



Noise: The Political Economy of Music

Jacques Attali , Brian Massumi (Translator)

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“Noise is a model of cultural historiography. . . . In its general theoretical argument on the relations of culture to economy, but also in its specialized concentration, Noise has much that is of importance to critical theory today.” SubStance“For Attali, music is not simply a reflection of culture, but a harbinger of change, an anticipatory abstraction of the shape of things to come. The book’s title refers specifically to the reception of musics that sonically rival normative social orders. Noise is Attali’s metaphor for a broad, historical vanguardism, for the radical soundscapes of the western continuum that express structurally the course of social development.” EthnomusicologyJacques Attali is the author of numerous books, including Millennium: Winners and Losers in the Coming World Order and Labyrinth in Culture and Society.

Noise: The Political Economy of Music Details

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John Levi says

Premise sounds good until you find Attali jumping through the extremes of employing a rigid/ mechanistic type of Marxist analysis and non-scientific poststructuralist 'readings'

Case in point: Attali equates noise to the raw, untamed violence beyond social order. Musical movements like Russolo's futurism are revolutionary for emancipating noise from the bourgeois romantic musical tradition. But this kind of analysis cannot account for the contemporary "noise" aesthetic common among artists regardless of political leaning. The connection between the sonic arts and its inherent politics is not as clear-cut as Attali claims them to be.

Davut says

Tarihin ilk devirlerinden günümüze kadar müziğin kullanımı, amaçları ve sahiplenilmesi üzerine yazılmış bir araştırma ve deneyim paylaşımı.

Ben says

In sum, the history of music should be rewritten as a political effort to channel violence through noise, which by its nature is unwieldy and acts as a safety valve, to put it too simply. This effort is as old as power.

Specifically, music is said by Attali to have been first created as a way to commit symbolic violence against the other, to preempt the need for ritual murder which in "ancient" societies was the act that identified a scapegoat, an other, thereby giving everyone else a sense of tribal in-ness.

As time went on, music became a representation, a mirror of its original purpose whose aim was to stand as spectacle. This period in musicality includes all of concert music and lasts into the 19th or 20th century.

Finally, music moved into a period of repetition, where spectacle was no longer possible because everything was always the same. This was made possible by the advance of capitalism and technology. Even concerts, in this stage, trailed the mass-produced object in meaning and importance.

Finally, there may yet be a final stage in musicality, a stage of composition, where people produce music for their own pleasure, without profit or repetition.

Attali's purpose in tracing this history is economic and prophetic. (By training he is an economist, and he worked as a finance minister under Mitterand. Now he runs a microfinance NGO.) Because the production of music requires no labor, humanity can mold it infinitely almost as soon as it imagines some new political possibility. So relations are enacted through music that will eventually come to inform other areas of society, including economics and government. Thus we can look to music as a foreshadowing, which Attali

demonstrates historically.

Thorsten says

absolutely genius book tracing the origin and development of music, but so much more - showing music as a reflection of, and a precedent for, the structure of production within society, by focussing on the relationship between music, power and money.

It takes its starting place atop Rene Girard's theory of memetic desire and the essential violence, showing music's birth and utility in the midsts of time amongst primal society and the ritualised slaughter of a scapegoat. That seemed a bit hard to swallow at first but after reading a bit more depth via wikipedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rene_Girard... - i could go with it.

The book describes four networks/stages of musical, and hence, societal, structures - sacrificial being the first, in which music was inscribed in ceremony and ritual, music was a very public thing and part of the background noise of life. 'Representation' is the second network structure, where music was abstracted from daily life, presented as spectacle, in concerts and private performances, where money was exchanged, charged for admission. This was reflected in society with the industrial revolution, where labour was also abstracted from one's own form of production and sold as an hourly commodity. 'Repetition' is the third network structure, and is brought about through the technology of recording, beginning with Edison's phonograph in 1877, as the commercialization of records began; this was reflected in society as a distribution of power as it dispersed throughout society, tying in well with Foucauldian ideas of power being intangible and elusive. The fourth and final stage of the musical production cycle he terms 'Compositional'. I was keen to see what examples he would give of this stage, but unfortunately the chapter is more open, more of a prediction of what is to come. He defines composition as the melding together of production and consumption, in which time and usage are not stockpiled as in repetition nor abstracted such as in representation. In composition, he presents quite a strongly optimistic view of society in which each person is personally responsible and powerful, living in the moment and taking pleasure in the act of production. Interesting to note the book was first published in France in 1977, so i'm not sure what effect or level of knowledge he would have had of punk at that point, as he never mentions punk. It can all seem quite prescient, as the idea of a compositional network can easily be imagined as first the DIY ethos of punk which fuelled the whole 80s and spread of lo-fi noise bands and music scenes, and as technology moved into the 90s and this present decade, how the widespread adoption and cheap cost of software has enabled mass amounts of young music producers, remixers, DJs. How those same ideas and technology are also shaping society and the structures of power through open source software and open data movements, ideologies of transparent government etc.

The history of copyright is also very impressively explained from original guild of copyists who were pissed at the invention of the printing press, so the law came up with the idea of "copy-right" for who could use these new printing press devices. At first this only covered dramatic works, as music in the middle ages and into the renaissance was still very much a fluid part of society - still in its sacrificial/ritual network stage - With the move into the Representation stage of the 1700s and 1800s and the emergence of musical stars and celebrities, we see the first musical collections society forming in 1850 - SACEM in France, to "demand, on behalf of the authors and editors, payment of royalties for every representation of a musical work, regardless of its importance". This was to collect money for the composers for their works which were being published in song books and used in mechanical playback machines, but for which the original composers were not being paid. The birth of publishing rights. As another technology breaks the existing order - the phonograph - and the move into the Repetition network stage, the musicians and publishers were upset at not being paid for recordings taken of performances, and from here the need for mechanical copyright arises.

aye, well recommended!

René says

Y vivir en el vacío, es admitir la permanente presencia potencial de la revolución, de la música y de la muerte.

Sol Rezza says

Libro imprescindible para todos aquellos interesados en el sonido. Un libro completo que nos despliega la historia de cómo nos hemos relacionado con el sonido y el ruido culturalmente, económicamente y políticamente.

Jamie says

Attali goes back as far as the middle ages to show how industrialism and capitalism have attempted to commodify music in the last 200 years, and how legislation has sought to discipline noise, restrict sound, and alienate both musicians and audiences from the cultural labor of creating music. But he also argues that industry has failed to complete this process, and that society not only has the power to reclaim music and noise-making, but that this reclamation is inevitable.

While this over-arching thesis is compelling, Attali makes other arguments that are far more esoteric (that noise is murder and that music is like ritual sacrifice? That bubblegum pop music will destroy the family and eventual result in a sort of Brave New World where children are raised as pop stars from infancy?), and often in language that is dense and difficult to slog through. Attali is clearly a Marxist, so his rhetoric is somehow both thrilling and boring. He's also French, and while Massumi's translation is well-done and readable, it also captures how academic French tends to make everything sound really fascinating, but also really dull. But even if it's not the easiest read, Noise and the ideas contained therein are worth the effort, if you can find a copy. Highly recommended to anyone who expresses their love of music and/or noise by overthinking it and microanalyzing their favorite songs.

Jim says

This is one of the three books that have changed the way I listen to the world. Attali posits that music is a leading indicator not of the health of the political economy, but the very structure of it. And as a bonus, it's not nearly as obtuse as most contemporary French philosophy.

Alfredo Bojórquez says

Libro fundamental para los primeros acercamientos a una visión política de la música occidental.

Chris and Yuri says

The idea that music is a manifestation of political power is probably disgusting to most people. But there is a reason we call people like Haydn "court" composers: Haydn wouldn't have happened without a patron wielding significant political and financial power.

This isn't as interesting as where Jacques Attali takes us later in the book: that the devaluing of recorded music by technology, etc. will lead us all back into composition. In other words, Attali predicts a future in which people will write and enjoy their own music, the way people in some communities are already growing and harvesting their own food.

It probably sounded like a wild idea 30 years ago, but with the wide availability of things like Garage Band and WiiMusic, he may not be far off the mark.

Michael says

As an investigation into the fetishization of music and the regression of listening, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* manages to fail in interesting ways. Attali attempts to provide a historical investigation into the development of music from its origins in ritual through to the development of modern recording. To achieve this, he draws on an approach heavily influenced by Theodor Adorno and Critical Theory. The result is at times brilliant as it traces the economics of nineteenth and twentieth century music production and reception and frustrating in its overly broad and oftentimes unsubstantiated claims of the ur-history of music prior to the age of capitalism.

The failure of the book rests on three factors, each in its own way undermining the whole of the thesis. First, as a materialist history of music, the book takes in a much too broad aesthetic category over a too large period of time. In the nineteenth century alone, the divergent musical forms distributed over both high and low cultures would require a tome of considerable length, but Attali glosses over this and not only includes the one century but the entire history of music. As a consequence, we end up with the second factor undermining the book, a series of unsubstantiated generalizations such as music is ritualized human sacrifice. Attali does not have the time or the capacity to substantiate the claim, but instead relies on an interpretation

of a work of visual art, Brueghal's Carnival's Quarrel with Lent, to assert his thesis. Finally, because the theory relies so heavily on Adorno, Attali fails to give sufficient consideration to the liberationist elements within music, so that musical innovation can only be reducible to market demand and exploitation. There is no dialectic of technological repetition. To this end, the book could use a little Walter Benjamin and the revolutionary potential of Technological Reproducibility.

At the same time, though the book fails, it does fail in interesting ways. When Attali is focused on the political economy of nineteenth and twentieth century music, he does offer fresh insight into the economic exploitation of music. The history of copyright ownership, technical reproduction, commercial performance and innovation all reveal ways in which external economic factors drive music's development in the last two centuries. In these discussion, Attali is at his best as he provides descriptions of how musical forms were developed or marginalized depending upon the markets and the technologies of different eras. The history of the relationship between music, technology and capitalist economics, essentially the process whereby music production became a monetized activity, are revealing and instructive for understanding musical history. Frustratingly, here where he is most interesting, Attali is also uninterested in providing a greater degree of depth because his theory of music as murder interferes with the much richer materialist dialectic between music and capitalism.

I can't say I would recommend this book. For a person interested in this general area of music theory, How the Beatles Destroyed Rock and Roll offers a much more interesting take on the relationship between technology, economy and music, one that is stronger because of its more narrow focus on twentieth century popular music in America.

Burcu says

Müziğin ça?lar boyunca geçirdi?i yolculuk üzerine güzel bir kitap. Kitabın yeni say?labilecek bir tarihte yazılm?? olması da teknolojik gelişmelerin müzik/bilgi paylaşım? üzerindeki etkilerini de dü?ünmeye fırsat veriyor. Klasik bir müzik tarihi kitab? beklentisiyle okunmamalı, ama müzikle ilgilenen herkes için okumaya değer bir kitap.

Jeremy Hurdis says

This book will change the way you think about music, unless you've already read books similar to this one (Adorno, Bataille, Dolar, or Goodman). Thinking about music as a product of labour is important and challenging. Attali provides a very interesting analysis of music as violence related to sacrifice. What is weak in this book is the connection to technology in musical production and reproduction. Even worse, perhaps, is that any discussion of leisure time vs. productive time, fixed capital, or knowledge production is absent. Regardless, as a fairly short read this book *will* provoke thought.

Armagan Kilci says

?lginç bilgiler içeren, yoğun emek verilmiş bir araştırma. Müzik ve iktidar ilişkisini somutlaştıran örneklerle dolu bir kitap. Attali, Antik Yunan müzikli tiyatrosundan, Verdi'ye; cazın beyazların

hakimiyetine geçmesinden The Doors'un popülaritesine kadar geni? bir skalada, Marksist bir perspektiften müzi?i ele al?yor. Kitap boyunca ikna olamad???m tek argüman, müzi?in ?iddeti yönetme arac? olarak de?erli oldu?u. Belki ayr?nt?l? ve ikna edici aktar?yordur, okurken kaç?rm?? olabilirim. Ama bu iddia bana sezgisel argümente edilmi? gibi geldi. 1900'lerin öncesinde kad?nlar?n müzikten uzak tutulu?unu da, müzi?in toplumsal ?iddeti yönetmekle ilgili olmas?na ba?lam???. Bu etkili arac?n, erkek egemen bir alanda tutulmaya çal???lmas?yla ili?kilendirmi?. Müzi?in yeniden üretimi ve tüketimi, fonograf bölümü de ilgimi çekti, belki Benjamin'le paralel okumak ve dü?ünmek verimli olabilir. Telif tarihi üzerine epey bilgi veriyor. Kitap genel olarak, dönemsellik vurgusu ile ilgi çekici hale geliyor. Okuyucuya, belli bir dönemin içinde oldu?unu ve bu dönemin, paradigmlar?n geçici oldu?unu da hat?rlatma i?levine sahip bir kitap. Bundan 100 sene önce, ?rkç? bir gündemle "Parmaklar? birle?meyen ilkel yarat?klar?n yapt???", müzik denilen ama asl?nda gürültü olan caza müsaade edilmemelidir. Kölelerin ba??nda biri olmazsa i?te ortaya bu gürültü ç?kar" gibi berbat dü?üncelerin, sayg?n müzik dergilerinde yer ald???n? görmek, epey ders niteli?inde.

e.Burak Yurtta? says

Jacques Attali ilginç bir adam. Bir ekonomist olmas?na kar??n labirentin tarihi, müzi?in ekonomi-politi?i vb gibi kitaplar? var. Kitab?n ilk yar?s?, geçmi?ten 20.yy'a müzi?in hangi toplumsal i?levleri gördü?ü ve müzik ekonomisinin nas?l olu?tu?u ile ilgili. ?kinci yar?s?nda 20. yy'da müzi?in nas?l metala?t??? ve toplumda hangi dönü?ümleri temsil etti?ini anlatmakta. Kitab?n son çeyre?i 60'lardan günümüze geliyor. Bu son çeyre?i harikayd?, özellikle. Payla??mc? bir toplum hayal edenler için de?i?imin nas?l gelece?ini müjdeleyen, neredeyse tanr?sal bir ilham ile yaz?lm??cas?na okudu?um son sat?rlar?, akl?m? uzunca bir süre kurcal?yaca?a benziyor. Bir süre sonra tekrar okuyaca??mdan eminim.
