

Chapter Five

Composing

We see emerging, piecemeal and with the greatest ambiguity, the seeds of a new noise, one exterior to the institutions and customary sites of political conflict. A noise of Festival and Freedom, it may create the conditions for a major discontinuity extending far beyond its field. It may be the essential element in a strategy for the emergence of a truly new society.

In the tumult of time, in the Manichaeism of a political debate stupidly trapped in a facile and sterile economism, opportunities to grasp an aspect of utopia, reality under construction, are too rare not to attempt to use this scanty clue to reconstruct that reality in its totality.

Conceptualizing the coming order on the basis of the designation of the fundamental noise should be the central work of today's researchers. Of the only worthwhile researchers: undisciplined ones. The ones who refuse to answer new questions using only pre-given tools. Music should be a reminder to others that if *Incontri* was not written for a symphony orchestra, or the *Lamentations* for the electric guitar, it is because each instrument, each tool, theoretical or concrete, implies a sound field, a field of knowledge, an imaginable and explorable universe. Today, a new music is on the rise, one that can neither be expressed nor understood using the old tools, a music produced elsewhere and otherwise. It is not that music or the world have become incomprehensible: the concept of comprehension itself has changed; there has been a shift in the locus of the perception of things.

Music was, and still is, a tremendously privileged site for the analysis and revelation of new forms in our society. It announced, before the rest of society,

the destruction of sacrifice by exchange and representation, then the stockpiling of the simulacrum of usage in repetition. Thus what once were rites today appear to be wastefulness; what was the foundation of peace appears as antisocial violence; what was an element in the social whole appears as a work of art to be consumed. Our society mimics itself, represents and repeats itself, instead of letting us live.

But the very death of exchange and usage in music, the destruction of all simulacra in accumulation, may be bringing about a renaissance. Complex, vague, recuperated, clumsy attempts to create new status for music—*not a new music, but a new way of making music*—are today radically upsetting everything music has been up to this point. Make no mistake. This is not a return to ritual. Nor to the spectacle. Both are impossible, after the formidable pulverizing effected by the political economy over the past two centuries. No. It is the advent of a radically new form of the insertion of music into communication, one that is overturning all of the concepts of political economy and giving new meaning to the political project. The only radically different course open for knowledge and social reality. The only dimension permitting the escape from ritual dictatorship, the illusion of representation, and the silence of repetition. Music, the ultimate form of production, gives voice to this new emergence, suggesting that we designate it *composition*.

There is no communication possible between men any longer, now that the codes have been destroyed, including even the code of exchange in repetition. We are all condemned to silence—unless we create our own relation with the world and try to tie other people into the meaning we thus create. That is what composing is. Doing solely for the sake of doing, without trying artificially to recreate the old codes in order to reinsert communication into them. Inventing new codes, inventing the message at the same time as the language. Playing for one's own pleasure, which alone can create the conditions for new communication. A concept such as this seems natural in the context of music. But it reaches far beyond that; it relates to the emergence of the free act, self-transcendence, pleasure in being instead of having. I will show that it is at the same time the inevitable result of the pulverization of the networks, without which it cannot come to pass, and a herald of a new form of socialization, for which self-management is only a very partial designation.

Composition is not easy to conceptualize. All political economy up to the present day, even the most radical, has denied its existence and rejected its political organization. Political economy wants to believe, and make others believe, that it is only possible to rearrange the organization of production, that the exteriority of man from his labor is a function of property and is eliminated if one eliminates the master of production. It is necessary to go much further than that. Alienation is not born of production and exchange, nor of property, but of usage: the moment labor has a goal, an aim, a program set out in advance in

a code—even if this is by the producer's choice—the producer becomes a stranger to what he produces. He becomes a tool of production, itself an instrument of usage and exchange, until it is pulverized as they are. From the moment there was an operability to labor, there was exteriority of the laborer. From the moment there was sacrificial ritual coded independently of the musician, the musician lost possession of music. Music then had a goal exterior to the pleasure of its producer, unless he could find pleasure—as is the case in repetition—in his very alienation, in being plugged into codes external to his work, or in his personal recreation of a preestablished score.

Exteriority can only disappear in composition, in which the musician plays primarily for himself, outside any operability, spectacle, or accumulation of value; when music, extricating itself from the codes of sacrifice, representation, and repetition, emerges as an activity that is an end in itself, that creates its own code at the same time as the work.

Composition thus appears as a negation of the division of roles and labor as constructed by the old codes. Therefore, in the final analysis, to listen to music in the network of composition is to rewrite it: “to put music into operation, to draw it toward an unknown praxis,” as Roland Barthes writes in a fine text on Beethoven.¹²⁶ The listener is the operator. Composition, then, beyond the realm of music, calls into question the distinction between worker and consumer, between doing and destroying, a fundamental division of roles in all societies in which usage is defined by a code; to compose is to take pleasure in the instruments, the tools of communication, in use-time and exchange-time as lived and no longer as stockpiled.

Is composition future or past? Is there a noise that can organize the transition toward it from the gray world of repetition? Is it possible to read composition in music—if it develops—as an indication of a more general mutation affecting all of the economic and political networks?

Music, in its relation to money, is once again prophetic, announcing the ultimate outcome of the current crisis. Although the excess of repetition heralds a crisis of proliferation, although it renders the production of demand ineffective and the pseudocommunication instituting solitude unacceptable, it also ushers in composition—amid confusion on the part of creators; in and by the death of all the networks; outside codes, exchange, and usage.

It is a foreshadowing of structural mutations, and farther down the road of the emergence of a radically new meaning for labor, as well as new relations among people and between men and commodities. Hear me well: composition is not the same as material abundance, that petit-bourgeois vision of atrophied communism having no other goal than the extension of the bourgeois spectacle to all of the proletariat. It is the individual's conquest of his own body and potentials. It is impossible without material abundance and a certain technological level, but is not reducible to that.

Music is only the first skirmish in a long battle, for which we need a new theory and strategy if we are to analyze its emergence, manifestations, and results. Music is a foretoken of *evolution on the basis of behavior* in the human world, in a crisis announced by artists' refusal to be standardized by money.

The Fracture

Representation made repetition possible by means of the stockpile it constituted. And repetition created the necessary conditions for composition by organizing an amazing increase in the availability of music.

Composition can only emerge from the destruction of the preceding codes. Its beginnings can be seen today, incoherent and fragile, subversive and threatened, in musicians' anxious questioning of repetition, in their works' foreshadowing of the death of the specialist, of the impossibility of the division of labor continuing as a mode of production.

The New Noise

What practice of music should be read as the real harbinger of the future? The pseudonew proliferates today, making it difficult to choose. Musicology always situates this essential fracture back at the entry of noise into music. That was indeed when provocation and blasphemy, the cry and the body, first entered the spectacle. Their entry was imperative in a world in which brutal noise was omnipresent; it did not, however, translate into a real rupture of the existing networks. As early as 1913, Russolo was talking about "the crashing down of metal shop blinds, slamming doors, the hubbub of crowds, the variety of din, from stations, railways, iron foundries, spinning mills, printing works, electric power stations and underground railways and the absolutely new noises of modern war."¹²⁷ He invented an orchestra of vibrators, screechers, whistles. Honegger wrote a work, *Pacific 231* (1924), which reproduces the rhythm of the wheels of a train, and Antheil wrote a *Ballet mécanique* (1926), which calls for airplane propellers. In 1929, Prokofiev wrote *Pas d'acier*; Mossolov wrote *The Iron Foundry*; and Carlos Chavez, *HP*.

In Cage, the disruption is more evident; it can be seen in his negation of the channeled nature of music and the very form of the network, in his unconventional use of classical instruments and his contemptuous sneering at the meaning attributed to Art. When Cage opens the door to the concert hall to let the noise of street in, he is regenerating all of music: he is taking it to its culmination. He is blaspheming, criticizing the code and the network. When he sits motionless at the piano for four minutes and thirty-three seconds, letting the audience grow impatient and make noises, he is giving back the right to speak to people who do not want to have it. He is announcing the disappearance of the commer-