

Music and Ideology in Cold War Europe

Mark Carroll



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Mark Carroll 2003

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Minion 10.5/13.5 pt *System* \LaTeX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 82072 3 hardback

Contents

List of figures page viii

Acknowledgements ix

Introduction: issues and perspectives 1

- 1 Back to the future: Nabokov's selection criteria for
L'Œuvre du XXe siècle 8
 - 2 Nabokov, Shostakovich and the view from the bridge 25
 - 3 Articles of war: the Prague Manifesto and the Progressistes 37
 - 4 Creative freedom or political obligation? Serialism and
Stalinism in France 50
 - 5 Culture and confrontation at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées 69
 - 6 Neither you nor they: the avant-garde and neutralité 87
 - 7 Music and Sartrean commitment 103
 - 8 René Leibowitz and the musician's conscience 116
 - 9 A forlorn hope: Sartre's 'virtual' audience 132
 - 10 Serialism, scientism and the post-war world view 141
- Epilogue: the aftermath of *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* 165
- Appendix: the musical programme for *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* 177
- Notes* 186
- Bibliography* 218
- Index* 237

Figures

- 1 US President Truman and Joseph Stalin conjugate the possessive. *Nation* 171 (December 16 1950), 593 page 18
- 2 Shostakovich's opening salvo in New York. *New York Times* (28 March 1949), 1, 2 page 26
- 3 Happy birthday, Uncle Joe: Stalin idolatry in the guise of Franco-Soviet friendship. *Les lettres françaises* 298 (9 February 1950), 8. © Pablo Picasso, 1949/Succession Picasso. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney 2002 page 42
- 4 The official song of the PCF youth peace march shows well the relationship between clarity and consonance requisite to socialist realist music. *Les lettres françaises* 321 (20 July 1950), 8 page 57
- 5 The power and the glory: the cover of the programme for *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* page 70
- 6 Stravinsky (with arms raised) and Jean Cocteau acknowledge the applause following their presentation of *Oedipus rex*, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées 19 May 1952, *The Congress for Cultural Freedom: 10 years, June 1950–June 1960* (Paris: Congress for Cultural Freedom, n.d.), 7 page 75
- 7 Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*. © Pablo Picasso/Succession Picasso. Licensed by Viscopy, Sydney 2002 page 106

1 Back to the future: Nabokov's selection criteria for *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle*

L'Œuvre du XXe siècle formed part of an attempt by the Congress for Cultural Freedom to seize the cultural and, with that, the political initiative from the Soviet Union.¹ During the late 1940s and early 1950s the Soviet Union achieved considerable success in repairing the image of Stalinism abroad, and in discrediting those opposed to it. Of particular concern to the Congress, which included in its ranks leading intellectuals and artists drawn from the non-communist Left in Europe and America, as well as a number of disillusioned and highly motivated former Marxists, was the Soviet Union's apparent success in fostering a politically neutral stance amongst intellectuals, artists and scientists in Western Europe, and France in particular.

Addressing itself to Soviet attacks against so-called 'decadent' Western art, the Congress sought in this instance to counter the Soviet propaganda thrust by staging a festival featuring twentieth-century works of art deemed by Nicolas Nabokov to be 'the products of free minds in a free world'.² Although the festival featured exhibitions of modern painting and sculpture, and a series of celebrity-studded panel discussions of art and literature, Nabokov's professional background and his intimate understanding of the Soviet Union's proscriptions against its own composers ensured that music was the primary focus. The inclusion of works by Soviet composers who were at best openly criticised by their own government, and at worst silenced, was intended to reinforce the Congress's view that, in contrast to the 'gradual eclipse of culture behind the iron curtain', it was a measure of the robustness of Western society that in all forms of expression were 'open to acceptance or rejection, praise or criticism, freely and openly'.³

The choice of Paris as the site for the festival pointed to a more assertive political agenda. Owing to the strength of the orthodox Stalinist Parti communiste français (PCF) France was seen by Western and Soviet strategists as the soft underbelly of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) alliance. The dual intention was to shore up French support for the alliance and, for international consumption, to stage a demonstration of NATO solidarity with France, literally at a time when an American-sponsored draft treaty calling for the formation of a single Western European defence force was being initialled at the Quai d'Orsay. This in turn generated a vigorous debate because in the eyes of many *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* was, as the communist newspaper *L'Humanité* declared, 'a parody of culture to facilitate

the ideological occupation of France by the United States.⁴ The inclusion of music by French composers, which was criticised for being proportionally either too little or too selective, exacerbated concerns that French culture was being used as a pawn in an ideological struggle whose nature and course were beyond France's control. The result was that those in France who were opposed either to NATO in general or the United States in particular, or who believed it vital that France be neutral, were able to articulate their political concerns by targeting various icons appropriated by the Congress in the name of 'freedom'.

The cultural ramifications of the Congress's ideological stance become more apparent when the content of the festival's music programme is taken into account. As is also frequently the case with arts festivals today, the music programme of *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* is best understood as a mixture of high-profile performances intended to entice the public to the box-office, and fringe events, which aroused the public's curiosity and, in the case of *Structures 1a*, its indignation.⁵ The former, which comprised mainly symphonic and operatic works, were staged principally at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. These were, as Janet Flanner (Genêt) pointed out, 'presented and mostly paid for by well-intentioned wealthy Americans.'⁶ The fringe events included a chamber music series at the Comédie des Champs-Élysées – described tellingly as the 'true festival' by the editor of *La revue musicale*, Albert Richard – and those events considered 'en marge', including three concerts of *musique concrète* given at the Salle du Conservatoire.⁷

Establishing who or what was to be heard on a given day was apparently not for the impecunious. According to Colin Mason the printed programme lacked specific details regarding programmes and performers:

These [details] were given on separate leaves inserted each night. These leaves however were not for sale separately, and any enthusiast who went to several concerts, and had bought a 'programme générale' at the first, had no way of finding out just what he was to hear, and who was doing it, except by producing another 350 francs. Charitably interpreted, this was bad organization. Less charitably one might call it disingenuous.⁸

The even less charitable regarded the ongoing expense as further confirmation that the festival was elitist. Rather than seeking a genuine engagement with those susceptible to Moscow's overtures it was thought to be more concerned with preaching to a converted that was in a position, materially and politically, to steer French domestic politics ever closer to the NATO camp.

Chosen by Nabokov himself, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées programme generated the most publicity for the Congress. Paradoxically, in light of its relatively conservative outlook, the programme also attracted a good deal

of controversy. Given the ambitiousness of the title *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle*, or rather what the French composer and critic Henri Barraud termed its inaccurate translation 'for American promotional purposes' as 'Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century', Nabokov's programme could not have satisfied everyone.⁹ Rollo Myers described the programming dilemma as follows:

The Festival naturally came in for a good deal of criticism in various quarters – criticism not always free from a partisan taint, either political or artistic – and the organisers were often blamed for what they had omitted rather than praised for what they had managed to include. That there should have been omissions in so vast a field as that of the entire musical production of a half a century is not surprising; nor is it surprising that opinions differed as to what should or should not have been selected among the masterpieces of the 20th century.¹⁰

The most frequently voiced criticism of the programme was that it was, as the music critic for the *New York Times*, Olin Downes, suggested, 'a lopsided affair . . . looking mainly at the past and little at the present and future'.¹¹ Like many observers Downes was concerned that, save for notable exceptions, there was a bias in favour of music that was either neo-tonal or drawn from the early twentieth-century canon or, inexplicably in view of the festival's title, even earlier in the case of Hector Berlioz's overture *Le carnaval romain* (1844), Richard Strauss's *Don Juan* (1889), and Claude Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1892). Given the stated aims, the inference drawn from this was that the defence of the so-called 'free' world against 'the rise and spread of totalitarian doctrine' was best served through an exhibition of cultural icons created at a time removed from the historical moment.¹² The stance added fuel to the debate already raging in Parisian intellectual and artistic circles concerning the avant-garde and its relevance to post-war society.

The retrospective nature of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées programme was underscored by the place of honour accorded Igor Stravinsky who, amid great fanfare, returned to Paris for the first time since the summer of 1938. Stravinsky's music had, much to the chagrin of Boulez and his classmates at the Paris Conservatoire, also been the focus of the 1945 commemorations of the liberation of Paris.¹³ *Symphony in C* had also featured during the earlier celebrations, although the critic Roland Manuel was irritated by what he called its 'serious superficiality' and 'limpid refinement'.¹⁴ An editorial appearing on the same page as Manuel's critique admonished the celebrations as an indulgence which, despite being 'an antidote for the Nazi poison', detracted from other, more profound attempts to restore the dignity of a fractured nation. Events leading up to *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* suggest that

Nabokov had decided that neo-classicism of the type celebrated in *Symphony in C* remained a no less viable panacea.

So it was that for the second time in seven years Stravinsky came to be associated with Paris and liberty. Denise Tual recalled that all the publicity for the festival was linked to Stravinsky's participation.¹⁵ Tual, together with Hervé Dugardin, the director of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and the millionaire American industrialist Julius Fleischmann, formed the Comité de direction artistique for *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle*. She, perhaps understandably, was aghast to receive a list of demands from Stravinsky's son-in-law, André Marion, who asserted that the composer on his visit would not be giving any press interviews or answering questions. Neither would he pose for photographs, nor participate in any official or private receptions. This led Tual to suspect that she was dealing with 'an aging capricious star, a spoilt child interested in money above all else'. Nabokov reassured her that she would find Stravinsky a most charming man, although she and others were alarmed when, upon arrival at Orly airport and being faced with a media scrum, Stravinsky threatened to take the next available flight home. The text of Stravinsky's statement, prepared by Nabokov and read out by the composer on the tarmac with his wife, Vera, Robert Craft and Nabokov at his side, was reported in *Combat*:

I am extremely moved to return to France for the first time since the events of the last war forced our departure. I thank you for your welcome, which in its warmth and simplicity has touched me greatly. It is with great joy that I am able to present to my French friends – thanks to the devoted efforts of the organisers of the Festival of *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* – some of my more recent compositions and to work with magnificent orchestras which I so admire and appreciate...¹⁶

Bernard Gavoty well understood why the Congress was keen to adopt Stravinsky as a figurehead. There was, in Gavoty's estimation, simply no musician 'of greater significance, greater originality, and whose discoveries have carried more weight'. 'In the absence of heroes', Gavoty intoned, 'here is a champion of the twentieth century.'¹⁷ What better individual, then, to carry the standard of Western music into battle against socialist realism?

Any number of people, as far as Jean Kanapa was concerned. Writing in *L'Humanité* under the none-too-subtle sub-heading 'Le festival du XXe siècle... américain', Kanapa was scathing about both Stravinsky's involvement and the Congress's choice of Soviet works: 'The organisers have announced that they will perform works by the Soviet composers Shostakovich and Prokofiev, but only those that have been criticised by the Soviet public,

and by the composers themselves. It is the formalist Stravinsky, who has come to represent all that is American, who will be the big star.¹⁸ Many French men and women would have felt uneasy at Kanapa's linkage of 'le festival américain' with the declaration by the director of *Life* magazine, Henry Luce, that the twentieth century was 'the American century'.

Yet what Mason described as the 'deification' of Stravinsky at the festival should also be considered within the context of Nabokov's contribution to what was an ongoing debate.¹⁹ The debate addressed the relative merits of restoration, as characterised by neo-classicism, and innovation, as typified in the first instance by Schoenberg's development and use of twelve-tone technique, and subsequently by Boulez's uncompromising application of the technique to parameters other than pitch. Nabokov had earlier locked horns with René Leibowitz on the issue in an exchange published in the *Partisan Review*. Nabokov was, together with Nadia Boulanger, among the more vocal defenders of Stravinsky's neo-classicism, while Leibowitz was the principal advocate of Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique in the immediate post-war years in France. The arguments put forward by the two men correspond to the dialectical model that was at the same time being formulated by Theodor Adorno for his *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1948).

Leibowitz argued that Schoenberg's greatness lay in his discipline. The composer in his development of twelve-tone technique had 'accepted the consequences of a tradition' and used it in a way that had 'entirely transformed the art of sound'.²⁰ Stravinsky's approach to composition was by contrast 'arbitrary and hedonistic', and although the composer was 'originally attracted by new sounds and rhythmic devices [he] failed to really see what they implied'. Conversely, Nabokov's view was that Schoenberg was neither innovative nor necessarily disciplined. For Nabokov, twelve-tone technique was merely the final and inevitable step in the evolution of tonal harmony. According to Nabokov, Stravinsky was the true revolutionary because his expansion of the rhythmic possibilities freed the composer from 'the burden of a declining [polyphonic] tradition' – supposedly a burden under which Schoenberg had laboured.²¹ Freed from the burden, Stravinsky sought to 're-establish ties with the true polyphonic thinking of the eighteenth-century tradition'.

Nabokov in his defence of Stravinsky maintained that the composer's neo-classicism constituted a form of renewal. The sociological implications of Nabokov's essentially Apollonian view of art, which he shared with Stravinsky, were expressed clearly in a letter to the composer written soon after the conclusion of World War II: 'In the tragic world in which we live... only a few encouraging, reasonable, and beautiful things remain. One of these, and for me the most important, is your art, with all its nobility, beauty, and

intelligence... It is in thinking of the Symphony in C that one begins to see clearly, and to feel again the meaning of *homo sapiens*.²²

That Nabokov should find mankind's salvation in the most archetypal of Stravinsky's neo-classicist works established a precedent for its performance at *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* under the direction of the composer. The possibility that Nabokov was assisted to his conclusion by the composer's dedication of the symphony 'to the glory of God' suggests a value judgement based upon the relationship between text and music, one that will become increasingly significant as events unfold. Certainly, Stravinsky's dedication lends to the work a sense of closure that is consistent with the sonata-form accommodation of the first movement of the symphony.

Nabokov's preparedness to laud the regenerative potential of neo-classicism, and Leibowitz's invocation of Schoenberg's increasingly out-moded twelve-tone technique with which to counter Nabokov's claims, doubtless failed to impress Boulez. Under the aegis of *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* Boulez, both in word (the essay 'Eventuellement...') and in deed (*Structures Ia*), adopted a position that implied that Leibowitz's logic was wrong for the right reasons, and Nabokov's was right for the wrong reasons.²³ Boulez's view, made abundantly clear in 'Possibly...' and the infamous essay 'Schoenberg Is Dead' (which appeared during the month of the festival), was that however innovative Schoenberg's development of twelve-tone technique may have seemed at first glance, the technique was really more evolutionary than revolutionary. As far as Boulez was concerned, Schoenberg's failure to apply serial operations to musical parameters other than pitch betrayed a lack of genuine revolutionary zeal. More critically, it also meant that the overall unity of his twelve-tone compositions was hopelessly compromised, because pitch content was generated using serial logic, while the other musical elements were obtained according to a 'pre-existent' rhetoric.²⁴ By the same token, Stravinsky's 'blend of complex vocabulary and a complex rhythmic syntax' was effectively neutralised because it was rendered subservient to 'poles that are as classical as could be: tonic, dominant, and subdominant'.²⁵ According to Boulez's rationale, Leibowitz was right to recognise the importance of Schoenberg's adoption of twelve-tone technique, but wrong because he failed to acknowledge Schoenberg's reluctance to pursue the technique to its logical, evolutionary conclusion. Nabokov, on the other hand, was right to emphasise the revolutionary aspect of Stravinsky's rhythmic innovations, but wrong to assume that this gave some kind of historical justification for neo-classicism.

In 'Possibly...' and 'Schoenberg Is Dead' Boulez proclaimed with youthful arrogance the redundancy of any composer who did not embrace the serial aesthetic. Yet at the same time he invoked the idea of freedom of choice

through a generous use of the word ‘liberty’ in defending his position. The following from ‘Schoenberg Is Dead’ captures Boulez’s style and idea: ‘It is not leering demonism but the merest common sense which makes me say that, since the discoveries of the Viennese School, all non-serial composers are *useless* (which is not to say that all serial composers are useful). It will hardly do to answer in the name of so-called liberty, for this liberty has the strong flavour of ancient servitude.’²⁶ In ‘Possibly...’ Boulez made it clear that the servitude to which he referred was one adopted towards ‘the vocabulary of classicism’, which he argued had become the rallying point for those who ‘in the name of *liberty*, forbid themselves to be *prisoners* of the [serial technique]’.²⁷

Boulez was dealing with the concept of freedom on two levels. The first addressed the frequently voiced accusation that serial operations deprived the composer of creative choice once the parametric sequence had been established: a criticism challenged by György Ligeti in his analysis of *Structures 1a*.²⁸ Boulez was equally sceptical of the opposing argument that music that responds to the pull of the tonic necessarily gives the composer a greater freedom of choice. Stravinsky, who attended the première of *Structures 1a*, made it clear that he subscribed to this view when, in the one interview that he granted in Paris during *L’Œuvre du XXe siècle* (for the Congress’s journal *Preuves*), he stated that ‘the serialists are prisoners of the number twelve. I feel a greater freedom with the number seven.’²⁹ Should the reader be in any doubt as to who was the pre-eminent jailer, Stravinsky concluded the interview with the words: ‘L’oncle Joseph a tout “bétonarmé”.’

The second, more profound conception of freedom turns on the issue of whether creative freedom is a condition to be enjoyed, as was the case with Stravinsky, or asserted, as Boulez sought to do through the expansion of serial technique. It will emerge that there is a correspondence between these positions and political ideology, in that neo-tonality of the type celebrated during *L’Œuvre du XXe siècle* affirmed an ideal of freedom that the United States enjoined its European allies, and France in particular, to embrace. *Structures 1a* was, by contrast, an assertion of independence from the cultural and ideological conditioning to which France was being exposed.

Any perception that neo-tonality stood for renewal or serialism for reform rested then, as it does now, on their susceptibility to external commentaries. Clement Greenberg had some twelve years earlier grappled with the same issue. Events during *L’Œuvre du XXe siècle* suggest that there was a good deal of prescience in Greenberg’s findings concerning the ideological potential of avant-garde art, and what he regarded as its diametrical opposite, kitsch, which he identified with surrealism.³⁰ Greenberg’s argument turned on the idea that avant-garde art ‘imitates the processes of art [whereas] kitsch

imitates its effects'.³¹ The former is concerned with articulating the primary creative impulse, with establishing the materials and processes through which those inner impulses find expression. Conversely, kitsch, with its emphasis on reception, is in effect a commentary on pre-existing impulses and processes. The intervention in kitsch of an imitative agency between the creator and the creative process renders the artwork susceptible to subversion by a third party. That window of opportunity, the ability to assert that a given work is not *ipso facto* autonomous, was in Greenberg's estimation exploited by totalitarian regimes with the view to furthering their ideological agendas – socialist realism being a typical example.³²

Adorno made similar claims regarding Stravinsky's neo-classicism, and these claims help to establish a broader context for Nabokov's praise of *Symphony in C*. Echoing Greenberg's concerns, Adorno described Stravinsky's work as 'music about music', and asserted that 'the concept of mutilated tonality itself, upon which all Stravinsky's works since *L'Histoire* are more or less based, presumes "literarily" established subject matter for music. Such material exists outside the immanent formal validity of the work and it is determined through a consciousness which exerts itself also from outside the work.'³³

Like Greenberg, Adorno believed that self-referential art was susceptible to the intervention of a third agency – to 'a consciousness which exerts itself also from outside the work'. Nabokov sensed in Stravinsky's *Symphony in C* just such a consciousness, a philosophical preoccupation which allowed him 'to feel again the meaning of *homo sapiens*'. This coincided with the Congress's later view that the nobility of mankind and freedom of political association were indivisible, and accordingly it allowed Nabokov to unite his aesthetic preferences with his ideological beliefs.

Boulez in a lecture series given at Darmstadt in 1960 appears also to have subscribed to the idea of intervention. Boulez acknowledged that although there would always be outside commentators who attempted to uncover a political message in a given work, music 'cannot undertake the task of expounding rational ideas'.³⁴ Yet he immediately qualified this by adding that 'music can, on the other hand, undertake the qualification of our ideas, their emotional character and their ethical content. This is particularly true when there is a generally accepted system of conventions, so that certain musical situations automatically evoke certain mental situations by means of associative reflexes.'

To apply Boulez's logic, neo-classicism constitutes a generally accepted system of conventions, governed above all by the resolution of dissonance to consonance. Stravinsky's dedication of *Symphony in C* to God established an association between conventional tonal practice and spiritual

affirmation. Nabokov's reflexive association in this instance might follow a sequence whereby Stravinsky's neo-classicism reminded him of Man's nobility, which was itself a condition articulated in an expressive freedom that could only be guaranteed through freedom of political association. Boulez's attitude towards neo-classicism suggests that he, too, regarded it as a system of conventions, albeit one that he was determined to confront. Boulez associated Stravinsky's neo-classicism with devolution, which went hand in hand with artistic servitude and a loss of individuality.

Boulez went on to state that 'If this system of conventions disappears or the meaning of the conventions is for some reason lost, we are unable to decipher that particular code of ideas to which the music refers.' This realisation bears out Greenberg's belief that the autonomy of the avant-garde, which is by definition against existing convention, meant that only it could keep culture free from subversion in the midst of 'ideological confusion and violence'.³⁵ Nabokov's Théâtre des Champs-Élysées programme, which, as Suzanne Demarquez observed at the time, eschewed music representative of 'today's aesthetics', appears to have been an acknowledgement that avant-garde music could not be relied upon to communicate either the specifics of the Congress's ideological agenda or the strengths of musical composition in the West.³⁶ This is scarcely surprising, given that Nabokov in a recent letter to Stravinsky had singled out Boulez as a composer 'who writes notes, not music'.³⁷ Nabokov was not alone in the view. The PCF's Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, who contributed regularly to *Ce soir* and *Les lettres françaises*, was of the opinion that Boulez's twelve-tone music was incomprehensible to one who 'still craves... the moral strength of music'.³⁸ She reported that the moral strength denied during a performance of Boulez's Second Piano Sonata (1948) was restored subsequently with a performance of an unnamed work by Robert Schumann.

Nabokov's programme, with its bias towards music that was possessed of a sense of closure capable of sustaining an ideological emphasis, was consistent with the Congress's belief that political freedom was a necessary precursor to individual freedom of expression. The Congress believed that once favourable political (that is, pro-NATO) conditions were established in Eastern Europe, freedom of expression would flourish. It sought to remind those Western intellectuals and artists whom it feared had been targeted by the Soviet Union that there was no artistic freedom under Stalinism. Conversely, given the Congress's desire to counter what it perceived to be Soviet-inspired neutralism in France, to attempt to do so using music that was resistant to external commentaries was problematic. The question to be resolved is whether the chamber music component of *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle*, with its emphasis on music that was resistant to ideological appropriation,

constituted an attempt, either deliberate or subliminal, to depoliticise a cultural battle that William Barrett at the time warned was a prelude to World War III.³⁹

Colin Mason was one of a number of critics who suspected that the Congress's cultural agenda was a hostage to political exigencies. According to him, this was confirmed by the Congress's failure during *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* to join in the protests in Paris that greeted the ban imposed by the French government upon Roger Vailland's play *Le colonel Foster plaidera coupable* (*Colonel Foster Will Plead Guilty*).⁴⁰ A fiction set in wartime Korea, the play concerns the aftershocks of war crimes committed by an American colonel on the battlefield.⁴¹ Comparisons were immediately drawn between the villain Colonel Foster and General Matthew Ridgway, whose allegedly ruthless battle tactics in Korea and stance in favour of biological warfare were widely condemned in Paris. The closing of the play by French police was, as the *New Statesman and Nation* reported, 'all the more awkward as we are now in Paris right in the middle of a Festival of "The Free Art of the Western World", whose aim is to show how lucky artists are, all the way from Bach to Britten, not to have lived or be living under the Soviet system of police controls!'⁴² The Congress's indirect and somewhat timid reply, via the June 1952 edition of *Preuves*, was that *Le colonel Foster* crossed the fine line between freedom of expression and 'provocation'.⁴³

L'Humanité rejoiced in linking General Ridgway's first visit to Paris since his appointment as NATO military commander with the closure of the play and *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle*: "That "cultural freedom", in reality an American festival placed misleadingly under its banner, and the arrival yesterday of Ridgway, have brought about the closure by Pinay of *Colonel Foster*, truly gives one cause to reflect."⁴⁴ The newspaper's call for protests against the 'war criminal' Ridgway resulted in the arrest of its editor, and police raids on Communist Party premises. The right-wing *L'Aurore* called the protests against a senior officer of 'the army that liberated us...intolerable'.⁴⁵ The streets of Paris were engulfed in protests for and against the three events. In what was a rather unfortunate juxtaposition, *L'Aurore* carried a front-page photograph of Ridgway's arrival next to one featuring the President of the Republic and his entourage enjoying *Oedipus rex* from their box at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. For reasons possibly beyond its control the Congress fiddled while Paris burned.

The position adopted by a large proportion of French society was that the Cold War power struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union was more concerned with perpetuating outmoded and ultimately unworkable political ideologies than with a genuine pursuit of liberty. To those who advocated a Neither-Nor stance *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* was little



Figure 1 US President Truman and Joseph Stalin conjugate the possessive.
Nation 171 (16 December 1950), 593

more than a thinly veiled attempt by the Congress to make it appear that the organisation also placed freedom of expression above political expediency. Jean Gandrey-Rety, the editor of *Les lettres françaises*, declared that he had uncovered the ulterior political motive behind the festival. According to Gandrey-Rety, any doubts that the whole exercise was little more than an 'American political propaganda enterprise' would have to be laid to rest in view of an article published in the *New York Herald Tribune* of 21 April 1952. The article gave notice of the festival under the self-explanatory sub-heading 'The War for the Spirit of Man: Soviet Cultural Propaganda Will Receive a Response in Paris This Spring Through a Festival Presenting Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century.'⁴⁶ A perusal of Nabokov's programme led Gandrey-Rety to conclude that the festival 'was not an expression but a caricature or falsification of the spirit of the twentieth century'.

A similarly political motive surfaced in Nabokov's own justification of *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle*. Echoing NATO concerns, Nabokov identified France as a country where 'there are many who proclaim with bitterness that our culture is dead... that the fruits of our creative impulses lack meaning in today's world'.⁴⁷ Nabokov in his earlier criticism of Leibowitz's letter to the *Partisan Review* judged those who embraced the serial aesthetic to be among the disillusioned. Nabokov accused Leibowitz of being reactionary in his championing Schoenberg's dodecaphony and asserted, moreover, that Leibowitz's 'revival of a settled debate shows a lack of new ideas' and as such was indicative of the 'impotent attitude which is now so apparent in most phases of cultural and political life in Europe'.⁴⁸ Nabokov's bias against twelve-tone music obliged Dika Newlin to come to Leibowitz's defence. Newlin pointed out that Nabokov's accusation regarding the dearth of new ideas was 'particularly infelicitous' in view of the fact that twelve-tone technique was enjoying a revival in a France 'dominated by Stravinsky, Boulanger, and *Les Six*'.⁴⁹ But Nabokov's statement was more than a mere declaration of personal taste when it is borne in mind that his diagnosis of

impotence accorded with the view later held by the Congress's hawks that there was no place for neutralism in the face of an increasingly assertive ideological enemy.

Nabokov's preparedness to make a connection between the precarious political situation in France and the rise of serial thought is significant in view of the fact that the Congress's anti-neutralist stance in Europe was concordant with American foreign policy imperatives. That agenda was underscored by strong suspicions that the Congress was from the outset funded partially by the United States's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), an alleged relationship that when given wider publicity in the late 1960s, most notably in Christopher Lasch's ground-breaking essay in the *Nation*, 'The Cultural Cold War', led to the Congress's demise.⁵⁰ The suspicion held by the French Left, communist and non-communist, that the United States government and the Congress by association were seeking to build upon the Nazi proscriptions against communism and modernism could only have been heightened by the spectre of *Kulturbolschewismus* betrayed in Nabokov's rejoinder to Leibowitz that 'the problem of atonality' was hitherto a 'closed issue... the revival [of which] in France is a part of a general infiltration of "Mittel-Europa" ideas into the "cora" of French civilisation...'⁵¹ As was the case with other 'Mittel-Europa' ideas, communism and existentialism in particular, serialism was regarded by Nabokov as intrinsically alien to the French, and a potential impediment to France's cultural and ideological rejuvenation.

A notable exception to the exclusion of twelve-tone music from the orchestral programme of *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* was Luigi Dallapiccola's *Canti di prigionia*, which employs a less than rigorous use of tone rows. The reason for its inclusion was undoubtedly because, as is the case with Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, the work protests against physical and mental torture, a protest consistent with the Congress's championing of the nobility of humanity in the face of persecution and tyranny. A similar protest may also account for the inclusion of works as diverse as Benjamin Britten's *Billy Budd*, performed by the Covent Garden Opera Company under the direction of the composer, and Schoenberg's monodrama *Erwartung* which, in an irony not lost on Stravinsky, appeared on the same programme as the second of two performances of *Oedipus rex*.⁵² Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Berg were identified by Nabokov in his prospectus as being composers of what Soviet critics called decadent and degenerate music.⁵³

Denise Tual was entrusted by Nabokov with overseeing preparations for the performance of *Oedipus rex*, which was generally acknowledged to be the focal point of the festival.⁵⁴ The opera-oratorio's imposing orchestral and choral forces were conducted by Stravinsky, using an elaborate *rideau*

de scène and seven *tableaux vivants* (allegorical figures performing short actions) designed by Jean Cocteau. Cocteau also acted as the Narrator to his own Latin libretto. Relations between Stravinsky and Cocteau were strained initially, owing to Stravinsky's apparent reluctance to deal directly with Cocteau. Stravinsky's reticence was, as far as Tual and Nabokov were concerned, because he had been unduly influenced by persistent rumours that Cocteau had collaborated with the Nazis during the war.⁵⁵ Stravinsky understandably did not want to see his long-awaited return to Paris mired in controversy. Yet any personal animosity, and the considerable difference of opinion between the two men concerning the hierarchy between the visual and aural aspects of the production, were set aside in a warm public embrace following its first performance.⁵⁶

Olin Downes reported that pressure was brought to bear on the festival organisers by 'the British' in order to ensure that 'if an opera by Benjamin Britten be performed it must be his latest work, *Billy Budd*'.⁵⁷ Irrespective of whether the insistence was based on the opera's humanitarian message, or on a national rivalry that sought to showcase new works, the opera proved to be less than successful, not least because the French failed apparently to see the humour in the line 'Don't like the French!' Writing in *Le Figaro*, 'Clarendon' lambasted *Billy Budd* as 'long and annoying'.⁵⁸ *L'Aurore* was even less forgiving, and reported that Henri Sauguet had expressed relief at not having to pay to see it, and that a certain Florent Fels had dismissed the opera as 'pretentious and homosexual'.⁵⁹ Downes was a little more circumspect, dismissing it only as 'weak and amateurish'.⁶⁰

Myers regretted that the withdrawal of John Barbirolli and the Hallé orchestra, owing to a large difference of opinion over the choice of programme, had left the British represented by William Walton's *Façade*, Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Dives and Lazarus*, Michael Tippett's *Plebs angelica*, Antony Hopkins's *Carillon* and Constant Lambert's Piano Concerto.⁶¹ As far as Myers was concerned, the only high point for the British was Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, which had been heard previously in Paris, although 'never before decked with a splendour quite as rich as that imparted to it by the strings of the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Pierre Monteux'.

The Congress extracted a good deal of propaganda value out of featuring works by composers who were thought to have laboured under Soviet censure. These included two by Serge Prokofiev (*The Prodigal Son* and *Scythian Suite*) and Dmitri Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, the orchestral score of which was performed as a concert suite 'in spite of Stalin and the verdict of his commissars that the music would never again be

played', as Nabokov boasted.⁶² Soviet sensibilities were no doubt further affronted by these works being performed by the orchestra of the West Berlin Radio in the American Sector (RIAS). The difficulties experienced by Shostakovich in the wake of *Lady Macbeth* were highlighted in an article by Nabokov published in the special issue of *Preuves* given over to *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle*.⁶³ For the benefit of the English readership the saga of *Lady Macbeth* was retold by Nabokov in his festival prospectus:

on its first performances in 1934 in Leningrad and Moscow [the opera] was hailed as the great masterpiece of Soviet operatic art, but in 1937 it disappeared from the face of the free world, all copies of its score having been recalled to Russia, we have learned, on direct orders from no less a personality than Joseph Stalin himself, there, we presume, to be buried in a forbidden museum of 'decadent' works by Soviet creative artists. After a fantastically difficult hunt, we found a concert version through underground sources in Vienna.⁶⁴

Nabokov in the *Preuves* article placed on an equal footing Shostakovich's loss of artistic liberty and the decision by Manuel de Falla (whose *Suite from The Three-Cornered Hat* was performed at the festival) to flee Franco's Spain. In this regard one of the few areas of coincidence between the Congress's European members and the PCF was their shared desire to block Spain's admission to NATO, or at least slow the pace of its rehabilitation within the European community. Many in France made a sharp distinction, one lost on the more hawkish Congress members, between fascism as a form of political oppression and communism as a progressive social experiment. The *Preuves* article also featured a tribute to Béla Bartók, who was honoured at the festival with a concert featuring his works exclusively. As Nabokov pointed out, not only was Bartók's music the target of Soviet attacks, but his native Hungary was one of the more recalcitrant Soviet satellites.

A no less politically charged aspect of Nabokov's selection criteria emerged in a letter from Nabokov to Stravinsky, in which the details of the latter's impending involvement in the festival were discussed. A performance of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, to be conducted by Roger Désormière, apparently had been proposed for the festival. Nabokov's response was that the Congress found Désormière (who was at the time a close friend and confidant of Boulez) unacceptable because he was an active member of the Communist Party.⁶⁵ That a similar association did not preclude works by Elsa Barraine and Henri Dutilleux being performed in the chamber music series suggests that Fred Goldbeck was less concerned with the political allegiances of the composers than his American counterpart.

Nabokov's agenda for the orchestral component of *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* can be summarised as one in which personal allegiance and aesthetic preference combined to produce an expectation that music, if it was to be of use to pro-NATO forces as a weapon in their ideological struggle with the Soviets, should ideally be capable of sustaining an association with humanist values that the Congress argued were either absent or suppressed in the Soviet Union. Nabokov recognised the potential for neo-tonality, and Stravinsky's neo-classicism in particular, to fulfil these aims. What Mason described as the Congress's desire to restore 'the virtues of classical formality, impersonality and objectivity' was celebrated by the use in the festival's logo of Orpheus's lyre, adorned with a star to reinforce the connotation of power and glory.⁶⁶

There was a good deal of pragmatism in responding to Soviet cultural incursions using means that were readily understood. The problem for the avant-garde was that this created a double bind whereby popular taste and communist dictates appeared to conspire against it. There was, for Mason, an unpalatable truth in all this, one that calls to mind Greenberg's metaphorical 'umbilical cord of gold' through which an increasingly autonomous avant-garde was nurtured by a supposedly increasingly alienated social élite:

the modern artist's function, differing essentially from that of his predecessors at almost any time in history, is to serve not a small social aristocracy where all such culture as there may be is concentrated, but a vast democracy in which the highly cultured form an infinitesimal minority – a minority rapidly becoming deprived . . . of its cultural domination, and soon perhaps to be deprived of all means of existence, not by the wicked Communists, but by the ineluctable evolution of society.

The need to reconcile the pursuit of innovation with creative outcomes accessible to the broader population troubled liberal American ideologues well before *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle*. A precedent in this regard was the dilemma facing the directors of New York's Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) during the mid-1940s. Capitalising upon the considerable prestige of the MOMA, the directors, including James Johnson Sweeney, who was later to curate the visual art component of *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle*, wanted to encourage innovation and individuality in American art in a way that would not alienate audiences and critics. Guilbaut describes a scenario that foreshadows Nabokov's agenda for *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle*:

What the critics expected from the Museum of Modern Art was a consistent aesthetic line, a guide to good taste . . . In such an uncertain time what was needed was a positive aesthetic choice capable of responding to

contemporary needs, a direction that the American public could follow without grumbling. What was needed above all was a sense of unbroken continuity. Only continuity could assure the stability of a culture that stood in such urgent need of protection against chaos.⁶⁷

Yet what the American public got for its trouble was Jackson Pollock, soon to become a high priest of Abstract Expressionism. The Museum directors had decided to champion a symbol of the new, young America, 'strong, adventurous, exuberant, and open to the world': an emboldened, secure America ready, willing, and able to rescue the Western world and its seemingly embattled culture.

Sweeney's selections for the visual art component for *L'Œuvre du XXe siècle* pursued the theme of continuity. The rationale was that there was an unbroken line of tradition in recent Western art, one that not only far surpassed anything that could be produced on demand by a government, but which needed also to be actively defended. One hundred and twenty-five paintings traced the evolution of visual art from the late nineteenth century, as represented by Van Gogh, Cézanne and Renoir, through Picasso, Gauguin, Kandinsky, Miró, Chagall, Matisse, Masson, Dali, Mondrian and de Chirico.⁶⁸ To this impressive list were added sculptures by artists such as Brancusi, Arp, Calder and Giacometti.

The crucial omission here is the work of Abstract Expressionists championed on the other side of the Atlantic, which is all the more surprising given that Pollock was on the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. The omission suggests that Sweeney recognised that Paris was, in comparison to an America in the ascendant, too fractured socially and politically to attach an ideological import to a Pollock or Willem de Kooning. Like Nabokov, Sweeney perhaps realised what Guilbaut suggests was one of the main reasons why New York was able to seize the artistic momentum from Paris at the time. This was quite simply that in Paris 'the weight of tradition was too great to allow an avant-garde to achieve victory overnight. Various traditions in art were deeply rooted and many had direct ties to political parties.'

Sweeney's exhibition of paintings by Picasso confirms that he, like Goldbeck, was more inclined than Nabokov to overlook an artist's political or ideological preferences. Nabokov and Stravinsky had intended initially to mount a full stage production of *Le sacre du printemps*, re-choreographed by George Balanchine, who wanted to collaborate with Picasso on the set design. As was the case with Désormière, Nabokov responded by saying that 'naturally, after the recent antics of Comrade Picasso... he is out of the question for us.'⁶⁹ Chief among Picasso's misdemeanours was his

well-publicised support for the Soviet position, which resulted in regular features of his representative works in *Les lettres françaises*.

For all of his advocacy of the festival as a celebration of ‘free minds in a free world’, Nabokov’s actions imply an aesthetic and ideological bias that differed from the Soviets only in its political complexion. Both parties remained preoccupied with the ends rather than the means – with the value or appropriateness of the creation itself, rather than the freedom implicit in the act of creation, an exercise of freedom that formed a significant part of the *raison d’être* of the French avant-garde.