Stravinsky, *Les Noces* (*Svadebka*), and the Prohibition against Expressive Timing

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Scored for vocal soloists, chorus, four pianos, and percussion, the final 1923 version of Stravinsky's *Les Noces* (*Svadebka*) remains to this day startling and problematic. Coming on the heels of a near decade-long search for a suitable instrumental guise (1913–23), the final arrangement was later described by the composer as "perfectly homogeneous, perfectly impersonal, and perfectly mechanical."[1] And there can be few qualms at least in principle with this description, the references to the "impersonal" and the "mechanical" perhaps above all.

At the same time, however, there are practical considerations. After two or so tableaux, the four "elephantine" pianos (as Stravinsky described them),[2] pounding away often chordally as a form of accompaniment to the vocal soloists and chorus, can sound monotonous. The effect can be like that of an arrangement, which is in fact what the final version is, at least in part: a rendition of something conceived earlier for very different instruments.[3] Even the tempo changes are of little

[1] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 134.

[2] Ibid., 133.

[3] Several arrangements preceded the 1923 version of *Les Noces*, the most extensive of these having been a 1919 version of the first two tableaux for harmonium, pianola, and two cimbaloms. An account of these earlier arrangements, based on an extensive study of the available sketches and drafts, will be published in *Stravinsky and "Les Noces": Accent, Ritual, and the Secrets of Style*, a book currently in its final stages of completion and authored by Margarita Mazo and myself. See also the following: the lengthy study of

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help in this regard. Often closely related and held metronomically in check, their effect on the listener is likely to be controlling rather than contrasting or releasing.

In an interview dating from January 1925, the composer pointed to the "intransigent" quality of *Les Noces,* the demands of the material for a sharp, percussive approach, "nothing so human as strings."[4] Yet the many sacrifices are difficult to ignore, including the compositional detail in an early sketch of the octatonic passage at rehearsal no.11 in the first tableau, transcribed here in Example 2.[5] The sketch is from the second version of *Les Noces,*[6] dating from 1915 and scored for double string quintet; it may be compared in Example 3 to the final version. Missing in the latter is the detailed part writing of the early sketch. Consisting in the main of a superimposition of tritone-related (0 2 3 5) Dorian tetrachords, the passage includes B A G♯ F♯ in the accompanying parts, F E♭ (D) C in the bass solo. (The octatonicism here is slightly impaired; the B♭ lies outside of the octatonic transposition in question, namely, Collection II.) The intricate working out of the parts in the early draft is missing from the later version, which is not only more percussive and mechanical (like wallpaper, in fact), but also more plain and direct. In this respect, there is less invention in the final version.

On the other hand, what may compel is precisely the hardness of this version, the stiff, percussive nature of the articulation, qualities of Stravinsky's early music that lie at the heart of much of the criticism leveled over the past century or so; a relentless and often literal repetition of themes, motives, and chords combined with a demand for a metrical beat that was inflexible and without "expressive fluctuation" (as T. W. Adorno termed it), without a traditional sense of "nuance."[7]

Les Noces in Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through "Marva"* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996), 1319–86; the earlier discussions of *Les Noces* in Margarita Mazo, "Stravinsky's *Les Noces* And Russian Village Wedding Ritual," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 43 (1990): 99–142; and Pieter C. van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), 155–77.

[4] *Musical America,* January 10, 1925. Quoted in Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 622.

[5] The vast majority of the available sketches and drafts of *Les Noces* are housed at the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel, Switzerland. This includes the sketch transcribed here in Ex. 2.

[6] See n3.

[7] Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music,* trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (New York: Seaburg Press,1973), 154. Among Adorno's many complaints about the rhythmic-metric character of Stravinsky's music was its apparent ban on expressive timing, the need in performance for a metronomic adherence of the beat, for an absence of any "subjectively expressive fluctuation of the beat." Much of the specific criticism of Stravinsky's music in Adorno's writings, criticism above all of the repetitive features, the mechanical beat, static harmony, and lack of a traditional sense of development, is not altogether different from what it is in Cecil Gray, *A Survey of Contemporary*

Shown in Table 1 is a sampling of the analytical descriptions contained in T. W. Adorno's celebrated indictment of Stravinsky's music. Drawn from Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music*[8] and a later article entitled "Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait,"[9] the descriptions, often incomplete and fragmentary in the writings themselves, are here pieced together in the form of a single train of thought. Adorno himself avoided schemes of this kind, as has been noted in a number of recent publications,[10] but they are hard to ignore when attempting a closer look at the description along lines that are more specifically musical.

The stylistic features cited in Table 1 are traceable to a single musical condition, namely that of metrical displacement. Two subsidiary conditions result from displacement: 1) metrical beats which are maintained inflexibly (lacking in expressive timing, in other words), and 2) a repetition of themes, motives and chords that is relentless, literal, and lacking in the traditional modes of elaboration or "developing variation."[11] In turn, these conditions spawn a host of characterizations

Music (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1924), or in Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935). Criticism of the static quality of Stravinsky's harmony is no less severe in Pierre Boulez's writings of the 1950s. See Pierre Boulez, *Notes of An Apprenticeship,* trans. Herbert Weinstock (New York: Knopf, 1968), 74. Superimposition is viewed by Boulez as an "irreducible aggregation," a "coagulation" which creates for the superimposed fragments a "false counterpoint," all of this "eminently static in the sense that it coagulates the space-sound into a series of unvarying stages . . . and in the sense that it annuls the entire logic of the development." For further discussion of these issues, see van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky,* 61–66.

[8] See n7.

[9] Theodor W. Adorno, "Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait" (1962), in Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verse, 1998), 145–75.

[10] The unsystematic nature of Adorno's approach is discussed in Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 19–20. See also Julian Johnson, "Analysis in Adorno's Aesthetics of Music," *Music Analysis* 14 (1995): 296–97.

[11] Championed in Adorno's music criticism generally is the thematic-motivic model of the Classical style, or "developing variation" (as Schoenberg called it), whereby motivic particles, detached from thematic shapes, are varied, developed, and finally transformed. Adorno underscored the identity-nonidentity dialectic underlying the process, the way in which "the musical element subjects itself to logical dynamic change while simultaneously retaining its original identity": see Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1991), 20. Adorno's own references to these dynamics are sketchy and scattered, however. See T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge, 1989), 477–78, and "Vers une musique informelle" (1961), in Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia,* 283–84. Adorno's approach to analysis is discussed in Johnson, "Analysis in Adorno's Aesthetics of Music," 295–313, while Adorno's critique of Stravinsky's music along these lines is discussed in Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 227–34. Adorno's point of departure on matters of the motive and its "developing variation" was Schoenberg, as represented by the latter's music and critical writings. See especially Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition,* ed. Gerald Strang and Leonard Stein

which, although relatively concrete, neutral, and observational to begin with, are increasingly less so further on down the line. The more specific the imagery, in fact, the less tangible and more speculative. On the left-hand side of Table 1, the need for strictly held meters is made to imply mechanization and impersonality, while mechanization leads to "anti-humanism" and a "collective" voice that stands in opposition to the individual.[12] On the right-hand side, the lack of variation in the repetition of Stravinsky's themes and motives is made to imply a similar identification with the "murderous collective,"[13] as Adorno expressed it, with various "agents of destruction."[14]

Stravinsky's "identification with the collective" is thus "primitive" and pre-individual in Adorno's imagination.[15] The repetitive features of his music are ritualistic in this respect, symbolic of something stiff and unyielding, more specifically here, the refusal of the collective voice to give way to the variations of the individual. Locked in repetitive gesture, the "musical subject" is unable to move beyond the trance-like stupor of ritual. These conditions are contrasted with the developmental style of the Classical tradition which, drawn in large part from Schoenberg's analytic-theoretical definitions, symbolized for Adorno the ability of the subject to mature with time, to meet the day's challenges, and to develop accordingly.[16] While ritual and ritual-like repetition represented a form of enslavement, developing variation represented relative freedom. This was the musical opposition Adorno sought to reveal, the split he attributed to Stravinsky's music and its tear from tradition and traditional sensibility.

While the descriptive terms in Table 1 are Adorno's, the outline converts much of the description and characterization into stylistic features of one kind or another, features which are connected and arranged in the form of an explanatory path. A larger rationale has thus been sought for the stylistic features acknowledged in one way or another, an

(London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 1–19. See also Walter Frisch, *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), and, most recently, Ethan Haimo, "Developing Variation and Schoenberg's Twelve-Tone Music," *Music Analysis* 16 (1997): 349–65.

[12] Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music,* 160.

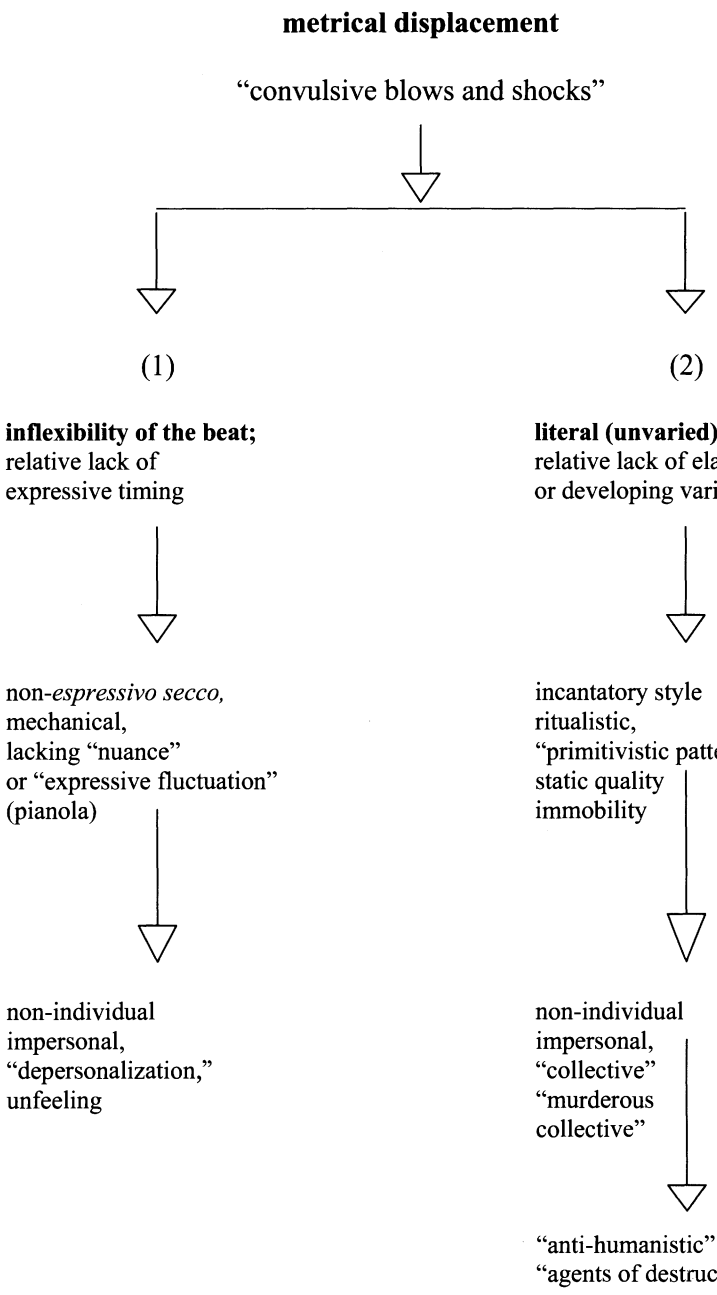
[13] Adorno, "Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait," 149.

[14] Ibid., 149.

[15] Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music,* 145–47, 157–60.

[16] Ibid., 154. Some of the aesthetic and sociological implications of these opposing worlds are addressed at greater length in Robert Adlington, "Musical Temporality: Perspectives from Adorno and de Man," *repercussions* 6 (1997): 12–13. While, with the developmental style, "maturation implies the ability to cope with, and develop in response to, changing circumstances," the "regressive" features of Stravinsky's music denote "a reversion to infantilistic modes of behavior." For Adorno, "repetition represents an infantile denial of time . . . while development signals proper recognition of the temporal condition."

TABLE 1. Adorno's representation of metrical displacement

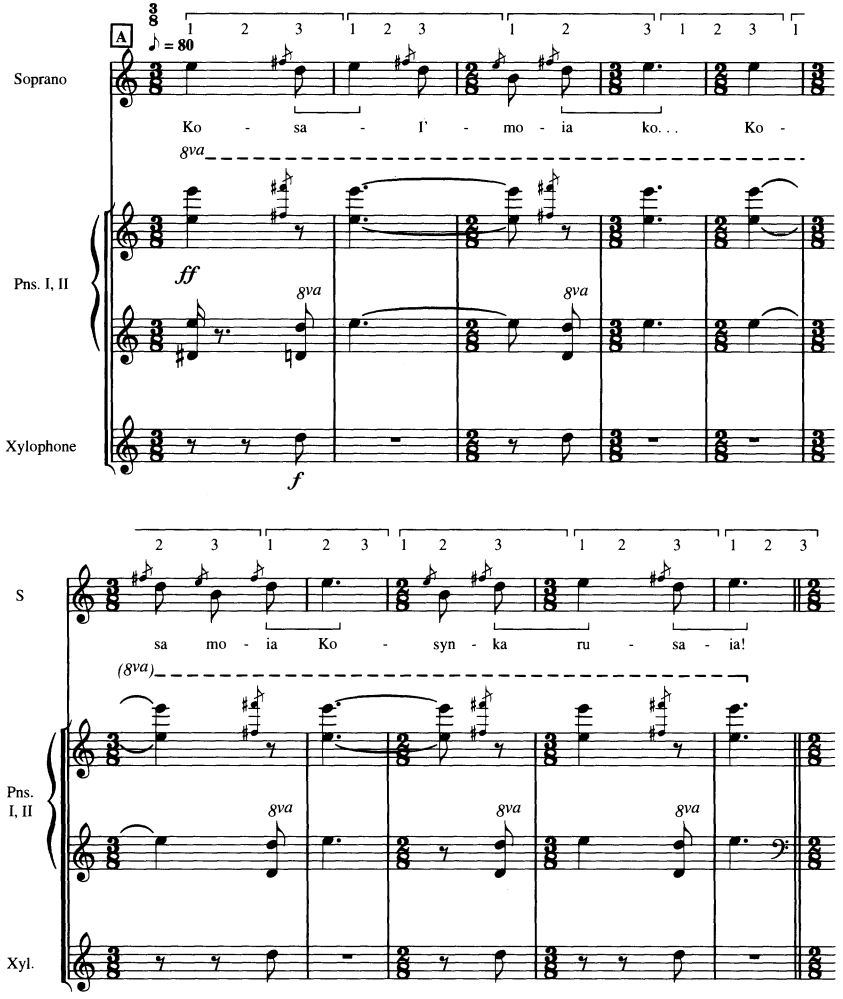


explanation in more specifically musical terms: What it is that binds the various features, motivates or triggers one in relation to the others. The features themselves are not isolated phenomena, in other words; they interact in ways that vary complexly from one context to the next. There are concrete reasons for the lack of traditional variation and development in Stravinsky's music, just as there are reasons for the strict metricality often demanded in its performance.

Consideration of Example 1 makes it clear that the rules and regulations governing the repetition in the opening two blocks of *Les Noces* could not be tighter. With the pitch E as the point of departure and return, melody consists of a reiteration of but three pitches, E, D, and B, pitches which together form the trichord (0 2 5); F♯ is sounded as a grace-note to the D. The confinement of this content extends to subsequent restatements of blocks A and B throughout the first tableau as well. More telling still is the tiny motive D-to-E, bracketed just beneath the soprano staff in Example 1. Falling over the bar line, repeats of this motive (five occurrences in block A) are without elaboration, transposition, or changes in dynamics or instrumental assignment. Each repeat is a carbon copy of the next. The D is inflected by the grace note F♯, enters fortissimo, and is doubled massively by the accompanying parts in the pianos and xylophone. There are no modifications to this routine. From start to finish, features of the motive are held rigidly in place.

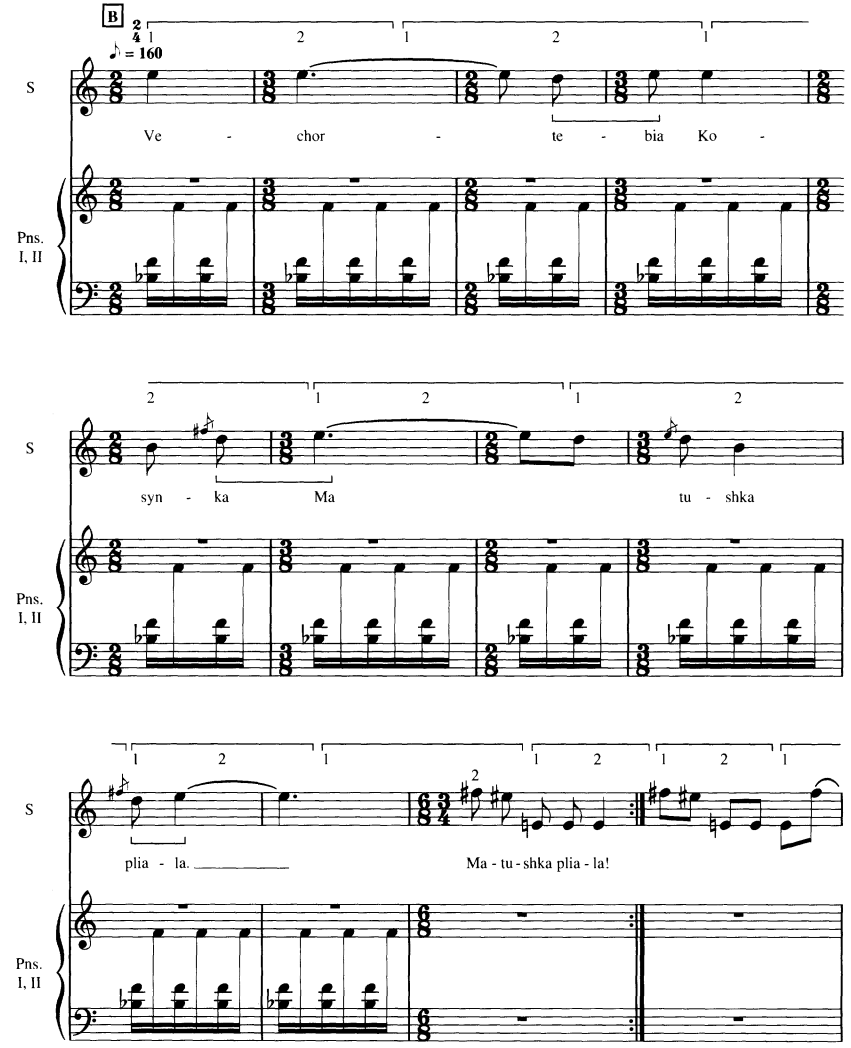
A partial explanation for this immobility rests with the pattern of displacement that lies concealed beneath the notation. Against the backdrop of the various components held in place, returns to E as the point of departure vary. With all other components held immobile, the spans between these returns number three or sometimes five eighth-note beats. This of course means that the alignment will vary. If the $\frac{3}{8}$ meter of the opening measures is pursued through the whole of block A, repeats of the motive will be read as a series of displacements, as shown by the brackets in Example 1: For the main soprano line alone, the notated irregular meter is reproduced in Example 4a, while just below in Example 4b, the passage is rebarred by way of the steady $\frac{3}{8}$ meter. Although irregular insofar as the spans are concerned, the series of displaced repeats forms a cycle: If the $\frac{3}{8}$ bar line is considered by itself, the motive shifts from the third beat of a $\frac{3}{8}$ measure to the second and first beats, respectively, before arriving back on the third beat for two concluding repeats. Significantly, too, the two conflicting barrings arrive "on target" as the passage draws to a close. They intersect with the return of the original alignment of the motive, providing the downbeats of the concluding measures with a sense of resolution. The departures of the previous measures are thus followed by a return and arrival point.

EXAMPLE 1. Stravinsky, *Les Noces,* first tableau, opening



This is the nature of the invention by which opposing forces are set in motion: metrical parallelism on one hand, displacement and the steady meter on which displacement hinges on the other. With the first of these forces, outlined in Example 4a, a motive and its repeats are aligned in a fashion that is metrically parallel; the meter shifts in order that the alignment of the D-to-E motive might be held constant. And constancies of this kind are the source of much of the notated metrical irregularity in Stravinsky's music, above all in works of the early Russian period. With the second of the two forces, Example 4b, the steady

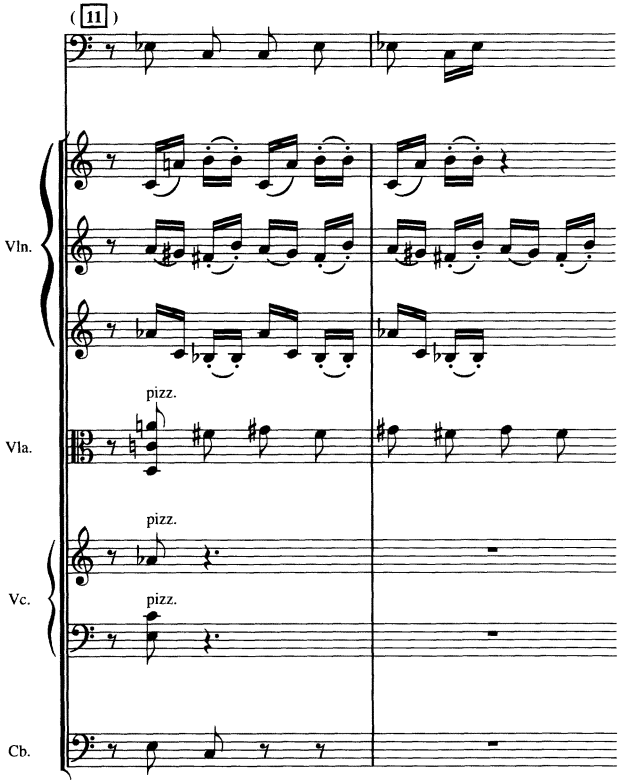
EXAMPLE 1. (*continued*)



meter is sustained with the motivic repeats heard and understood as displacements. The two readings are not reconcilable. Although listeners may switch from one reading to the other, or sense one in relation to the other, they cannot attend to both simultaneously.[17]

[17] In earlier studies of metrical displacement in Stravinsky's music, I described the two types of barrings pursued here in Exs. 4a and 4b as "radical" and "conservative," respectively. Meter is interrupted in Ex. 4a, while in Ex. 4b it is maintained (conserved), with the repetition of the motive displaced as a result. See Pieter C. van den Toorn, *Stravinsky*

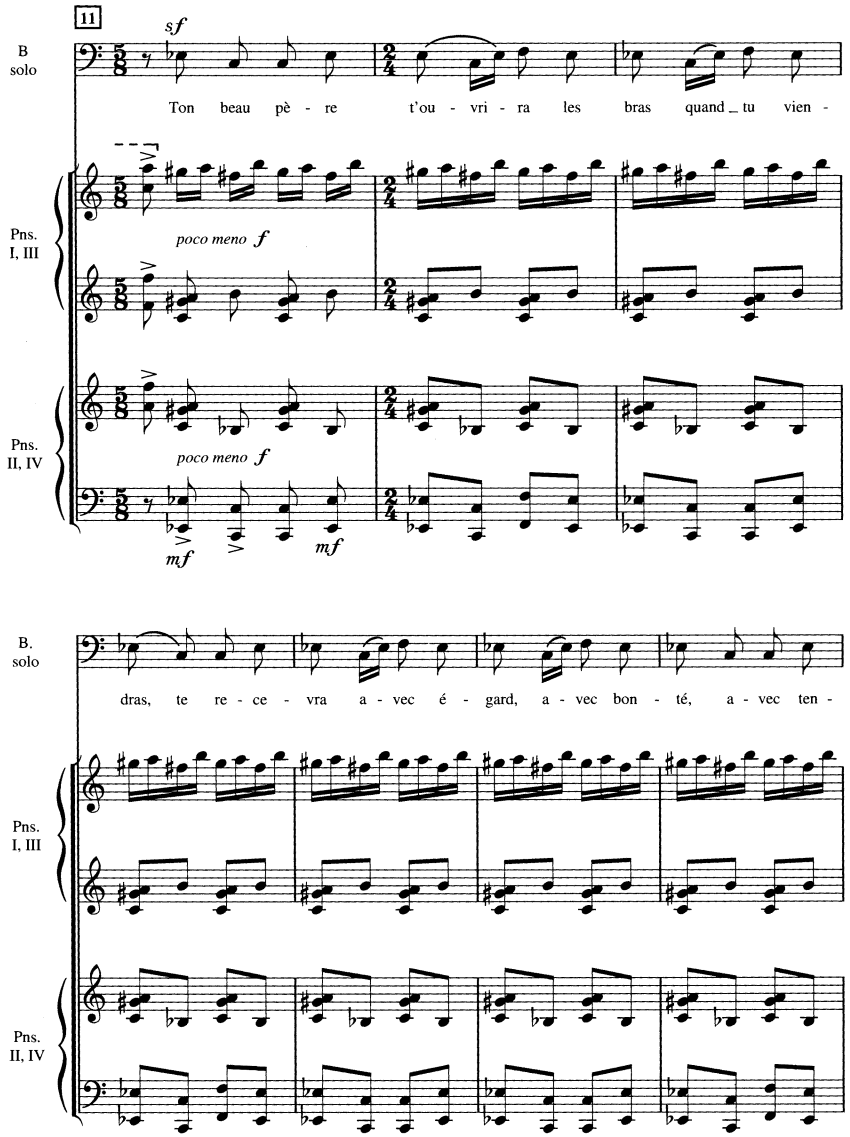
EXAMPLE 2. Stravinsky, *Les Noces,* first tableau, early sketch (2nd version), transcription



In pieces such as *Les Noces,* the repetition itself follows a different logic. Themes, motives, and chords are repeated not to be developed along traditional lines but to be displaced. And in seeking thus to displace a repeated theme, motive, or chord, the composer retains features other than alignment in order that alignment itself (and its shifts) might be set in relief. The literalness of the repetition acts as a foil in this respect. Features of pitch, duration, and articulation are retained, as the metrical alignment shifts for the given theme, motive, or chord.

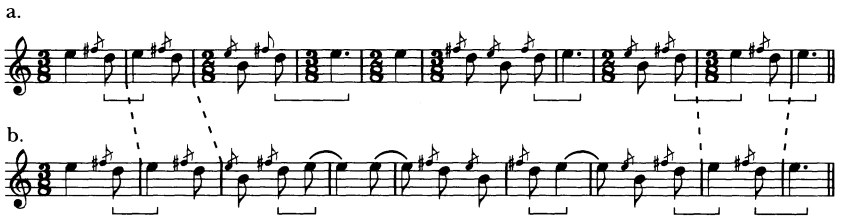
and "The Rite of Spring" (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987), 67. These terms were first introduced in Andrew Imbrie, " 'Extra' Measures and Metrical Ambiguity in Beethoven," in Alan Tyson, ed., *Beethoven Studies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 45–66. They were introduced as a way of distinguishing alternative interpretations of hypermeter in Beethoven's music. Subsequently they were applied somewhat similarly in Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 22–25. A further application to alternative interpretations of displacement in Stravinsky's music may be found in Gretchen Horlacher, "Metric Irregularity in *Les Noces:* The Problem of Periodicity," *Journal of Music Theory* 39 (1995): 285–310.

EXAMPLE 3. Stravinsky, *Les Noces*, first tableau



But literalness acts as a counterforce, too. Exact or near-exact repetition can have the effect of referring the listener back to the motive's original placement. In direct opposition to displacement, it can raise expectations of metrical parallelism, the repetition of the original

EXAMPLE 4. Stravinsky, Les Noces, first tableau, opening: "radical" (a) and "conservative" (b) barrings



placement along with all else that is repeated literally. And the more that is repeated literally, the more fully reinforced are these conflicting expectations likely to be.

In *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*, Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff treat conflicts between meter and metrical parallelism as conflicting "well-formedness" and "preference" rules.[18] In the common-practice contexts examined by these authors, the "preference" rule for metrical parallelism yields to the "well-formedness" rule for metrical regularity, the stipulation that a level of pulsation consist of equally spaced beats. Meter is maintained, in other words, while displacement is absorbed as a form of syncopation. Typically in Stravinsky's music, however, the two sides of this coin are more equally balanced. There is insufficient evidence for an automatic ruling in favor of one side or the other, so that the listener is left in the lurch, unable to commit wholeheartedly one way or the other. With varying degrees of intensity, the result is a form of metrical disruption. An inferred meter, internalized by the listener, is challenged, disrupted, and at times overturned.[19]

It should be noted, however, that conditions in the opening block A of *Les Noces* (Ex. 1) are not nearly so traumatic. Metrical parallelism is likely to be the "preferred" take here, as indeed Stravinsky's notation implies, with the meter constantly interrupted in order that the D-to-E motive and its subsequent repeats might be aligned in parallel fashion. The tempo is slow, repeats of the motive are literal and pronounced, the $\frac{3}{8}$ meter is likely to be established only very weakly at the beginning,

[18] See Lerdahl and Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory*, 74–75.

[19] Crucially in this regard, meter and metrical parallelism, although separable, interact. Recent studies of the psychology of this interaction have underscored the role played by parallelism in the formation of meter. See David Temperley and Christopher Bartlette, "Parallelism as a Factor in Metrical Analysis," *Music Perception* 20 (2002): 117–49. Even in some of the common-practice instances of displacement examined by Lerdahl and Jackendoff, the potential for disruption is likely to be felt by the listener.

and displacements occur at the level of the bar line, not at that of the tactus, i.e. the eighth-note beat with a metronome marking of 80. A sense of the varying spans and displacements is likely to occur only rather dimly in the mind of the listener, with the "preference" for a parallel reading of each D-to-E fragment likely to predominate.

But consider pitch structure. Midway through this passage, vertical coincidence or "harmony" is little different from what it is at the beginning or at the end. Missing altogether is a sense of harmonic change, movement, or progress, all of which becomes a function not of harmony strictly speaking, but of the varying spans of the repeated motive —of metrical alignment and displacement. What was once harmonic-contrapuntal in design becomes metrical, a function of metrical alignment and timing.

Indeed, the contrast to the world of developing variation and the Classical style could not be starker. Displacement and its many and varied implications preclude the sympathetic give-and-take of that world, the way in which motivic particles, detached from themes, are exchanged between instrumental parts. In Example 1, the D-to-E motive is not tossed about from one instrument to the next in the manner of a dialogue, as it might be in a string quartet by Haydn or Mozart. It is not treated "humanistically" by such means (as the character of such treatment has often been imagined, at the very least, in modern times, since the dawn of instrumental chamber music).[20] Nor is it treated expressively. If the forces of meter and metrical alignment are to make themselves felt, then the beat must be held evenly (mechanically) throughout, with little if any yielding to the conventions of expressive timing and nuance, traditionally the means by which performers have made their mediating presence felt.

This latter prohibition could not have had a deeper or more profound effect on the critical reception of Stravinsky's music throughout the past century. What had been implied by these conventions of expressive affect in terms of individual performance and interpretation was set aside or curtailed severely. The implications, consisting of small-scale deviations from the regular and the exact, cadential retardations and the like, had involved immediacy, spontaneity, and, as this equation

[20] The association of the "humanistic" with chamber music, dialogue, and the developmental style generally is discussed in Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), 252–61. "The idea of chamber music," Dahlhaus concludes, "arose as a musical reflection of a humanistic-aristocratic culture primarily centered on conversation. The aesthetic of this genre may be derived from the constantly recurring comparison with educated discourse . . . that each party continuously shows regard for the other. In this way, the whole emerges from an interplay of voices sustained by an understanding of each participant for the overall context, and not as a mumbled amalgam of its parts" (260).

seemed to suggest, truth. A sense of engagement on the part of the performer had been implied: true, authentic feeling, as it were, an indication of the human capacity for arousal. More specifically, the ritardandos and rallentandos had implied delay, added suspense, and by such means an intensification of the listener's anticipation of the cadence. The cadence itself had represented a form of release from expectation.

Among the most intimate terms known to music, in fact, the deviations of expressive timing were motivated not by affect alone, but also by structural considerations. They had served to clarify delineations of grouping and phrase, to impart an evolving sense of structure, with even the smallest departure heard and understood not as effect or caprice but as a means toward that larger end. Recent studies of the psychology of expressive affect by Eric Clarke,[21] John Sloboda,[22] and Bruno Repp[23] have borne this out by identifying connections between expressive timing and the projection of meter and phrase rhythm in the large.

When applied to Stravinsky's music, however, the same modifications weakened structure. They obscured the juxtapositions, stratifications, and metrical alignments of Stravinsky's repeated themes, motives, and chords. And they were set aside quite deliberately by the composer and his adherents for these very reasons. They were dismissed as a form of liberty taken anachronistically and at the expense of structure. Identified with the interpreting performer alone, they were viewed accordingly as a form of display by which structure was sacrificed to give expression to the performer's feelings.

No greater sin could be imagined in relation to Stravinsky's music and its articulation. For the composer himself, the personal in music could not have taken on a worse connotation. What traditionally had been a matter of structure as well as engagement had become one of engagement alone—indeed, one of self-indulgence. (Conductors were always the most heavily censored in Stravinsky's many published remarks on the subject of interpretation; his own experiences had evidently convinced him that no indulgences on the part of performers were as severe in their consequences as those of the conductors.)[24] The

[21] See Eric Clarke, "Expression and Communication in Musical Performance," in John Sunberg, Lennart Nord, and Rolf Carlson, eds., *Music, Language, Speech and Brain* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 184–93; or Eric Clarke, "Expression in Performance: Generativity, Perception, and Semiosis," in John Rink, ed., *The Practice of Performance* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 22–54.

[22] See John Sloboda, "The Communication of Musical Meter in Piano Performance," *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 14 (1983): 377–96.

[23] Bruno Repp, "Pattern Typicality and Dimensional Interactions in Pianists' Imitation of Expressive Timing and Dynamics," *Music Perception* 18 (2001): 173–211.

[24] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes* (New York: Knopf, 1966), 145–56.

performance of Stravinsky's repeated and displaced themes, motives, and chords required mechanical-like precision. Fidelity was mandatory, coolness with a sense of restraint. Notes were not to be slurred or tied into. In matters of articulation, of small-scale separation and grouping, a crisp, clean, *secco* approach was necessary if the bite of invention was to be given its due.

Stravinsky's lifelong battle with "interpretation" and "nuance" begins here, in fact—not necessarily with aesthetics nor with the formalist ideas he had encountered earlier in the century in Paris, but with these practical matters of performance. It begins with the need to temper "interpretation," to counter the traditional flexibility with a beat whose metronomical precision highlighted to a maximum degree elements of meter, metrical alignment, and the changes in alignment (i.e. displacements) that were at the heart of this new way of composing. Only then did it extend to the ways in which the traditional flexibility had been linked to expressivity and emotion, the personal, and transcending human value.

At the same time, the implications of these strictures for straight, non-*espressivo* readings of Stravinsky's music went well beyond performance practice and engagement. The requirements anticipated more general modernist trends in the 20th century, notably the mid-century preferences for straight, unnuanced readings of all manner of repertory. And yet they are not a passing fancy, a reflection merely of the times or of a conductor's personality. They serve purposes that are deeply structural in origin. They are parts of the package as a whole, whether viewed from afar or from the details of the repetition in the opening passage of *Les Noces.*

Indeed, questions of meaning and significance posed by Adorno and other critics can best be addressed not in the context of Stravinsky's unvaried repetition of themes, motives, and chords (as indeed Adorno often addresses them), or even in the context of expressive timing and its absence. As shown by Table 1, conditions of this kind represent the effects of deeper, underlying forces, most notably those of meter and metrical alignment. Given Stravinsky's predilection for metrical displacement, inclinations to repeat literally and to keep the tempo as exact as possible (with the conventions of expressive timing held to a minimum) are apt to follow readily. Thus the next step in an inquiry of this kind would be an examination of the various processes of metrical displacement, presumably from a perceptual, cognitive, and emotional standpoint as well as from a music-analytical one.

In an earlier paper I attempted to do just that, surveying Adorno's pointed objections to Stravinsky's displaced accents and their disruptive

effect.[25] Given the irregularity in the spans defined by the displaced repeats in Stravinsky's settings, disruption was inevitable, Adorno argued. With the irregularity of these spans, listeners were prevented from forming metrical patterns, and hence from anticipating and assimilating displacement. Their engagement with the music having been interrupted, they were left to fend for themselves. They had become victims of a kind of barrage, bobbing this way and that in reaction to what Adorno termed "convulsive blows and shocks."[26]

I want to suggest here that experiences of metrical conflict in Stravinsky's music need not be the debilitating, traumatic ones scorned by Adorno. As internalized meters are brought to the surface of consciousness in the most disruptive cases of displacement, a heightened sense of attention, engagement, and suspense may ensue. Indeed, as has been suggested already, conflict and disruption can bring implication and inhibition to the fore, along the lines pursued by Leonard Meyer some time ago. Derived in large part from John Dewey's "conflict theory" of human emotion, Meyer's idea was that emotion in music arose from the same set of circumstances encountered in everyday life, namely, from the blocking of expectations or tendencies.[27] He suggested that inhibition, blockage, or arrest of tendency, when accompanied by a belief in the eventual resolution of the conflict (or clarification of the ambiguity) could have the effect of heightening a sense of anticipation and suspense.[28] "Delay pleasures play," Meyer reasoned.[29]

In much music of the 19th century, delay can seem to have taken on a life of its own, of course. The ways in which completion is averted or suspense sustained appear to have grown ever more elaborate as the century wore on, from both a harmonic and a melodic standpoint. In poetic terms, the outwardly fragmentary and incomplete nature of much music of this period can be identified with an endless yearning: "longing eternally renewed," as Charles Rosen expressed it in his discussion of the opening song of Schumann's *Dichterliebe*.[30] The emphasis on the purely negative side of pleasure ("negative pleasure," as some have termed it)[31] can seem sadistic or sadomasochistic as well. Pleasure

[25] See Pieter C. van den Toorn, "Stravinsky, Adorno, and the Art of Displacement," paper delivered at the 24th annual convention of the Society of Music Theory, Philadelphia, November 2001.

[26] Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 155.

[27] Leonard Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1956), 25–32.

[28] Ibid., 28–29.

[29] Ibid., 35.

[30] Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 41.

[31] See Jerold Levinson, *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990), 306–35.

is being derived from the inhibition or blockage itself, the pain of want and desire, the withholding of a sense of arrival, completion, resumption, or release. Adorno himself identified "sadomasochistic" strains in Stravinsky's music,[32] noting the composer's "perverse joy in self-denial" and the shocks of his metrically displaced accents.[33]

Implications of this kind have doubtless long been a part of music in the Western art tradition, perhaps since the dawn of tonality. And there has been no dearth of acknowledgment. Heinrich Schenker likened the circuitous routes of his linear progressions to real-life experiences of "delays, anticipations, retardations, interpolations, and interruptions";[34] famously, the half cadence at the close of an antecedent phrase was judged an "interruption" in the progress of such a progression.[35] In recent studies of the psychology of anxiety, emotions have been identified more generally as "interrupt phenomena" which arise from the "interruption (blocking, inhibiting) of ongoing, organized thought or behavior."[36] More specific versions of this equation involve not one but several simultaneously aroused and conflicting implications or tendencies.

Here, of course, the fit could not be tighter. Settings of metrical displacement in Stravinsky's music involve the opposition of irreconcilable forces, those of meter and metrical displacement on the one hand, parallelism on the other. To inhibit, arrest, block, delay, or interrupt one of these forces (an "ongoing thought or behavior") is to stir the emotions. To displace a repeated theme, motive, or chord metrically is to thwart implications of parallelism, disrupt the meter, and thus to invite the "convulsive blows and shocks" to which a sizable portion of Adorno's criticism is directed.

And so the question arises: If inhibition or interruption can be an accepted and even expected part of the listening experience of the tonal (or atonal) repertory to which Adorno adheres, why can it not be of the experience of Stravinsky's? Even if we grant the distinction in application, the processes substantiate the same general psychology. Moreover, metrical disruption is not unique to Stravinsky's music. The

[32] Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 159.

[33] Ibid., 153.

[34] Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, trans. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), 5.

[35] Ibid., 36.

[36] George Mandler, "The Generation of Emotion," in Robert Plutchik and Henry Kellerman, eds., *Emotion: Theory, Research, and Experience* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 225. More recent theories of anxiety and emotion are discussed in Renee Cox Lorraine, *Music, Tendencies, and Inhibitions: Reflections on a Theory of Leonard Meyer* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 406.

disruption may be less relentless in other works, as well as less immediate, with displacements generally confined to less immediate levels of metrical pulsation, i.e. the bar line and above. When they do occur, conflicting alternatives to an established meter and its continuation tend to surface in the form of alternative meters, usually hemiola-related, while in Stravinsky's music they tend to surface in the form of outright disruptions. The spans between a series of displaced repeats are invariably patterned and regular in earlier contexts, while in Stravinsky's music they are often irregular (as they are, indeed, in the opening pages of *Les Noces*). Nor is the repetition in earlier repertoires as literal as it is in Stravinsky's music; instead motives are constantly transposed and elaborated as part of a process of developing variation. Such is the case with much of the metrical conflict in Schumann's music, for example, as examined by Harold Krebs.[37]

Yet notwithstanding the severity of these qualifications, matters of musical expectation, tendency, inhibition, and disruption are not as cut and dried as Adorno suggests. It should also be noted that Adorno's analytical descriptions of Stravinsky's music, sampled and condensed in Table 1, are just as easily framed with positive socio-political images as they are with negative ones. The very features vilified in Adorno's account may, from a different vantage point, represent what is most appealing. If the lack of expressive timing in the performance of Stravinsky's music can spell coldness and indifference to the plight of the individual (as Adorno insists), then it can spell directness and unsentimentality, too, a determination to confront the world "as it is." And if the lack of variation can imply intractability—the refusal of a collective voice to give way to the variations of the individual (a state of unfreedom, as Adorno understands it)—then it can also reveal something of the hardness of the outside world, and can do so without compromise or falsification.[38] Whatever the claims of Adorno's adherents about the "inseparable" nature of the various components of Adorno's argument, they are not full proof. Much of the analytical description can be

[37] See Harold Krebs, "Some Extensions of the Concepts of Metrical Consonance and Dissonance," *Journal of Music Theory* 31 (1987): 99–119. The application of these "concepts" to Schumann's music in particular is pursued at length in Harold Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999).

[38] Such a reversal was indeed briefly entertained by Adorno as a form of "negative truth," but it was rejected all the same. No sense of an awareness of this "truth" or predicament could be detected by Adorno on the part of the "musical subject." And the static implications of Stravinsky's music are for Adorno not a style feature, but the negation of the medium of music itself. See Adorno, "Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait," 149–55. And see the discussion of this in Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, 268.

understood and appreciated irrespective of the larger philosophical or socio-political rationale. And it can be appreciated irrespective of the critical verdict as well.[39]

In this connection, ritual and the ritualistic need not be confined to the primitive, unthinking, or herd-like. The archaic wedding rituals that underlie the scenario and music of *Les Noces* are a specific case in point. From what is known of the early performing practices of these rituals, the separation between character and character type, and between genuine feeling and play-acting were by no means hard and fast.[40] One of the aims of these rituals, even when enacted by hired professionals, was to awaken within both the bride and the other participants something of the "specific thoughts and emotions" to which reference was made.[41] Genuine feeling and the feelings demanded by the ceremonial traditions were supposed to overlap. This is what ritual is, of course, not public exercise alone but public exercise mixed with the personal. It involves the expression, by means necessarily public or communal, of what are presumed to be an individual's "thoughts and emotions."[42] Communication with the outside world is guaranteed, while a buffer is afforded against the perils of an individual's isolation. The emphasis falls on commiseration and bonding, but this comes not wholly at the expense of the concerns of the individual. Ritual acts as a go-between in this regard, a way of easing the public strain of personal remorse as well as the community's difficulty in relating to that remorse. The proxy performances associated with the wedding rituals were not entirely formulaic or stereotypical. From the evidence it may be gathered that the formulas were mixed with improvisation, and that the latter was intended as a more immediate reflection the bride's true feelings.[43] By such means, the stock in trade merged with the personal. And successful performances were not only "emotionally infectious" (beckoning the participants in the appropriate way),[44] but designed as a combination of the tradition and the individual.

Inflecting the opening pages of *Les Noces* is the grace note F♯. This hint of a sob proves integral not only to the idea of a lament, but to the composer's musical conception as well. The repetition is incantatory and ritualistic in character, imitating the highly stylized vocalizations that informed the early laments themselves. So too, in the first line of

[39] Matters of this kind are discussed in greater detail in van den Toorn, "Stravinsky, Adorno, and the Art of Displacement."

[40] See the discussion of this in Mazo, "Stravinsky's *Les Noces*," 119–22.

[41] Y. M. Sokolov, *Russian Folklore*, trans. Catharine Ruth Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 211–12.

[42] Ibid.

[43] See Mazo, "Stravinsky's *Les Noces*," 121–22.

[44] Sokolov, *Russian Folklore*, 213.

the text, is the stutter in the setting of the Russian word *kosal,* meaning "braid." The isolated repetition of the first syllable of this word produces an effect similar to that of the grace note F♯, namely that of a gasp or sob, and this is likewise integral. The motivation is not only poetic in the sense of a ritual lament, but musical as well, an aspect of structure and musical understanding.

And yet the effect is spontaneous and unrehearsed as well. Even in the strictest, most exacting performance of *Les Noces,* with the rigidities of the construction in full view, as it were, the experience of the single bride is apt not to be lost. The grace notes and stutter motives are still likely to be heard and understood as those of the single bride. Their effect is still likely to be that of an uncontrollable weeping, spontaneous and hence true to the individual, immediate and reflective of a personal anguish or anxiety—one that is shared and collective in one way or another, but not therefore "impersonal."

What we as participants sense and feel is thus likely to be derived from the experience of the bride. And the more stiff and intransigent the aspects of the construction seem, the more emphatically they succeed in setting off the circumstances of the individual bride. Much of this has been overlooked by the detractors of Stravinsky's music who would equate the repetitious, percussive, and metronomic features of pieces such as *Les Noces* (i.e. the "mechanical") not only with ritual and ritual action, but with a collective voice as well, one that is primitive, autocratic, and "anti-humanistic" in its opposition to the interests of the individual person. "Stravinsky's music identifies not with the victims," T. W. Adorno argued in one of his most extravagant summations, "but with the agents of destruction."[45]

Given the many rules governing repetition in the opening pages of *Les Noces,* the character of this music can indeed seem implacable. Yet the rigidities are balanced by counteraction. The repeats of the intoning pitch E and of the succession D-to-E over the bar line are spaced irregularly, in defiance of the registral confinement of the melodic invention, the literalness of the repetition, and the metronomically held tempos. The stiffness of the construction is countered by fluidity in matters of rhythm, timing, and alignment. Detail of this kind should not be ignored in studies of the philosophical and socio-political implications of Stravinsky's music, studies that seek a broadened context from which to apprehend the specific nature of the music's appeal.

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[45] Adorno, "Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait," 149.

ABSTRACT

In Stravinsky's *Les Noces,* folklike fragments are repeated relentlessly and literally (ritualistically). They are not varied or developed, strictly speaking, but are cut up and displaced metrically. Typically, displacement results in a disruption of the meter. Conflicting expectations of metrical parallelism are raised in the mind of the listener, expectations which catch the listener off guard. And if this disruptive effect is indeed to materialize, then the beat must be held firmly and without expressive nuance.

This analytical perspective suggests a specifically musical rationale for exact, metronomic readings of the composer's music, and it also offers a way out of the doomsday aesthetics of "anti-humanism" (T. W. Adorno) with which the inflexible elements of the composer's idiom have been identified. The psychology of metrical entrainment and disruption can speak to the vitality of *Les Noces,* the ability of this music to excite in ways unrelated to the familiar socio-political equations.