

## Chapter Four

# Repeating

The power to record sound was one of three essential powers of the gods in ancient societies, along with that of making war and causing famine. According to a Gaelic myth, it was precisely by opposing these three powers that King Leevellyn won legitimacy.<sup>102</sup>

Recording has always been a means of social control, a stake in politics, regardless of the available technologies. Power is no longer content to enact its legitimacy; it records and reproduces the societies it rules. Stockpiling memory, retaining history or time, distributing speech, and manipulating information has always been an attribute of civil and priestly power, beginning with the Tables of the Law. But before the industrial age, this attribute did not occupy center stage: Moses stuttered and it was Aaron who spoke. But there was already no mistaking: the reality of power belonged to he who was able to reproduce the divine word, not to he who gave it voice on a daily basis. Possessing the means of recording allows one to monitor noises, to maintain them, and to control their repetition within a determined code. In the final analysis, it allows one to impose one's own noise and to silence others: "Without the loudspeaker, we would never have conquered Germany," wrote Hitler in 1938 in the *Manual of German Radio*.

When Western technology, at the end of the nineteenth century, made possible the recording of sound, it was first conceived as a political auxiliary to representation. But as it happened, and contrary to the wishes of its inventors, it invested music instead of aiding institutions' power to perpetuate themselves; everything suddenly changed. A new society emerged, that of mass production,

repetition, the nonproject. Usage was no longer the enjoyment of present labors, but the consumption of replications.

Music became an industry, and *its consumption ceased to be collective*. The hit parade, show business, the star system invade our daily lives and completely transform the status of musicians. Music announces the entry of the sign into the general economy and the conditions for the shattering of representation.

This major conflict, inherent in industrial society, between the logic of industrial growth and the political exigencies of the channelization of violence, was announced in the confrontation between the repetitive penitents of Lent and the differentiated masks of Carnival. *The fundamental answer: to silence, through a monologue of organizations distributing normalized speech.*

For with the appearance of the phonograph record, the relation between music and money starts to be flaunted, it ceases to be ambiguous and shameful. More than ever, music becomes a monologue. It becomes a material object of exchange and profit, without having to go through the long and complex detour of the score and performance anymore. Capitalism has a frank and abstract interest in it; it no longer hides behind the mask of the music publisher or entertainment entrepreneur. Once again, music shows the way: undoubtedly the first system of sign production, it ceases to be a mirror, an enactment, a direct link, the memory of past sacrificial violence, becoming a solitary listening, the stockpiling of sociality.

The mode of power implied by repetition, unlike that of representation, eludes precise localization; it becomes diluted, masked, anonymous, while at the same time exacerbating the fiction of the spectacle as a mode of government.

*Music announces that we are verging on no longer being a society of the spectacle.* The political spectacle is merely the last vestige of representation, preserved and put forward by repetition in order to avoid disturbing or dispiriting us unduly. In reality, power is no longer incarnated in men. It is. Period.

The emergence of recording and stockpiling revolutionizes both music and power; it overturns all economic relations.

By the middle of the twentieth century, representation, which created music as an autonomous art, independent of its religious and political usage, was no longer sufficient either to meet the demands of the new solvent consumers of the middle classes or to fulfill the economic requirements of accumulation: *in order to accumulate profit, it becomes necessary to sell stockpileable sign production, not simply its spectacle.* This mutation would profoundly transform every individual's relation to music.

Just as the street hawker's blue books shaped the reader and supplanted the storyteller, just as the printer supplanted the copyist, representation would be replaced by repetition, even if for a time it looked as though they had reached an accommodation. Like the others, this shake-up was ineluctable. *Once music became an object of exchange and consumption, it hit against a limit to accumu-*

lation that only recording would make it possible to exceed. But at the same time, repetition reduces the commodity consumption of music to a simulacrum of its original, ritualistic function, even more so than representation. Thus *the growth of exchange is accompanied by the almost total disappearance of the initial usage of the exchanged*. Reproduction, in a certain sense, is the death of the original, the triumph of the copy, and the forgetting of the represented foundation: in mass production, the mold has almost no importance or value in itself; it is no longer anything more than one of the factors in production, one of the aspects of its usage, and is very largely determined by the production technology.

Reproduction, then, emerges as a tremendous advance, each day giving more people access to works created for representation—formerly reserved for those who financed the composition of the work—than at any other time since man's creation. But it also entails the individualization of the sacrificial relation as a substitute for the simulacrum of the rituality of music.

This constitutes, moreover, a massive deviation from the initial idea of the men who invented recording; they intended it as surface for the preservation of representation, in other words, a protector of the preceding mode of organization. It in fact emerged as a technology imposing a new social system, completing the deritualization of music and heralding a new network, a new economy, and a new politics—in music as in other social relations.

In the eighteenth century, the paradigm of representation succeeded in establishing itself as a scientific method in music and the sciences. Economic theories, political institutions, and counterpowers were born of these theories: the practice of creating economic models, combinatorics, harmony, the labor theory of value and the theory of social classes, Marxism. All of these concepts stem from the world of representation and still live by its conflicts. Recording expresses itself in an overturning of the whole of understanding. Science would no longer be the study of conflicts between representations, but rather the analysis of processes of repetition. After music, the biological sciences were the first to tackle this problem; the study of the conditions of the replication of life has led to a new scientific paradigm which, as we will see, goes to the essence of the problems surrounding Western technology's transition from representation to repetition. Biology replaces mechanics.

For the turn of the century was the moment when programs for the repetition of man and his discourse became generalized, shattering speech and differences, in order to channel violence and the imaginary into commodity needs and false subversions.

This radical mutation was long in the making and took even longer to admit. Because our societies have the illusion that they change quickly, because the past slips away forgotten, because identity is intolerable, we still refuse to accept this most plausible hypothesis: if our societies seem unpredictable, if the future is

difficult to discern, it is perhaps quite simply because *nothing happens, except for the artificially created pseudoevents and chance violence that accompany the emplacement of repetitive society.*

In this type of organization of the production of society, power can no longer be located simply in the control of capital or force. It is no longer an enactment through representation. And if there are no longer any localizable power holders, neither are there counterpowers that can be institutionalized in response. Power is incorporated into the very process of the selection of repeatable molds. It is spread among the different elements of the system. Impossible either to locate or seize, having become the genetic code of society, power must be changed or destroyed.

Music, transformed into a commodity, gives us insight into the obstacles that were to be encountered by the ongoing commodification of other social relations. Music, one of the first artistic endeavors truly to become a stockpileable consumer product, is exemplary. However, we must avoid reading this as a global plot of money against sociality. Neither money nor the State entirely understood or organized this mutation of music and its recording. The first, beginning in the nineteenth century, they saw only as a harmless diversion, and the second only as a functional tool to make the leader's work easier. The history of the process of the emplacement and generalization of recording is thus the history of an invention which, in spite of its inventors, played a far-reaching role in the restructuring of society. Conceived as a way of preserving one network (representation), recording was to create another (repetition), and heralded an immense mutation in knowledge and politics.

## The Emplacement of Recording

### *Freezing Speech*

In a half-century's time, an invention that was meant to stabilize a mode of social organization became the principal factor in its transformation. Beyond music, the process of this technological and ideological mutation brought on an entire transformation of a paradigm and a world vision. I would like to describe the conditions of this birth in enough detail to make its scale apparent, to allow us to ponder the real conditions of insertion of an invention in a mode of social organization, conditions that are very often unrelated to those anticipated by the innovators themselves.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, when industry established the economy of its reign, at least two French recording procedures (Léon Scott's phonotaugraph and Charles Cros' paleophone) preceded Edison's cylinder-based phonograph, which would ultimately gain acceptance. Both of them failed because they did not demonstrate the economic advantages of their use in repre-