Chapter 1

Background

In this chapter, I will attempt to tackle different concerns regarding a single question that I consider to be very important, that is: *what is radical music today?* This question I think is particularly relevant at the present time considering that for some years now the prevailing ideology in thinking about music has been one of skepticism and indifference towards radical ideas and innovation in how we create, perform and listen to music. In addition, there has been an urge to find new terminology to define music that defies it's conventional definition and functions. New terms such as Sonic Arts, Sound Art, Audio Art, etc., have emerged in an attempt to justify these new practices. It has been precisely the resistance and unwillingness toward accepting radical music that has motivated the invention of new definitions that try to identify these sonic practices as 'other' arts and not as music. The reluctance to widening the definition of *what music is* has motivated some to search for new definitions that they believe will give some acceptance and legitimacy to their practices. Instead of taking this approach, I prefer to struggle a bit more with the concept of music and I am of the opinion that one should strive to redefine *what music is* rather than following the recent trend to find new names for recent practices relating to sound. This is important, I think because. . . .

-Division of Music and Music Tech/Sonic Arts, etc. -Technological Innovation is not equal to Radical or Innovation in Music!

1.1 Rancière and the Reevaluation of the Notion of Modernity

Jaques Rancière in his book *The Politics of Aesthetics* examines the relationship between the concept of modernity and the break from figurative representation in the visual arts. He argues that the departure from representation of images through figurative means is often confused with aesthetic modernity, which is specific to a single regime of the arts. That is, "a specific type of connection

between ways of producing works of art or developing practices, forms of visibility that disclose them, and ways of conceptualizing the former and the later."[1] If one is to think about this confusion that is associated with the concept of *modernism* in the realm of music, some questions come into mind: Does this confusion apply to the musical domain and if so how does it manifest itself? Is it possible to talk about representation in music and if so within what context? Could one compare the breaking from figurative representation to the departure from tonality at the beginning of the twentieth century? Has 'the musician' gone through a corresponding redefinition of *what is expected* from him by the community the same way as 'the fine artist' has through the process of modernisation?

In the following discussion, I will attempt to read Rancière's text as applied to music not only with the purpose of tracing parallels and discrepancies between music and fine art, but to try to find out something particular about music itself. Also, I will venture to examine the limitations of the notion of modernity within music and its relationship to the wider modernist political project.

1.1.1 The Distribution of the Sensible

Before starting our discussion on the notion of modernity and its political and aesthetic consequences, first I will try to examine the relationship of aesthetics and politics in the work of Rancière. According to Rancière, the political and the aesthetic spheres are intrinsically linked through what he calls 'The distribution of the sensible.'

> I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution.[2]

It is precisely this system of division of spaces, times and forms of activity that defines aesthetics and is also at the heart of politics. Therefore, aesthetics takes part in the political act of governing and in determining who the rulers are and how they come to power; as well as how the commons are distributed within a community. Here though, Rancière points out, that in order to make the

[1] Jaques Rancière, 'The Distribution of the Sensible,' in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Trans. Gabriel Rockhill, London: Continuum, 2004, p. 20.

[2] Ibid., p. 12.

relationship between politics and aesthetics, one must understand aesthetics "in a Kantian sense—re-examined perhaps by Foucault—as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience."[3] Aesthetics therefore should be seen here beyond the conventional view as strictly belonging to the confines of art and should not be seen merely as the 'aesthetic practices' manifested in different artistic disciplines. In contrast, in order to think of aesthetics in a context that could be applied outside of the arts, it requires its abstraction as modes of action, production, perception and thought; a system of "delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience."[4] Therefore, through the work of Rancière, it is possible to think of aesthetics in politics with a broader understanding of aesthetics as the distribution of the sensible. Moreover, for Rancière, 'aesthetic practices' that disclose visibility in artistic practices reveal 'ways of doing and making' that exist and have visibility within the community. There are different manifestations of this practices that confine an aesthetic distribution.

> This forms define the way in which works of art or performances are 'involved in politics,' whatever may otherwise be the guiding intentions, artists' social modes of integration, or the manner in which artistic forms reflect social structures or movements. . . . In this way, a sensible politicity exists that is immediately attributed to the major forms of aesthetic distribution such as theater, the page, or the chorus. There 'politics' obey their own proper logic, and they offer their services in very different contexts and time periods.[5]

Consequently, it could be argued that there is an inherent political core in the way this artistic forms are constituted. Moreover, within each major aesthetic discipline lays a political project that renders a distribution of 'ways of doing and making,' an internal mode of organization and a delimitation of what remains visible or invisible.

1.1.2 The Regimes of Art

In order to understand Rancière's reevaluation of the notion of modernity one must first understand what he calls the three 'regimes of art,' which are modes of identification and articulation between 'ways of doing and making' and forms of visibility, as well as their conceptualization. In other words,

[3] Ibid., p. 13.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

the 'regimes of art' simply distinguish different ways of making and thinking about 'art' and how it is perceived.

The Ethical Regime of Images and the Poetic Regime of Art

To begin with, Rancière defines the *ethical regime of images* as the pragmatic Platonic[6] notion of the use and distribution of images in relationship to the community's *ethos*. This regime therefore uses images as 'true' imitations of the original and are distributed and valued by their purpose of educating the community in accordance to it's social order. Therefore, within this regime 'art' is not evaluated by qualities within itself but by their purpose in the community. He goes on to define a *poetic regime of art* (also referred to as *representative regime of art*) as that which breaks away from the *ethical regime of images* and values the arts in terms of their own *substance*.

> I call this regime *poetic* in the sense that it identifies the arts—what the Classical Age would later call the 'fine arts'—within a classification of 'ways of doing and making,' and it consequently defines proper 'ways of doing and making' as well as means of assessing imitations. I call it *representative* insofar as it is the notion of representation or *mimēsis* that organizes these ways of doing, making, seeing and judging. Once again, however, *mimēsis* is not the law that brings the arts under the yoke of resemblance. It is first of all a fold in the distribution of 'ways of doing and making' as well as in social occupations, a fold that renders the arts visible. It is not an artistic process but a regime of visibility regarding the arts.[7]

If one is to apply Rancière's notion of the 'regimes of art' to music and understand the difference between the *ethical regime of images* and the *poetic regime of art* outside the domain of the visual and fine arts, first one must remember that music not only has different social functions and visibility, but within it's unique organization, it has particular 'ways of doing and making' that are specific to it's own discipline. Even though music occupies a different and particular position in the ways of distributing the sensible, I will continue to argue that it is still possible to refer to the *ethical* and the *poetic* regimes in music.

Following Rancière categorization, I will refer to music within the *ethical regime* as music that is made, heard and judged for it's purpose within the community. By this, I mean music that is not assessed by it own qualities—or as Rancière would say 'by it's own *substance*'—but by the purpose

[6] As in Plato's *The Republic*—not sure about this one. . .

[7] Ibid., p. 22.

it performs within the community. Examples of this in western tradition would include church, court and military music, to mention just a few. It is easy to find music that falls within the *ethical regime* in other cultures where in some cases music is not even differentiated from other disciplines, like dance or storytelling, and is performed (in some cultures everyone partakes in music-making) and valued by members of the group by it's communal and ceremonial purposes (celebration, mourning, war, etc). Of course, one can still find many examples of the *ethical regime* today in music for theater, dance, television, films and religious purposes. Here, I want to make clear that I am not attempting to devalorize or make a value judgment about music that falls within the *ethical regime*. Furthermore, some music might also qualify within more than one regime simultaneously.

I will define music that falls within the *poetic regime* as that which is appreciated for its own *substance* but still follows or imitates a model.[8] Namely, music that is judged by it's own 'musical' qualities, and that is made with the main purpose of been listened to and evaluated by it's own subject matter. This music would be *representative* insofar as it imitates or resembles a musical model (for example rules of harmony, counterpoint or sonata form, to mention just a few). A lot of western 'concert music' would follow in this category in that it is made, heard and valued for it's 'musical' qualities and judged as good or bad, adequate or inadequate, satisfactory or not, based on how the performer or composer follows certain models—in the case of the performer, models of performance practice, and in the case of the composer, compositional models such as chord progressions, voice-leading, musical themes, variations, etc.

It is interesting to note that even though in the visual arts, the breaking from the *ethical regime of images* and the establishment of the *poetic regime of art* is what separates the 'fine arts' from other modes and techniques of production (of images, shapes, objects, etc), in music there is not such a change in definition. That is to say, in the visual arts this break between *ethical* and *poetic* regimes identifies the arts as such but in music it does not change its identification. Why is it that on the musical domain it is still plausible to call the 'ways of doing and making' in both regimes *music*? Why within our culture someone who designs billboards is not considered to be a *fine artist* (it probably would fall into graphic design) while someone who writes jingles for television commercials is still a *musician*? Later, I will come back to this questions and look at the possible reasons and implications of this difference. However, before drawing any conclusions about the consequences of this disparity, first I will examine the *aesthetic regime of art* to have a better understanding of Rancière's enquiry.

[8] By model I not only mean the written but also the unwritten rules in music performance and composition. The written rules could be for example tretises of harmony and orchestration whereas the unwritten rules could be performance practices and conventions in composition and improvisation, too name a few.

The Aesthetic Regime of Art and the Shortcomings of the Notion of Modernity

Rancière calls the *aesthetic regime of art* that which liberates art from the *poetic regime* by breaking with its identification as the division of 'ways of doing and making.' The *aesthetic regime* therefore puts an end to the models used by the *poetic regime* and breaks the barriers of identification in the arts. It does so by distinguishing art as an occupation that establishes, questions and alters the concept of what art is, it's hierarchies, subject matter and genres.

> The aesthetic regime of the arts is the regime that strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres. Yet it does so by destroying the mimetic barrier that distinguished 'ways of doing and making' affiliated with art from other 'ways of doing and making,' a barrier that separated its rules from the order of social occupations. The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity.[9]

Hence, the *aesthetic regime* establishes the autonomy of art and at the same time makes art independent of it's own forms. As a result, the artist becomes a practitioner of a discipline specific to whatever falls into the category of art.

At this point, I suggest to examine the *aesthetic regime* in the domain of music. I will propose that music that falls within this regime is music that challenges the *poetic regime* and the very notion of *what music is* at a given point in time. It also should be thought as a regime that makes music independent from it's own subject matter, rules, conventions and genres, and frees it from specific 'ways of doing and making.' It changes music's visibility and makes it autonomous from the very notion of itself, from it's expected 'musical' and social functions.[10] In the history of music, it is easy to think of examples of music that breaks with musical practices of its time and redefines itself[11]. It is even possible to think of brief historical periods before the twentieth century where one can observe some form or manifestation of the *aesthetic regime* in music. Nevertheless, it is difficult to think of music as an autonomous discipline, freed from it' own *substance*. That is to say, even though the definition of music has changed and was challenged in several occasions, it was not until the twentieth century that the concept fully emerged of 'the musician' as someone who creates whatever he conceders suitable music to be and is not expected to follow traditional formulas of music-making.

[9] Ibid., p. 23.

[10] Here, I refer to 'social functions' not as in the purpose or use of music within the *ethical regime*, but the social functions it performs within the *poetic regime*.

[11] There are too many examples for me to list them here.

Even to this day, I think that this concepts of music and 'the musician' are not completely widespread within the community.[12]

Rancière, goes further to examine the limitations of the notion of modernity and it's relationship to the *aesthetic regime of art*. He describes what commonly is referred to as *modernism* in art as an 'incoherent' label designated instead of what truly should be attributed to the *aesthetic regime of art*. There is a sort of simplicity ascribed to the notion of modernity that is viewed as a clear line of transition or rupture from the old to the new and in the case of the visual arts between figurative and non-figurative representation. Rancière argues that the break from figurative representation is a confusion that emerged from the simplistic view that this break would mean a rupture from the *poetic regime of art*.

> The basis for this simplistic historical account was the transition to non-figurative representation in painting. This transition was theorized by being cursorily assimilated into artistic 'modernity's' overall anti-mimetic destiny. . . . However, it is the starting point that is erroneous. The leap outside of *mimēsis* is by no means the refusal of figurative representation.[13]

Therefore, the break from figurative representation does not mean the establishment of a new visibility for art nor a break from the mimetic barrier. Moreover, Rancière asserts that the contradiction of the *aesthetic regime of art* which on the one hand establishes the autonomy of art and on the other hand questions the distinction between art and other activities leads to two big misunderstandings of the notion of modernity. The first confusion was to simply associate the modernist movement with the autonomy of art. The modernist project was therefore reduced only to an anti-mimetic[14] movement that concentrates on the idealistic concept of stripping away from all references of previous art forms and works in order to reveal art's 'purity' of form and reach it's 'essence.' They attempted this by exploring only the formal aspects of art by focusing on the capabilities of it's own medium. The second big confusion, according to Rancière, is the idea that the forms of the *aesthetic regime of art* were somehow related to other forms that would materialize by accomplishing a task or fulfilling a destiny specific to modernity. In other words, the revolution that rendered autonomy to art became the example for the Marxist revolution. The failure of both the anti-mimetic principles of

[12] See p.23-24 for a further discussion on the possible reasons for this problem.

[13] Ibid., p. 24.

[14] From now on, I will use the term 'anti-mimetic' as reffering to the *erroneous* modernist notion that associates *mimēsis* with figurative representation in the visual arts and tonal music as well as references to other musical styles and traditions in music

modernism and the political revolution resulted in a 'crisis of art' caused by this paradigms of modernism. Modernism in art therefore "became something like a fatal destiny based on a fundamental forgetting."[15]

1.2 Modernity and Music: Misconceptions and Misunderstandings

I will propose that a similar confusion has taken place in western music, which leads to analogous misunderstandings regarding the so called modernist project. However, in order to avoid simplifications, one should first remember certain aspects about the state of western music at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. It is important first of all to realize that due to certain developments in western music by the end of the nineteenth century there was a clear specialization of musicians—some were trained specifically as performers and others as composers. This division of occupations in music lead to a greater dichotomy in the 'ways of doing and making' music. The specificity of the performer's creative decisions therefore became mostly linked to the realization of a given score. The composer's role, on the other hand, was to provide a score to the performers and establish certain directions and instructions on parameters such as pitch, rhythm, musical form and instrumentation. During this time, the role of the composer became more prominent concerning music innovation and therefore most of these developments are attributed mostly to composers in western music. Hence, I will mostly refer to composers in attempting to explain the limitations of the notion of modernity in music. Nevertheless, by no means I am attempting to discredit or ignore the performers' role—I am just referring to the more widespread view of these developments. Later in this chapter, I will explain how this division of occupations in wester music has been questioned and how performers have also attempted to establish themselves within the *aesthetic regime* but first, I will analyze the work of some composers that reflect the misunderstandings usually ascribed to the modernist project.

At the end of the nineteenth century, composers such as Wagner, Mahler and Debussy, to name a few, were already expanding the tonal system through what became widely known as the 'emancipation of dissonance,' signaling what was to become a radical break in western music—that is, Schönberg's moving away from the tonal system altogether and starting to compose freely, without following the tonal system. This *event*—as Alain Badiou would describe it—signals a step towards the *aesthetic regime* in that this gesture attempts to free music from previous models thus venturing to unleash music from it's own *substance*. Schönberg, in he's period of so called "free atonality"[16] and

[15]Ibid., p. 27.

[16]The period between 1908 and 1923 in which Schönberg abstained from using tonality and did not adhere to a

later with his twelve-tone method[17], breaks away from the convention that a composer should follow previous models of composition and starts to define a new notion of the composer as someone who decides what he considers music to be and chooses how it is to be organized. Therefore, the rupture from the tonal system at the beginning of the twentieth century challenges the definition of music in western society and contributes to redefine 'the musician' as someone who does not follow existing models, but can invent his own modes and systems of music-making. However, it is important to note that the break from tonality by no means represents the establishment of an *aesthetic regime* in music nor a leap outside representation and the *poetic regime*. Stravinski's *Le Sacre du Printemps*[18], is a clear example of a work that points towards the *aesthetic regime* but does so not by abandoning tonality, but by breaking with other models of concert music. The radicality of *Le Sacre du Printemps* comes from developments in musical parameters such as rhythm, tonality (polytonality, etc), timbre and form, but not from a complete renounce from tonality. Stravinsky's use of folk-music, primitive rhythms, asymmetric structures and orchestral textures was music never heard before and stretched the definition of concert music as well as proposed new ways of organizing it's subject matter, freeing music from specific 'ways of doing and making.' At the same time Stravinsky invents new rules and defies traditional genres and styles, which are all characteristics of the *aesthetic regime*.

Schönberg's importance in the establishment of the *aesthetic regime* is also not to be discredited and I believe that by departing from tonality, he certainly redefined *what music is* and questioned music's subject matter. Moreover, through his revolutionary shock on the community's notion of music, he certainly contributed to changing the notion of 'the musician' as someone who produces what *he considers music to be*. It is also compelling to see that Schönberg's use of dissonance was not with the purpose of centering his musical discourse around pitch organization or being non-referential to previous styles and genres. Paradoxically, even though his way of organizing pitches was radically new, he was fairly traditional in his use of other musical parameters such as form[19], timbre and gesture. For Schönberg, the methods to organize notes or achieve atonality were not very important elements in his work.

> I personally do not find that atonality and dissonance are the outstanding features of my works. They certainly offer obstacles to the understanding of what is really my musical subject.[20]

systematic method of pitch organization.

[17]Devised by Schönberg in 1921 and first described to his inner circle in 1923.

[18]Premiered in Paris, 1913.

[19]He constantly used traditional forms such as sonata form, suite and theme and variations.

[20]Arnold Schönberg, *Style and Idea*, Trans. Leo Black, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984, p. 77.

This separates him from the next generations of composers that embraced his twelve-tone system and who's main compositional objective focused on the organization of these twelve pitches.

1.2.1 Anti-mimetic Tendencies and the Influence of Serialism

It is by trying to understand this next generation of serialist composers' work that Ranciére's analysis of the confusion of the notion of modernity comes handy. It is crucial to remember the fist confusion, which is to simply seek the autonomy of art through anti-mimetic strategies. In the case of music, this was attempted by focusing on formal aspects of music such as how to organize pitches, rhythms, dynamics and all other possible 'musical' parameters. By giving importance to the formal aspects of the compositional medium they sought to stretch music's capabilities and to seek music's autonomy by striping it away from all references of other musics. It is fascinating to read that when Schönberg showed his twelve-tone method to his associates in 1923, he already could notice the potential problems of looking at music only in terms of the formal techniques implemented to compose it.

> What I feared, happened. Although I had warned my friends and pupils to consider this as a change in compositional regards, and although I gave them the advice to consider it only as a means to fortify the logic, they started counting the tones and finding out the methods with which I used the rows. Only to explain understandably and thoroughly the idea, I had shown them a certain number of cases. But I refused to explain more of it, not the least because I had already forgotten it and had to find it myself. But principally because I thought it would not be useful to show technical matters which everybody had to find for himself and could do so. This is also the error of Mr. Hill. He also is counting tones and wants to know how I use them and whether I do it consequently.[21]

Schönberg's use of the twelve-tone method did not have an anti-mimetic purpose and he devised it to be able to have a systematic approach to form and to compose melodies, themes, phrases and chords. He also made clear his abandonment of the tonal system was not more important than other aspects of his work. It is important to note as well that after the invention of his method, he relied on gestures, orchestration and structures that where related to traditional styles and genres—specially those of the germanic tradition. Therefore, Schönberg's invention of the twelve-tone method was mostly pragmatic and did not have the purpose of not referring to other musics or focusing only in music's formal aspects. It is precisely these aspects of Schönberg's use of dodecaphony that later

[21] Ibid., p.214.

Boulez would criticize in his article "Schönberg is dead."

> From Schönberg's pen flows a stream of infuriating clichés and formidable stereotypes redolent of the most wearily ostentatious romanticism: all those endless anticipations with expressive accent on the harmony note, those fake appoggiaturas, those arpeggios, tremolandos, and note-repetitions, which sound so terribly empty and which so utterly deserve the label 'secondary voices'; finally, the depressing poverty, even ugliness, of rhythms in which a few tricks of variation on classical formulae leave a disheartening impression of bonhomous futility.[22]

For what interested Boulez in the twelve-tone system were the formal aspects of the *series*—an approach closer to Webern's dodecaphony. One can already see here in Boulez's position an anti-mimetic preoccupation to avoid clichés and references to pervious traditional music as well as a modernist concern towards the formalization of music through the capabilities of serialism.

> It has to be admitted that this ultra-thematicization is the underlying principle of the *series*, which is no more than its logical outcome. Moreover, the confusion between theme and series in Schönberg's serial works is sufficiently expressive of his inability to envisage the world of sound brought into being by serialism. For him dodecaphony is nothing more than a rigorous means for controlling chromaticism; beyond its role as regulator, the serial phenomenon passed virtually unnoticed by Schönberg.[23]

It was through the development of serialism in the fifties and sixties—lead by Boulez and Stockhausen—that composers would seek music's pure form through the serialization of all conceivable 'musical' parameters, thus focusing only in an exploration the formal capabilities of music and sound. The confusion caused by the establishment of the *aesthic regime* that identifies modernity only with the autonomy of art and which lead to an anti-mimetic revolution became a major force in postwar european avant-garde. Serialism thus would seek through it's self-contained system an ideal of music that would avoid any external or 'impure' elements and would attempt to escape any reference to other existing music. The scope of the serialist movement and it's influence over the avant-garde and 'modernist' composers across the world should not be overlooked. Even composers that did not adhere themselves to the serialist camp were influenced by the leading focus on the

[22] Pierre Boulez, 'Schönberg is dead,' in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 212-213.

[23] Ibid., p.212.

abstract organization of sound and 'musical' parameters and they too adopted the anti-mimetic ideal as an important aesthetic principle.[24]

1.2.2 The Political Revolution and Modernism in Music

Another misconception of the notion of modernity in music was the association of the *aesthetic regime* with the fulfillment of a Marxist revolution. The aesthetic revolution was confused with it's materialization in the social and political domains. Therefore, the revolution that attempted autonomy for music was identified with the modernist political project and the social application of it's ideals of egalitarianism, solidarity and liberty. Leftist politics was associated with the artistic avant-garde and a misleading link was formulated between modernism in music and the political revolution. Curiously enough, Schönberg again detected the fallacy of establishing a direct relationship between serialism and leftist politics—in fact, with any other political association—and like Rancière,[25] makes the point that progressive artistic innovation can produce developments within art but bears no direct correspondence in the political sphere.

> It has become a habit of late to qualify aesthetic and artistic subjects in terms borrowed form the jargon of politics. Thus mildly progressive works of art, literature or even music might be classified as 'revolutionary' or 'left-wing,' when they only evolve artistic possibilities. . . . No wonder, then, that there are people who call the method of composing with twelve tones 'bolshevik.' They pretend that in a 'set of twelve tones,' upon which such compositions are founded, since there is no tonic nor dominant, every tone is considered independent, and consequently exerts equal functions. This is wrong in every respect. . . . Whether this concept is an advantage or a handicap to the composer or to the listener, certainly it has nothing in common with 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity,' neither with the bolshevik, fascist, nor any other totalitarian brand.[26]

Despite Schönberg's warning, many associations where made between modernity in music and the Marxist revolution. This notion was also fueled by the political affiliation of many composers and by their general plea for revolution in both the aesthetic and political spheres. Marxist themes where also incorporated in music identified as modernist using leftist texts, images and sounds based

[24]Some examples of composers that were influenced by these ideals at some point in their career include John Cage, Morton Feldman, Alvin Lucier and Earl Brown in America and Pierre Schaeffer, Iannis Xenakis, György Ligeti, Helmut Lachemann and Cornelius Cardew in Europe.

[25]See Rancière, 'Politicized Art,' in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, pp.60-66

[26]Schönberg, pp. 249-250.

on the struggle of the proletariat, student demonstrations and other revolutionary events. Luigi Nono most notably was engaged with political activism and at the same time used Marxist dialectics and other themes related to leftist ideology in his compositions. Nono viewed music as a form of activism and at the same time embraced strategies related with the aesthetic revolution. Many of his works use titles and texts that are politically engaged and at the same time reject musical representation. He viewed his work as a continuation of the developments of the Second Viennese School and his approach to musical material can be closely linked with serialism and the Darmstadt School—despite certain differences he had with Boulez and Stockhausen.[27] Consequently, there is an interesting contradiction inherent in Nono's *oeuvre* between on the one hand the use of many 'extra-musical' references to address political concerns and on the other hand an anti-mimetic stand which avoids 'musical' references that could be associated with leftist politics and ideology.

Other composers that followed a leftist political affiliation but used strategies that were considerably different to the serialist approach were a group who's most prominent figures included Rzewski, Cardew, Wolff and Curran. Some of their compositions rejected the modernist notion of an anti-mimetic ideal with the purpose of introducing political themes as musical material in their compositions and others questioned the division of occupations imbedded in western music-making. Georgina Born argues that these composers were more politicized than what she calls the 'postserialist camp.'

> Beginning in the later 1960s, inspired in part by Marxist-Leninism or Maoism, there emerged out of this a set of experimental composers, including Wolff, Cardew, Frederic Rzewski, and their followers, who were more frankly politicized than those in the postserialist camp. In some cases they attempted to produce political effects through the use of or by reference to, revolutionary popular musical material or lyrics. Another strategy, developed by some of the same composers but more widely influential, extended the critiques of the musical division of labor. Composers such as Cardew, Wolf, and groups such as the Italian-American MEV *(Musica Eletronica Viva)*, the British Scratch Orchestra, and AMM, emphasized changes in the social relations of music production and performance in their attempt at a new interactive, collective, and nonhierarchical group practice. The social dimension of music was seen as a crucible for experiments in collective and democratic social relations.[28]

[27] Nono was against Boulez and Stockhausen's interest in the music of John Cage and the use of indeterminism and chance operations. See Luigi Nono, *Texte. Studien zu seiner Musik*, ed. Jürg Stenzl, Zürich: Atlantis, 1975, pp.34-40.

[28] Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture : IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*,

According to Born, the later strategy as implemented by these groups questioned the power structures and division of occupations in western music through collective compositional strategies based on group improvisation as a method of creating music. By avoiding hierarchical forms of composition and performance these groups attempted to challenge the traditional roles of composer, conductor and performer. Their purpose was to pursue an ideal of an egalitarian division of the group and democratic relations between musicians. Born suggests that there was a conscientious attempt by these groups to invigorate the principle of equality and freedom within the politicity of western music production and performance. Nevertheless, a counter-argument could easily be raised against Born's position if one would just questions the effectiveness of these two approaches within the political and aesthetic spheres.[29] Despite how effective their strategies where, the contribution of this group of composers to the association between a leftist political revolution and the notion of modernity in music should not be underestimated.

1.2.3 The Fall of Communism and the Shortfalls of Utopian Thinking

Given the association between musical modernity and the Marxist revolution, 'the fall of Communism' was later conceived as a failure of modernist aesthetics. The aesthetic revolution in music and it's ontological model came under scrutiny and close examination. The corruption and abuses brought with the implementation of Marxist ideals in communist countries brought disillusionment and skepticism toward utopian ideals in politics and contributed to a further examination of utopia as it manifests in other aesthetic practices. Richard Taruskin, one of the prominent critics of utopia in music, asserts that the fundamental problem of utopia is that it imagines a 'perfect world' instead of a 'better world.'

> But what utopians envision is not a better world. It is a perfect world—or in Kant's two-centuries-old formulation, "a perfectly constituted state"—that utopians wish to bring about. And that is what makes them dangerous, because if perfection is the aim, and compromise taboo, there will always be a shortfall to correct—a human shortfall. . . . When communism "fell," the intellectual world divided into two camps: those who said it was time to go back to the drawing board and those who said it was time to get rid of drawing boards. I am utterly of the latter persuasion.[30]

Berkley: University of California Press, 1995, pp. 58-59.

[29] See p.33-35 for a further discussion on free group improvisation as a political model.

[30] Richard Taruskin, 'Against Utopia,' in *The Danger of Music*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2009, p. xii.

According to Taruskin, there is a gap between the imagined state of perfection and it's implementation in reality. It is this gap that is dangerous as it depends on a deficit that has to be corrected and that may result in human casualties and suffering.

He argues that one of the shortfalls of utopian thinking has been the decline in popularity and dominance of classical music in contemporary culture. This has been partly attributed to the dominance of utopian ideals in modern performance-practice and has been the governing attitude of professional performers in their rendition of classical music's 'masterpieces.' Edward Said has written about how musical performance, with the specialization of musicians and the division of labour in western classical music during the twentieth century, has become what he calls an 'extreme occasion.'[31] The phenomenon of viewing an abstract piece of music as represented in a score as a 'utopia' gives the performer the 'heroic' opportunity to display their virtuosity and physical dexterity in their attempt at a 'perfect' rendition of the composition. This extreme musical practice in classical music, Said suggests, has gone as far as to replace the composer from the center of classical music. Despite the dominance and relative popularity of these 'superstar' performers, the influence of classical music has declined in western culture, even within the intellectual elite.[32] It is precisely this utopian practice, in combination with the invention of recording—listening to recordings became a substitute for music-making—that has alienated the layperson from playing classical music. Therefore, one of the shortfalls of this utopian practice has been that the amateur musician has become intimidated by the professional and has abandoned the performance of classical music. At the same time, the deficit of amateur musicians attempting this compositions has had a counter-effect in that it has also taken their attention away from classical music.

In twentieth century composition, utopian thinking may be associated with the other main misunderstanding of musical modernity that I have previously discussed. That is, the utopian ideal of an aesthetic revolution that would seek music's autonomy by stripping it away from all possible references to other types of music.[33] This was attempted by focusing in music's formal aspects and the capacities of it's own medium in order to attempt music's 'perfect' construction. One of the shortfalls of this utopian way of thinking was that contemporary composition became extremely unappealing to a general public that was not educated in the formal aspects of music and found this

[31]See Edward W. Said, 'Performance as an Extreme Ocation,' in *Musical Elaborations*, London: Vintage, 1992, pp. 1-34.

[32]Said refers to an annecdote about Michel Foucault commenting to Pierre Boulez about the ignorance that contemporary intellectuals have about popular and classical music. See Ibid., p 15.

[33]This was mostly true in regard to making reference to other existing western music as some modernist composers looked for alternatives to the western aesthetic by researching non-western musical traditions.

music extremely difficult as it also lacked any reference to any other music that was familiar to them. This resulted in an unfortunate seclusion of the musical avant-garde that found it's main refuge in academia, which became a comfortable yet alienated new home for composers to test their musical 'experiments'—composition at universities consequently became an academic specialization[34] which on the most part focused on technical aspects of music.

The failure of the anti-mimetic principles of modernity in combination with the 'fall of Communism' resulted in a major crisis in music that was caused by the decline of modernist aesthetics and the loss of confidence in utopian thinking. After this crisis, musical modernist tendencies remain to this day 'in life support' and one can not but avoid noticing their nostalgic attitude and unyielding acceptance of defeat—they remain as vigilant victims of a lost utopia, endlessly waiting for a futile comeback. Taruskin points that this attitude of continuing new music's 'quiet' presence in contemporary culture in hope that one day it becomes more widely recognized as important or relevant—an attitude according to him dominant in academic circles—is year anoter consequence of utopian thinking that he associates with communist revolutionary ideals and to the Soviet order.[35]

1.3 Postmodernism and the resurgence of representation in music

Postmodernism in music first came as a reaction to everything that modernist composers stood for: the formalization of music's subject matter, the quest for non-resemblance, the desire for musical progress and emancipation, the association of the aesthetic and political revolutions, and the search for music's 'essence' and 'purity' of construction. Therefore, at the beginning, composers who used the postmodernist 'label' simply identified the confusion ascribed to the notion of modernity and the aesthetic regime and attempted to rectify it by reversing all modernist ideals in music. Rancière attributes postmodernism, at first to "the name under whose guise certain artists and thinkers realized what modernism had been: a desperate attempt to establish a 'distinctive feature of art' by linking it to a simple teleology of historical evolution and rupture."[36] This was attempted firstly by breaking away from 'abstract' treatments of musical parameters and other anit-mimetic practices by reintroducing tonality and references to other traditional and popular music either by quotation or resemblance. Luciano Berio was one of the first european avant-garde composers that started to

[34]Here, one can not avoid making reference to Babitt's famous article 'Who cares if you listen.' See Milton Babbitt, "The Composer as Specialist," In *The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt.* ed. Stephen Peles, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. pp 48-54.

[35]See Tarusking, p.

[36]Rancière, 'The Distribution of the Sensible,' p. 28.

reintroduce references to other existing music in his work. In Sinfonia[37] . . . . Berio. Sinfonia.

> And the time came when the semiologist discovered that the lost pleasure of images is too high a price to play for the benefit of forever transforming mourning into knowledge.[38]

1.3.1 The Critique of Meta-Narratives

Lyotard. Grand narratives...

1.3.2 The Society of the Spectacle and the Carnaval of Simulacra

Guy Debord.

> However, it was precisely the next episode that showed that postmodernism was more than this. The joyful, postmodern artistic license, it's exaltation of the carnival of simulacra, all sorts of interbreeding and hybridization, transformed very quickly and came to challenge the freedom or autonomy that the modernist principle conferred—or would have conferred—upon art the mission of accomplishing.[39]

Some examples of postmodernist crap - Essa Pekka Salonen??

1.4 Radical Music Today?

- Zizek on Fukuhiama. Crisis of Capitalism. Ecological Catastrophy. Unsustainability. Need for Radical Reform in Politics? Critique of liberal democracy - need for new alternatives. - ethical regime - defined as music - elaborate. . . Close relationship to culture and musiking. - aesthetic regime in music - still pending - emancipatory potential?

[37] Composed in 1968-1969 for orchestra and eight amplified voices. Premiered in New York, October 1968.
[38] Jaques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, Trans. Gregory Elliot, London: Verso, 2007, pp. 21-22.
[39] Rancière, 'The Distribution of the Sensible,' p. 28.