Presentation


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A. Introduction

1. Title of this book: Remaking the past – self-contradictory - how can you remake the past?
2. Aim of Remaking the Past: a study of musical construction of early 20\textsuperscript{th}-century, to identify strategies composers employed for coming to terms with earlier music.
3. Straus’ analytical framework is based on a theory of poetic influence by Harold Bloom (literary critic, and Professor at Yale and New York University), published as two books titled The Anxiety of Influence (1973) and A Map of Misreading (1975).

3.1 Bloom’s theory of influence
- offers an ambitious reconsideration of poetic tradition (against the 2 current models of artistic influence – “influence as immaturity” and “influence as generosity” (T. S. Eliot)
- proposes that major poets struggle against the suffocating weight of their predecessors, creating new poems by ‘misreading’ older ones through a complex series of rhetorical defense mechanisms.

3.2 Aspects of Harold Bloom’s theory that are relevant to the study of 20\textsuperscript{th}-century music:
- the idea of intertextuality (that each text exists in relation to others): a poem is not self-contained, an organic whole, rather it is a relational event, embodying impulses (often contradictory impulses) from a variety of sources.
- the idea about the ambivalence a poet may feel toward a overwhelming and potentially stultifying tradition - anxiety of influence - being swallowed up or annihilated by one’s towering of predecessors (or a particular style). For Bloom the history of poetry is the story of a struggle by newer poets against older ones, an anxious struggle to clear creative space.
- the idea about how later poets transform earlier ones. This struggle takes the form of the newer poet’s misreading of the past poets.

3.2.1 Misreading:
- a form of interpretation in which later poets asserts freedom from the domination of a precursor by revising or transforming the precursor’s work. To read is to be dominated, to misread is to assert one’s own priority. The later poet makes earlier poet say what the later poet wants or needs to hear. For Bloom, a misreading is not failed and inadequate interpretation, it is rather the most interesting interpretations for their power to revise.
- Bloom devised a map of misreading. This map contains a series of “revisionary ratios”, or strategies which later artists use to reinterpret their predecessors.
- See Bloom’s map of 6 revisionary ratios
- Straus’s Musical revisionary ratios: Motivicization, Generalization, Marginalization, Centralization, Compression, Fragmentation, Neutralization and Symmetricization.
- Implications: by using these musical revisionary ratios, 20\textsuperscript{th} century composers reinterpret earlier music in accordance with their own compositional needs. These strategies also define a 20\textsuperscript{th} century common practice.
B. Main Discussion: Analytical Misreading

1. The theme of Chapter 2 of *Remaking the Past*: Composers of early 20th century misread/misinterpret earlier works (at all structural levels) via a revisionary ratio of motivicization. These misreadings reflect the composers’ own compositional interests/approaches. Their compositional approaches also serve to avoid their anxiety of influence of the past musical tradition. The misreadings are manifested through their analytical writings or discussions.

2. Five composers representative of new musical directions: Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Bartok and Stravinsky. These composers are all living in an environment surrounded by music of the past.

3. Early 20th century musical environment - Why an environment of music of the past? Some precursors:
   - culmination of cultural and social development, rooting in late 18th and early 19th-century.
   - taste shift - from contemporary to older music - a mass culture which prefers familiar and sanctioned masterworks.
   - increasing separation of popular and classical traditions.
   - the crystallization of the classical canon.

4. Given that the central misreading in their analysis is motivicization, why has motive become so important to them?

4.1 Role of motive in music history:
   - In 16th century and earlier - plays a subtle interconnective role in a modal setting (e.g. in motets and masses of Josquin and Isaac, music of Machauat and Palestrina, etc.)
   - 18th and 19th century: plays a increasingly important role, and take the form of diminution or embellishment and can occur at all levels of structure as concealed repetition. Concealed repetition serves to enhance the unity and coherence of a composition.
   - BUT: Conceal repetitions and other motivic relations are neither necessary nor sufficient for tonal coherence - it is only a secondary determinant of structure in tonal music. Furthermore, they are also subject to "the boundary conditions of tonality" - the shared norms of harmonic progression and voice leading.
   - Late 19th-century to early 20th-century: declining role of tonal relation is now seen in the academic field as the rise of motivic relations.
   - motivic association was elevated into a central and independent organizing principle (e.g. music of Wagner, Brahms, Liszt, and Mahler).
   - Consequence: to compensate the loss of tonality as an organizing principle, composers strive to enhance the motivic content of their works. This can be shown in the "free atonal" works by Schoenberg (and his pupils). Schoenberg dislikes the label "atonal" and see these works as "working with tones [notes] of the motif."

C. Schoenberg

1. For analyzing how motivic Schoenberg's music is, the pitch-class set theory does the best job as it is an analytical tool which reflects motivic orientation.
   1.1 Schoenberg: Piano Piece, Op.11, no.1
   1.2 To ensure motivic unity, Schoenberg devised the twelve-tone composition technique.
      - use of a matrix listing all relations to the motive (tone-row): inversion, retrograde, and
2. So far we have shown how motivically oriented Schoenberg's music was, let's see how he analyses earlier music.

3. Two principles that Schoenberg applies in his analysis
   - Grundgestalt and Developing Variation
   - Grundgestalt: basic shape/ basic idea, from which every aspect of the musical structure derives.
     - Grundgestalt is the referential source, and everything happens in a piece come from the reshaping of a basic shape, and everything happens in a piece of music can be traced back to it, or, the theme foretells the whole piece.
   - developing variation: a process in which diverse structures are evolved from a basic shape.
     - reshaping of a musical shape is, in another word, repetition. But this repetition is not exact or sequential. This repetition takes the form of a continual alteration (e.g. rhythm, interval, harmony and contour) of the basic shape, while maintaining its recognizability with the basic shape.

4. With these two principles in mind, Schoenberg's analyses of earlier music produces a misreading via the revisionsary ratio of motivicization.

4.1 Brahms: String Quartet in A minor, op. 51, no. 2, 2nd mvt
4.2 Brahms: "O Tod," from Four Serious Songs, op.121
4.3 Beethoven: String Quartet in F Major, op. 135, 4th mvt

D. Webern

1. Webern did not write any sustained analysis, but gave lectures on evolution of music history (seen from his own perspective) and deals with many musical examples of the past periods, published as the book The Path to the New Music.

1.1 The Path to the New Music
   - consists mainly of two series of lectures (16 in total) given by Webern at a private home in Vienna in 1932 and 1933, originally recorded as shorthand script by Dr. Rudolf Ploderer (a Viennese lawyer).
   - Aim: tries to show that the 12-tone system was the inevitable (and the only possible) outcome of the development of music through the ages, in other words, aspects of dodecaphony were foreshadowed in previous musical periods.
   - The "path": he sees that music is seen to progress and improve following an evolutionary path of increasing motivicization.
   - Evolution of music from Webern’s perspective:
     - 1. conquest of the tonal field: modal -> major-minor tonality and harmonic relations.
     - 2. comprehensibility and unity - motivic structure - direct repetition -> direct imitation (polyphonic) -> variation of motive (cancrizian or retrograde) -> inversion -> increasing refinement of the thematic network, until tonality (as old methods of present the idea) was pushed into the background -> the New Path of music.
       ◆ the New Path of music:
       • a syle which is inter-penetrating horizontal and vertically - polyphony.
       • music with the strongest unity - to develop everything else from one principal idea.
       • the watchword: "Thematicism"
2. Webern's misreading:
- a highly personal interpretation of music and music history.
- puts emphasis on only those aesthetic goals that older styles share in common with the "new" music.
- similarity with Schoenberg's point of view: the motive with varied or unvaried repetition as the basic principle = Grundgestalt composed out via developing variation.

E. Berg

1. His only extensive analysis of Schumann's "Traumerei" from Kinderszenen has a similar motivic orientation with that of Schoenberg.
2. Analysis of "Traumerei" was written in response to Hans Pfitzner's essay "The New Aesthetic of Impotence: A Symptom of Decay?"
2.1 Hans Pfitzner (1869-1949)
- German composer, conductor and musical polemicist.
- Strong advocate of Romantic idealism
- his musical language was influenced by Wagner, Strauss, Weber and Schumann, etc., and he tries to preserve the Romantic tradition.

2.2 In his essay "The New Aesthetic of Impotence: A Symptom of Decay?" Pitzner argues that melodic beauty of Traumerei is indescribable and is beyond the reach of analysis or explanation:
- "thoughtful, serious feeling, deeply losing itself, fine-souled and yet powerful. The well-known head of Schumann with his head supported on his hand can give an idea of this. One can enthuse on into the illimitable in this way without managing to conjure up the magic of this music in words. It is a drop of music from the deepest spring; we too are musically depraved and lost if we dissociate ourselves from this beauty."
- the melody "rises through the notes of the triads"

2.3 Berg's response is to give a motivic analysis of "Traumerei", to prove that the beauty of Traumerei can be explained by:
- the exceptional pregnancy of individual motifs,
- the intimate interrelationship of these motifs, and
- the multifarious ways of variating the motivic material.
- Example: Schumann: "Traumerei" from Kinderszenen

2.4 Berg's revisionary ratio: motivicization (the motivic content of the earlier work is radically intensified).

F. Bartok

1. does not write about Western art music, only publishes transcriptions and recordings of folk music, and claims explicitly his principal influence as Hungarian and Rumanian peasant music.
2. his anxiety of influence (of the Western classical music tradition) = his intense interest in Eastern European folk music.
3. his attribution of causality (of his compositional approach) reflects his misreading/misinterpretation of the folk materials.
4.1 Bartok: Suite No.2 for Orchestra, op.4
- claim 1: Folk scales "brought about" his approach to structure.
  ■ Bartok traces the sources of its structure to pentatonic folk melodies.
  ■ the final chord - a simultaneous resonance of all tones of the motive - a vertical projection of the previous horizontal form - a logical process. "When the consonance form of the seventh was established, the ice was broken: from that moment the seventh could be applied as a consonance even without a necessarily logical preparation."
- claim 2: Folk melodies "brought about" his harmonic language
  ■ causal relationships: frequent skip of perfect 4th of Hungarian melodies -> fourth chord and its inversions
  ■ treatment of tritones in Rumanian and Slovak folk songs -> free use of augmented 4th, the diminished 5th -> applications of inversion and juxtaposition of these chords -> varieties of chords and the freest harmonic and melodic treatment.
5. BUT: do these intrinsic qualities of the folk material necessarily determine a certain way of compositional method?
6. his composition approach is, in fact, self-determined: motivically controlled integration of musical space, just like Schoenberg, but with folk materials (as a means to escape the burden of the entire Western musical tradition?)

G. Stravinsky

1. he does not analyze music, but his tastes in earlier music shows a love of structural surprises, intrusions, and seeming discontinuities.
2. In Bach's music, he pays special attention to the sudden turn of phrases, the sudden modulations, the unexpected harmonic changes and deceptive cadences. In Beethoven, he looks for sections of new change.
3. Therefore, in earlier music, Stravinsky looks for the same kind of seeming discontinuity, or "block juxtaposition", that characterizes his own music across all stylistic phases.
4. Stravinsky is misreading via the revisionary ratios of fragmentation and neutralization.
  - fragmentation: elements that occur together in the earlier work (such as two triads in a functional relationship to each other) are compressed into something synchronous in the new one.
  - neutralization: traditional musical elements (such as dominant-seventh chords) are stripped of their customary function, particularly of their progressional impulse. Forward progress is blocked.

H. Conclusion

Analytical misreading - to reinterpret earlier music in accordance with composers' own compositional needs - helps composers establish a link with the tonal tradition and at the same time lighten its burden. It is one way to remake the past.