CHAPTER ONE

LATE CAPITALISM ON VINYL

Music has an incredible power over life. For some, music reveals this power through its ability to move our bodies and inspire our minds. Who cannot resist moving their hips when Chubby Checker asks us to do the twist? Or does not feel intellectually uplifted when listening to the music of J. S. Bach? Or politically committed and socially engaged when listening to Bob Dylan’s “Hurricane” (1975), N.W.A.’s “Fuck Tha Police” (1988), or Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” (1989)?

For others though the connection between music and life is far stronger than mere affect. For people like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Miles Davis, a case might be made that “music is life.” Not just in the sense that their lives were consumed with making music, but also in a far stronger sense, namely, that for each of them “there is no life outside of music.” Understanding what these two complementary statements might mean involves a consideration about the relations not just between life and music but also death and music. This also opens up a related question, that is, What is the capacity of music to “foster life” and to “disallow it to the point of death”?
The composer of over six hundred works, including many of the most well-known and revered works of classical symphonic, operatic, concertante, choral, and chamber music, Mozart was a musical prodigy. Although he died at the age of thirty-five, almost all of these years involved musical composition in some form or another. For Mozart, it seems fair to say, music was his life. As a three-year-old, he watched his seven-year-old sister, Nannerl, take keyboard lessons with their father. After her brother’s death, Nannerl reflected on Wolfgang’s early interest in music: “He often spent much time at the clavier, picking out thirds, which he was ever striking, and his pleasure showed that it sounded good.” “In the fourth year of his age his father, for a game as it were, began to teach him a few minuets and pieces at the clavier. . . . He could play it faultlessly and with the greatest delicacy, and keeping exactly in time. . . . At the age of five, he was already composing little pieces, which he played to his father who wrote them down.” In short, his brief life from his earliest years of age was completely consumed with music and its composition.

Although Miles Davis, like Mozart, had a parent who played violin and keyboard, Cleota Mae Henry Davis was not a composer or an experienced music teacher like Leopold Mozart. Davis says in his autobiography that “[t]he first time I really paid attention to music was when I used to listen to a radio show called ‘Harlem Rhythms.’” He “was about seven or eight” at the time, and then “when I was nine or ten I started taking some private music lessons.” Like Mozart, Davis was consumed with music. “When I got into music I went all the way into music; I didn’t have no time after that for nothing else.” “By the time I was twelve,” says Davis, “music had become the most important thing in my life.” Regarding a five-year period from 1975 to early 1980 during which Davis didn’t pick up his horn even once, he comments, “I had been involved in music continuously since I was twelve or thirteen years old.”
It was all I thought about, all I lived for, all I completely loved. I had been obsessed with it for thirty-six or thirty-seven straight years, and at forty-nine years of age, I needed a break from it, needed another perspective on everything I was doing in order to make a clean start and pull my life back together again. I wanted to play music, but I wanted to play in big halls all the time instead of little jazz clubs. For the time being, I was through with playing little jazz clubs because my music and its requirements had just outgrown them.8

So, in the end, even the hiatus was about his life in music and finding a fresh perspective on it. “For me,” writes Davis in summation in his autobiography, “music has been my life.”9

For both Mozart and Davis, the biopower of music was something that they came to recognize and embrace from a very early age. They are examples of how music and life can be regarded as co-extensive and are illustrative of the extreme power of music over life. For most people, though, the power of music over life is far less overwhelming but many times no less significant. It can be observed in both the desire to dedicate one’s life to musical performance and composition as well as in the enjoyment of listening to music and the accumulation of musical recordings. To be sure, the ways in which music exerts power over life are many—even if we are only now beginning to develop accounts of the biopolitics of music.

The power of music over life though goes well beyond the individual feelings and emotions of the performer, composer, and listener. Affect theory today encourages us to engage philosophical inquiries into aesthetic feeling in a dialogue with complementary areas such as psychology, neuroscience, biology, and cultural studies. It also pushes us beyond “tired” oppositions such as subject/object, mind/body, and nature/culture. Contemporary theorists explore affect as both a philosophical and a political problem, drawing material for their inquiries from philosophy, political theory, and everyday life.
For one such theorist, Brain Massumi, in a line of thought that can be traced back through Gilles Deleuze, Henri Bergson, and ultimately Benedict de Spinoza, we are immersed in affects. “Affect theory,” writes Massumi, “does not reduce the mind to the body in the narrow, physical sense. It asserts that bodies think as they feel, on a level with their movements. This takes thinking out of the interiority of a psychological subject and puts it directly in the world: in the co-motion of relational encounter.” Massumi is concerned with intensities of experience related to an immediate participation in events of the world—a line of thought that “requires a far-reaching re-evaluation of what the body can do.” This re-evaluation has as its goal arriving “at a transformational matrix of concepts apt to continue the open-ended voyage of thinking-feeling life’s processional qualities, foregrounding their proto-political dimension and the paths by which it comes to full expression in politics (taking the word in the plural).” Affect moves through the “encounter” to “politics.” Thus, his examination of the political dimensions of relational encounter is one of experience in-the-making and, as such, of a politics that is emergent.

In this chapter, I would like to acknowledge the importance of the work of Massumi and others on affect theory and note its potential for interesting and innovative work on a politics of music. Still, I am less interested here in a “proto-political” or an emergent politics of music than understanding the dominant political economy of music, which might alternately be labeled either neoliberal or late capitalist. Specifically, I ask how that politics engages the proposition that music has power over life. This particular politics is more attuned to the biopolitics of the late seventies and early eighties Michel Foucault than the work in the same period by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The irony here is that whereas the latter wrote explicitly and eloquently about music during this period, the former did not.

In A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia ([1980] 1987), although Deleuze and Guattari explain why music is so often
concerned with death, their analysis is more about the problem of content and expression in music than the biopolitical economy of music or even its necropolitics, that is, the relationship between sovereignty and power over life and death. Still, the role of death as related to the content and expression of music is clearly stated:

What does music deal with, what is the content indissociable from sound expression? It is hard to say, but it is something: a child dies, a child plays, a woman is born, a woman dies, a bird arrives, a bird flies off. We wish to say that these are not accidental themes in music (even if it is possible to multiply examples), much less imitative exercises; they are something essential. Why a child, a woman, a bird? It is because musical expression is inseparable from a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, a becoming-animal that constitutes its content.13

Thus, for Deleuze and Guattari music is often concerned with death “[b]ecause of the ‘danger’ inherent in any line that escapes, in any line of flight or creative deterritorialization: the danger of veering toward destruction, toward abolition.”14 Music confronts death “[n]ot as a function of the death instinct it allegedly awakens in us, but of a dimension proper to its sound assemblage, to its sound machine, the moment that must be confronted, the moment the transversal turns into a line of abolition.”15

Music, for Deleuze and Guattari, “gives us a taste for death.”16 But this is very different from the idea that music can “disallow [life] to the point of death.” It is this latter notion, following the biopower of Foucault, that I am most interested in pursuing. For Deleuze and Guattari, “music-making is expressive inasmuch as it serves to construct a territory.”17 And “[t]hat territory defends against the anxieties, fears, pressures we feel; it doesn’t do away with them, of course, but gives them different form.”18 Although there is in the work of Deleuze and Guattari a direct and interesting response regarding the power of music over life and death, in
this chapter, I would like to look at the more Foucauldian question of the power of music to both “foster life” and to “disallow it to the point of death” and its attendant or resulting political economy.

To engage music in a dialogue with power, life, and death is to engage it at a level where it becomes both a facet of biopower and a feature of biopolitics. But to do so is to go forward without the direct assistance of Foucault, who has very little to say about music in his work on biopower and biopolitics. Fortunately, however, his somewhat younger French contemporary, Jacques Attali, wrote at length about the biopolitics of music at the same time that Foucault was lecturing, with increasing depth, on biopolitics at the University of Paris in the mid- to late seventies. However, before examining Attali’s contributions to a neoliberal biopolitics of music, I’d like to go back and reflect a bit on the work of a nineteenth-century philosopher who not only arguably made significant contributions to the biopolitics of music, particularly late in his career, but who is now becoming increasingly recognized as a thinker whose work on man as homo economicus is a prequel to our own neoliberal man. This thinker is of course the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

My aim in examining the work of Nietzsche and Attali on music through the lens of Foucault’s biopolitics is to lay the groundwork for a twenty-first-century biopolitics of music. It will be a journey that begins in the late nineteenth century with Nietzsche and is extended through the work of Attali into the late seventies. I’ll conclude by making some observations as to how Attali’s work understood as a pioneering work on biopolitics and the political economy of music contributes to our present concerns.

MUSIC CONTRA LIFE

Friedrich Nietzsche spent the fall of 1888 in Turin, Italy. During his stay, he went through his older writing going back as far as 1877 and selected pieces that reflected his position on the composer
Richard Wagner. The pieces, often shortened and clarified, were to become his final book, *Nietzsche contra Wagner*—a book that would not be published until many years later, that is, in 1895 in volume eight of his collected works.

Nietzsche wrote the preface for *Nietzsche contra Wagner* on Christmas of 1888, and then early the next month he became insane, after which his friend and former colleague, Overbeck, transported him back to Basel, Switzerland, from Turin. He was then committed to the asylum in Jena, Germany, but shortly thereafter released to the care of his mother in Naumburg, Germany. When his mother died in 1897, his sister moved him to Weimar, Germany, where he died on August 25, 1900.

*Nietzsche contra Wagner* leaves little doubt about his position on Wagner. “We are antipodes,” writes Nietzsche in the preface, a position that he contends will not be a popular one with German readers. “I have readers everywhere,” says Nietzsche, “in Vienna, in St. Petersburg, in Copenhagen and Stockholm, in Paris, in New York—I do not have them in Europe’s shallows, Germany.”

His critique of the music of Wagner in this work and others is interesting both for what it is (a “physiological” one) and for what it is not (an “aesthetic” one). In fact, in the preface he alludes to this by saying that the book is “an essay for psychologists, but not for Germans.” Although Nietzsche “admire[s] Wagner wherever he puts himself into music,” “[t]his does not mean that I consider this music healthy.” In brief, Nietzsche contends that the music of Wagner is not only unhealthy but also that the composer himself is a “sickness.”

In *The Case of Wagner [Der Fall Wagner]*, published in September of 1888 and the last book that Nietzsche would see to publication before his breakdown, he is direct and clear about the effect of Wagner and his music on our health: “I am far from looking on guilelessly while this decadent corrupts our health—and music as well. Is Wagner a human being at all? Isn’t he rather a sickness? He makes sick whatever he touches—he has made music sick.”
Later, in the same section of *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche reflects further on the relationship between sickness, health, and life: “To sense that what is harmful is harmful, to be *able* to forbid oneself something harmful, is a sign of youth and vitality. The exhausted are *attracted* by what is harmful: the vegetarian by vegetables. Sickness itself can be a stimulant to life: one only has to be healthy enough for the stimulant.”

Health for Nietzsche involves a certain type of resilience, one that allows some people to “instinctively cho[ose] the *right* means against wretched states.” The resiliency of the healthy person enables that person to use sickness as a “stimulant to life.” A variant of this line written in the same year (1888) from *Ecce Homo* links this all back to the development of a philosophy: “A typically healthy person, conversely, being sick can even become an energetic *stimulus* for life, for living *more*. This, in fact, is how that long period of sickness appears to me now: as it were, I discovered life anew, including myself; I tasted all good and even little things, as others cannot easily taste them—I turned my will to health, to *life*, into a philosophy.”

The significance of these passages stems less with the German philosopher’s specific problems with the music of Wagner or, for that matter, with vegetarianism (Wagner was a vegetarian, and Hitler is claimed to have followed the composer’s dietary practice) but rather with the way in which what we now call biopolitics enters into a dialogue with music through the late writing of Nietzsche.

Foucault first introduced the problematic of biopower in his lectures at the Collège de France in the spring of 1976 and then devoted his next two years of lectures at the Collège (the 1977/1978 and 1978/1979 academic years) to developing his thoughts on biopolitics. In his final lecture in 1976 under the course title “Society Must Be Defended,” he notes that in the second half of the eighteenth century “a new technology of power” emerges. He terms it here biopower and biopolitics.

Foucault explains that while biopower “does not exclude
disciplinary technology . . . it does dovetail into it, integrate it, modify it to some extent, and above all, use it by sort of infiltrating it, embedding itself in existing disciplinary techniques.”

“Unlike discipline, which is addressed to bodies,” biopower “is applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being; ultimately, if you like, to man-as-species.”

Biopower addresses “man-as-species” as “a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on.” It is a “seizure of power that is not individualizing but, if you like, massifying, that is directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species.”

The first object of biopolitics are processes “such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of the population, and so on.” In the second half of the eighteenth century, biopolitics seeks to control these processes. It is here that “the first demographers begin to measure these phenomena in statistical terms.” During this period, death is “no longer something that suddenly swooped down on life—as in an epidemic.” Death becomes “permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it.”

While Foucault enumerates many different elements that enter into the domain of biopolitics both in its early stages and its later stages, he says “biopolitics will derive its knowledge from, and define its power’s field of intervention in terms of, the birth rate, the morality rate, various biological disabilities, and the effects of the environment.” Also, in addition, it “deals with the population, with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power’s problem.” Biopolitics is as well credited by Foucault with introducing “forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures.”

The topic of biopolitics is also discussed by Foucault around the same time in The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction, the 1978 English translation of his 1976 book La volonté de savoir. In part five of this book, entitled “Right of Death and Power over
Life,” Foucault discusses “the ancient right to take life or let live” that comes to be replaced beginning in the eighteenth century by “a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.” The context here is the changes in the right of the sovereign to take life through the death penalty. Focus in the application of capital punishment shifts from the emphasizing the “enormity of the crime” to “the safeguard of society” and “the monstrosity of the criminal.” “Now it is over life, throughout its unfolding,” comments Foucault, “that power establishes its dominion; death is power’s limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most ‘private.’”

Under the aegis of an emerging biopolitics, “life more than the law . . . became the issue of political struggles” to the point where even Aristotle’s observations on the nature of man as a political animal were no longer valid. Whereas “[f]or millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question.”

It is against the relief of the emerging and developing biopolitics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that Nietzsche’s comments on the life-giving and life-taking powers of music begin to make more sense. While some might be inclined merely to dismiss Nietzsche’s comments regarding Wagner’s music as the aesthetic rantings of a philosopher whose well-known falling out with his former friend have tainted his appreciation of the composer, the emerging biopolitics indicated by Foucault provide an important and different context in which to understand his comments.

If Foucault is accurate in his assessment that the issue of measuring and calculating what fosters life and disallows it to the point of death is a major social and political preoccupation of the period, then Nietzsche’s observations on the music of Wagner are prime fodder to begin a discussion of a biopolitics of music. For example, Nietzsche’s comments that the music of Wagner is harmful to one’s
health and makes people sick might be understood through the context of the emerging social and political concerns and controls over the health of society. What might have seemed without biopolitics as a passing aesthetic jab at Wagner by Nietzsche becomes through the context of a biopolitics a commentary on the health of society. It also suggests that the philosopher’s comment that *Nietzsche contra Wagner* is not a book for Germans and that he does not have readers in Germany entails that because the music of Wagner is championed in this country, its people, like the composer and his music, are sick and unhealthy.

Nietzsche explains in some detail in *Nietzsche contra Wagner* the difference between healthy and unhealthy music. It is a difference that is not grounded in aesthetics but rather in physiology. “My objections to the music of Wagner are physiological objections: why should I trouble to dress them up in aesthetic formulas? After all, aesthetics is nothing but a kind of applied physiology.” This notion of aesthetics as a “kind of applied physiology” turns up later in the twentieth century in efforts to measure the effects of music on people and to use these effects as a form of control over them. For Nietzsche, however, the physiological “fact” of Wagner’s music is quite clear: “My ‘fact,’ my *petit fait vrai*, is that I no longer breathe easily when this music begins to affect me; that my foot soon resents it and rebels: my foot feels the need for rhythm, dance, march—to Wagner’s ‘Kaiser-marsch’ not even the young German Kaiser could march—it demands of music first of all those delights which are found in good walking, striding, dancing. But does not my stomach protest too? my heart? my circulation? Are not my entrails saddened? Do I not suddenly become hoarse? To listen to Wagner I need pastilles Gérandel.” It is important to note that Nietzsche’s comments here are not about his emotional response to the music of Wagner but rather about its “affect.”

Massumi clearly describes the difference—a difference that might be used to explicate Nietzsche’s comment:
you have to understand affect as something other than simply a personal feeling. By “affect” I don’t mean emotion in the everyday sense. The way I use it comes primarily from Spinoza. He talks of the body in terms of its capacity for affecting and being affected. These are not two different capacities—they always go together. When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than you might have been the moment before. You have made a transition, however slight. You have stepped over a threshold. Affect is this passing of a threshold, seen from the point of view of the change in capacity. It’s crucial to remember that Spinoza uses this to talk about the body. What a body is, he says, is what it can do as it goes along.49

Thus, the problem with the music of Wagner according to Nietzsche is its affect on his body: it makes him breathe uneasily, upsets his stomach, pains his heart, changes the circulation of his blood, makes him so hoarse that he requires a throat lozenge (P pastilles Géraudel) to ease his physical discomfort.

The trouble here is that these are not the bodily affects Nietzsche “expects of music”: “And so I ask myself: What is it that my whole body really expects of music? For there is no soul. I believe, its own ease: as if all animal functions should be quickened by easy, bold, exuberant, self-assured rhythms; as if iron, leaden life should lose its gravity through golden, tender, oil-smooth melodies. My melancholy wants to rest in hiding-places and abysses of perfection: that is why I need music. But Wagner makes sick.”50 The implications of Nietzsche’s comments on the music of Wagner regarding a politics of life are manifest: music has power over life. Some music eases our body, whereas other music does the opposite, that is, dis-eases our body. This power of music over life extends to populations as well. It is, in the words of Foucault, “massifying.” The fact that the people of Germany adore the music of Wagner is for Nietzsche a statement in itself on their overall health.
Although the “physiological objections” to the music of Wagner cited appear quite early in the philosopher’s final book, *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (they are in the second section under the title “Where I Offer Objections”), they were first made in section 368 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, first published in 1882 and then again in a revised edition in 1887, whose title has been translated as *The Gay Science*. The wording is very similar to that in *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, but the philosopher noticeably omits the final paragraph of the section, which is stylistically set as a parenthetical reply from the Wagnerian: “(I forgot to mention how my enlightened Wagnarian replied to these physiological objections: ‘Then you really are merely not healthy enough for our music?’”).51 This final thought in section 368 of *The Gay Science* brings us back to the matter of affect and capacity. Like Spinoza, Nietzsche views the body in terms of its capacity for affecting and being affected. However, Nietzsche’s comments on Wagner open up the added dimension of considering the body in terms of its capacity for affecting music as well as its being affected by it. Thus, the question “Then you really are merely not healthy enough for our music?” arguably concerns both the domains of affect and biopolitics.

**MODES OF MUSICAL PRODUCTION**

A few weeks before Nietzsche’s *The Case of Wagner* was published, a man named Charles Cros died in poverty. Cros, the author of *Kippered Herring* (*Hareng saur*) was also an inventor. Although his invention would ultimately not be a successful one, it was one of the earliest efforts to, in the words of another French theorist, “transform sound into writing, in other words, to achieve automatic stenography.”52 That theorist is Jacques Attali, and the invention was the “paleophone,” one of the precursors to Thomas Edison’s successful “automatic stenographer,” the cylinder-based phonograph. Attali’s book *Bruits: Essai sur l’économie politique de la musique* (1977)53 shows how the invention of the phonograph
brought about a new form of political economy, one he calls “repetition” but which we call today neoliberal political economy.

_Bruits_, translated into English by Brian Massumi in 1985 as _Noise: The Political Economy of Music_, takes its title from Attali’s definition of music: “All music can be defined as noise given form according to a code (in other words, according to rules of arrangement and laws of succession, in a limited space of sounds) that is theoretically knowable to the listener.” His study is a primer of sorts on both biopower and biopolitics composed at the same time that Foucault was himself lecturing and publishing on the same topic. Moreover, and perhaps more important to the concerns of this chapter, Attali’s _Bruits_ provides an interesting historical framework in which to consider neoliberalism or neoliberal biopolitics in music.

Before _Bruits_, Attali published a few books on economic history, political economy, and political science including _La parole et l’outil_ (1975), _Les modèles politiques_ (1972), and _Analyse économique de la vie politique_ (1972). And then, two years after, he published a book on the history of medicine, _L’ordre cannibale: Vie et mort de la médecine_ (1979). His other book from this period was _La nouvelle économie française_ (1978), published a year after _Bruits_. After the 1970s, however, Attali’s writing production exploded, with well over sixty books to date authored by him. Although over half of these books are categorized like _Bruits_ as “essays,” his output includes at least five volumes of memoir, ten novels, five biographies (including studies of Diderot, Gandhi, Pascal, and Marx), two plays, two books of lyrics, two dictionaries, and a book of fairy tales. Still, in spite of his prodigious output, less than ten of his titles including _Bruits_ have been translated into English: _A Man of Influence: The Extraordinary Career of S. G. Warburg_ (1987); _Millennium: Winners and Losers in the Coming World Order_ (1991); _A Brief History of the Future: A Brave and Controversial Look at the Twenty-First Century_ (2009); _The Economic History of the Jewish People_ (2010, with a foreword by Alan Dershowitz); _The Labyrinth in Culture and Society: Pathways to
Wisdom (1998); After the Crisis: How Did This Happen? (2010); and From Crystal to Smoke (2010), his play about Kristallnacht.

However, the focus in this chapter is not on Attali the prolific public intellectual, who Foreign Policy magazine listed in 2008 and 2010 as one of the top 100 public intellectuals in the world, but rather much more narrowly on how aspects of his early study Bruits provide an intriguing historical framework in which to discuss neoliberalism, or more precisely, neoliberal biopolitics, in music. Fredric Jameson, who wrote the foreword to the University of Minnesota Press translation, recognizes the neoliberal aspects of Bruits, writing "Attali's varied and complex reflections thus rejoin, from a unique perspective (which is, given his political role, a unity of theory and practice in its own right), the now widespread attempts to characterize the passage from older forms of capitalism (the market stage, the monopoly stage) to a new form." The “unity of theory and practice” Jameson refers to is Attali’s role as both an academic and practicing political advisor. A professor of economic theory at the École Polytechnique, the École Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, and the Université Paris-Dauphine, Attali also served as a special adviser to the president of the republic (François Mitterand) from 1981 to 1991 and was the founder and first president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in London from 1991 to 1993. Currently, he is CEO of A&A, an international consulting firm in strategy, based in Paris, and president of Positive Planet, an international non-profit organization assisting microfinance institutions all over the world, which as of the composition of this chapter advises and finances the development of microfinance in eighty countries.

When Jameson wrote his foreword in 1985, Attali was already the author of a dozen books ranging from mathematical economy to health economics and music and recognized as “a central figure in France’s . . . socialist experiment.” As Jameson notes, Attali’s work including Bruits is written with “the sense that something new is emerging all around us, a new economic order in which new forms
of cultural production can often give us the most precious symptoms, if not the prophetic annunciation.”⁵⁹ Although Attali does not use terms like late capitalism or neoliberalism in his work to define this new form or stage of capitalism, retroactively we would term it as such. Jameson’s foreword alludes to this: “This new form of capitalism, in which the media and multinational corporations play a major role, a shift on the technological level from the older modes of industrial production of the second Machine Revolution to the newer cybernetic, informational nuclear modes of some Third Machine Age. The theorists of this new ‘great transformation’ range from anti-Marxists like Daniel Bell to Marxists like Ernest Mandel (whose work Late Capitalism remains the most elaborate and original Marxian model of some new third stage of capital).”⁶⁰

Jameson does a fine job of staging Attali’s work in Bruits vis-à-vis the work of predecessors like Max Weber and Theodor Adorno but also of offering the ways in which it both comports with strictly linear historicist models of economic and social development by suggesting distinct stages as well as deviates from them. As a compliment to Attali’s work, Jameson says that it avoids the historicist social staging of the work of contemporaries like Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard, especially in a later work, Les trois mondes from 1981, in which he clearly “delinearizes” his proposed stages of social development, providing a type of synchronic and residual overlap with the socially dominant stage. His “three worlds” of representation in this 1981 work are “regulation, conceived in mechanical terms of determinism and reversibility—theory ultimately linked to the classical market”; “production, whose strong form is clearly classical Marxism”; and “organization of meanings and signs.”⁶¹

In Bruits, Attali views music as “prophetic of the emergent social, political, and economic forms of a radically different society,”⁶² arguing that there are four stages, or better yet, “networks,” of music: sacrificing, representing, repeating, and composition. Sacrificing refers to the prehistory of modern music, the period
prior to 1500 CE, a time before musical notation. During the sacrifice stage, music persists solely in the memory of people, most notably in oral songs and folktales. Representing refers to the area of printed music, roughly 1500 to 1900 CE. It is during this period that music becomes tied to a physical medium (printed music) and therefore becomes a commodity. For Attali, music “fetishized as a commodity . . . is illustrative of the evolution of our entire society: deritualize a social form, repress an activity of the body, specialize its practice, sell it as spectacle, generalize its consumption, then see to it that it is stockpiled until it loses meaning.”63

Although his observations regarding the specific mode of production linked to sacrificing and representing are interesting, this chapter will focus on his third stage of music: repeating. This period begins with the invention of technologies of recording like those of Cros and Thomas Edison in the late nineteenth century and later broadcast sound and runs through the present. Here music is trapped and preserved on everything from discs covered with lampblack and wax cylinders to vinyl, tape, and compact disc. Although his final chapter hints at an emerging stage, composition (or simply, the post-repeating stage), his theory of it is incomplete and sketchy, particularly given the rich and extensive treatment given to the repeating stage. Still, the composition stage might be tied to modes of musical production associated with sampling, remixing, and live performance, but I’ll leave speculation on it to another occasion and focus here on linking his work on repeating to what we might now call a neoliberal biopolitics of music. To do this though we need to go back now to Cros, Edison, and the late nineteenth century of Nietzsche.

RECORDING LATE CAPITALISM

“Recording has always been a means of social control,” writes Attali. It allows power to not just “enact its legitimacy” but also stockpile memory of its power, a history that can be traced back
to “the Tables of the Law.” But for Attali, it is not only power that is revolutionized through the “emergence of recording and stockpiling” but also music. For him, the revolution in recording and stockpiling “overturns all economic relations.”

In this new world of overturned economic relations, “the whole of understanding” is overturned as well. Although music is the first area where the processes of repetition are to be seen, science, particularly biological science, did not lag far behind music. “[T]he study of the conditions of the replication of life has led to a new scientific paradigm,” comments Attali, one that “goes to the essence of the problems surrounding Western technology’s transition from representation to repetition.” For him, this means that “biology replaces mechanics.” The emergence of biology in the network of repeating or repetition coupled with the stockpiling of power through the revolution in recording provides us with the materials for a notion of biopower both comparable to and different from Foucault’s.

Although the road to the emergence of a new form of power, biopower, goes through the transition of mechanics as the dominant science to biology, it does not start with a transformation in the natural sciences but rather with one in the applied physical sciences, namely developments in recording technology. And “with the appearance of the phonograph record, the relation between music and money starts to be flaunted, it ceases to be ambiguous and shameful.” For Attali, music is transformed into a unique type of commodity during the network of repetition. It is exemplary in this regard because it is “one of the first artistic endeavors truly to become a stockpileable consumer product.”

The phonograph record and its history are central to Attali’s arguments about the emergence of a new economy. They lead him to talk less about the problem of content and expression in music (à la Deleuze) than about the biopolitical economy of music heralded by the development of new technologies of recording and stockpiling in the twentieth century. That is, Attali focuses more
on the consumption of music and the industry that emerges in support of it.

For Attali, with the advent of recording, “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 shattering its representation.”70 The story of music becoming an industry is outlined by Attali by focusing on technological developments in the reproduction of sound and filtering them through a narrative that foregrounds the emergence of replication.

The birth of replication and its attendant neoliberal biopolitics begins with Cros’s invention, the paleophone, one of several attempts prior to Thomas Edison’s cylinder-based phonograph to preserve sound. Developed around 1861, Cros’s paleophone was not taken seriously because he was not a specialist in the area. Writing sometime after he registered his invention with the Academy of Sciences in 1877, Cros complained,

There is every reason to believe that they wanted to sidetrack me and I had the foresight to have my sealed envelope opened. . . . Justice will be done in the long run, perhaps, but in the meantime these things remain an example of the scientific tyranny of the capital. They express this tyranny by saying: theories float in the air and have no value, show us some experiments, some facts. And the money to run the experiments? And the money to go look at the facts? Get what you can. It is thus that many things are not carried out in France.71

Attali views Cros’s failure here not as a scientific one but an economic one. Cros and others before Edison failed to “demonstrate the economic advantages” of transforming sound into writing. Even Edison, who patented his phonograph in 1877, lost interest in it the next year. The purpose of the phonograph, for Edison,
“was to stabilize representation rather than to multiply it.”\(^7\) It was meant to be used as “an archival apparatus for exemplary words,”\(^7\) a position supported by the fact that “speech was the only sound it was technically feasible to record before 1910, and even then only a few operas were recorded.”\(^7\) Attali notes that it was not until 1914 that the first symphony was recorded (Beethoven’s Fifth, conducted by Arthur Nikisch).\(^7\)

In short, no one foresaw during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the mass production of music that was to come. Edison even went so far as to oppose the use of the phonograph in jukeboxes because it would make “it appear as though it were nothing more than a toy.”\(^7\) It was not until 1898, over twenty-two years after patenting his invention, that Edison “realized the commercial potential for recorded music.”\(^7\) It is important to note that it is in this context that Nietzsche is commenting on the life fostering and life enervating power of music, that is, in a context prior to its repetition through the phonograph.

So, in a way, the musical biopolitics of Nietzsche through the lens of Attali reference a different network of relations, namely, those of what he calls “representation.” Through this network we can see music become a commodity, but it became one through a set of economic relations that would be overturned by “repetition,” or what we now call neoliberalism.

The phonograph, along with the invention of radio and broadcast technology, for Attali, were “part of a radically new social and cultural space demolishing the earlier economic constructions of representation.”\(^8\) The phonograph came to be seen by conservatives in the early twentieth century “as something dangerous, giving a wide audience effortless access to a consumption of signs reserved for an elite.”\(^7\) Under the emerging conditions of repetition, the music of Wagner and Mozart undergo a “tremendous mutation.”\(^8\) Born in the age of representation, their music was something that people including the author of these works
“perhaps did not hear more than once in a lifetime (as was the case with Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and the majority of Mozart’s works).” For Attali, “Mozart’s works were almost exclusively background music for an elite who valued them only as a symbol of power.”

However, in the age of repetition, their work “becomes accessible to a multitude of people, and becomes repeatable outside the spectacle of its performance. It gains availability. It loses its festive and religious character as a simulacrum of sacrifice. It ceases to be a unique, exceptional event, heard once by a minority.” Attali’s comments here remind us that much of Nietzsche’s critique of the music of Wagner was linked to its religious character, particularly later works like Parsifal (1882). It also reminds us that outside of the opera houses that were staging these works, they were not heard by a mass audience. Attali’s work thus points to a radical change in the biopolitics of music that occurred with the advent of the phonograph. One of the most significant is that it allows for the “stockpiling of time.”

According to Attali, “the first repetition of all was that of the instrument of exchange in the form of money. A precondition for representation, money contains exchange-time, summarizes and abstracts it: it transforms the concrete, lived time of negotiation and compromise into a supposedly stable sign of equivalence in order to establish and make people believe in the stability of the links between things and in the indisputable harmony of relations.” Recorded music, however, unlike money, contains use-time, not exchange-time. This is a crucial distinction for Attali. It allows him to show how a new economic process got underway with the “stockpiling of music.” “It was thought that discourse—in other words, exchange-time once again—was being stockpiled, while in fact what was being stockpiled was coded noise with a specific ritual function, or use-time.” His point here is to distinguish music as a “unique commodity” because
to take on meaning, it requires an incompressible lapse of time, that of its own duration. Thus the gramophone, conceived as a recorder to stockpile time, became instead its principal user. Conceived as a word preserver, it became a sound diffuser. The major contradiction of repetition is in evidence here: people must devote their time to producing the means to buy recordings of other people’s time, losing in the process not only the use of their own time, but also the time required to use other people’s time. Stockpiling becomes a substitute, not a preliminary condition, for use. People buy more records than they can listen to. They stockpile what they want to find the time to hear. Use-time and exchange-time destroy each other.87

In short, repetition “stockpiles use-time” and “Replicated man finds pleasure in stockpiling the instruments of deritualized substitute for sacrifice.”88 The notion of music as “stockpiling” is then also put to use by Attali to explain the presence of death in music. Whereas for Deleuze and Guattari music “gives us a taste for death” and serves to construct a territory that defends against the anxieties, fears, pressures we feel, for Attali death “is present in the very structure of the repetitive economy: the stockpiling of use-time in the commodity object is fundamentally a herald of death.”89 He writes, “it is no coincidence that many great musicians have chosen physical death (Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison), or institutional death (the Beatles). Or that theoretical music accepts noise and uncontrolled violence.”90 Why? Because repetitive society is an “age when death will be everywhere present.”91

In a way, the biopolitics of music in Attali is more properly speaking a thanatopolitics, a politics of death, as music is the herald of death in a society where it is everywhere present including the structure of its economy. But repetitive distribution also fosters an ideal of health, or life, if you will. Repetitive distribution “has become a means of isolating, of preventing direct, localized,
anecdotal, nonrepeatable communication, and of organizing the monologue of great organizations." The political role of music, for Attali, is not found in “what it conveys, in its melodies or discourses, but in its very existence.”

“Power,” he comments, “in its invading, deafening presence, can be calm: people no longer talk to one another. They speak neither of themselves nor of power. They hear the noises of the commodities into which their imaginary is collectively channeled, where their dreams of sociality and need for transcendence dwell. The musical ideal then almost becomes an ideal of health: quality, purity, the elimination of noises; silencing drives, deodorizing the body, emptying it of its needs, and reducing it to silence.” But what if everyone then decides to express themselves through this music? What then does it say about them? For Attali it says that “they have nothing more to say, because it no longer has a meaningful discourse to hold, because even the spectacle is now only one form of repetition among others, and perhaps an obsolete one. In this sense, music is meaningless, liquidating, the prelude to a cold social silence in which man will reach his culmination in repetition.” For Attali, the “absence of meaning . . . is nonsense; but it is also the possibility of any and all meaning.”

The final analysis of life in music under repetition is as follows: “If an excess of life is death, then noise is life, and the destruction of the old codes in the commodity is perhaps the necessary condition for real creativity.” The political power of music is not found in its lyrics or melodies but rather in the ways in which noise is controlled by society: “It is possible to judge the strength of political power by its legislation on noise and the effectiveness of its control over it . . . the history of noise control and its channelization says much about the political order that is being established today.” For Attali, the music of Dylan, N.W.A., and Public Enemy is no more or less political or powerful than any other music from this period, the late age of repetition.
CONCLUSION

In the final chapter, Attali’s Bruits looks forward to a stage of music that avoids the commodification and exchange exemplary of repetition. This stage, termed composition, moves beyond repetition and its neoliberal biopolitics of music to something different. Attali’s comments here on the characteristics of the post-repetition world regarding music are provisional. But more significant, they are not set in the material conditions of the technologies of music reproduction and distribution that would come to dominate the late 1990s and early twenty-first century, namely the digital revolution. Still, in spite of this, his analysis of repetition and its attendant neoliberal economy is extremely prescient.

In his 1978–79 lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault explains how neoliberals, at least in America anyway, “try to apply economic analysis to a series of objects, to domains of behavior or conduct which were not market forms of behavior or conduct; they attempt to apply economic analysis to marriage, the education of children, and criminality, for example.”99 For Foucault, this “poses a problem of both theory and method, the problem of applying such an economic model, the practical heuristic of the model, etcetera.”100 Foucault’s comment here helps to situate Attali’s analysis of the political economy of music in the twentieth century and to locate its difficulties.

Prior to the age of repetition, although music is a commodity, it does not really lend itself to market forms of behavior. It is only through the introduction of the phonograph that music becomes a market form of behavior but in doing so overturns the existing economic picture. In the process, homo musicus merges with homo economicus. And again, as Foucault points out in the same lecture series, “there are important stakes in the generalization of the grid of homo economicus to domains that are not immediately and directly economic.”101 The stakes, as Attali points out, turn out to be “the destruction of the old codes in the commodity,” music, and
the emptying of its meaning. Music under neoliberalism or late capitalism has more in common with death than life. Nietzsche’s fears of the deadly impact of the music of Wagner become the fears of all music under late capitalism. The irony here of course was that Nietzsche too speculated on man as *homo economicus*, but because the technologies of music reproduction were only quietly developing during his lifetime, he could not foresee the ways in which the form of music consumption and distribution could be as life enervating as its content and expression.

My take on Attali’s economic analysis of music in the twentieth century is that it is a dark road to neoliberal thought and biopolitics. In Foucault and Attali’s work is the notion that neoliberalism revises what it means to be a human person, but the nature of that shift differs a bit. Foucault says that “[h]omo economicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself,”¹⁰² whereas Attali seems to be qualifying this by insinuating that music in the twentieth-century facilitates *homo economicus* becoming an entrepreneur of himself. This idea is evident in Attali’s comments on the exchange-time versus the use-time of music.

Foucault, citing Gary Becker, says that “[w]e should not think at all that consumption simply consists in being someone in a process of exchange who buys and makes a monetary exchange in order to obtain some products. The man of consumption is not one of the terms of exchange. The man of consumption, insofar as he consumes, is a producer. What does he produce? Well, quite simply, he produces his own satisfaction.”¹⁰³ Perhaps we need to view the stockpiling of recorded music as both a unique form of commodity as well as one that through stockpiling allows for a new type of satisfaction or pleasure: the pleasure of stockpiling the instruments of deritualized substitute for sacrifice. Thus, Attali’s “replicated man” can produce pleasure at will by simply spinning some vinyl or just collecting it.

Writing in the mid-seventies, Attali’s analysis looks at a music industry that had already begun to move beyond vinyl with the
advent of the eight-track and cassette tape as a means of stockpiling and distributing music. It describes the growth of this industry as characterized by an increasing dependence not only on the staples of neoliberal thought, namely, statistical methods and measurement, but also on the ways in which this technology changes both what economics means as well as what it means to be human.

So in light of Attali’s thought, we might view the fall and resurrection of vinyl over the course of the last twenty-five years as evidence of the resiliency of neoliberalism. This observation is bad news for those who resist neoliberalism but collect records. Through the lens of Attali’s work, this is analogous to being an animal rights advocate who also enjoys dining on a good steak. The good news though is that Attali’s work gives us an excellent starting point to consider the resurgence of records and resiliency of neoliberalism.