

§ Some Ideas on the Sociology of Music

The creation of a sociology of music in terms of accepted scientific conventions would mean defining its scope, dividing it up into specific branches, reporting on the problems it tackles, the theories it develops, and any results it produces, and integrating all these, as far as is possible, into a coherent system. This would be to treat it as one branch of sociology among others. It would then be organized into subordinate disciplines, which would at best be assembled under one roof, a single "frame of reference." But society is both an umbrella concept that subsumes every more specialized subsystem within itself and something that manifests itself as a totality in each of its branches. It cannot be conceived, therefore, as either a general collection of more or less unconnected facts or a supreme logical category to be arrived at by a progressive process of generalization. Instead it is a process; it produces both itself and its subordinate parts, welding them together into a totality, in Hegel's sense of the term. The only knowledge of society worthy of the name is one that would grasp both that totality and its parts through the process of critical analysis. For this reason it appears more profitable to think in terms of models of musical sociology than to aspire to an overview of the subject and its methods. Such an overview can all too easily exhaust itself in self-important gestures, making a virtue of its incorruptible objectivity as a way of compensating for its failure to shed light on its material. Let us abandon the separation of method from subject matter. Method is not something to be applied to an object in a fixed, unvarying manner. Instead, method should adapt itself to its object and legitimate itself by the light it sheds on it. The individual fields of research should be treated not

as neatly coordinated with, or subordinated to, each other, but in terms of their dynamic interrelationships. Even the plausible distinction between the spheres of production, reproduction, and consumption should be thought of as a social product in need of explanation rather than simple acceptance.

So conceived, a sociology of music has a dual relationship to its object: an internal and an external dimension. Any social meaning inherent in music is not identical with that music's place and function in society. The two do not even need to be in harmony with each other, and indeed nowadays are often in conflict. Great music of integrity, once the essence of a genuine consciousness, can degenerate into ideology and even into a socially necessary illusion. Even Beethoven's most authentic compositions, works notable, in Hegel's phrase, for the unfolding of truth, have been debased into cultural commodities by the music industry. They supply consumers with prestige and even with emotions that they do not themselves possess but to which their nature cannot remain immune. Music in its present state is defined by contradictions such as that between the social content of a work and the context in which it is received by the public. As a manifestation of objective spirit it finds itself situated in society and functions within it. It plays its role not just in the life of mankind, but also in the economic process, as a commodity. At the same time it is essentially social in itself. Society has been inscribed in its very meaning and its categories, and the task of a sociology of music is to decipher them. This compels it to acquire an understanding of music that encompasses the most minute technical details. It can only transcend the disastrously superficial reduction of products of the intellect to social circumstances if it locates the social dimension in their autonomous form and perceives it as aesthetic content. Sociological concepts that are imposed on music from outside, without being able to demonstrate their credentials in strictly musical terms, remain devoid of force. The social meaning of musical phenomena is inseparable from their truth or untruth, their success or their failure, their contradictory nature or their inner coherence. The social theory of music implies its critique.

This means that the sociology of music deals with music as ideology, but not only as ideology. Music only becomes ideological when it is objectively untrue or when its nature contradicts its function. The fact that music is fundamentally nonconceptual—it does not directly proclaim any teachings nor can it be reduced to any unambiguous assertions—may

seem to imply that it is free of ideology. We may refute this, however, by pointing to the use made of music by politicians and other authorities who regard it as a cohesive social force, as something capable of creating the illusion of immediate community within a reified and alienated society. This was the fate of music under fascism, and this is how it is manipulated in totalitarian countries today, and even in nontotalitarian ones with their "national and youth music" movements, their cult of social bonding [*Bindungen*] and collectivity as such, and the integration of the individual into busy communal activities. The rationalized world, which is actually still the irrational world, disguises its true nature by cultivating the realm of the unconscious. This means that the sociology of music must maintain its vigilance so as to prevent the social legitimacy of music from being confused with its social function, that is, with its impact and popular appeal in society as it is actually constituted. It must not allow itself to be forced by its own definition onto the side of music as a social force. Its critical role increases in importance as musical activities of the most varied kinds are made increasingly subservient to unexplained trends and needs—mainly those of domination.

But music is not just ideology in the sense of being a clear tool of domination. It is also a manifestation of false consciousness, a way of trivializing conflict and producing spurious reconciliations. Traditionally, the novels of a writer like Gustav Freytag were labeled ideological, and in the same way we may think of much music of the so-called heyday of liberalism as ideological—even including some very famous works, such as those of Tchaikovsky—because of their use of the symphonic form, for example. Instead of working through the conflicts contained in their own premises, such works are content to place those conflicts on view, superficially, decoratively, but so as to obtain the maximum effect. They operate with stereotypes much like the black-and-white characters of the conventional novel. There is a complete failure to perceive the relationship between the whole and the parts as an interactive, even conflictual process of production. In fact the effectiveness of such pieces—the possibility of easy listening—is based on that refusal to work things through and that smoothing out of contradictions, which thus become reduced to mere components of a reified form that is inflated by simple contrasts. The popularity of such pieces is founded on reducing to a sensuous plane something that could be justified only in intellectual terms.

At every point here the true problem of the sociology of music is one of

mediation. The nonconceptual nature of music deprives us of the kind of evidence for our insights that in the case of traditional literature appears to be legitimated by its contents. Hence assertions about the intrinsic ideological character of music are constantly in danger of being reduced to mere analogies. The only remedy here is a technical and physiognomical analysis that describes formal features as elements of an organized musical meaning (or that points to the absence of such meaning) and goes on to infer social significance from those features. The task is to articulate the social meaning of the formal constituents of music—its logic, in short. How to learn or practice this is something that is scarcely capable of abstract formulation. Attempts to achieve it tend to be arbitrary and to be justified only through internal consistency and the ability to shed light on music's individual features. The crucial task facing a sociology of music—the task of socially decoding music itself—resists the kind of positivistic verification of tangible realities of the sort provided by data about musical consumption or the description of musical organizations, but which shies away from analysis of the music itself. The precondition of a productive sociology of music is to understand the language of music. This goes far beyond anything available to the sociologist concerned merely with applying his own categories to music, but also far beyond anything communicated by the official and ossified musical culture of the conservatories or university musicology. The future of the sociology of music will depend essentially on the refinement and reflexive powers of the methods of analyzing music itself and their relation to the intellectual substance that can be realized in art only by virtue of the technical categories at work in it.

Taken globally, the function of music in society is mainly to act as a diversion. Questions such as whether Mr. X plays Beethoven's G Major Piano Concerto better than Mr. Y, or whether the voice of the young tenor has been put under too much of a strain, have scarcely anything to do with the substance and meaning of music. But it all contributes to the creation of the cultural veil, the concern with spirit degraded to the level of "education," which prevents countless listeners from obtaining any perception of more essential realities. The neutralization of music through its reduction to matters of cultural activity and cultural chitchat would itself be a rewarding subject of investigation by a sociology of music, as long as it refused to collude in that neutralizing process. But to attempt to combat that neutralization by simply invoking the living power of mu-

sic to affect people, without realizing the extent to which music depends on society as a whole, is to capitulate to ideology even more abjectly. Music is especially prone to that capitulation because its nonconceptual nature encourages its listeners to think of themselves as feeling subjects, to give their thoughts free rein, and to think whatever ideas happen to come into their heads. Music functions as a kind of wish fulfillment and vicarious gratification, but unlike film it does not really get caught in the act. This gratification extends from dozing off—the promotion of a condition that largely precludes any rational or critical behavior—to the cult of passion, the philosophical irrationalism that has been so intimately linked with repressive and violent social tendencies ever since the nineteenth century. Music makes its own contribution to the "ideology of the unconscious," even though this frequently conflicts with its own form and meaning. Impotent and deluded in the face of the progressive freezing of the world under the pressures of rationalization, it provides solace, it "warms the heart"; on the other hand—as in Wagner—it may even go so far as to justify the persistent irrationality of the world as a whole.

It was Max Weber, the author of what up to now has been the most comprehensive and ambitious attempt at a sociology of music (it can now be found as an appendix to the new edition of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*), who first identified "rationalization" as the crucial concept for the sociology of music. In so doing, his richly documented argument struck a blow against the irrationalism that prevails in the current view of music, albeit without really making much of a dent in the bourgeois religion of music. There can be no doubt that the history of music exhibits a progressive process of rationalization. Its different stages are the Guidonian reforms, the introduction of mensural notation, the invention of continuo and of equal temperament, and finally, the trend to integral musical construction, which has advanced irresistibly since the time of Bach and has now reached an extreme. But rationalization—which is inseparable from the historical process of the bourgeoisification of music—represents only one of the social features of music, just as rationality itself, Enlightenment, is no more than one aspect of the history of a society that is still developing in an irrational and "natural" manner even today. Within the global development in which music shared in the progressive emergence of rationality, music at the same time always remained the voice of all who fell by the wayside or were sacrificed on the altar of the rational. This defines the central social contradiction of music, and by the

same token it also formulates the tension that has driven musical productivity hitherto. By virtue of its basic material, music is the art in which the prerational, mimetic impulses ineluctably find their voice, even as they enter into a pact with the processes leading to the progressive domination of matter and nature. This is the material to which music owes its ability to transcend the business of mere self-preservation, an ability that led Schopenhauer to define it as the immediate objectification of the will and to place it at the apex of the hierarchy of the arts. If anywhere, it is in music that art rises above the mere repetition of what just happens anyway. At the same time, however, this material fits it for the constant reproduction of stupidity. The very element that raises music above ideology is also what brings it closest to it. As a carefully cultivated preserve of the irrational in the midst of the rationalized universe, music becomes negativity pure and simple, as this is rationally planned, produced, and administered by the Culture Industry. This irrationality has been calculated down to the nth degree, and its sole effect is to ensure that people are kept in line. As such, it constitutes a parody of the protest against the dominance of the concept of classification, a protest of which music is uniquely capable when, as with all the great composers since Monteverdi, it subjects itself to the discipline of the rational. Only by virtue of such rationality can it transcend rationality.

In such phenomena as the socially manipulated irrationality of music we see expressed the much larger reality of the primacy of production. Sociological research that would prefer to avoid the problems of analyzing production and to confine itself to questions of distribution or consumption remains imprisoned in the mechanisms of the market and hence gives its sanction to the primacy of the commodity character of music, even though to investigate this quality should be one of the foremost tasks of a sociology of music. Empirical studies that take audience responses as their starting point, on the assumption that they constitute the ultimate, secure foundation for scientific data, lose validity because they fail to see these responses for what they have become, that is to say, as functions of production. And incidentally, we must note that what used to be thought of as artistic production has now been replaced by a production process organized and controlled on the pattern of industrial processes, a change that has affected the entire realm of music for the consumer. Furthermore, the difficulties of nailing down the social effects of music are scarcely smaller than those involved in discovering the mean-

ing of their intrinsic social content. In the end, all that can be determined is the opinions of interviewees about music and their relationship to it. These opinions, however, have been preformed by social mechanisms such as propaganda and the selection of material on offer, and hence remain inconclusive in themselves. What respondents think of as their relationship to music, especially in the form in which they verbalize their experience, falls far short of what actually transpires subjectively—in terms of both individual and social psychology. If, for example, they claim that what attracts them to a piece of music is its melody or rhythm, they will normally have only a very hazy idea of what those words entail. They will use those concepts to designate a vague, conventional meaning: in the case of rhythm, no more than the interaction of the formal beat with syncopated deviations from it; in the case of melody, the easily identified top part in eight-measure periods. The analysis of one's own musical experience is a problematic business for anyone who has not made a special study of music or who lacks exceptional ability and training in introspection. Moreover, reliable experimental methods that are intended to avoid such difficulties by relying on precise counting and measuring lead nowhere. Whether a listener's pulse quickens, and so forth, is an irrelevant abstraction in a discussion of his specific reaction to music he has heard. Consider research of the kind developed by Frank Stanton in the Princeton Radio Research Project. Here the attempt was made to discover indicators that register whether people have a positive or negative reaction to specific passages in a piece of music. Such a procedure is based on a view of listening that is both atomistic and overphysical. It conceives of reactions to music as the sum of sensory stimuli, a theory that itself stands in need of scrutiny. The primitive nature of such experimental methods rides roughshod over the complexities involved in our responses to even the most primitive pieces of music. The preoccupation with precision becomes a fetish that conceals from the investigator the irrelevance of his conclusions. This is not to assert that such laboratory techniques are wholly devoid of scientific value; in many ways they fit their victims like a glove. They may have a use in establishing quantitative estimates of social attitudes toward music; but even these will be useful only if the sociologist confronts listeners with the meaning of what they are reacting to and the objective social conditions of such reactions.

A further consideration is that the concept of production should not be hypostatized, nor should it be simply equated with the social produc-

tion of goods in general. If a special sphere of musical production has developed and made itself independent of reproduction and consumption, this must be regarded as itself the consequence of a social process, specifically, the process of bourgeoisification. It should be analyzed in connection with such categories as the autonomy of the subject, on the one hand, and of the commodity and its value, on the other. The salient point is that it was above all thanks to the social division of labor that the production of music came to diverge from its other aspects. This is what made the great music of the last 350 years possible—a fact overlooked by naive sociological observers who would like to revoke that autonomy in the sphere of production in deference to the idol of musical immediacy. Musical production is not “fundamental” in the same sense that the production of food is fundamental to the sustenance of society. It does not emerge until much later. Historically, however, it has acquired an importance that a contemporary sociology of music cannot ignore. At the same time, features of production such as the autonomy of expressive need and above all of the objective logic of the composition must be distinguished from the laws governing the production of commodities for the marketplace that have played a role throughout the entire bourgeois epoch and whose influence secretly affects even the most sublime aesthetic moments. The tension between these two elements is one of the most crucial features of musical production. They were not only in opposition to each other but also mediated by each other in the sense that over considerable periods of time the autonomy of a piece of music was honored by society in the name of the purity of art and the rights of the individual. Even the freedom of music from social purposes has been boosted by society itself. Only in our day, when the entire culture of music appears increasingly to have been taken over by administration, does that freedom seem to have been abrogated, in the same way that the internal laws governing the development of music seem to have turned against its own inner freedom. But even the individualism of high bourgeois music is not to be taken literally. It cannot be constructed on the model of private property, as if great composers could create music as they wished by virtue of their unique psychology. As with every productive artist, the composer “owns” far less of his own composition than can be imagined by outsiders, who still think in terms of the creative genius. The greater a piece of music, the more the composer acts as its executor, as someone who complies with what the work requires of him. Hans Sachs’s assertion in *Die Meis-*

tersinger that the composer makes the rule and then follows it reveals the dawning awareness of this truth and also of the “nominalism” of modernism, which is no longer faced with the demands of any substantial artistic order. But even a rule someone has proposed for himself seems to be only that. In reality it reflects the objective stage reached by the language and the forms of music. Both are socially mediated. The path leading to their inner core is at the same time the only path leading to the discovery of their social significance. The composer’s subjectivity is not something added on to these objective conditions and desiderata. It proves its worth precisely because it elevates his own impulse, which of course cannot be imagined out of existence, and merges it with that social objectivity. This means not only that he is tied to the objective social preconditions of production, but that his own achievement is itself social, even though it is the most subjective thing about him, a kind of logical synthesis of his own nature. The compositional subject is no individual thing, but a collective one. All music, however individual it may be in stylistic terms, possesses an inalienable collective substance: every sound says “we.”

This collective substance, however, is only rarely that of a specific class or group. Attempts to reduce music to its social origins have something dogmatic about them. Neither a composer’s origins nor his life history, nor even the impact of his music on a particular social stratum, yields any compelling sociological insights. The gestural language of Chopin’s music is aristocratic—in a sense that would have to be specified concretely. Its popularity, however, stems precisely from this aristocratic manner. We may say that it transforms the ordinary citizen, who aspires to hear himself in its mellifluous melancholy, into a gentleman. Music that is alive today is bourgeois in its entirety; prebourgeois music is played only out of historical interest. And the claim of the Eastern bloc that what they produce emanates from socialism is refuted by the music itself, which simply warms up late Romantic, philistine clichés and sedulously avoids everything that threatens to deviate from conformist consumer needs. But by the same token, music also reflects the trends and contradictions of bourgeois society as a totality. The idea of a dynamic unity, a totality, in traditional great music was nothing but the idea of society itself. The reflection of social activity—which means ultimately the production process—lies fused with the utopian idea of “free human beings” united in solidarity. To this day the insoluble contradiction implicit in all great mu-

sic is that of the general and the particular—and the greatness of the music depends on whether it gives formal shape to this contradiction and renders it visible, instead of concealing it behind a harmonious façade. The essence of that contradiction lies in the fact that the interests of the individual and those of humanity point in different directions. Music transcends society by enabling this contradiction to find expression and at the same time by reconciling the irreconcilable in an anticipatory image. But ever since the middle of the nineteenth century, ever since *Tristan*, the more profoundly it has devoted itself to this cause, the more it has become alienated from any understanding with existing society. If music on its own initiative makes itself into something desired, something socially useful, something by which human beings may profit, then, by the light of its own truth content, it betrays those human beings. Its relationship to exchange value is, like that of all the arts in our day, dialectical through and through.

If ascribing works of music to particular social interests and tendencies is a dubious practice, it remains true nevertheless that specific social characteristics can be read off from traditional music. No one is likely to fail to register the somewhat forced echoes of a secure bourgeois background in Mendelssohn. No less obvious is the aura of the more progressive, upper middle class in Richard Strauss. His intuitionist *élan vital* with its hostility toward the pedantry of any well-honed musical logic, coupled with a certain brutality, a residue of vulgarity, is not dissimilar to the expansionist outlook of the German industrial bourgeoisie. Freedom from stuffy narrow-mindedness is combined with imperialist ruthlessness. Compelling though such characterizations are—and they are probably of greater value than the more accurate data collected by musical statisticians—it is no easy task to justify them according to the criteria laid down by the established sciences. It is at this point that the sociology of music must combine its talent for an empathetic understanding of music with the ability to distance itself from the artistic phenomenon so as to make it socially transparent. A physiognomical eye for the social significance of the formal languages of art is an indispensable element of the sociology of music. It may base itself on the canonical rule that all musical forms, all the materials and elements of the language of music, were once contents. They bear witness to social processes, and their social meanings must be brought to life again by the persistent observer. He should not confine himself to the social origins of these elements, their

connection with song and dance, for example, but must focus on the forces that have transformed elements that were substantive, social, and functional in origin into compositional and formal features and that have developed them further.

These forces are complex. On the one hand, they relate to the quasi-autonomous, internal development of music, much as the history of philosophy consists of a more or less self-contained body of problems. This is the side of the history of music that comes closest to intellectual history [*Geistesgeschichte*]. It differs from the latter only in that it is concerned not just with a subjective "understanding" of the composer's intentions, but also with the objective technical aspects of music. Like Leibniz's monads, the autonomous development of music is "windowless," yet at the same time it reflects the entire universe, simply by virtue of its own logic. Thus the integrated mode of composition that grows out of demands for ever greater inner coherence reflects the tendencies of bourgeois society to achieve an ever greater integration because music's underlying dominant categories are identical with those of the bourgeois mind, even though it is not always possible to demonstrate the impact of external social forces on them. On the other hand—and from this point of view the history of music is at variance with intellectual history—the internal development of music, whose social implications have to be uncovered in each particular instance, is anything but self-contained. Music develops in accordance with its own internal laws, which are secretly those of society. But again, it can also be moved and deflected directly by social force fields. To that extent it does not exhibit a seamless stylistic progression, a continuum. The *style galant* of the early eighteenth century, which displaced Bach and the stage of mastery of the language of music he had achieved, is to be explained not with reference to the logical development of music but in terms of the consumer, the needs of a bourgeois clientele. In the same way, Hector Berlioz's innovations are largely unconnected with solving the problems thrown up by Beethoven. They are far more readily explained by the emergence of industrial techniques unrelated to music, but which led to a radically different view of technique from those of classical composition. In Berlioz and the composers who directly followed him, Liszt and, later on, Richard Strauss, the achievements of Viennese classicism are ignored, much as the latter had ignored those of Bach. Such ruptures are just as much a part of the sociology of music as the continuities, and the study of the relationship between the two would not be the least

important aspect of the subject. In general it is through such ruptures, such discontinuities, rather than directly, that the main social tendencies governing music come to prevail. This rules out a straightforward, linear account of musical development. Such an account could in any case refer only to the stage reached in the rational mastery of the musical material, and not to the musical quality of the compositions themselves. The quality of the works is of course inseparable from that degree of formal mastery, but is by no means identical with it. Moreover, even that increase in formal mastery advances in a spiral movement that can be comprehended only by a knowledge that is also aware of what has been sacrificed or left by the wayside. For such a conception of the history of music, antinomies, unavoidable contradictions, play a crucial part in the process of fermentation of social knowledge. The technical inconsistencies in a composer of such supreme grasp of form as Richard Wagner proclaim the social impossibility of what he wanted to achieve: a work of art that would provide bourgeois society with a cultic unity. They reveal the untruth of the objective substance of his works and thereby their ideological nature. The reduction of successful, great music to its social origins is as dubious as the reduction of any truth. However, any failure that does not arise simply from defects of talent but is perceived to have a necessity of its own does point to social causation. Moreover, the concept of talent is not one that a sociology of music can afford to leave unexplored, as if it were a natural given. The different epochs and forms of society nurture the talents that are appropriate to them, including the critical talents. At the present time, music is characterized by attempts at integration that are being taken to extremes and are overshadowed by the process of reification. Such attempts do not follow simply from the present state of musical technique and the procedures developed by Schoenberg's Viennese school. They also harmonize with the administered world that they unconsciously mimic and, indeed, through the process of defining it, transcend. The criterion of the social truth of music today is the extent to which it enters into opposition to the society from which it springs and in which it has its being—in short, the extent to which it becomes "critical," however indirectly. That was possible in certain epochs without disrupting the process of social communication. An instance is the age which people are now pleased to describe as that of the emerging bourgeoisie. The Ninth Symphony could proclaim the unity of what fashion had strictly separated, and could still find an audience. Since then a di-

rect correlation has emerged between the social isolation of music and the seriousness of its objective social content, even though isolation as such may be purely solipsistic and hence no guarantee of social content on its own.

The sociological interpretation of music is the better grounded, the higher the quality of the music. It becomes dubious in the case of simpler, more regressive, or worthless music. It is harder to see why one hit song should stand higher in public esteem than another than to distinguish between the social significance of public reactions to different works by Beethoven. The analytical procedures developed by the Radio Research Project were applied to light music in America, and their analysis of this music as the product of a monopolistic market hit the nail on the head. Nevertheless, the most banal piece of light music is still the most mysterious as to its social existence and impact. To these mysteries belong the question asked by the Viennese theoretician Erwin Ratz, who inquired how it can be said that a piece of music is vulgar and indeed what the social and aesthetic meaning of banality can be said to be in general. The answer to such questions implies that we can answer the opposite question too: How can it be possible for music to rise above the realm of mere being, to which of course it owes its very existence? It would be important to investigate the social implications of the division of music into serious and light. This division has become institutionalized and established by categories, such as that of popular music, that now stand rigidly opposed to each other as fixed entities. This division corresponds to the distinction between high and low art established in antiquity, a distinction that proves nothing less than the failure of all cultures that have ever existed hitherto. Now of course the Culture Industry is preparing to take over the whole of music. Even music that is different can survive economically and hence socially only under the wing of the Culture Industry it detests—one of the most flagrant contradictions in the social situation of music. No doubt, thanks to such trends as the increasing sophistication of jazz, this centralized control will enable lowbrow music to be brought up to the standard of the latest technological developments, much as happens in the cinema in the case of its cruder, barbaric elements. At the same time, music is reduced by the dominant bureaucracies to the level of the commodity production that lies concealed behind the wishes of the consumer. And because those wishes are manipulated and reproduced they tend to converge with those of the bureaucracy. As a

branch of leisure-time activity, music comes to resemble the very things it opposes, even though it only derives its meaning from that opposition: that is its sociological prognosis. The self-contradiction in which it is caught up gives the lie to the coming integration of production, reproduction, and consumption. The unity of contemporary music culture under the patronage of the Culture Industry is one of total self-alienation. The intolerance of the Culture Industry toward everything that does not bear its stamp has become so all-embracing that this alienation has ceased to be visible to the consumer. What has been achieved is a false reconciliation. What should be close at hand, the "consciousness of suffering," becomes unbearably alien. The most alien thing of all, however, the process that hammers the machinery into men's consciousness and has ceased to contain anything that is human, invades them body and soul and appears to be the nearest and dearest thing of all.

§ Bourgeois Opera

To focus our thoughts about contemporary theater on opera is certainly not justifiable in terms of opera's immediate relevance. Not only has the crisis of opera been well known and persistent in Germany for thirty years (that is, since the time of the great economic crisis), not only have opera's place and function become questionable in society today, but beyond this, and quite apart from its reception, opera has come to seem peripheral and a matter of indifference, an impression that is combated only by somewhat forced attempts at innovation. Indeed, it is hardly a coincidence that these attempts at innovation usually get stuck halfway, especially as far as music itself is concerned. If we are to speak of opera at all we should rather do so because in more respects than one it marks a prototype of the theatrical—indeed, a prototype of precisely those elements that have been profoundly undermined today. There are aspects of the collapse of opera that belong to the most fundamental level of the stage. We experience these perhaps most drastically in opera's relation to costume. Costume is essential to opera: in contrast to a play, an opera without costume would be a paradox. If the gestures of singers—which they often bring along as if straight from the prop room—are themselves already part of their costume, then their voices are entirely put on—donned, as it were, by natural human beings as soon as they step upon the operatic stage. The American expression "cloak-and-dagger," the idea of a scene in which two lovers sing to each other while murderers lurk left and right behind pillars, eccentrically expresses something of the matter itself: that aura of disguise, of miming, which attracts the child to the theater—not because the child wants to see a work of art,