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Review of Jonathan Cross's *The Stravinsky Legacy*

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At the 1999 Triennial British Musicological Society Conference during a paper session devoted to musical influence, the frequently repeated remark "that's how it's done on the other side of the pond" revealed that in some ways British and American musicology are separated by a common language. Nowhere is this divide more apparent than in Jonathan Cross's recent book on Stravinsky's influence on 20th century music: although informed by the scholarship of Richard Taruskin, Pieter van den Toorn, Allen Forte, and Joseph Straus among others, this study is ultimately critical of their approach, dubbed by the author as the "American School of Unitary Theory and Analysis." Cross is instead inspired by the recent writing of Arnold Whittall regarding musical modernism and Theodore Adorno's attacks on Stravinsky's music. The end result is a thought-provoking book containing valuable and original insights into the various Stravinskian traits adopted by later composers. In spite of these successes, however, Cross's book may be seen as polemical rather than informative by American theorists, for whose work the book was written as an antidote.

Cross identifies the Stravinsky legacy as specific musical traits that are prominent features of his style; these Stravinskian fingerprints include the composer's unique approach to form, rhythm, dramatic music, and the use of pre-existent material.¹ Each of the chapters in the first part of the book traces the influence of one of these ideas in the

¹ This last chapter, entitled "Minimal developments," discusses a number of features that link Stravinsky's works to the American minimalist school of Adams, Glass, and Reich. The use of pre-existent material is only the first of these connections; others include diatonicism, rhythmic process, musical stasis, and repetition.

works of later composers. This investigation, fascinating in its own right, serves a higher purpose. The initial idea for Cross's study clearly stems from Arnold Whittall's article on modernism and analysis,² in which he asks, "What is modernism?" By exploring the web of connections among 20th century works whose origins can be linked to Stravinsky rather than Schoenberg, the Germanocentric view of musical modernism is tempered. To this end, Adorno's writings on Stravinsky serve as a frequent touchstone since Adorno's dialectical view of modernism sought to subjugate Stravinsky's music to that of Schoenberg. Cross cites Adorno to isolate specific aspects of Stravinsky's music, only to show them to be part of the Stravinsky legacy. In this way, Cross ingeniously uses Adorno's arguments against him, much as Schenker's criticism of Stravinsky's *Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments* has been read by some as insightful analysis.

The first path Cross explores concerns Stravinsky's influence regarding musical form. Edward T. Cone's article "Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method"³ is Cross's starting point: he finds that Stravinsky's block structures—more specifically, the stratification, interlock, and synthesis of multiple musical lines—represent the composer's formal legacy. The resulting "discontinuous continuity" is then identified in a variety of composers including Varèse, Messiaen, Stockhausen, Tippett, and Birtwistle. The inclusion of Varèse in this list is hardly a surprise, while the links drawn between Stravinsky and the other composers result in some fascinating reading. The formal similarities that link Stravinsky with both Messiaen and Stockhausen are especially noteworthy.

Cross repeatedly invokes the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* as the ideal of Stravinsky's formal structure: the paths of influence he traces stem almost exclusively back to this one work, which helps to exemplify the details of Stravinsky's formal innovation. The *Symphonies* is certainly a revolutionary work regarding form, although it must be noted that it was only one of several works that Cone analyzed in his study;⁴ it weakens Cross's argument to identify a single score as the origin of Stravinsky's formal legacy. This same criticism is also true for other chapters, where *The Rite of Spring* and *Oedipus rex* are identified as the primary sources of the composer's rhythmic and dramatic legacies, respectively.

Cross next traces the influence of Stravinsky's rhythm in *The Rite*, the work which, according to Boulez, showed that rhythm could serve as a structural agent.⁵ More specifically, Cross is interested in Boulez's concept of tiling and van den Toorn's rhythmic type II, which both describe the superimposition of differentiated musical fragments. Messiaen described this Stravinskian process as "personnages rythmiques,"

² Arnold, Whittall, "Modernist Aesthetics, Modernist Music: Some Analytical Perspectives," in James Baker, David Beach, and Jonathan Bernard, eds., *Music Theory in Concept and Practice* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997), p. 157.

³ Edward T. Cone, "Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method," in *Music: A View from Delft*, ed. Robert P. Morgan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 293-301. Originally published in *Perspectives of New Music* 1, no. 1 (1962), 18-26.

⁴ The others are the first movements of the *Serenade* and the *Symphony of Psalms*.

⁵ Pierre Boulez, "Stravinsky Remains," in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.110.

and used the same idea in his own works. The links drawn between Stravinsky and Messiaen are entirely convincing, and Cross's summary of this relationship is worthy of quoting:

It is through the application of common rhythmic/durational procedures to diverse musical materials that Messiaen is able to contain otherwise seemingly disconnected—though simultaneously presented—ideas. The precedents are to be found in *The Rite of Spring*; Messiaen elevate Stravinsky's general rhythmic practice into a rational constructive principle. [p. 118]

Cross also firmly establishes a Stravinskian rhythmic influence on Ligeti and Birtwistle. His attempt to draw Carter into this web of relations is less convincing, however, for it seems that Ives was perhaps a more direct influence. Still broader doubt is raised over Cross's conclusions by his analysis of two Debussy passages ('Sirènes' from the *Three Nocturnes*, and 'Voiles' from the *Preludes* for Piano Book I), both of which implicitly call into question whether this rhythmic practice should necessarily have its origins exclusively in Stravinsky.

Stravinsky's impact on theater works is traced in the chapter "Ritual theaters," and here Cross uses as his point of departure Peter Brook's four categories of theater: deadly, holy, rough, and immediate.⁶ Although Stravinsky's dramatic works are not limited to any one of these categories, it is the aspect of ritual from the "holy" theater that is found to be his most influential trait. Cross's analysis and distribution of Stravinsky's works into these four categories is perhaps the most original aspect of his study, and suggests future lines of research. In spite of the originality of this method, Stravinsky's dramatic legacy as traced by Cross is not always convincing. Rhetorical weakness is felt in the following passage that places Reich's *The Cave* (and ultimately Messiaen's *Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum* and Boulez's *Rituel*) into this network of connections. The reasons for this rhetorical impotence—found here and throughout Cross's study—are discussed more fully below.

The link between *Les Noces* and *Oedipus rex*, at one end of the century, and *The Cave*, at the other, might be understood to be achieved via ritual works for the concert hall which do *not* involve any obvious theatre (other than the theatre of performance itself) but which still clearly have their roots in Stravinsky's music. The drama, the ceremonial, in these cases is derived from the internal structure of the music, often involving a high degree of repetition, and from the implied roles played by instruments within that structure—such as we have seen on a number of occasions lie at the heart of such works as *Three Pieces for String Quartet* and the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. Much of the music of Messiaen falls into this category, and not only because there is a Christian subtext to all his works. [p. 149]

With the links and figures involved in Cross's web of relations briefly described above, the type and strength of these relations—a topic which lies at the heart of this study—music now be analyzed. There are a handful of references to Bloom's "Anxiety of Influence," but for the most part Cross's methodology for identifying musical

⁶ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: McGibbon and Kee, 1968).

influence relies on the traditional factors of access and similarity.⁷ Influence of this type therefore involves contact between artists that brings about changes to one composer's style through the incorporation of salient characteristics from the other's works. Unfortunately, not all the connections traced in this study are so solidly established. In fact, Cross makes it clear in his introduction that tracing Stravinsky's influence is not his only goal when he asks the central question of his study, "What is it in Stravinsky's modernism that has informed, influenced and provoked later generations of composers?" [p. 9] By the end of the chapter on form, Cross makes his criteria for establishing the Stravinsky legacy even broader when he concludes that

Stravinsky's modernism... and in particular the radical structure of the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* helped to create a climate in which formal experiment, in which non-directed, non-developmental, unending structures, were seen not only as possible but legitimate. For these reasons alone, even though the direct technical influence of the *Symphonies* may often be difficult (and unnecessary) to substantiate, I would argue we are justified in regarding it as a structural paradigm for the twentieth century. [p. 80]

Establishing a Stravinskian influence as opposed to a Stravinskian climate are goals of a different order. As a result, the scholarly weight of these two objectives is directly proportional to the evidence required for their proof. Therefore, when Cross clearly reveals a Stravinskian influence, the results are fascinating and informative. Such an example is found when Cross links the formal construction of Varèse's *Amériques* to that of Stravinsky by revealing the intersection between Varèse's concept of crystallization and Stravinsky's block structure. However, when the burden of proof is lowered in tracing connections, the results are disquieting. This, unfortunately, occurs all too often. One particularly egregious passage links the formal organization of Stockhausen's *Kontra-Punkte* and Stravinsky's *Symphonies*:

In *Kontra-Punkte* each group of arpeggiated notes is clearly and distinctly defined/ opposed in both harmonic and instrumental terms. One by one, instruments drop out during the course of the movement to leave just the piano at the end (maybe a suggestion of instrumental drama, of Stravinskian role-play): the original six timbres, formed by fixed groupings of the ten instruments, 'merge into a single timbre.' Thus is achieved, according to the composer, 'the idea of resolving the antithesis of a many-faceted musical world of individual notes and temporal relationships to the point where a situation is reached in which only the homogeneous and the immutable is audible.' There is thus a vague but not inconsequential correspondence with the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, in that the final piano music of *Kontra-Punkte* has a similar 'synthesizing' role to that of the chorale in the *Symphonies*. [p. 57]

Here, Cross has drawn a connection between works whose differences significantly distance them from one another; this calls into question not only the validity of the superficial similarity they share, but the direct impact one work had on the other. This type of logic is not unique, for Cross's discussion of the impact of Stravinsky's musical

⁷ These terms are borrowed from Richard Taruskin, "Revising Revision," Review of Kevin Korsyn, "Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence," and Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition*. *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46 (1993), 117.

opposition on later composers—which begins with Stravinsky and mechanical instruments, leads to the opposition between diatonic and chromatic harmony, and ends by linking these concepts to Messiaen's use of "natural" birdsong within an "artificial" block structure and to Birtwistle's notion of the "mechanical pastoral"—is truly breathtaking. [p. 36-7] Logic such as this was attacked almost thirty years ago when Babbitt wrote

there is but one kind of language, one kind of method for the verbal formulation of 'concepts' and the verbal analysis of such formulations: 'scientific' language and 'scientific' method... statements about music must conform to those verbal and methodological requirements which attend the possibility of meaningful discourse in any domain.⁸

Babbitt is not invoked here to imply that Cross's study is without merit. However, the mixture of solid evidence and intuitive speculation he employs in establishing the Stravinsky legacy forced this reader to lose faith and to call each point made into question. Whether one eventually agrees or disagrees with the conclusions drawn, it is undeniable that this study is thought-provoking and of tremendous value, although informative in a way perhaps unintended by Cross.

Babbitt's "scientific" method is of course anathema to the so-called "new" musicologists, who claim that this type of musical discourse is conservative, elitist, positivistic, and emotionally arid.⁹ Cross obliquely identifies himself with this camp ("When the sea changes it is dangerous to be caught with your head in the sand" [p. 196.]) which explains his choice of methodology. The benefits gained from his approach do not seem to spring from a greater emotional involvement with his subject, but rather from a facility to draw connections without the full burden of positivism. It is undeniable that Stravinsky has had an enormous impact on the music of the 20th century; incontrovertible evidence will not alter the a priori status of this musical truth but will simply be offered as proof of a pre-existing fact. Persuasive evidence may eventually be provided for each of the connections that Cross traces in his study. Until then, there will be skeptics, for, as Nicholas Cook notes, "however little formal techniques of analysis may tell us about music, they at least tell us it in precise and explicit terms."¹⁰

Because formalistic analysis has fully embraced Babbitt's call for a scientific method of musical discourse while New Musicology has reacted against it, Cross's dissatisfaction with analyses published by the "American School of Unitary Theory and Analysis" is not surprising. He is especially critical of analyses of Stravinsky's neoclassical works, where issues of organicism and continuity—analytical goals of formalist theory—are

⁸ Milton Babbitt, "Past and Present Concepts of the Nature and Limits of Music," in *Perspectives of Contemporary Music Theory*, eds. Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 3.

⁹ A sustained debate on this subject has been the interchange between Pieter van den Toorn and Ruth Solie. See "Politics, Feminism, and Contemporary Music Theory," *Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 3 (1991): 275-299; "What do Feminists Want? A Reply to Pieter van den Toorn," *Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991): 399-410; and *Music, Politics, and the Academy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Nicholas Cook, *A Guide to Musical Analysis* (New York: George Braziller, 1987), 123. Formal theory here does not simply refer to the analysis of form, but rather the larger category of analysis that involves the coding of music into symbols, the organization of which helps to determine the musical structure.

notoriously difficult to quantify. In the chapter "A fresh look at Stravinsky analysis," Cross presents his own analyses of the *Symphony in Three Movements* and the *Symphony in C*. These analyses are meant to be more reflective of the competing tendencies within these works, tendencies towards organicism and continuity in their reflection of the musical past, and towards collage and discontinuity in the recasting of this musical past in a post-tonal context. Indeed, Cross's analyses never pigeonhole, but instead reach multivalent conclusions such as "this music is simultaneously static and dynamic" (p. 222) and "[competing tendencies] are held in balance in a chord that suggests simultaneous resolution and non-resolution." (p. 223)

Cross successfully identifies the competing impulses within these scores. Yet the theoretical insights provided is negligible, for while he accurately describes individual contexts, no attempt is made to generalize these insights into a theory applicable elsewhere.¹¹ Cone's theory of stratification, interlock, and synthesis, which features so prominently in the opening chapter of Cross's study, provides an interesting comparison here: this theory accounts for the discontinuities that disrupt the musical surface, while simultaneously attentive to the competing tendencies towards unification. Further, this model is applicable to any work that exhibits these same formal phenomena, and can adjust to the unique characteristics of any such score. Cone's theory would therefore seem to satisfy the requirements of both New Musicologists and formal theorists. This is not to suggest that Cone's theory is the analytic panacea for neoclassicism in general. Rather, it is mentioned here since it represents the ideal towards which theorists should strive in their consideration of this repertory. Because Cross's own analyses meet only the requirements of New Musicology, it is unlikely his methodology will be adopted by other analysts.

¹¹ This would seem to be a requirement for his goal here, the analytic rehearing of Stravinsky's neoclassicism to expand our understanding of the composer's modernist tendencies, which Cross maintains is currently based on Stravinsky's Russian works alone.