrophic break with the (tonal) past and the search for entirely new techniques and modes of expression suitable to a new age. The resulting notion of a single, linear, modernist mainstream (predicated on the basis of a Schoenbergian model of musical progress) has served to conceal a more subtle relationship between past and present. Increasingly, it is being recognised that there exist many modernisms and their various identities are forged from a continual renegotiation between past and present, between tradition(s) and the avant-garde. This is especially relevant when attempting to discuss the reception of modernism outside central Europe, where the adoption of (Germanic) avant-garde attitudes was often interpreted as being ‘unpatriotic’. The case of Great Britain is examined in detail: Harrison Birtwistle’s opera *The Mask of Orpheus* (1973–83) forms the focus for a wider discussion of modernism within the context of late/post-modern thought.

Key words: Modern, modernism, Schoenberg, Stravinski, Birtwistle, *The Mask of Orpheus*.

*[W]hat an abortive neologism the word
modernism is! Just what does it mean?*¹

Taking Sides

Daniel Albright’s recent study of modernist artistic collaborations, *Untwisting the Serpent*, raises pertinent questions as to how one might attempt to define modernism. For the purposes of his book, he proposes modernism, tentatively, as ‘the testing of the limits of aesthetic construction’.² As Albright acknowledges, such a definition is not, in itself, sufficient. It could apply equally well to a broad range of ‘modern’ ideas and musics – whether they be the mensural innovations of the *ars nova* of the early-fourteenth century, the new expressive force of the operas and madrigals of Monteverdi in the early seventeenth century, or the theories of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Wagner – as it could to the specific

¹ Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, tr. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 81. I am very grateful to Julian Johnson for his comments on a draft version of this article.

² Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 29. He reiterates this position in *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 11–12.

modernism of Schoenberg's twelve-note music or Boulez's integral serialism. The problem lies, of course, with the word modern itself, which has accrued many (and contradictory) meanings.

A dazzling new study of modernity in the context of what the author calls 'late musicology' explores definitions and uses of modernism in a much more nuanced way. Indebted to the Marxist work of Fredric Jameson, Andrew Timms's theoretically rich discussion is framed with a clear (and familiar) distinction between 'modernity' and 'modernism', where modernity designates a period of social history that stretches back at least as far as the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, if not further, and modernism is an aesthetic category, 'a cultural period – beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century – that responds to a crisis of many degrees. Fundamentally, this crisis is one of modernity itself [...]'. 'Post-modernism' and its associated adjective 'postmodernist' then clearly denote a cultural period that emerges after modernism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Timms declines to use the words 'postmodernity' or 'postmodern' because one of his key assumptions is that 'modernity continues'.³ Central to modernity as a post-Enlightenment project is an engagement with human subjectivity.

The question thus arises: if modernism is just a particular manifestation of modernity, then what is so distinctive about it? How is it possible – and, indeed, why would one wish – to distinguish modernist art from modern art more generally? Or – to put the question round the other way – can we not learn much from an examination of modernism as part of and contiguous with modernity, rather than as a separate category? Is it not instructive to regard modernism as merely a symptom of late modernity? Musicologists are really only just beginning to consider these issues. This, indeed, is the focus of a collection of new studies that attempts to explore 'the modernism of the twentieth century as a chapter in a much longer story, the story of musical modernity'.⁴

Of course, a number of early modernists saw their work as categorically different from what had gone before. Extreme examples of avant-garde modernist art appeared to challenge or abandon entirely the principles of the art that preceded it, and placed itself within a discourse of fracture, crisis and opposition. Just as many of the social and political structures of Western liberal-bourgeois society were collapsing in the

³ Andrew Timms, 'Late Musicology: Recent Intersections Between Theory, Modernity, and Marxism', PhD diss. (University of Bristol, 2005), ix. Timms's sophisticated critical analysis of modernism and postmodernism has inflected a number of my ideas in this article.

⁴ 'Preface', in Karol Berger and Anthony Newcomb (eds), *Music and the Aesthetics of Modernity: Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), x.

early years of the twentieth century, culminating in the slaughter of the First World War, so the art of the time was also in a state of collapse. In music, the tonal centrality that had acted for so long as a metaphor for the unity of the human subject now came under fundamental attack climaxing in the total collapse of the system (and, by analogy, of the subject) in the hands of Schoenberg, Webern, Stravinsky and others. German Expressionist art, concerned as it was with atonality, formlessness, with the unconscious, with feelings pushed to extremes, with the aesthetics of the scream, came to stand as a model for all modernist art. Schoenberg's *Erwartung* (1909) is the exemplar. It clearly conforms to Albright's definition quoted at the start of this article.

Modernist artists were often quick to assert their avant-garde credentials. The futurist rhetoric of Edgard Varèse emphasises the radical nature of his enterprises (even if his actual compositions may not have done so as categorically):

When new instruments will allow me to write music as I conceive it, the movement of sound masses, of shifting planes, will be clearly perceived, taking the place of linear counterpoint. When these sound masses collide the phenomena of penetration or repulsion will seem to occur. Certain transmutation taking place on certain planes will seem to be projected on to other planes, moving at different speeds and different angles.⁵

The desire for a complete break with the past – a familiar thread in modernist thought – echoes the more extreme and violent utterances of the founding father of futurism, Marinetti:

Do you, then, wish to waste all your best powers in this eternal and futile worship of the past, from which you emerge fatally exhausted, shrunken, beaten down? [...] But we want no part of it, the past, we the young and strong Futurists! [...] Come on! Set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums! [...] Take up your pickaxes, your axes and hammers and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!⁶

Later modernists were equally strident in their denial of the value of tradition.

History as it is made by great composers is not a history of conservation but of destruction – even while cherishing what has been destroyed.⁷

⁵ Edgard Varèse, 'The Liberation of Sound', in Elliott Schwarz and Barney Childs (eds), *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 197.

⁶ F.T. Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' (1909), reproduced in Umbro Apollonio (ed.), *Futurist Manifestos* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 23.

⁷ Pierre Boulez, in *Conversations with Célestin Deliège* (London: Eulenberg, 1976), 21.

[...] a refusal of repetition, of variation, of development, of contrast. Of all, in fact, that requires ‘shapes’ – themes, motives, objects [...] . All this I renounced when I first began to work with ‘pointillism’. Our own world – our own language – our own grammar: nothing neo- [...]!⁸

And in America, for a rather different set of reasons, John Cage was arguing for:

[...] a musical composition the continuity of which is free of individual taste and memory (psychology) and also of the literature and ‘traditions’ of the art.⁹

Cage is an especially interesting figure in the history of modernism. If we accept for the moment that subjectivity has been the defining central aspect of all modern art since the Renaissance, then his embracing of chance procedures and the rejection of the omniscient, omnipotent role of the composer in the act of composition would appear to be a radical step in a new direction. Many have argued that this marks the beginning of a postmodern aesthetic in music (notwithstanding the fact that a number of Cage’s ideas are anticipated in the work of two of his early modernist heroes, Erik Satie and Marcel Duchamp). *4’33”* (1951), in which not a single ‘conventional’ musical sound is heard, would appear to stand in total opposition to the modern Western tradition of art music. By giving his player(s) nothing to play (indicated by the conventional term *tacet*), Cage would appear to be freeing the ‘work’ from ‘individual taste and memory’. And yet, even here, it is hard to escape the fact that *4’33”* operates both within as well as against the traditions of modernity. The presence of a published score with the composer’s name emblazoned in large letters across the front and a list of his back catalogue on the reserve gives a strong indication of Cage’s imprimatur.¹⁰ Aside from its ‘lack of notes’, in every other respect *4’33”* engages directly with the Western concert tradition in that it throws into relief the conventions of performance. David Tudor, its first exponent, presented it at the piano, in a dedicated performance space, in full concert dress and in front of an attentive audience. While the first audience may have been bemused and had their expectations thwarted, latter-day audiences have witnessed the adoption of *4’33”* into a canon of contemporary classics and know

⁸ ‘Concerning my Music’, for a broadcast of *Kontra-Punkte* (1956), reproduced in Karl Wörner, *Stockhausen: Life and Work*, tr. Bill Hopkins (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), 30.

⁹ John Cage, *Silence* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), 59.

¹⁰ Lydia Goehr has also argued that in *4’33”* ‘Cage has not obviously succeeded [...] in undermining the force of the work-concept’ (*The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 264).

precisely how to behave. At the recent self-styled world première performance of the full orchestral version,¹¹ given by the BBC Symphony Orchestra in the Barbican Hall, London, as part of the 2004 Cage Festival, the capacity audience applauded the entry of the conductor, sat in reverential silence for each of the three movements, coughed in a knowing way between movements, and again applauded enthusiastically at the end. Of course, the audience's behaviour here may well be interpreted as 'ironic', just as Cage's sanctioning of his name on score covers and the receipt of publisher's royalties might be said to have been intended as an ironic comment. The work's reception, however, demonstrates that, in distinct opposition to Cage's statement quoted above, it demands to be understood within the 'literature and "traditions" of the art'. In the case of Cage's *Europeras*, that (European) literature and tradition, and its preservation in the twentieth century by means of commercial recording, is literally present.

Returning to the statements of the radical modernist artists I quoted above, what is striking is, in fact, how rare such statements are. Experimental artists from Dada to Fluxus continued to assert their independence from tradition, but for the most part modernist art and music were fully cognisant of their (difficult) relationship with tradition. The most widely discussed technical musical contribution to modernism remains the twelve-note method, especially Schoenberg's formulation and its influence, via Webern, on much of the remainder of the twentieth century. In its abandonment of tonality and its rationalisation of the 'emancipation of the dissonance' begun with Schoenberg's turn to atonality around 1907, the method took on iconic status and even as late as the 1950s Boulez was writing that 'all non-serial composers are useless'.¹² With Adorno as their cheerleader,¹³ the post-Second World War Darmstadt generation turned their back on Stravinsky's neoclassicism and promoted serialism as *the* modernist way.

Yet Schoenberg's own writings tell a quite different story. Whatever the (allegedly humorous) context of the remark, Schoenberg's observation

¹¹ Cage's preface to the score makes clear that 'the work may be performed by any instrumentalist(s)'. His use of the very word 'work' here is revealing.

¹² Pierre Boulez, 'Schoenberg is Dead', in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, tr. Stephen Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 214.

¹³ Adorno's lectures at the *Darmstadt Ferienkurse für neue Musik* were highly influential. His setting of Schoenberg and Stravinsky in opposition, as in *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, played an important role in perpetuating the importance of serialism for the avant-garde. In Adorno's view, Stravinsky's music negates subjectivity and identifies with the object whereas in Schoenberg's twelve-note music a free subject still persists.

on the new method to his pupil Rufer that he had discovered ‘something that would ensure the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years’¹⁴ reveals an acute sense of the importance and relevance of the continuity of tradition. In his *a posteriori* linear history of the inevitability of the emergence of the method out of post-Wagnerian chromaticism and the ‘chaos’ of atonality,¹⁵ what comes across most clearly is the persistence of traditional values such as formal cohesion, thematic connectedness and motivic unity. The role of the prime form of the row is presented as being akin to that of the tonic in tonal music. In practice, the process of developing variation that Schoenberg identifies as being fundamental to the music of Brahms¹⁶ is also at the heart of his own music such that, aside from the absence of tonality, there would appear to be little difference between the aesthetic intentions and effects of, say, Brahms’s C minor String Quartet, Op. 51 No. 1 and Schoenberg’s Fourth String Quartet, Op. 37. As is well known, in later life Schoenberg returned to writing a kind of highly chromatic tonal music (such as the Variations on a Recitative for Organ, Op. 40, and Theme and Variations for Wind Band, Op. 43). Even the late twelve-note Piano Concerto, Op. 42 (1942) displays strong links with its later-nineteenth century predecessors, though only four years later he also wrote the much more progressive String Trio, Op. 45. Schoenberg’s pedagogical texts written for his students at the University of Southern California and UCLA betray a deep-felt allegiance to traditional values. The models presented in *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* are almost exclusively drawn from the music of Beethoven in order to impress upon the student reader the significance of organic coherence in music: ‘The chief requirements for the creation of a comprehensible form are logic and coherence.’¹⁷ As Arnold Whittall has written, what is most noteworthy is ‘Schoenberg’s deeply serious sense of the need to advance without losing touch with the past’.¹⁸

The radical modernism of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* and *Svadebka (Les Noces)* – embodied, *inter alia*, in their primitivism, their rhythmic complexity and their harmonic daring – was much commented

¹⁴ Schoenberg to Rufer, quoted in Malcolm MacDonald, *Schoenberg* (London: Dent, 1987), 29.

¹⁵ See Arnold Schoenberg, ‘Composition with Twelve Tones (1)’, in *Style and Idea*, tr. Leo Black (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 216–18.

¹⁶ See, for example, ‘Brahms the Progressive’, in *Style and Idea*, 398–41.

¹⁷ Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (London: Faber and Faber, rev. 1970), 2.

¹⁸ Arnold Whittall, *Music Since the First World War* (London: Dent, 1977), 142. A reworked and updated version of this book appeared as *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

on at the time of their premières. Yet very shortly afterwards Stravinsky appeared to have made an extraordinary break with his younger self by casting his eye backwards. *Pulcinella* was his ‘discovery of the past’. And while that particular work is as much arrangement as it is recomposition of eighteenth-century musical material, it heralded a thirty-year period of direct engagement with and reinvention of tradition. *Pulcinella* was the ‘epiphany through which the whole of my later work became possible’.¹⁹ It was in his six lectures delivered at Harvard in 1939–40 in which, in many senses, he presented his (or, to be strict, his ghost-writers’) neoclassical *credo*. Far from rejecting tradition, the past was now at the centre of his thinking:

A real tradition is not the relic of a past that is irretrievably gone; it is a living force that animates and informs the present. [...] Far from implying the repetition of what has been, tradition presupposes the reality of what endures. It appears as an heirloom, a heritage that one receives on condition of making it bear fruit before passing it on to one’s descendants.²⁰

But did this apparent *volte-face* make Stravinsky any less of a modernist? His younger contemporaries thought so. As Boulez wrote many years later, the ‘very survival of the language demanded choosing between what Adorno called “progress” and “restoration”, and nothing seemed more urgent than to make this choice’.²¹ And for a while it might even have seemed as if Stravinsky himself believed this. One possible motivation for his turn to serialism in the 1950s was ‘a desire to seem stylistically *au courant*, to do what the young people were doing and, if possible, to impress them in the process’.²² But a more dispassionate reflection on Stravinsky’s neoclassicism reveals as strong a modernist impulse as in the *Rite*. In many key respects, Stravinsky’s engagement with tradition is far more radical than Schoenberg’s. Schoenberg had never really broken with the past. For Stravinsky, the *Rite* represents an irrevocable severance with tradition, and his subsequent neoclassical statements are concerned precisely with exploring the *gap* between the present and the past, or even between different aspects of the present (such as between so-called ‘high’ and ‘low’ music). Though the material

¹⁹ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 113.

²⁰ Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, 57.

²¹ Pierre Boulez, ‘Stravinsky: Style or Idea?’, in *Orientalisms*, tr. Martin Cooper (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 349.

²² Joseph Straus, ‘Stravinsky the Serialist’, in Jonathan Cross (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151.

(which might include thematic material, formal stereotypes and entire genres) may be of earlier provenance, Stravinsky's treatment of it is entirely modernist. By contrast, one might argue that, in many of his twelve-note compositions, Schoenberg's material is modernist, but its treatment is conventional.

This is most readily apparent in works where the contrast between tradition and modernism is at its starkest. The first movement of Stravinsky's *Symphony in C* makes an apt case-study.²³ Here the adoption of the external dimensions of sonata form, with its associated intense motivic saturation and exploration of key, is an acknowledgement of tradition but from which the work's direct links are severed as a consequence of the contradictory underlying musical processes. In short, it is the unresolved opposition (a negative dialectic) between the implied continuities/directedness of the borrowed form and the discontinuities/stasis of the composer's attitude to the materials that gives the movement its distinctive character. It is all too easy to latch only on to the obvious and familiar elements of tradition, partly because they can be readily evaluated within the context of a conservative analytical practice (see below), and so participate in the dismissal of such 'reactionary' music from the singular, linear history of the twentieth-century legitimated by the dominant Schoenbergian (Adornian) reading. For Albright, the 'purity of form' of Stravinsky's neoclassicism – the binary opposite of the 'formless energy' of 'Neobarbarism' – is entirely in line with his definition of modernism as an attempt 'to find the ultimate bounds of certain artistic possibilities'.²⁴ Richard Taruskin goes one step further in arguing that the 'antimodernism' of Stravinsky and the post-First World War generation 'now seems [...] so much more modern than the "modernism", directly descended from Romanticism, with which it then contended'.²⁵ This is a thought-provoking inversion of the more established view, such as that expressed by David Lodge, who sees antimodernism as that which 'continues the tradition modernism reacted against'.²⁶

This leads inevitably to the conclusion that we are no longer able to talk of a singular modernism. It has been possible for some time in the

²³ I have discussed this example at length in *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Chap. 6.

²⁴ Albright, *Modernism and Music*, 11.

²⁵ Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1599.

²⁶ David Lodge, 'Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism', in *Working with Structuralism: Essays and Reviews on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Literature* (London: Ark, 1986), 6.

realm of literary studies to discuss early twentieth-century culture in the plural: the very title of Peter Nicholls's book *Modernisms* makes this clear.²⁷ Daniel Albright is patently writing 'only a version of Modernism. There exist many Modernisms'.²⁸ Modernism (singular) implies a grand narrative that would now no longer seem sustainable. Nicholls calls for a recognition of the diversity of modernism as a reaction to the tendency of postmodern thinking to caricature modernism as a 'monolithic ideological formation'.²⁹ Different modernisms coexist and intersect in highly complex ways. Schoenberg's modernism is not Stravinsky's; Cage's modernism is not Shostakovich's. And one might argue that what differentiates these various modernisms is the internal balancing of or tensions between avant-garde and traditional tendencies. This is at least a more nuanced position than that of which Stravinsky complained: 'Sometimes artists are reproached for being too modern or not modern enough.'³⁰ As we have already seen, Stravinsky himself fell victim to such reproaches: where *The Rite of Spring* was too modern (even though, in the *Poetics*, he attempts to deny its revolutionary status), his neoclassical works were not modern enough. But how much is too much, or too little? This, of course, is an idiotic question, but it serves once again to draw our attention to the problematical nature of a unitary definition of modernism.

Questions also arise in relation to the reception of avant-garde modernist art over time. Despite Louis Andriessen's claim that the *Rite* is still a revolutionary work for the twenty-first century,³¹ what is interesting is how the avant-garde of its day later became part of a tradition. Terry Eagleton addresses this issue head on, by acknowledging the inevitable failure of the (bourgeois) avant-garde to bring about its own downfall:

The avant garde failed, rolled back by Stalinism and fascism. Some time later, *Ulysses* entered the university syllabuses and Schoenberg sidled regularly into the concert halls. The institutionalization of modernism had set in.³²

²⁷ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

²⁸ Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, 31 (author's emphasis).

²⁹ Nicholls, *Modernisms*, vii.

³⁰ Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, 81.

³¹ Louis Andriessen in conversation with Michael Oliver, in 'Stravinsky and Influence', BBC Radio 3 interval talk, first broadcast 9 February 1995. Andriessen reiterated this view in 'Composing with Stravinsky', in Cross (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, 254

³² Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 372.

Thanks in no small part to Stravinsky's own efforts in turning *The Rite of Spring* from revolutionary ballet into canonical concert piece, its avant-garde credentials and their allied formalism have come to constitute a central strand of a particular modernist tradition. The modernism of the *Rite* echoes through – to pick just some obvious examples – Varèse's *Amérique*, Messiaen's *Turangalila*, Carter's *A Symphony of Three Orchestras* and Birtwistle's *Earth Dances*, but is it necessarily right to describe these as avant-garde (in the sense of progressive) works? Each of the works listed here reinterprets its modernist forebear to a greater or lesser extent, each composer makes Stravinsky's modernism his own. For example, even at its première, *Earth Dances* was recognised as a 'rite of spring for this decade [1980s]'.³³ What is happening here is that the progressive aspects of the *Rite* (*inter alia*, its primitivism, its layering, its visceral rhythmic organisation, its ritual) are being valorised over its more traditional aspects (its connections with the Russian nineteenth century, as teased out by Taruskin³⁴). Thus, the modernism of composers such as Birtwistle, Boulez, Carter, Ferneyhough, Lachenmann and Stockhausen is now more likely to be regarded as 'aged', to appropriate Adorno, or 'untimely', to appropriate Dahlhaus. These composers now represent a particular modernist tradition that persists as just one tendency among many within a postmodern cultural climate. They remain avant-garde figures only in so far as their work conforms to Peter Bürger's theory of the avant-garde, that is, that in general their brand of modernism tends to value the structures of the autonomous artwork over matters of expression or social relevance.³⁵

In this context, mention also needs to be made of the way in which this modernist tradition has been maintained within the (Anglo-American) academy via an essentially conservative theoretical tradition. The dominance of the Americanised Schenkerian view, which promotes connectedness at all costs, is echoed in pitch-class set theory.³⁶ The explosive avant-garde nature of, say, Schoenberg's expressionist works is defused by analytical readings whose ideological stance is essentially backward-looking. For example, at the beginning of his article on Schoenberg's Piano Piece Op. 11 No. 1, Allen Forte dismisses earlier interpretations that place the work

³³ Review by Nicholas Kenyon, *Observer* (16 March 1986).

³⁴ Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*.

³⁵ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, tr. M. Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

³⁶ Taruskin alludes to this in 'Revising Revision', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 46/1 (1993), 114–38.

in a tonal context.³⁷ For Forte it is the ‘first atonal masterwork’, abandoning its links with the tonal past. And yet the sub-surface connections revealed by the set-theoretic method are not so far removed from the sub-surface thematic/motivic connections one might find in Brahms. The very title of Forte’s article invokes a (contradictory) Schenkerian authority. While in its own terms I find Forte’s analysis persuasive because it tells me interesting things about the piece, what fascinates me is the author’s hard-line insistence on the total absence of tonal vestiges. Yet what is intriguing about Op. 11 is not its complete rejection of a ‘bygone aesthetic’, as Schoenberg’s polemic would have it, but the accommodation it makes between progressive aims and traditional materials. Is Op. 11 too modern or not modern enough? How does one set about analysing the work without taking sides?

British Modernism(s)

The contributions of key figures in Britain and Ireland to early twentieth-century literature and the visual arts have been widely acknowledged. Even though, according to one commentator, London was, at the turn of the century, ‘a city without much avant-garde tradition and inhibited by a conservative opposition with a proven reputation for outrage’,³⁸ certain kinds of modernism flourished. In literature, Joseph Conrad, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf were all leading figures of European modernism. In the visual arts, a uniquely English interpretation of Futurism emerged in Vorticism (promoted by the painters Wyndham Lewis and David Bomberg, as well as by Ezra Pound), while the ‘abstract’ sculptures of Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore were at the forefront of their art. Even in criticism, figures such as Clive Bell, Roger Fry and T. E. Hulme played an important role in shaping the British reception of continental modernism.

The same cannot be said for the most radical composers at work in the British Isles. There were isolated triumphs of home-grown modernism in the first years of the century, – most notable among them Gustav Holst’s *The Planets* (1914–16), a work whose radicalism nevertheless remains somewhat concealed behind its obvious lyrical programmaticism. But for all sorts of reasons, not least an anti-Germanism generated by the First World War, British composers were suspicious of continental (Schoenbergian) modernism, even though such music had been and

³⁷ Allen Forte, ‘The Magical Kaleidoscope: Schoenberg’s First Atonal Masterwork, Op. 11, No. 1’, *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute*, 5 (1981), 127–68.

³⁸ Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900–1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 209.

continued to be heard regularly in London. Schoenberg's *Five Orchestral Pieces*, Op. 16, were premièred on 3 September 1912 at the Queen's Hall, London, under the direction of Sir Henry Wood, founder of the Promenade Concerts, and leading continental figures (Schoenberg, Strauss, Stravinsky and Webern among them) were active in London as conductors of their own music. As revealed in Jennifer Doctor's extensive study of the BBC in the 1920s and '30s, the music of the Second Viennese circle was frequently broadcast in the inter-war years, alongside occasional programmes of music by living British composers. Doctor also gives an account of how, in 1931, Britain hosted for the first time the ISCM festival, showcase for the vanguard, but at which the host nation was represented only by the less-than-progressive music of Vaughan Williams, Constant Lambert and Eugene Goossens.³⁹

Despite this activity, it is striking that it had such limited direct impact on the development of the most prominent British composers. The inter-war years were still dominated by Vaughan Williams's 'nationalist conservatism',⁴⁰ evident in the folk-derived modality and nineteenth-century developmental techniques of, respectively, the 'Pastoral' Symphony (1922) and the Fourth Symphony (1934). This latter is a fascinating work as, ever since its première, its modernism has been the battleground for opposed camps: at the time it was rejected for espousing hard-line modernism (a violent chromaticism) and turning its back on 'English' values,⁴¹ whereas in recent years it has become the focus of attempts to reclaim the modernist Vaughan Williams from the grip of a 'pastoral and parochial image'.⁴² Such debates highlight all too clearly the ongoing problems with the word modernism and its monochromic application. Recalling Stravinsky's words, the Fourth Symphony has been accused of being both too modern and not modern enough. Surely what we should really be searching for is a more

³⁹ Jennifer Doctor, *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922–1936: Shaping a Nation's Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 212–17.

⁴⁰ Arnold Whittall, 'British Music in the Modern World', in Stephen Banfield (ed.), *Music in Britain: The Twentieth Century* [*The Blackwell History of Music in Britain*, Vol. 6] (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 17.

⁴¹ It is instructive – even amusing – to note the verdict of the English composer and commentator, Constant Lambert, who in the same year as the Fourth Symphony received its première predicted that 'Of all contemporary music that of Sibelius [and not Schoenberg] seems to point forward most surely to the future.' (*Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), 277.) With hindsight it is easy to dismiss this judgement, yet it reveals, in an interesting way, a persistent conservatism at the heart of British musical culture.

⁴² Alain Frogley, 'Constructing Englishness in Music: National Character and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams', in Alain Frogley (ed.), *Vaughan Williams Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 18.

nanced reading of the relationship between this four-movement symphony in F minor ('tradition') and the ferocious rethinking of its romantic harmonic and melodic materials ('modernism'), in order to come to a richer understanding of the reception of modernist thought in Britain.

Certainly the music of the generation that followed Vaughan Williams – most notably that of Tippett and Britten – has been evaluated more fully and critically. Despite various obstacles placed in their way by conservative institutions (in Britten's case being denied by the Royal College of Music the opportunity to study with Berg⁴³), they were able to absorb a wide range of influences from continental modernists, Stravinsky pre-eminent among them. But this did not fully manifest itself until well after the Second World War, when British culture and society had changed almost beyond recognition. In Tippett's case, Stravinsky's influence is explicitly responsible for a new, stridently modernist style that emerged in works from the 1960s onwards, such as the opera *King Priam*, the Second Piano Sonata and the Third Symphony. In Britten's case, the impact of Stravinsky's neoclassicism is felt more subtly in his harmonic practices. In both cases, the relationship between a lyrical English tradition and the desire to be 'modern' is a fascinating one.

In general, the work of the most progressive figures from the earlier years of the century, such as Frank Bridge (1879–1941) and the younger serialist Elisabeth Lutyens (1906–83), has been shamefully marginalised.⁴⁴ In their own time, without an institutional voice, they virtually disappeared from view. Bridge had studied at the Royal College of Music but spent most of his life on the margins of the main musical institutions. Though his early symphonic suite *The Sea* (1910–11) was reasonably frequently performed and made a deep impression on the young Benjamin Britten when he first heard it, Bridge's accomplished mature works such as *Enter Spring* (1927) and *Oration* (1930) remained hidden behind the work of more prominent contemporaries such as Vaughan Williams. His String Quartet No. 3 (1926) speaks in a lyrical, motivically intense modernist language as advanced as that of Berg's *Lyric Suite* or Bartók's Fourth String Quartet, with which it is virtually contemporaneous. Its

⁴³ 'There was at that time an almost moral prejudice against serial music – which makes one laugh today!' (Benjamin Britten, 'Britten Looking Back', *Sunday Telegraph*, 17 November 1963, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 52.)

⁴⁴ These issues are discussed more extensively in Jonathan Cross, 'Compositori e istituzioni in Inghilterra', in Jean-Jacques Nattiez (ed.), *Enciclopedia della musica*, Vol. 1: 'Il Novecento' (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 2001), 471–91. Translated into French as 'Compositeurs et institutions en Grande-Bretagne', in Nattiez (ed.), *Musiques: une encyclopédie pour le XXI^e siècle* (Actes Suds/Cité de la Musique, 2003), 575–96.

dedicatee was the wealthy American patron, Mrs Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, who was also the commissioner of such significant chamber works as Schoenberg's Third and Fourth Quartets (1927, 1936), Bartók's Fifth Quartet (1934), Webern's serial Quartet Op. 28 (1938), and Britten's First Quartet (1941). 'It was the generosity of this ... influential patron of chamber music that enabled Bridge in the later part of his career to withdraw from professional performance and to compose without too constricting a deference to the taste of British audiences.'⁴⁵ For Bridge, institutional validation only came posthumously with the publication of a number of his works by Faber Music, founded in 1964 to publish the music of Britten. Even still, he is better remembered as Britten's early teacher, and the source of that composer's *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*, than he is as a significant composer in his own right.

Lutyens has suffered an even worse fate. As both a hard-line modernist and a woman, acceptance by the main musical institutions was doubly difficult. Only in 2006, the centenary of her birth, are efforts being made (by the young University of York Music Press) to catalogue and promote her music in a professional way. As the Press proclaims, 'Lutyens occupies a unique place in British music history. Throughout her career and almost single-handedly, her prolific yet uncompromising work reconnected the parochial British musical establishment with the aesthetic and theoretical developments of the European avant-garde.'⁴⁶ This was in part achieved via an early fascination with Purcell, the counterpoint of whose string fantasias, combined with her discovery of Webern, inspired her unique version of serialism in the innovative Chamber Concerto No.1 (1939). Her twelve-note technique came to full maturity after the Second World War in works such as *O saisons, o châteaux!* (1946) and the Sixth String Quartet (1952). But it was not until the cultural 'thaw' that took place in the 1960s (see below) that her music began to be taken at all seriously.

1934 was a symbolically pivotal year for British music. It was the year in which two important representatives of the old tradition passed away (Elgar and Holst) and in which two key representatives of a new, tougher modernism were born (Maxwell Davies and Birtwistle). This new generation was a different breed. Neither Maxwell Davies nor Birtwistle was from the patrician classes that controlled the conservative institutions; both had attended state grammar schools rather than private establishments; both chose to continue their musical studies, first in their native north of England, away from the stifling London air, and later abroad. They had no need or desire to conform to tradition, and every reason to embrace a radical moder-

⁴⁵ Peter Evans, 'Instrumental Music I', in Banfield (ed.), *Music in Britain*, 240.

⁴⁶ See <http://www.uymp.co.uk/lutyens100/index.htm> (site consulted 12 January 2006).

nism. Alexander Goehr, fellow student and intellectual leader of this group of composers, wrote of ‘a certain Central European feeling’ about Manchester,⁴⁷ and it was via Goehr that they discovered the Second Viennese School as well as the latest developments from Paris and Darmstadt. Their path was cleared by a man named William Glock, who was appointed Controller of Music at the BBC in 1959, an appointment that ‘came as a shock to the musical world both inside and outside the BBC’.⁴⁸ Glock was a key reformer in British musical institutional life. As a newspaper critic, through his position at the BBC, and via the Bryanston Summer School of Music (later the Dartington International Summer School) and the journal *The Score*, both of which he founded, he was able to promote a very different kind of modernism across the United Kingdom and bring young composers into direct contact with continental avant-garde ideas. It was Glock who brought Stravinsky and Cocteau to London to perform *Oedipus Rex*; it was Glock who commissioned works for the Proms from many of the leading avant-garde composers; it was Glock who invited Boulez to become Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. For a while at least, the conservatives had had their day.

Much has changed since then. In the era of the internet, of the iPod, of multiple digital radio and TV channels, of devolved funding and privatised state organisations, the likelihood of another Glock emerging with such influence over national taste is slim (however much one might be tempted to argue that Rupert Murdoch plays an inversionally equivalent role for us today). Nonetheless, this brief history of modernism in Britain is important because, to some extent, we still live with the legacy of these swings between a conservative traditionalism and a radical avant-garde. Our responses to modernism remain polarised. Though a generalisation and, as such, easily susceptible to contradiction, I sense that it is still generally true that ‘traditional musical values’ (represented in melody and tonality), characterised by expressiveness, are the preserve of the intellectual Right, relying on popular appeal and the market to sustain them, while the ‘progressive avant-garde’ (including an on-going high modernism), characterised by formalism, is the domain of the intellectual Left, who rely, to a great extent, on the subsidies of the state via such institutions as the Arts Councils, the BBC and the universities.⁴⁹ Of

⁴⁷ Alexander Goehr, *Finding the Key: Selected Writings of Alexander Goehr*, ed. Derrick Puffett (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 30.

⁴⁸ Nicholas Kenyon, *The BBC Symphony Orchestra: The First Fifty Years: 1930–1980* (London: BBC, 1981), 289.

⁴⁹ I have elsewhere discussed a fascinating illustration of this situation. In brief, reception of Birtwistle’s 1995 BBC commission *Panic* – premiered at the ‘traditional’ Last Night of the Proms – was crudely polarised between a right-wing tabloid press

course, there is an inherent contradiction in the Left supporting an elitist avant-garde from the public purse: what this polarisation (embodied in my generalisation) blinds us to is the fact that historical political divisions are today breaking down, that the old Left and Right are now fighting for the same common middle ground, and that a crude opposition between ‘old’ and ‘new’, between ‘reactionary’ and ‘progressive’ is unsustainable. It is ultimately a deception to try to relate all twentieth-century (and later) music to a single, central modernist mainstream, predicated on a (self-evidently false) Schoenbergian model, to laud or chastise music merely for being too modern or not modern enough. Modern music is more sophisticated than that and deserves better. There exist many modernisms, and their various identities are forged from a continual renegotiation between tradition(s) and the avant-garde.

A Case Study

As a graduate student in London in 1986, I was fortunate to be present at the première of Harrison Birtwistle’s monumental opera *The Mask of Orpheus* (composed 1973–83). It was overwhelming. With the exception of Wagner, I had never experienced anything quite like it in the theatre: huge orchestra (even in the absence of any strings) directed by two conductors, a vast array of percussion, singers, puppets and mimes, a giant set, block lighting, electronic sounds filling the entire auditorium, simultaneous actions in multiple time frames, often inscrutable lyrics or speech that only existed in fragments. It was a veritable *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a piece of ‘total theatre’ in the post-war modernist tradition of Henze’s *We Come to the River*, Nono’s *Intolleranza 1960*, Stockhausen’s *Licht* cycle, Xenakis’s ‘polytopes’ and Zimmermann’s *Die Soldaten*.

The music, too, had an extraordinary power. From the electronic ‘auras’ that began and ended the work, via all manner of new formulations, it was the music’s avant-garde credentials (new sounds, fragmented and multi-layered utterances, and rhythmic energy) that were the first things to strike me. Despite the many lyrical moments in the work, it was its

who hated its modernism and dismissed it as a ‘cacophony’, and a left-wing broadsheet press who loved its modernism and praised its beauty. See Cross, ‘Writing about Living Composers: Questions, Problems, Methods’, in Peter DeJans (ed.), *Identity and Difference: Essays on Music, Language and Time* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 9–40. Whether or not you believe it to be accurate, the analysis by Roger Scruton (intellectual spokesman of the Right) of the current position is pertinent: ‘The avant-garde persists only as a state-funded priesthood, ministering to a dying congregation’ (*The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 506).

strident and confident modernism that made the immediate first impressions and that lived with me after the performances. The music for the Oracle of the Dead in Act II exemplifies this most clearly: wordless, loud, rhythmic, it asserts directly the aesthetics of Dionysus.

So when I was invited to contribute a book to a series of monographs dedicated to discussion of landmarks in music since 1950,⁵⁰ it was perhaps inevitable that I should choose to write about *The Mask of Orpheus* as both a landmark in music-theatre in the second half of the twentieth century (“opera”, after *The Mask of Orpheus*, will never be the same⁵¹) and, I thought, as a landmark in an uncompromising manifestation of high modernism. I discuss its modernist traits below, which are clearly an important defining feature of the work. But in 2006, twenty years after the première, recollecting *Orpheus* ‘in tranquillity’, what strikes me is just how much tradition is also represented in the work. What gives it – and much of Birtwistle’s music – its distinctive melancholy is the apparently irresolvable tension between the centripetal tendencies of traditional genres (recitative, aria and so on) and the centrifugal forces of modernism. In Adornian terms, one might argue here for a modernist ‘negative dialectic’ in which tradition and progress are held in opposition but never resolve.

Underlying the work is the well-known story of Orpheus as told, principally, by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. But it is clear right from the start that this is no traditional telling of the tale.

ORPHEUS is an Opera or, rather, a Lyric Tragedy, in which the myth of the life and death of Orpheus is used as a carrier to otherwise express the transitions from chaos to order and back again of music, words and thought. At the highest level, it is with the evolution and degradation of civilised man that ‘Orpheus’ is concerned.⁵²

In practice, the narrative is disrupted in many ways, thereby alienating the listener/spectator. Various versions of the story of Orpheus and Euridice, as well as of the subsequent emergence of the Orphic religion, are presented, but complexly. For example, there is not one

⁵⁰ Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: The Mask of Orpheus* (Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming [2007]).

⁵¹ Wilfred Mellers, *The Masks of Orpheus: Seven Stages in the Story of European Music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 170.

⁵² Peter Zinovieff, ‘Introduction’ to the ‘Explanatory Document’, a four-volume typescript ‘libretto’ housed in the ‘Harrison Birtwistle Collection’ at the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel. It was from this document that the much-condensed published libretto to *The Mask of Orpheus* was produced (London: Universal Edition, 1986). A slightly revised and expanded version accompanies the later recording of the work (London: NMC, 1997), NMC D050.

Orpheus but three: Orpheus Man (who dominates Act I), Orpheus Hero (Act II) and Orpheus Myth (Act III), represented respectively by Orpheus Singer, Orpheus Puppet and Orpheus Mime, all masked. There are similarly three forms of Euridice and three of Aristeus. More than one Orpheus can – and indeed does – appear simultaneously to represent different versions or interpretations of the myth. In periodic ‘Time Shifts’, events already seen are re-presented but from different perspectives. In the first such Shift, for instance, at the start of Act I, scene 3, the death of Euridice from a snake-bite is re-enacted in three slightly different ways simultaneously on three different areas of the stage. Orpheus, too, dies many times during the later stages of the drama, and in different ways according to a variety of sources: he hangs himself, he is torn apart by the Maenads and he is killed by a thunderbolt from Zeus. This is not, then, a simple, linear narrative.

The modernism of *The Mask of Orpheus* manifests itself in many ways.

1) It is interested in the primitive (the pre-modern pastoral tradition, for instance, of Virgil) and articulated via a visceral Stravinskian rhythmic virtuosity and prominence of percussion. The words of Wilfred Mellers in relation to Stravinsky would seem to be equally applicable to Birtwistle: ‘in the Waste Land of the twentieth century and in the wake of two world wars to destroy, not save, Civilisation, [he] restated the pristine savagery of the original myth, allowing the Terrible Mothers to rend Orpheus to pieces in revenge on his patriarchal pride’.⁵³

2) Its disruption of narrative (textual, dramatic, musical) and the consequent alienation of the listener/spectator.

3) An anti-Romantic attitude is symbolised by the absence of conventional strings from the orchestra.

4) It has a self-reflexivity and interest in its own materials. It is a work that to an extent is about song (especially, but not exclusively, in Act II – what we might call, after Monteverdi, the ‘Possente spirito’ dimension of the work).

5) It has a fascination with a technology that becomes foregrounded: not just the obvious and virtuosic electronic components, but also the technology of theatre and performance. Technology stands symbolically at the heart of the opera in the form of the imaginary structure of the ‘Arches’ that dominates Act II – a representation of antique technological prowess, perhaps, such as those glorious ancient Roman aqueducts, or maybe as a symbol of the declining industrial era in a late-capitalist world,

⁵³ Mellers, *The Masks of Orpheus*, 166–7.

like the viaduct that stood near Birtwistle's birthplace of Accrington in the industrial North of England. (Birtwistle began writing the work in 1973, the year of the oil crisis that triggered the end of a 'Golden Age' in the West and marked the beginning of the collapse of an era of industrial and economic success, and social democracy.⁵⁴ The 1980s, saw the – often violent – dismantling of Britain's manufacturing base under successive Conservative governments, prompting a very rare public political utterance from Birtwistle when he described the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, as 'that evil woman'.)

6) It betrays a Proustian concern with memory and remembering. 'I remember' is a phrase repeated often by Orpheus throughout the work.

7) The apparent absence of a single narrative vantage-point through the fracturing of voices (multiple Orpheuses) reflects a post-Freudian thinking about dreams, identity and madness. Compare this, for example, with Daniel Albright's discussion of Stravinsky's own *Orpheus* of 1947 in terms of 'desperation, ecstasy, [and] madness'.⁵⁵

8) The consequent fracture of the 'Enlightenment subject' raises fascinating questions about identity and its representation in the late-modern era.

9) The work's fascination with myth brings with it matters 'of memory and its functioning, of (cyclical) history, of symbol',⁵⁶ which, Christopher Butler argues, were defining characteristics of early modernist thinking.

'There is something absolutely fundamental about Orpheus – the subject matter is music, it's about the birth of music.'⁵⁷ Orpheus is the ideal vehicle for Birtwistle because he can carry so many of the composer's ongoing obsessions – with myth and memory, with melancholy and lament, with time, with the nature of music itself. Orpheus reappears in different guises throughout Birtwistle's works, and an Orphic lyrical conviction underlies all his art. Despite the modernist urge to fragmentation so clearly evident in *The Mask of Orpheus*, there is a deep resistance to this powerful centrifugal force, a yearning for the opposite, for a line, a narrative, for Ariadne's thread of melody that attempts to hold things together even in the certain knowledge that – like Orpheus's quest for

⁵⁴ The term 'Golden Age', marking the period 1945–73, is Eric Hobsbawm's – see *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1995).

⁵⁵ Daniel Albright, *Stravinsky: The Music Box and the Nightingale* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1989), 41.

⁵⁶ Christopher Butler 'Innovation and the Avant-Garde, 1900–20', in Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (eds), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 77.

⁵⁷ Quoted in publicity material from his publisher, Universal Edition.

Euridice – the attempt will always fail. Though Orpheus's head was severed from his body, it still continued to sing.

The extremes of the aesthetic experience tend to converge: in the Modernist movement, the most primitive art tends to be the most up-to-date and sophisticated. [...] In the Modernist movement, things tend to coexist uncomfortably with their exact opposites.⁵⁸

The opera presents a remembering or reconfiguration of past traditions with which it appears to have severed continuity. Narrative emerges through the work's many disruptions; traditional forms and generic types (pre-eminently from opera) 'coexist uncomfortably' with the more progressive elements. This is a source of the work's fragile melancholy and a symptom of its late modernity (as well as its high modernism).

By way of illustration, let us look briefly at the 'First Duet of Love' (designated 'aria') which occurs early on in *The Mask of Orpheus* but which echoes throughout much of Act I. As in the prototypical Baroque aria, it is primarily concerned with music. Here we have an act of reflection on a moment, when the two lovers, Orpheus and Euridice, stop to sing each other's names. The emotional depth of this moment is explored by means of extending it musically in time. At the heart of this Duet is a simple melody (in fact, a related pair of melodies). The sketches reveal that this melody was the first element of this 'number' to have been written.

The entire duet for Orpheus and Euridice – across the many interruptions and extensions as they appear in the final score – is written out in full in the sketches. Orpheus's melody is generated from sets of 4, 5 or 6 notes (Euridice's is slightly more complex) and each set corresponds with one statement of the names 'Orpheus' and 'Euridice'. There appears to be a logic about how Birtwistle proceeds from one set to the next, that is, there is a degree of linear continuity or narrative consistency in the way in which the melody unfolds according to a 'chromatic wedge' scheme. But it is only the semblance of forward motion because the line in fact keeps turning back in on itself, being pulled back to its opening pitches of G and B flat. It moves forward yet stands still. Such a notion of 'stasis in progress' was central to Birtwistle's thinking at this time. It emerged explicitly in a work of 1976 called *Melencolia I*, and the phrase 'stasis in progress' is itself taken from an essay by Günther Grass⁵⁹ which, like Birtwistle's piece, uses the Dürer etching of the same name

⁵⁸ Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, 30.

⁵⁹ Günther Grass, 'On Stasis in Progress: Variations on Albrecht Dürer's Melencolia I', in *From the Diary of a Snail*, tr. Ralph Manheim (London: Minerva, 1997; first published in German in 1972), 286–310.

as its starting point. It is an apt metaphor here, because Orpheus is forever lamenting the loss of Euridice, their love only being a memory which he is constantly replaying; because Orpheus makes journeys that, in fact, only take place in his imagination; and because Orpheus's quest to retrieve Euridice from the underworld results only in losing her again – he moves forward but ends up where he started.

Though the melodies were conceived as one large span, in the final version two important metamorphoses take place. Firstly, the melodies are divided into discrete chunks and then pasted across the Act where they are labelled 'extensions' of the Love Duet (an example of what, after Edward T. Cone, one might call Stravinskian stratification and interlock⁶⁰). In the course of the Act, we keep re-encountering the singing lovers, but their context is always changing as the plot has moved on. Secondly, each of the two initial melodies bifurcates and is presented by *two* Orpheuses and *two* Euridices (Man/Woman and Hero/Heroine). Thus, two related but different perspectives on their love are also presented *simultaneously*. Time and memory become central concerns.

It should be noted that, aside from the duet, other events take place simultaneously, other layers that were composed separately and then 'tiled' (to use Boulez's verb) on top. These include spoken text about 'remembering'; a background electronic aura; a series of percussion mobiles; a network of wind lines that proliferate outwards, heterophonically, from the central melodies to suggest an ineffable realm beyond words;⁶¹ and a number of independent layers that present a commentary on the central musical material.

Thus, despite its overt espousal of a high-modernist and avant-garde aesthetic, the modernism of *The Mask of Orpheus* is nonetheless clearly articulated in relation to tradition. The 'remembering' that is at the heart of the work is embodied in the musical and dramatic structure: trying to piece together a fractured past, yearning to speak of a centred, unified subject. It inevitably fails in its attempt but, in so doing, expresses powerfully something of what it means to be modern in the late-twentieth century.

Shifting Sands

Subjectivity is one of the central concerns of modernity, and it remains so for modernism. In the twentieth century – the most violent

⁶⁰ 'Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method', *Perspectives of New Music*, 1/1 (1962), 18–26.

⁶¹ Vladimir Jankélévitch writes – in relation to Fauré, but which also seems remarkably apt here – of music 'charged with the ineffable nostalgia of a past that has [...] flown away'. *Music and the Ineffable*, tr. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 75.

and ‘terrible century in Western history’⁶² – the status of the subject came under serious challenge. This was made manifest in the music of the early years of the century. In Schoenberg, by Adorno’s interpretation, the subject was alienated but nonetheless survived in serial technique; Stravinsky, on the other hand – most famously in *The Rite of Spring* – legitimised through repetition the liquidation of the subject and so prefigured the terrors of Stalin’s gulags and Hitler’s concentration camps. For both composers, modernism was understood as a crisis, the crisis of the representation of the subject where an irreconcilable tension was seen to exist between a fragmented present and a unified past. And, in various ways, modernist music continued to play out these issues throughout the twentieth century. Some have argued that it is only in the context of postmodernism – where we are able, in theory, to let go of such notions as the unified subject, of the autonomous work and even of modernity itself – that the crisis has passed. Perhaps, for the iPod generation, any notion of a fixed identity is an irrelevance. For one recent commentator, this attitude has to do with a new relationship between present and past:

Postmodernism shares with modernism a kind of presentism. Other literary-cultural periods in the past have come about when cultures have looked elsewhere, with a renewing attention to other periods, other cultures: the Renaissance and antiquity, Romanticism with its naïve archaisms and exoticisms, even modernism with its strange mix of primitivism and zippy contemporaneity. Postmodernism, by contrast, is concerned almost exclusively with the nature of its own presentness. Indeed, one definition of postmodernism might be: that condition in which for the first time, and as a result of technologies that allow large-scale storage, access, and reproduction of records of the past, the past appears to be included in the present, or at the present’s disposal, and in which the ratio between present and past has therefore changed.⁶³

The crisis of modernism speaks via a nostalgia for the constitutive subject that has been lost. For modernism as for Orpheus, the impossibility of a longed-for return to the past colours and offers a critique of the present; the relationship between present and past is continually being renegotiated. Postmodernism therefore represents a radical change because the past has now been absorbed into the present resulting in the mere play of surfaces.

⁶² Isaiah Berlin, quoted in Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 1.

⁶³ Steven Connor, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10.

The conclusion of a short essay on modernism is not really the place to initiate a discussion about postmodernism. It might well be argued that the position I have adopted here in relation to modernism is itself symptomatic of a postmodern condition(ing), in that it offers a self-consciously personal, geographically specific view that attempts to challenge a 'totalising' narrative of modernism and substitute a more plural, contextually nuanced approach (even while – I readily admit – notions of form and work persist). Of one thing I am certain: a singular, linear reading of musical modernism has not served twentieth-century history well. Future discussions of the relationship between the 'avant-garde' and 'tradition' will need to be infinitely more sensitive to the varied reception and interpretation of modernism. Like the very meaning of the word postmodernism, a postmodern understanding of modernism will continually be shifting according to the contexts and discourses within which readers/writers find themselves.

Џонатан Крос

МОДЕРНИЗАМ И ТРАДИЦИЈА
И ТРАДИЦИЈЕ МОДЕРНИЗМА
(Резиме)

Како дефинишемо модернизам? Реч 'модерно' је проблематична јер обухвата многобројна (и контрадикторна) значења. Она одређује како период социјалне историје у времену после епохе просветитељства, тако и естетску категорију која припада новијем културном раздобљу. Уопште узевши, може се рећи да модернизам представља кризу позне модерности.

Многи рани модернисти бранили су своју уметност пред изазовима онога што је претходило, покушавајући да оповргну сваки континуитет са традицијом. Био је то дискурс раскида, кризе и опонирања. Исто се поновило и после Другог светског рата. Други, пак кључни протагонисти отишли су врло далеко, демонстрирајући своју повезаност са прошлошћу: Шенберг (Schoenberg) је говорио о дванаест-тонској методи као о „нечему што би осигурало примат немачкој музици у следећих сто година“. Арнолд Витол (Arnold Whittall) је писао о „Шенберговом веома озбиљном схватању нужности напретка без губљења нити са прошлошћу“. Насупрот томе, неокласицизам Стравинског је схваћен као сувише обузет прошлошћу. Но, у многим кључним аспектима, бављење традицијом код Стравинског било је далеко радикалније него код Шенберга. Шенберг заправо никада није раскинуо са прошлошћу, док се Стравински бавио истраживањем међупростора садашњег и прошлог. Антимодернизам Стравинског био је модернији од модернизма који није прекинуо своје везе са романтичарском традицијом.

Може се стога закључити да има много модернизма. Различити модернизи могу коегзистирати и укрштати се на веома сложене начине. Шенбергов модернизам није модернизам Стравинског; Кејдов модернизам није исти као Шостаковичев. Оно што разликује ове разноврсне модернизме, јесте унутарња равнотежа или тензија између авангардних и традиционалних тенденција.

* * *

Допринос кључних фигура енглеске и ирске књижевности, као и визуелне уметности модерне с почетка двадесетог века, опште је признат. То се не може рећи и за најрадикалније композиторе чије је стваралаштво остало непознато. Средњоевропска авангарда није директно утицала на развој најзначајнијих британских композитора. У међуратним годинама још увек је доминирао 'национални конзервативизам' Вона Вилијамса (Vaughan Williams). Иако својевремено неприхваћена због подржавања тврдог модернизма, *Четврта симфонија* Вона Вилијамса (1934) данас, чини се, представља фасцинантну равнотежу између традиције (четвороставачна симфонија у f-mollu) и модернизма (оштра преиначења базично романтичарског хармонског и мелодијског језика). Као резултат крупних социјалних промена свих врста, послератна британска авангарда је напредовала, али је бојиште између 'конзервативаца' и 'прогресиваца' и даље опстајало. Да би се боље разумела рецепција модернизма у Енглеској, треба поћи од признавања егзистенције више модернизма чији различити идентитети извиру из непрекидних преговора између традиције/а и авангарде.

* * *

Орфејева маска (1973-83) Харисона Бертвисла (Harrison Birtwistle) представља сјајан огледни пример. Ознаке високог модернизма тог дела су јасне: огроман оркестар са два диригента, велика група удараљки, певача, ту су лутке и пантомима, огромна бина, осветљење, електронски звукови који испуњавају целокупни аудиторијум, симултане радње у вишеструким временским оквирима, немушти текст или говор који се јавља само у фрагментима. Но, пажљивијим увидом открива се дубока повезаност са традицијом. Оно што делу даје својствену меланхолију јесте очигледно неразрешива тензија између центрипеталних сила мелодије, речитатива, арија итд., и центрифугалних сила модернизма. У адорновском смислу, овде се може дискутовати о модернистичкој 'негативној дијалектици', где су традиција и напредак у опозицији, без помирења. Дакле, модернизам *Орфејеве маске* је, и поред отвореног подражавања авангардне естетике, јасно артикулисан у односу на традицију. 'Памћење' које је у сржи дела, оличено је и музичком и драмском структуром: оно тежи да повеже делове прошлости, жуди да говори о усредсређеном, јединственом субјекту. У том покушају очигледно не успева (баш као што ни Орфеј не успева да спасе Еуридику), али чинећи то, ово дело снажно испољава нешто од оног што значи 'бити модерно' у позном двадесетом веку.

(превела Јелена Михајловић-Марковић)

UDC 781.22:78.037/.038