



the artist and his conscience

You have asked me, my dear Leibowitz, to append a few words to your book. The fact is that I happened to write some time ago on the subject of literary commitment and, by linking our names together, you wish to indicate that artists and writers stand shoulder to shoulder in their common concerns in any one period. If friendship had not been sufficient, the concern to show this solidarity would have made up my mind for me. But now I have to put pen to paper, I confess I feel very awkward.

I have no particular competence in music and I don't want to invite ridicule by repeating badly and in inappropriate terms what you have put so well in the appropriate language. Nor would I foolishly presume to introduce you to readers who already know you extremely well and who follow you passionately in your threefold career as composer, conductor and music critic. It would be a pleasure to say how good I think your book is—it is so simple and clear, it taught me so much, it clears up the most confused and intricate problems, teaching us to take a new perspective on them—but what purpose would that serve? The reader doesn't need me for that: to appreciate its virtues, he simply has to open the book. In the end, the best I can do is to assume we are chatting, as we have done so often, and unburden myself of the concerns and questions your work raised for me. You have convinced me, yet I feel uneasy and have misgivings. I must tell you about them. In so doing, I am, of course, a layman questioning an initiate, a pupil talking over the lesson with the teacher. But, after all, many of your readers are lay people and I imagine my feelings reflect theirs. All in all, this preface has no other aim than to ask you, in their name and mine, to

write a new book, or just an article, in which you would remove our last remaining doubts.

The queasy condition of the Communist boia, incapable either of keeping down or coughing up the enormous Picasso, gives me no cause for amusement. In the Communist Party's indigestion, I discern the symptoms of an infection that extends to the whole of our age.

When the privileged classes are happily ensconced in their principles, when they have good consciences, when the oppressed, duly convinced that they are inferior creatures, pride themselves on their servile condition, the artist is at ease. Since the Renaissance, the musician has, you say, constantly addressed himself to an audience of specialists. Yet what was this audience but the ruling aristocracy, which, not content with exerting military, judicial, political and administrative power over the whole land, at some point also appointed itself the arbiter of taste? Since this divine-right elite decided what was or was not human, the cantor or *Kapellmeister* could direct their symphonies or cantatas to the whole of humanity. Art could call itself humanistic because society remained inhuman.

Is it the same today? This is the question which torments me and which, in turn, I put to you. For the ruling classes of our Western societies can no longer dream of claiming that they are, themselves, the measure of humanity. The oppressed classes are conscious of their strength; they possess their own rites, techniques and ideology. Of the proletariat Rosenberg says, admirably:

On the one hand, the present social order is permanently threatened by the extraordinary potential power of the workers; on the other, the fact that this power is in the hands of an anonymous category, a historical 'zero', gives all modern mythmakers the temptation to treat the working class as the raw material for new collectivities, through which society can be subjugated. Cannot this history-less proletariat be so easily converted into *anything*, as into itself? Holding in suspense the drama between revolution by the working class on its own account and revolution as an instrument for others, the pathos of the proletariat dominates modern history.⁹

Now music, to speak only of this one art, has indeed undergone a metamorphosis. The art of music took its laws and limits from what it believed to be its essence; you have shown brilliantly how, at the end of a rigorous and yet free development, music wrested itself from alienation and set about creating its essence for itself by freely providing its own laws. Could it not, then, for its humble part, influence the course of history by helping to present the working classes with the image of a 'total man' who, having wrested himself from alienation and from the myth of human 'nature', forges in daily battle his essence and the values by which he judges himself?

When it recognizes *a priori* limitations, music, in spite of itself, reinforces alienation, celebrates *the given* and, while manifesting freedom in its own way, indicates that that freedom is bounded by nature. It is not uncommon for the 'mythmakers' to employ music to mystify audiences by communicating a sacred emotion to them, as is the case, for example, with military bands or choirs. But if I understand you aright, should we not see in the more recent forms of this art some-

thing like the presentation of the raw power of creation? And I believe I grasp here what sets you against those Communist musicians who signed the *Prague Manifesto*: they would like the artist to subject himself to an object-society and to sing the praises of the Soviet world as Haydn sang the praises of the divine Creation.¹⁰ They call on him to copy what *is*, to imitate without transcending and to offer his audience the example of submission to an established order; if music defined itself as a permanent revolution, would it not risk, for its part, awakening in its listeners the desire to transport that revolution into other fields? You, by contrast, wish to show man that he is not pre-fabricated, that he never will be, and that he always and everywhere retains the freedom to act and to *make himself*, above and beyond any kind of 'prefabrication'.

But here's what troubles me: haven't you established that an inner dialectic took music from monody to polyphony and from the simplest polyphonic forms to the most complex? This means that it can go forward, but not back: it would be as naïve to wish to return it to its earlier forms as to wish to reduce our industrial societies to pastoral simplicity. This is

all well and good, but, as a result, music's increasing complexity reserves it—as you recognize yourself—for a handful of specialists who are necessarily recruited from within the privileged class. Schönberg is further removed from the workers than Mozart was, in his day, from the peasants. You will tell me that most bourgeois have no understanding of music, and that would be true. But it is also true that those who can appreciate it belong to the bourgeoisie, enjoy the advantages of bourgeois culture and are generally members of the professions. I know that its *amateurs* are not rich; they are to be found mainly among the middle classes; it is rare for a big industrialist to be a music-lover. However, that does happen, whereas I don't remember seeing a worker at your concerts.

It is certain, then, that modern music breaks with established patterns, spurns convention and marks out its own path. But to whom does it speak of liberation, freedom, will and the creation of man by man? To a stale, genteel audience, whose ears are clotted with an idealist aesthetic. It says, 'permanent revolution' and the bourgeoisie hears 'Evolution and Progress'. And even if some among the young intellectuals understand

it, won't their present impotence lead them to see this liberation as a fine myth but not as *their* reality?

Let us be clear about this: it is the fault neither of the artist nor the art. Art has not changed *from within*: its movement, negativity and creative force remain what they always were. Today, as yesterday, what Malraux wrote remains true: 'All creation is, initially, the struggle of a potential form against an imitated one.'¹¹ And it has to be that way. But in the heavens above our modern societies, the appearance of those enormous planets, the masses, overturns everything, transforms artistic activity from a distance, without even touching it, strips it of its meaning and undermines the artist's good conscience: simply because the masses are *also* struggling for man, but blindly, because they run the constant risk of going astray, of forgetting what they are, of allowing themselves to be seduced by the voice of a mythmaker, and because the artist does not have the language that would enable them to hear him. It is indeed of *their* freedom that he speaks—for there is only one freedom—but he speaks of it in a foreign language.

The disarray in which the cultural policy of the USSR finds itself would be sufficient to prove that what is involved here is a historical contradiction essential to our age, not some bourgeois outrage due to the subjectivism of artists. Of course, if one takes the view that the USSR is the Devil, one may suppose that its leaders take an evil delight in carrying out purges that bewilder artists and exhaust them. And if one thinks that God is Soviet, there is no difficulty either: God acts justly and that is all there is to it. But if we dare for a moment to argue the new, paradoxical thesis that the Soviet leaders are human beings—human beings in a difficult, virtually untenable position, who are trying to do what seems right to them, who are often overtaken by events and who are sometimes carried further than they would like; in short, human beings like us—then everything changes, and we may suppose that they take no pleasure in making these sudden changes of tack that are in danger of throwing the whole machine out of kilter. In destroying classes, the Russian Revolution proposed to destroy elites, that is to say, those exquisite, parasitic organs one finds in all societies of oppression—organs that

produce values and works like papal bulls. Wherever an elite functions—the aristocracy of the aristocracy limning out for aristocrats the figure of the total man—then, instead of enriching the oppressed, the new values and the works of art increase their impoverishment in absolute terms: for the majority of human beings, the products of the elite are rejections, absences and limits. The taste of our ‘art-lovers’ necessarily defines the bad taste or tastelessness of the working classes, and, when a work is fêted by refined minds, there is in the world one more ‘treasure’ that the workers will not possess, one more thing of beauty they can neither appreciate nor understand. Values can be a positive determination for each only if they are the common product of all. A new acquisition on the part of society, be it a new industrial technique or a new form of expression, being made by everyone, must, for each person, be an enrichment of the world and a path opening up—in short, it must represent that society’s innermost potential. Instead of the total man of the aristocracy defining himself by the totality of the opportunities he denies to everyone, as the person who knows what others do not,

who appreciates what they cannot appreciate, who does what they do not do—in short, as the most irreplaceable of human beings—the total man of the socialist societies would be defined at birth by the totality of opportunities that all offer to each and at his death by the new opportunities—however small they may be—that he has offered to all. In this way, *all* are the path of each to himself and each is the path of all to all.

But at the same time as it sought to bring a socialist aesthetic into being, the needs of administration, industrialization and war prompted the USSR to implement first a policy of training *cadres*: it needed engineers, functionaries and military leaders. Hence the danger that this *de facto* elite, whose culture, occupations and standard of living were in marked contrast to those of the masses, would in turn produce values and myths; the danger that ‘art-lovers’ would arise within it who would create a *special* demand for artists. The Chinese text that you quote, revised by Jean Paulhan, sums up quite appositely the threat that hovers over a society under construction: if horse-lovers are enough to bring fine steeds into being, then

an elite that formed itself into a specialist audience would be enough to bring into being an art for the elite. There is a danger that a new segregation may occur: a culture of cadres will be born, with its accompaniment of abstract values and esoteric works, whereas the mass of the workers will fall back into a new barbarism that can be gauged precisely by their failure to understand the products aimed at that new elite. This, I believe, is one of the explanations for those infamous purges that revolt us: as the cadres strengthen their position, as the bureaucracy is in danger of transforming itself if not into a class then at least into an oppressive elite, a tendency towards aestheticism develops in the artist. And, while drawing on support from this elite, the leaders have to strive to maintain, at least ideally, the principle of a community producing its values as a whole. They are most surely forced into contradictory projects, since they are conducting a general policy of producing cadres and a mass-based cultural policy: with one hand they are creating an elite, while with the other they are attempting to wrest its ideology from it, though this is constantly re-emerging and always will. But, con-

versely, there is indeed confusion among the opponents of the USSR when they criticize its leaders for simultaneously creating both an oppressor class and yet wishing to smash class aesthetics. What is true is that the Soviet leaders and the artists of the bourgeois societies are faced with the same impasse: music has developed according to its own dialectic; it has become an art based on a complex technique; it is a regrettable fact, but *a fact nonetheless*, that it needs a specialized audience. In short, modern music requires an elite and the working masses require music. How is this conflict to be resolved? By 'giving form to the deep popular sensibility'? But *what* form? Vincent d'Indy made serious music 'on a French mountain air'. Do we believe the mountain-dwellers would have recognized their song? And then the popular sensibility creates its own forms. Folk songs, jazz, African chants have no need of being reworked by professional artists. On the contrary, the application of a complex technique to the spontaneous products of that sensibility would necessarily distort them. This is the tragedy of the Haitian artists who cannot manage to connect their formal culture to the folk subjects they

would like to treat. The *Prague Manifesto* says, more or less, that we have to lower the level of music while at the same time raising the cultural level of the masses. Either this means nothing or it is an admission that art and its public can unite only in absolute mediocrity. You are right to point out that the conflict between art and society is eternal because it relates to the essence of each. But, in our day, it has assumed a new, more acute form: art is a permanent revolution and, for forty years, the fundamental situation of our societies has been revolutionary. Now, social revolution demands an aesthetic conservatism, whereas the aesthetic revolution, in spite of the artist himself, demands a social conservatism. Picasso, a sincere Communist condemned by the Soviet leaders, and purveyor of works of art to rich American art-lovers, is the living image of this contradiction. As for Fougeron, his paintings have stopped pleasing the elite but never stirred up any interest among the proletariat.

Moreover, the contradiction becomes deeper and sharper when we come to the sources of musical inspiration. It is a question, says the *Prague Manifesto*, of

expressing 'the sentiments and the lofty progressive ideas of the popular masses'. I can agree on the sentiments, but how on earth are 'the lofty progressive ideas' to be turned into music? For music is, in the end, a *non-signifying* art. Unrigorous minds have happily spoken of a 'musical language'. But we know very well that the 'musical phrase' does not refer to any object: it is itself an object. How could this dumb thing evoke man's destiny for him? The *Prague Manifesto* offers a solution of entertaining naivety: 'the musical forms that enable us to achieve these goals' will be cultivated: 'in particular, vocal music, opera, oratorio, cantatas and choral works, etc.' Why, of course: these hybrid works have the gift of the gab; they are musical chatterers. There could be no better way to say that music is to be merely a pretext, a means of enhancing the glory of the word. It is words that will hymn Stalin, the Five Year Plan and the electrification of the Soviet Union. With other words, the same music might celebrate Pétain, Churchill, Truman or the Tennessee Valley Authority. Change the lyrics and a hymn to the Russian dead of Stalingrad will become a funeral oration for the Germans who fell before that same city.

What can sounds provide? A great blast of sonorous heroism; it is the word that will bring specificity. There could be musical commitment [*engagement*] only if the work were such that it were susceptible to only one verbal commentary; in short, the sound structure would have to *repel* some words and *attract* others. Is this possible? In some privileged cases, perhaps: and you yourself quote *A Survivor from Warsaw*.¹² And yet Schönberg has not been able to avoid recourse to words. How, without the words, would we recognize in this 'gallop of wild horses' the counting of the dead? We would hear a gallop. The poetic comparison is not in the music, but in the relation of the music to the words. But, you will say, here at least the words are part of the work; they are of themselves a musical element. That is so, but must we give up the sonata, the quartet, the symphony? Must we devote ourselves to 'operas, oratorios and cantatas', as the *Prague Manifesto* urges? I know you do not think so. And I agree with you when you write that, 'the subject chosen remains a *neutral* element, something like a raw material that will have to be subjected to a purely artistic treatment. It is only in the last analysis that the

quality of this treatment will prove or disprove that . . . extra-artistic concerns and emotions belong to the purely artistic project?

Only, in that case, I can no longer very clearly see where musical commitment lies. I fear it may have fled the work to take refuge in the artist's conduct, in his attitude to art. The life of the musician may be exemplary—his voluntary poverty, his rejection of easy success, his constant dissatisfaction and the permanent revolution he pursues against others and himself—but I fear the austere morality of his person may remain a commentary external to his work. The musical work is not *by itself* negativity, rejection of traditions and liberatory movement; it is the positive consequence of this rejection and negativity. As a sound object, it no more reveals the doubts, crises of despair or final decision of the composer than the inventor's patent reveals the torments and worries of the inventor. It does not show us the dissolution of the old rules: it shows us *other rules*, which are the positive laws of its development. Now, the artist must not be the commentary on his work for the public: if the music is committed music, then it is in the sound

object as it presents itself immediately to the ear, without reference to the artist or to earlier traditions, that the commitment, in its intuitive reality, will be found.

Is this possible? It seems we run up here, in another form, against the dilemma we encountered initially: by enlisting music, a non-signifying art, to express pre-established significations, one alienates it; but by rejecting the significations into what you call 'the extra-artistic', doesn't musical liberation run the risk of leading to abstraction and presenting the composer as an example of that formal, purely negative freedom Hegel calls Terror? Servitude or Terror: it is possible that our age offers no other alternative to the artist.¹³ If I have to choose, I confess that I prefer Terror: not for itself but because, in these lean years, it maintains the properly aesthetic demands of art and enables it to await more propitious times without suffering too much damage.

But I must confess that, before I read your book, I was less pessimistic. I present here my very naïve sense as a relatively uncultured listener: when someone performed a musical composition in front of me, I found no signification of any kind in the succession

of sounds, and it was of no matter to me whatever whether Beethoven had composed one of his funeral marches 'for the death of a hero' or whether, at the end of his first Ballade, Chopin had wanted to suggest the satanic laughter of Wallenrod; on the other hand, it did seem to me that that succession had a *meaning*, and it is that meaning I liked. I have, in fact, always distinguished meaning from signification. It seems to me that an object signifies when one aims, through it, at another object. In this case, the mind does not attend to the sign itself, but passes beyond it to the thing signified; it frequently happens, even, that this thing remains present to us when we have long forgotten the words that made us conceive it. Meaning, on the other hand, is not distinct from the thing itself, and the more we attend to the thing it inhabits, the more manifest it is. I shall say that an object has a *meaning* when it is the incarnation of a reality that transcends it but which one cannot grasp outside of it and which its infinite nature makes impossible to express adequately by any system of signs; it is always a totality that is involved: the totality of a person, of a milieu, of an age or of the human condition. Of the *Mona*

Lisa's smile I shall say that it does not 'mean' to say anything, but that it has a meaning: through it is realized the strange mixture of mysticism and naturalism, of self-evidence and mystery that characterizes the Renaissance. And I need only look at it to distinguish it from that other, equally mysterious, but more troubling, stiffer, ironic, naïve and sacred smile that floats vaguely on the lips of the Etruscan Apollo or the 'hideous', secular, rationalistic, witty smile shown in Houdon's *Voltaire*. Of course, Voltaire's smile had a *significance*, it appeared on particular occasions and *intended to say*, 'I'm not fooled' or, 'Listen to this fanatic!' But, at the same time, it is Voltaire himself, Voltaire as ineffable totality: of Voltaire you can speak *ad infinitum*; his existential reality cannot be encompassed in words. But as soon as he smiles, there you *have* the whole of him, effortlessly. Now, it seemed to me that music was a pretty, dumb creature with deeply meaningful eyes. When I hear a Brandenburg Concerto, I never *think* of the eighteenth century, of the austerity of Leipzig, the Puritan ponderousness of the German princes, of that moment in the history of the mind when reason, in full possession of its tech-

niques, remained nonetheless subordinate to faith and when the logic of the concept transformed itself into a logic of judgement. And yet it is all there, given in the sounds, in the same way as the Renaissance smiles on the lips of *La Gioconda*. And I have always thought that the 'average' listener who, like me, has no particular precise knowledge about the history of musical composition, could immediately date a work by Scarlatti, Schumann or Ravel—even if he might get the composer's name wrong—on account of that silent presence in any sound-object of the entire age and its *Weltanschauung*. Is it not conceivable that commitment in music resides at this level? I know what you are going to say to me: if the artist has painted himself wholly in his work—and his century with him—then he did so involuntarily: his only concern was to make music. And it is audiences today who, a hundred years later, discern intentions that are in the object without having been put there: the listener of the last century perceived only the melody; he saw absolute and *natural* rules in what we retrospectively regard as postulates that reflect the age. This is true: but can we not conceive today of a more self-aware artist who, by

thinking about his art, might attempt to embody his human condition in it? I merely ask the question; it is you who are qualified to answer it. But, I confess that if, with you, I condemn the absurd *Prague Manifesto*, I cannot help being disturbed by certain passages in the famous speech by Zhdanov that inspired the whole cultural policy of the USSR.¹⁴ You know as well as I do that the Communists are guilty because they are wrong in their way of being right, and they make us guilty because they are right in their way of being wrong. The *Prague Manifesto* is the extreme, stupid consequence of an entirely defensible theory of art and one that does not necessarily entail aesthetic authoritarianism. We must, said Zhdanov, 'know life, so as to be able to depict it truthfully in works of art, not . . . depict it in a dead, scholastic way, not simply as "objective reality", but . . . depict reality in its revolutionary development.' What did he mean other than that reality is never inert?—it is always changing and those who appreciate it or depict it are themselves changing. The deep unity of all these unavoidable changes is the future meaning of the whole system. So, the artist must smash those habits that have already crys-

tallized and that make us see in the present those institutions and customs that are already outdated. To provide a truthful image of our age, he must view it from the heights of the future it is fashioning for itself, since it is tomorrow that decides the truth of today. In a sense, this conception connects with your own: have you not shown that the committed artist is 'ahead of' his time and that he is watching the present traditions of his art with future eyes? There is, most certainly, an allusion in your writing, as in Zhdanov's, to negativity and 'overcoming', but he does not confine himself to the moment of negation. For him, the work's value derives from a positive content: it is a lump of the future that has fallen into the present; it is some years ahead of the judgement we shall pass on ourselves; it opens up our future possibilities; at one and the same time, it follows, accompanies and precedes the dialectical progression of history.

I have always thought there was nothing sillier than those theories that attempt to determine the mental level of a person or a social group. There are no levels: for a child to be 'his age' is to be simultaneously above that age and below it. It is the same with our intellec-

tual and sensory habits. Matisse has written, 'Our senses have a developmental age that derives not from the immediate ambience, but from a moment of civilization.'¹⁵ This is right. And, conversely, they transcend that moment and obscurely perceive a host of objects that we shall see tomorrow; they discern another world in this one. But this is not the product of some prophetic gift: it is the contradictions and conflicts of the age that over-excite the senses to the point of giving them a kind of double vision. It is true, then, that a work of art is both an individual production and a social fact. What we rediscover in *The Well-tempered Clavier*¹⁶ is not just the religious, monarchical order: to those prelates and barons, victims and beneficiaries of oppressive traditions, Bach offered the image of a freedom which, while appearing to contain itself within traditional frames, passed beyond tradition in the direction of new creations. He countered the closed tradition of the little despotic courts with an open tradition; he taught how to find originality by consenting to a discipline—in a word, how to live: he showed the play of moral liberty within religious and monarchical absolutism, he depicted the

proud dignity of the subject who obeys his king, of the believer who prays to his God. While being fully in his age, all of whose prejudices he accepts and reflects, he is at the same time outside it and judges it wordlessly in terms of the still implicit rules of a pietistic moralism that will give rise, half a century later, to the ethics of Kant. And the infinite variations he executes, the postulates he forces himself to respect, bring his successors to the brink of changing the postulates themselves. Admittedly, his life was an example of conformism and I do not suppose he ever aired any very revolutionary views. But is his art not simultaneously the magnification of obedience and the transcendence of that obedience, which he *judges*, in the very moment that he seeks to *show* it to us, from the standpoint of an individualist rationalism as yet unborn? Later, with no loss of his aristocratic audience, the artist gains another one: through his thinking on the recipes of his art and the continual adjustments he makes to received custom, he reflects to the bourgeoisie, ahead of time, the calm, non-revolutionary progression it wishes to accomplish. Your conception of musical commitment, my dear Leibowitz, seems to

me to suit that happy age: the match between the aesthetic demands on the artist and the political demands on his listeners is so perfect that a single critical analysis serves to demonstrate the wicked futility of internal customs barriers, tolls and feudal rights, and the futility of the prescriptions that traditionally govern the length of the musical theme, the number of its repetitions and the way it is developed. And that critique respects the foundations of both society and art: the tonal aesthetic remains the natural law of all music, property the natural law of all community. I have, naturally, no intention of explaining tonal music in terms of the regime of property ownership: I merely point out that there are, in every age, deep correspondences between the objects on which, in all fields, negativity exerts itself, and between the limits that negativity runs up against, at the same time, in all directions. 'There is a human nature, do not tamper with it!' Such is the shared signification of social and artistic prohibitions in the late eighteenth century.

Oratorical, pathos-laden and, at times, long-winded, Beethoven's art offers us, with a little delay,

the musical image of the revolutionary Assemblies; it is Barnave, it is Mirabeau and, at times, alas, it is Lally-Tollendal. And I am not thinking of the *significations* he sometimes liked to give to his works, but of their *meaning*, which ultimately expressed his way of throwing himself into an eloquent, chaotic world. But, in the end, this torrential rhetoric and these floods of tears seem held in abeyance in a freedom of almost deathly calm. He did not overturn the rules of his art; he did not transgress its limits and yet one might say that he was beyond the triumphs of the Revolution, beyond even its failure. If so many people have chosen to seek consolation in music, it is, it seems to me, because it speaks to them of their troubles in the voice they will use to speak of them themselves once they have found consolation, and because it makes them see those troubles from the viewpoint of the day after tomorrow.

Is it impossible, then, today, for an artist, without any *literary* intention and any concern for *signifying*, to throw himself into our world with enough passion, to love it and hate it with such force, to live its contradictions with such sincerity, to plan to change it

with such perseverance that that world—with its savage violence, barbarism, refined technologies, slaves, tyrants, deadly menaces and our fearful, imposing freedom—will transform itself, through him, into music? And if the musician has shared the fury and hopes of the oppressed, is it impossible for so much hope and rage to carry him beyond himself, so that he hymns this world today with a voice of tomorrow? And if this were the case, could we still speak of 'extra-aesthetic' preoccupations? Of 'neutral' subjects? Of signification? Could we distinguish the subject matter from its treatment?

It is to you that I put these questions, my dear Leibowitz, to you, not to Zhdanov. I know *his* reply, for, just when I thought he was showing me the way, I realized he was going astray. Hardly had he mentioned overcoming objective reality when he added, 'In addition to this, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remoulding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism.' I had thought he was inviting the artist to live the problems of the age *in their totality* and to do so intensely and

freely, so that the work would reflect them to us in its own way. But I see it is merely a question of ordering didactic works from functionaries—works they will execute as directed by the Party.

Since, instead of being allowed to find it, the artist has his conception of the future imposed upon him, it matters little that, where politics is concerned, this future remains to be made; for the musician, it is made already. The entire system sinks into the past. Soviet artists, to borrow an expression they are fond of themselves, are *backward-looking*; they hymn the future of the USSR the way our Romantics hymned the past of the monarchy. Under the Restoration, it was a question of counterbalancing the immense glory of our revolutionaries with an equal glory they claimed to find in the early days of the *Ancien Régime*. Today, the golden age has been shifted; it has been projected into the future. But this roving golden age remains, nonetheless, what it was: a reactionary myth.

Reaction or terror? Art free but abstract, art concrete but encumbered? A mass audience that is uneducated, a specialist listenership, but a bourgeois one? It is for you, my dear Leibowitz, for you, who

live out, in full awareness of what you do and without mediation or compromise, the contradiction of freedom and commitment, to tell us whether this conflict is eternal or just a moment in history and, if the latter is the case, whether the artist has in him today the means to resolve it or whether we have to wait for a profound change of social life and human relations to bring a solution.

Preface to René Leibowitz, *L'Artiste et sa conscience*
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