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Review of Glenn Watkins, *Pyramids at the Louvre*, Harvard University Press, 1994.

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[1] As this century draws to a close, historians in every field attempt to inscribe a narrative path on the panoply of twentieth-century events, a path leading from the rapidly receding horizon of the last *fin de siècle* to the turbulence of the present. While some authors claim post-historicity for much of our decade, others tell tales of continuing progress and evolution. In *Pyramids at the Louvre*, Glenn Watkins uses the rubric of collage to explore Modernism through its transition to Postmodernism, acknowledging persistent signs of continuity even in the purported absence of history. Watkins offers a survey of twentieth-century music in which history is structured by what he understands to be the primary impulses underlying much of twentieth-century culture: the cultural explosions and reconstitutions typical of our century, the access of Europe and North America to each other and to the non-Western World, and the interdisciplinarity of both culture and theory. Many of the cultural events and artifacts scrutinized by Watkins are often overlooked in more traditional music history textbooks, while familiar works and issues—*The Rite of Spring*, the Stravinsky-Schoenberg polemic—are seen from thoroughly new perspectives.

[2] The greatest strength of Watkins's book lies in his approach to the material: rather than move through the century along chronological and/or national lines, as do many surveys, Watkins traces the evolution of various musical and cultural trends, always keeping the reader abreast of the ways in which these cultural currents inform and influence each other. Like many musicologists, Watkins approaches the twentieth century via Debussy and Stravinsky. In his discussion of their work in the first two chapters, however, he focusses not on the whole of their oeuvres or even on their roles in the history of twentieth-century music, but rather on their contributions to the orientalist explosion at the *fin-de-siècle*. This opening section on orientalism functions in turn as an introduction to Watkins's extensive treatment of Primitivism in the next six chapters. Arguably the richest of the book, these chapters establish what Watkins considers to be one of the primary conditions of twentieth-century Modernism: Primitivism, in its multifarious guises and manifestations, as well as the modern West's fascination with all things "primitive" and its willingness to construe much of what defines twentieth-century culture as primitive, continually surfaces throughout the rest of the book. In section three, "Clockwork," Watkins tackles the issue of Stravinsky as a musical cubist, and investigates Modernist Primitivism's potential for accommodating forces such as Cubism; in section four, "Masquerades," Watkins deals with the *commedia dell'arte*, the allure of machine technology (whose capacity for depersonalization gave Primitivism new meaning between the wars), and Stravinsky's *Oedipus* and *Agon*; and finally in section

six, he addresses the issue of collage head on, reviewing some of the material previously covered, and discussing music and culture from World War II until the present.

[3] The interdisciplinary perspective that Watkins brings to his subject matter allows him the flexibility not only to collect a huge variety of material in one volume, but also to examine from a variety of viewpoints the subjects that most interest him. This is good news for Stravinsky enthusiasts: Watkins explores the composer and his work from many different angles, several of them new, all of them insightful and provocative. Not only does Stravinsky make appearances as an orientalist, a primitivist, a modernist, and a classicist, but also, and most intriguingly, as a cubist and a simultaneist.

[4] *Pyramids at the Louvre* is impressive in its scope, covering, as its subtitle states, "music, culture and collage from Stravinsky to the postmodernists." The intended audience seems to be undergraduate music students and educated laypersons with an interest in twentieth-century music and culture: technical terms, when used, are briefly defined in parentheses, and Watkins does not usually include observations that must be substantiated by in-depth musical analysis (although he does refer the reader to sources which offer more detailed analyses of works which he discusses from a theoretical perspective). Nevertheless, such a substantial amount of information is put forth by Watkins that even the most seasoned musicologist has much to glean.

[5] The enormity of such an undertaking has its drawbacks, however. On reading the book, the focus often seems almost too broad: this veritable smorgasbord of material is not always cohesive, intriguing specificities are often not fully explored, and some of the discussion suffers from an anecdotal superficiality. In his albeit captivating discussion of machine technology in chapter 12, "Masks and Machines," for example, Watkins travels in a matter of pages from Antheil's *Ballet Mecanique* through Adorno's opinions on culture and technology to the music of John Zorn and Michael Daugherty. This whirlwind tour is fascinating; a slower pace would permit the reader more thoroughly to absorb the sights along the way. In the same chapter, Watkins introduces the idea of a "new humanity" prevalent among artists in the 1920s (page 334). Watkins could have placed greater stress on the fact that this wave of utopic striving permeated the arts and sciences, from architecture to physical fitness, from Italy to France and Germany. This quest for utopia was discussed both in the mainstream media and in alternative publications. In the Parisian journal *l'Esprit nouveau*, for example, the desire for a new humanity characteristic of the time is manifest both in cultural commentary and in articles on physical fitness. One of the journal's regular columnists, Dr. Winter (his area of expertise was health and physical fitness), wrote in 1923 about the link of the architecture of Le Corbusier to a new spirituality and a new awareness of physical health: "When will we have the habitations of Le Corbusier—his cities, his interiors? Soon, soon, because we need a new space in which to live . . . Society, seen from this new angle, must be entirely rebuilt . . . We have abandoned our bodies to the doctors like we used to abandon our spirits to the priests . . . A new body, rich with a new spirit, will express itself tomorrow. . . " (*l'Esprit nouveau*, no month, 1923, pages 1756–1758). Yet when Watkins introduces the "new humanity," as it relates to Leger's *Ballet Mecanique* and film, he leaves the reader unaware of its greater significance and the momentum it carried outside the realm of this work. Given this lack of context, the reader is left somewhat confused at the key sentence, "Th[e] unmediated emphasis upon pure form and primary shape stood at the heart of the new humanity and bonded naturally to the Purist's celebration of the technological transformation of existence" (page 335). Observations such as this abound; the reader is often left to unpack the many important concepts lurking within sometimes murky prose.

[6] Much recent writing on Modernism and Postmodernism deals critically with works of art, approaching them not as autonomous aesthetic objects but rather as cultural constructs, texts imbued with sociopolitical significance; from this perspective works of art are often understood, for example, as manifestations of patriarchal power structures or colonialist venture. Watkins, however, makes his stance clear from the beginning:

> . . . the perceptions recorded here were intended less as a lively, frontal assault on a recent species of musicological reductionism given to pruning away contextual detail than as an affectionate attempt to return to the musicological discourse many of the approaches that have been somewhat aggressively strained out in recent years . . . (page 8).

[7] Watkins's affection for his subject matter shines through on every page, and indeed makes for a refreshing alternative to some recent writing on similar subjects. Nevertheless, his defensiveness with regard to recent musicological and critical

inquiry sometimes detracts from his arguments. For example, in chapter 6, "Josephine and Jonny," Watkins includes as an illustration a poster used to advertise *La Revue negre*, a music-hall act performing at the *Theatre des Champs-Elysees* in Paris in 1926. The black performers portrayed in the poster are caricatured such that they clearly resemble baboons: from our late-twentieth-century North American perspective, we can not help but cringe. In response to this anticipated reaction, Watkins tries to dismiss the reader's immediate impression by explaining that caricature in this case can be traced "to minstrelsy's own venerable tradition of parody and burlesque," and that the painter, Paul Colin, was interested in "ethnological and historical perspectives rather than racist portraiture" (page 142–43). While these statements in themselves may be true, Watkins's discussion of the matter would have been greatly enhanced had he addressed not only the intent of the artist, Paul Colin, but also the ways in which images such as these were received by the European public. In this way he would have made explicit some of the pervasive views (acknowledged implicitly by Watkins elsewhere in the book) held by Europeans regarding Africans and African-Americans. As Watkins illustrates in his discussion of Josephine Baker, African-Americans may have been subjected less overtly to racism in Paris than in New York; nevertheless, Africa, like the Orient, functioned as "them" to Europe's "us," representing Europe's own pre-history, a place and time lower down and further back on the evolutionary scale.

[8] A more critical approach would have enhanced several of Watkins's otherwise fascinating revelations. In chapter 3, for example, Watkins seems to excuse the practice of displaying Samoan, Sudanese and Indian villages replete with human inhabitants "as part of a typical summer's entertainment" at the Dresden Zoo in the summer months between 1905 and 1910. Apparently the villages complemented the Benin bronzes and Mexican artifacts on display in the Dresden Ethnographic Museum, and contrasted with contemporaneous practices at the Bronx Zoo, where villagers were displayed as captives in cages rather than as "commercial *Volkerschauen* in the zoological gardens" (pages 77–78). In his refusal to discuss the political implications of these practices, perhaps for fear of denigrating the Western art influenced in some way by them, Watkins tries the reader's faith in his exegeses. Given that he takes the reader through to the late twentieth century and purports to deal with Modern and Postmodern culture, some discussion of the colonialist and post-colonialist implications of practices such as these would have added a rich dimension; furthermore, this type of discussion need not dull the appeal of the works dealt with. Indeed, knowledge of some of the underlying colonialist implications of Primitivism helps us gain not only an understanding of the cultural exploitation and appropriation by the West of other cultures, but also, and more importantly in this context, an awareness of the ways in which Western artists used Primitivist techniques in order to critique Western values.

[9] Much recent writing on Primitivism and colonialism addresses the issue of displaying "tribal" peoples: such exhibitions not only symbolized the extent of the "mother" country's territories, but also indicated the lower evolutionary stages that the West believed these cultures represented. Any pretense to scientific inquiry, however, did not diminish the overriding experience on the part of Western viewers of being witness to an exotic spectacle (for a pictorial representation of such a scene see *The Whites Visiting the Blacks* from *Fliegender Blätter* 1905, reproduced in Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*, page 95). Colonialism required that subject peoples be described, presented, or represented by the colonial power in order that the mother country could continue to exercise control over them. Institutional Western representations of "primitive" peoples were based on the administrative needs of the mother country, and thus were often mere stereotypes. Primitivism in modern art, however, must also be seen within the context of the critical stance taken by the moderns to many of the cultural institutions and disciplines of the modern West, and, indeed, to modernism itself. In their search for and summoning of the Primitive, modern artists reacted against the notion of scientific progress, increasing urbanization, rationalism, and formalism; against, in sum, the very foundations of modern Western civilization. However, as Colin Rhodes explains (*Primitivism and Modern Art* [London, 1994]), modern artists paradoxically had to rely on the definitions of the primitive created and maintained by the very institutions and disciplines of which they were critical.

[10] The time is ripe to view works such as *Le Sacre* in light of the Modernist's disillusionment with modernity itself. Yes, as Watkins clearly demonstrates, *Le Sacre* was received as "primitive," and its critical reception reveals the mutability of the Primitivist identity in the pre-World War I period: *Le Sacre's* "barbaric" rhythms, while often understood to be relics of pagan Russia, were just as easily interpreted as African, Oriental, Caribbean, and North American Indian. But how did the work, in its music, dance and set design, critique or even transgress Western values? We would demean Stravinsky in no way by considering the highly cherished Western binarisms that were destabilized by the composer *et al* in *Le Sacre*:

individual/collectivity, nature/culture, us/them, to name a few. In several ways, Stravinsky and company implied that the eminently civilized Parisian audience was not as distant from the primitives portrayed on stage as they would like to have believed; indeed this suggestion was confirmed at the outbreak of World War I one year after the premiere of *Le Sacre*.

[11] Only by engaging more fully with issues of colonialism and Western identity can many of the most fundamental impulses informing twentieth-century culture be fully explored. Even Watkins's use of collage as a category encompassing the diverse trends of the twentieth century demands closer scrutiny with regard to these issues. Watkins uses the term *collage* as a metaphor: ". . . citation refers less to thematic recall of familiar tunes than to the assemblage and rearrangement of a rich parade of cultural loans," and juxtaposition "italicizes complementary qualities in the seemingly contradictory" (page 3). The metaphor allows him access to an enormous number of twentieth-century works. Although he admirably manages to distinguish many of the various ways in which citation and juxtaposition occur in twentieth-century music, he does not explicitly address the ways in which collage techniques serve to confirm or challenge aspects of Western cultural identity; nor do his discussions of the reasons behind collage's "rising tide of glamour" (page 3) take into account issues of Western cultural identity. It goes without saying that the cultures "on loan" are generally borrowed by the West from non-Western cultures, or from the non-modernized West (in the case of some folk and popular borrowings); the complementary qualities enhanced through juxtaposition are often those that have been thoroughly repressed in the culture doing the juxtaposing. Watkins tends to play down these perspectives, even though his book is based implicitly on them. Consider: "That artists have not always avoided value judgments and have exhibited an occasional tendency to devalue as they plundered, cannot be denied. The view of the East as opulent, colorful, and intriguing but also by turns sinister, menacing, and erotic has clearly fueled Western appetites both political and artistic. On all fronts, however, investigation generally has led not so much to a discovery of passions felt in the East that were absent in the West as to the capacity to paint them in more vivid tones for having been observed at some remove from mundane experience" (page 15).

[12] As Edward Said and other authors have argued, the Orient as such (as well as Africa, Oceania, and other non-Western cultures) is to some extent an invention of the West; the West used (and still uses) the East as a site of projective identification, a mirror with which to explore aspects of its own identity. Whether or not devaluation and plundering are involved is in some respects almost irrelevant; more important is the fact that cultural appropriation, with or without attendant exploitation, allows the West to continually confirm, challenge and create its own identity. Watkins often hints at this state of affairs, but never states it explicitly, again, I think, for fear of accusing composers themselves of cultural exploitation, devaluing and plundering. While perhaps an artist can be exempt in some circumstances from colonialist rhetoric and activity, the culture of which that artist is a member surely can not. To paraphrase Said, a European comes up against the Orient as a European first, an individual second (*Orientalism*, page 11). A more critical look at the notion of collage would also tell us more about the techniques involved as well as the thoughts of composers regarding these techniques. For example, do instances of citation, influence and juxtaposition always constitute collage?

[13] For anyone with even a passing interest in the kaleidoscopic cultural landscape of our century, *Pyramids at the Louvre* is well worth becoming acquainted with; for students of twentieth-century music history, this volume (or at least parts thereof) should be required reading. Watkins's treatment of the back-and-forth transatlantic influences in the first half of the century (see especially chapter 8) is unparalleled, and of great interest to anyone pursuing questions of crossover idioms. His insights, observations and hypotheses are not only original but often scintillating (see for example, his theory that the first of Stravinsky's *Three Pieces for String Quartet* of 1914 was intended as part of a theatrical presentation, *David*, proposed by Cocteau [page 235]), and never fail to stimulate the imagination. He writes with a sense of sincerity and depth of feeling for his subject, and draws on a wealth of research as well as on his own personal experience of and love for this material. Watkins is to be commended for providing a point of departure for a myriad of destinations throughout the twentieth century.

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