

prior to the whole of nineteenth-century political theory. There is in the operas of Cherubini a revolutionary zeal rarely attained in political debate. Janis Joplin, Bob Dylan, and Jimi Hendrix say more about the liberatory dream of the 1960s than any theory of crisis. The standardized products of today's variety shows, hit parades, and show business are pathetic and prophetic caricatures of future forms of the repressive channeling of desire.

The cardinal importance of music in announcing a vision of the world is nothing new. For Marx, music is the "mirror of reality"; for Nietzsche, the "expression of truth";<sup>2</sup> for Freud, a "text to decipher." It is all of that, for it is one of the sites where mutations first arise and where science is secreted: "If you close your eyes, you lose the power of abstraction" (Michel Serres). It is all of that, even if it is only a detour on the way to addressing man about the works of man, to hearing and making audible his alienation, to sensing the unacceptable immensity of his future silence and the wide expanse of his fallowed creativity. Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political.

### The Sounds of Power

#### *Noise and Politics*

More than colors and forms, it is sounds and their arrangements that fashion societies. With noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion. In noise can be read the codes of life, the relations among men. Clamor, Melody, Dissonance, Harmony; when it is fashioned by man with specific tools, when it invades man's time, when it becomes sound, noise is the source of purpose and power, of the dream—Music. It is at the heart of the progressive rationalization of aesthetics, and it is a refuge for residual irrationality; it is a means of power and a form of entertainment.

Everywhere codes analyze, mark, restrain, train, repress, and channel the primitive sounds of language, of the body, of tools, of objects, of the relations to self and others.

All music, any organization of sounds is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality. It is what links a power center to its subjects, and thus, more generally, it is an attribute of power in all of its forms. Therefore, any theory of power today must include a theory of the localization of noise and its endowment with form. Among birds a tool for marking territorial boundaries, noise is inscribed from the start within the panoply of power. Equivalent to the articulation of a space, it indicates the limits of a territory and the way to make oneself heard within it, how to survive by drawing one's sustenance from it.<sup>3</sup> And since noise is the source of power, power has always listened to it with fascination. In an extraordinary and little known text, Leibnitz

describes in minute detail the ideal political organization, the “Palace of Marvels,” a harmonious machine within which all of the sciences of time and every tool of power are deployed.

These buildings will be constructed in such a way that the master of the house will be able to hear and see everything that is said and done without himself being perceived, by means of mirrors and pipes, which will be a most important thing for the State, and a kind of political confessional.<sup>4</sup>

Eavesdropping, censorship, recording, and surveillance are weapons of power. The technology of listening in on, ordering, transmitting, and recording noise is at the heart of this apparatus. The symbolism of the Frozen Words,<sup>5</sup> of the Tables of the Law, of recorded noise and eavesdropping—these are the dreams of political scientists and the fantasies of men in power: to listen, to memorize—this is the ability to interpret and control history, to manipulate the culture of a people, to channel its violence and hopes. Who among us is free of the feeling that this process, taken to an extreme, is turning the modern State into a gigantic, monopolizing noise emitter, and at the same time, a generalized eavesdropping device. Eavesdropping on what? In order to silence whom?

The answer, clear and implacable, is given by the theorists of totalitarianism. They have all explained, indistinctly, that it is necessary to ban subversive noise because it betokens demands for cultural autonomy, support for differences or marginality: a concern for maintaining tonalism, the primacy of melody, a distrust of new languages, codes, or instruments, a refusal of the abnormal—these characteristics are common to all regimes of that nature. They are direct translations of the political importance of cultural repression and noise control. For example, in the opinion of Zhdanov (according to a speech he gave in 1947 and never really disclaimed), music, an instrument of political pressure, must be tranquil, reassuring, and calm:

And, indeed, we are faced with a very acute, although outwardly concealed struggle between two trends in Soviet music. One trend represents the healthy, progressive principle in Soviet music, based upon recognition of the tremendous role of the classical heritage, and, in particular, the traditions of the Russian musical school, upon the combination of lofty idea content in music, its truthfulness and realism, with profound, organic ties with the people and their music and songs—all this combined with a high degree of professional mastery. The other trend is that of a formalism alien to Soviet art; it is marked by rejection of the classical heritage under the cover of apparent novelty, by rejection of popular music, by rejection of service to the people, all for the sake of catering to the highly individualistic emotions of a small group of aesthetes. . . . Two extremely important tasks now face Soviet composers. The chief task is to *develop* and per-

fect Soviet music. The second is to *protect* Soviet music from the infiltration of elements of bourgeois decadence. Let us not forget that the U.S.S.R. is now the guardian of universal musical culture, just as in all other respects it is the *mainstay of human civilization and culture against bourgeois decadence and decomposition of culture.* . . . Therefore, not only the musical, but also the political, ear of Soviet composers must be very keen. . . . Your task is to prove the superiority of Soviet music, *to create great Soviet music.*<sup>6</sup>

All of Zhdanov's remarks are strategic and military: music must be a bulwark against difference; for that, it must be powerful and protected.

We find the same concern, the same strategy and vocabulary, in National Socialist theorists. Stege, for example:

If Negro jazz is banned, if enemies of the people compose intellectual music that is soulless and heartless, and find no audience in Germany, these decisions are not arbitrary. . . . What would have happened if the aesthetic evolution of German music had followed the course it was taking in the postwar period? The people would have lost all contact with art. It would have been spiritually uprooted, all the more so since it would find little satisfaction in degenerate and intellectual music that is better suited to being read than heard. The gulf between the people and art would have become an unbridgeable abyss, the theater and concert halls would have gone empty, the composers working counter to the soul of the people would have been left with only themselves for an audience, assuming they were still able to understand their own wild fancies.<sup>7</sup>

The economic and political dynamics of the industrialized societies living under parliamentary democracy also lead power to invest art, and to invest in art, without necessarily theorizing its control, as is done under dictatorship. Everywhere we look, the monopolization of the broadcast of messages, the control of noise, and the institutionalization of the silence of others assure the durability of power. Here, this channelization takes on a new, less violent, and more subtle form: laws of the political economy take the place of censorship laws. Music and the musician essentially become either objects of consumption like everything else, recuperators of subversion, or meaningless noise.

Musical distribution techniques are today contributing to the establishment of a system of eavesdropping and social surveillance. Muzak, the American corporation that sells standardized music, presents itself as the "security system of the 1970s" because it permits use of musical distribution channels for the circulation of orders. The monologue of standardized, stereotyped music accompanies and hems in a daily life in which in reality no one has the right to speak any more. Except those among the exploited who can still use their music to shout their suffering, their dreams of the absolute and freedom. What is called

music today is all too often only a disguise for the monologue of power. However, and this is the supreme irony of it all, never before have musicians tried so hard to communicate with their audience, and never before has that communication been so deceiving. Music now seems hardly more than a somewhat clumsy excuse for the self-glorification of musicians and the growth of a new industrial sector. Still, it is an activity that is essential for knowledge and social relations.

### *Science, Message and Time*

“This remarkable absence of texts on music”<sup>8</sup> is tied to the impossibility of a general definition, to a fundamental ambiguity. “The science of the rational use of sounds, that is, those sounds organized as a scale”—that is how the *Littré*, at the end of the nineteenth century, defined music in order to reduce it to its harmonic dimension, to confuse it with a pure syntax. Michel Serres, on the contrary, points to the “extreme simplicity of the signals,” “the message at its extreme, a ciphered mode of communicating universals” as a way of reminding us that beyond syntax there is meaning. But which meaning? Music is a “dialectical confrontation with the course of time.”<sup>9</sup>

Science, message, and time—music is all of that simultaneously. It is, by its very presence, a mode of communication between man and his environment, a mode of social expression, and duration itself. It is therapeutic, purifying, enveloping, liberating; it is rooted in a comprehensive conception of knowledge about the body, in a pursuit of exorcism through noise and dance. But it is also past time to be produced, heard, and exchanged.

Thus it exhibits the three dimensions of all human works: joy for the creator, use-value for the listener, and exchange-value for the seller. In this seesaw between the various possible forms of human activity, music was, and still is, ubiquitous: “Art is everywhere, for artifice is at the heart of reality.”<sup>10</sup>

### *Mirror*

But even more than that, it is “the Dionysian mirror of the world” (Nietzsche).<sup>11</sup> “Person-to-person described in the language of things” (Pierre Schaeffer).

It is a mirror, because as a mode of immaterial production it relates to the structuring of theoretical paradigms, far ahead of concrete production. It is thus an immaterial recording surface for human works, the mark of something missing, a shred of utopia to decipher, information in negative, a collective *memory* allowing those who hear it to record their own personalized, specified, modeled meanings, affirmed in time with the beat—a collective memory of order and genealogies, the repository of the word and the social score.<sup>12</sup>

But it reflects a fluid reality. The only thing that primitive polyphony, classical counterpoint, tonal harmony, twelve-tone serial music, and electronic

music have in common is the principle of giving form to noise in accordance with changing syntactic structures. The history of music is the “Odyssey of a wandering, the adventure of its absences.”<sup>13</sup>

However, the historical and musicological tradition would still, even today, like to retain an evolutionary vision of music, according to which it is in turn “primitive,” “classical,” and “modern.” This schema is obsolete in all of the human sciences, in which the search for an evolution structured in a linear fashion is illusory. Of course, one can perceive strong beats, and we will even see later on that every major social rupture has been preceded by an essential mutation in the codes of music, in its mode of audition, and in its economy. For example, in Europe, during three different periods with three different styles (the liturgical music of the tenth century, the polyphonic music of the sixteenth century, and the harmony of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries), music found expression within a single, stable code and had stable modes of economic organization; correlatively, these societies were very clearly dominated by a single ideology. In the intervening periods, times of disorder and disarray prepared the way for what was to follow. Similarly, it seems as though a fourth (and shorter) period was ushered in during the 1950s, with a coherent style forged in the furnace of black American music; it is characterized by stable production based on the tremendous demand generated by the youth of the nations with rapidly expanding economies, and on a new economic organization of distribution made possible by recording.

Like the cattle herd of the Nuer discussed by Girard,<sup>14</sup> a herd that is the mirror and double of the people, music runs parallel to human society, is structured like it, and changes when it does. It does not evolve in a linear fashion, but is caught up in the complexity and circularity of the movements of history.

This simultaneity of economic and musical evolution is everywhere present. We can, for example, toy with the idea that it is not by chance that the half-tone found acceptance during the Renaissance, at precisely the same time the merchant class was expanding; that it is not by coincidence that Russolo wrote his *Arte Dei Rumori* (“The Art of Noise”) in 1913; that noise entered music and industry entered painting just before the outbursts and wars of the twentieth century, before the rise of social noise. Or again, that it is not by coincidence that the unrestricted use of large orchestras came at a time of enormous industrial growth; that with the disappearance of taboos there arose a music industry that takes the channelization of desire into commodities to such an extreme as to become a caricature; that rock and soul music emerged with the youth rebellion, only to dissolve in the cooptation of the young by light music programming; or finally, that the cautious and repressive form of musical production condoned today in countries with State-owned property designates “socialism” (if that is

truly what it is) as simply the successor to capitalism, slightly more efficient and systematic in its normalization of men and its frantic quest for sterilized and monotonous perfection.

At a time when values are collapsing and commodities converse in place of people in an impoverished language (which in advertising is becoming increasingly musical), there is glaring evidence that the end of aesthetic codes is at hand. "The musical odyssey has come to a close, the graph is complete."<sup>15</sup>

Can we make the connections? Can we hear the crisis of society in the crisis of music? Can we understand music through its relations with money? Notwithstanding, the political economy of music is unique; only lately commodified, it soars in the immaterial. It is an economy without quantity. An aesthetics of repetition. That is why the political economy of music is not marginal, but premonitory. The noises of a society are in advance of its images and material conflicts.

Our music foretells our future. Let us lend it an ear.

### *Prophecy*

Music is prophecy. Its styles and economic organization are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code. It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things; it is not only the image of things, but the transcending of the everyday, the herald of the future. For this reason musicians, even when officially recognized, are dangerous, disturbing, and subversive; for this reason it is impossible to separate their history from that of repression and surveillance.

Musician, priest, and officiant were in fact a single function among ancient peoples. Poet laureate of power, herald of freedom—the musician is at the same time within society, which protects, purchases, and finances him, and outside it, when he threatens it with his visions. Courtier and revolutionary: for those who care to hear the irony beneath the praise, his stage presence conceals a break. When he is reassuring, he alienates; when he is disturbing, he destroys; when he speaks too loudly, power silences him. Unless in doing so he is announcing the new clamor and glory of powers in the making.

A creator, he changes the world's reality. This is sometimes done consciously, as with Wagner, writing in 1848, the same year the *Communist Manifesto* was published:

I will destroy the existing order of things, which parts this one mankind into hostile nations, into powerful and weak, privileged and outcast, rich and poor; for it makes unhappy men of all. I will destroy the order of things that turns millions into slaves of a few, and these

few into slaves of their own might, own riches. I will destroy this order of things, that cuts enjoyment off from labor.<sup>16</sup>

A superb modern rallying cry by a man who, after the barricades of Dresden, would adopt “the attitude of the rebel who betrayed the rebellion” (Adorno). Another example is Berlioz’s call to insurrection:

Music, today in the flush of youth, is emancipated, free: it does as it pleases. Many of the old rules are no longer binding: they were made by inattentive observers or ordinary spirits for other ordinary spirits. New needs of the spirit, the heart, and the sense of hearing are imposing new endeavors and, in some cases, even infractions of the old laws.

Rumblings of revolution. Sounds of competing powers. Clashing noises, of which the musician is the mysterious, strange, and ambiguous forerunner—after having been long imprisoned, a captive of power.

### The Musician before Capital

The musician, like music, is ambiguous. He plays a double game. He is simultaneously *musicus* and *cantor*, reproducer and prophet. If an outcast, he sees society in a political light. If accepted, he is its historian, the reflection of its deepest values. He speaks of society and he speaks against it. This duality was already present before capital arrived to impose its own rules and prohibitions. The distinction between musician and nonmusician—which separates the group from the speech of the sorcerer—undoubtedly represents one of the very first divisions of labor, one of the very first social differentiations in the history of humanity, even predating the social hierarchy. Shaman, doctor, musician. He is one of society’s first gazes upon itself; he is one of the first catalysts of violence and myth. I will show later that the musician is an integral part of the sacrifice process, a channeler of violence, and that the primal identity *magic-music-sacrifice-rite* expresses the musician’s position in the majority of civilizations: simultaneously *excluded* (relegated to a place near the bottom of the social hierarchy) and *superhuman* (the genius, the adored and deified star). Simultaneously a separator and an integrator.

In the civilizations of antiquity, the musician was often a slave, sometimes an untouchable. Even as late as the twentieth century, Islam prohibited believers from eating at the same table as a musician. In Persia, music was for a long time an activity restricted to prostitutes or, at least, considered shameful. But at the same time, the ancient religions produced a caste of musician-priests attached to the service of the temple, and mythology endowed musicians with super-