POSTMODERN culture

Ugly Beauty: John Zorn and the Politics of Postmodern Music

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1. I wish to look at a particular postmodern achievement, the music of composer John Zorn, in order to assess both the nature of a political praxis and to "define" the postmodern pragmatically, in the practice of art rather than only in theory. Zorn's music does something palpable to its listeners, or at least incites them to a form of action, of awakening; it activates the listener in a manner that a great deal of conventional and commercially-produced music, when it casts itself as soother or anaesthetic, does not. But Zorn achieves this affectivity, ironically, by exploiting and exploding both convention and commercial form.

2. Form itself, in so far as it is tied both to social production and aesthetic convention, provides a correlative for the dialectic of the social and aesthetic spheres, and thus offers an inroad into the problem of a postmodern praxis. Music, Jacques Attali asserts, manifests by its very nature as an "instrument of understanding," a "new theoretical form" (*Noise* 4). Music, that is, as Attali understands it, can provide a viable, fully realized conjunction of the theoretical and the practical, a form of theorizing which coincides with a formal practice.[1] To grasp the practice of music, then, within a postmodern context, is in some sense to arrive at a theoretical position *vis-a-vis* the postmodern, especially--as the aesthetic delimitation of music as a sphere of cultural activity is broadened to encompass the theoretical--toward a decidedly political praxis (cf. Arac ix-x, xxx-xxxi). But where, for Attali, that broadening takes on a decidedly utopian character, the "newness" and "originality" of Zorn's music, if we may speak in such terms, lie exactly in its self-conscious refusal to accept either the original or the new as valid categories of artistic expression, in either the compositional or the performative sphere. The politics of Zorn's music, its affective thrust, emerges from within the formal manifestations of a parodic, technocratically-saturated postmodern musicality, and also delineates a significant political current running through postmodernism in general. In its parodies of genre and received form, as well as its antagonistic postures, Zorn's music assumes a political force.

3. The most immediately audible characteristic of John Zorn's music is its noisiness. Abrasive, loud, fast, unpleasant, disjunctive, Zorn's musical textures are never sweet or satisfied in the conventional sense; one has only to hear the primal screams of Yamatsuka Eye (310 Kb .au file) on the first two recordings by Zorn's Naked City band, the punk-jazz thrash of his Ornette Coleman tribute, *Spy vs. Spy*, or his slippery, choppy, clanging arrangements of works by Kurt Weill or Ennio Morricone (250 Kb .au file, arrangement of Morricone's "The Good The Bad and the Ugly"), to realize that neither a

bathetic Classical prettiness nor a pretentious Romantic resolution has any place in his work, except as an antagonism. Nor does his work admit the conventions of modern and contemporary chamber music unproblematically. A work for string quartet, *Forbidden Fruit* (346 Kb .au file), incorporates "turntables" played by Christian Marclay, in which random, distorted snatches of pre-recorded music cut across the already fragmented textures of the strings themselves. A work for chamber ensemble such as *Cobra* not only uses conventional orchestral instrumentation including harp, brass, woodwinds and percussion, but also incorporates electric guitar and bass, turntables, cheesy organ, and sampled sounds ranging from horse whinnies and duck calls to train whistles, telephone bells and industrial clanging. Zorn, while affirming his own position as a "classically-trained" composer, fuses the materials of the "classical" world with pop music, hardcore punk, heavy metal, jazz (free and traditional), television soundtracks, and sound effects (*v*. Woodward 35-6). His work is consistently eclectic, hybridized, and polysemous.

4. His music, in fact, comes to consist in noise itself, or rather, in the tensions between noises. As a self-declared product of the "info age," Zorn taps into the diverse currents of sound and background emerging from the mass media--particularly television, radio and commercial recordings--that permeate contemporary life; all forms of sound, from white noise to Beethoven, from duck calls to bebop, become raw materials for the composer; musical sound, that is, need no longer be tempered or tonal in any preconceived manner (though tempered music, as well, may be used within composition as raw material on the same level as any other noise). Only the noise available to the social listener determines the limitations, if any, on composition. Music, then, as Jacques Attali posits, becomes simply "the organization of noise," constituting "the audible waveband of the vibrations and signs that make up society" (*Noise* 4). Zorn, in like fashion, cites Boulez's definition of composition as simply the "organization of sound" (Woodward 34).

5. But noise, for Zorn, is not simply haphazard or natural sound, the audible "background" that encroaches on a work such as Cage's *4'33"*, as the audience is forced by the tacit piano to listen to its own shufflings, or to the urban soundscapes that emerge through an open window. Such music, which Attali approves as the harbinger of a new age of composition and of listener-involvement in autonomous musical production, freed from the aesthetic and social restraints of the recording industry, Zorn calls the "dead, lifeless music" of "boring old farts," of whom, for him, Cage is a leading example (Woodward 35). Rather, Zorn includes in his own palette pre-recorded music, quotations and generic parodies--all of which Attali, following Adorno, suggests are correlative to social control, to the consumption of mass replications and the "death of the original" (*Noise* 87, 89). Noise, for Zorn, is always impure, tainted, derivative and, in the Romantic sense of the term, unoriginal.

6. Attali sees the appearance of the phonograph record as a cementing of the relation between "music and money," and of the deritualization of music and the limitations of the aesthetic powers of the composer-musician by his or her own technologies and tools:

> An acoustician, a cybernetician, [the musician] is transcended by his tools. This constitutes a radical inversion of the innovator and the machine: instruments no longer serve to produce the desired sound forms, conceived in thought before written down, but to monitor unexpected forms. . . . [T]he modern composer . . . is now rarely anything more than a spectator of the music created by his computer. He is subjected to its failings, the supervisor of an uncontrolled development.
>
> Music escapes from musicians. (115)

Attali's utopian vision, of what he calls a new age of "composition," involves a return to the original, liberated, primitive noise of the thinking, active individual, to a form of personal musical pleasure where the listener, in listening, becomes a composer, rewriting music as his or her own noise: noise, as music, is, Attali argues, to be "lived," no longer stockpiled (133-5). Zorn removes himself, decidedly, from any such idealistic primitivism. Parody, simulation and replication, developed in increasingly volatile and fragmented forms, noisily inform--and deform--the lived experience of music. Rather than attempt to dispense with the musical commodity, to withdraw from a culture of simulation and replication, Zorn revels in that commodification itself, happily abdicating compositional control both to the technologies of repetition and to the improvisational wills of those who play "his" music. The "score" of *Cobra*, for instance, consists not of notated music *per se* but rather of a set of rules which players, as they interact during the performance, must follow. Zorn, just as Attali suggests of all composers in an age of repetition, is not interested in maintaining absolute creative control over the tonal, harmonic and rhythmic substance of his music; that control, instead, remains in the hands of his players. His music is not aleatory, in the sense that works by Boulez or Lutoslawski or Cage involve sets of "chance operations" that remain within the ego-dominated sweep of the composer's will; Zorn, rather, abdicates the position of composer in all but name, preferring to become himself a performer or a player among other players, a participant in a collective noise-making which, despite their differences, resembles in practice Attali's vision of compositional noise-making: listening, composing and living simultaneously in what Adorno would call a "non-identical identity," a collective which does not obliterate the individual elements it collects.

7. Noise, in the widest possible sense, is thus central to Zorn's aesthetic, especially if we approach that aesthetic with political interest. In a 1988 interview, Edward Strickland asks Zorn if the duck-calls in his early free improvisations--represented by *Yankees* (387 Kb .au file), his 1983 collective recording with Derek Bailey and George Lewis--are an attempt to get back to nature, a direction of which Attali would certainly approve. Zorn says no:

> I just wanted some kind of raucous, ugly sound. . . . I don't think they're ugly. I find them beautiful. It's like Thelonious Monk's title "Ugly Beauty." People used to think his playing was ugly, now it's recognized as classic. (Strickland 138)

The abrasive raucousness, Zorn implies, of his duck calls and other paraphernalia, used on Yankees and in his early improvised trios (recorded on *Locus Solus*), is an attempt to alter how people hear, just as Monk's playing changed the way listeners perceived how a melody functioned within an apparently discordant harmonic context. Noise, as sound out of its familiar context, is confrontational, affective and transformative. It has shock value, and defamiliarizes the listener who expects from music an easy fluency, a secure familiarity, or any sort of mollification. Noise, that is, politicizes the aural environment; Zorn's music is difficult in the sense that Adorno finds Schoenberg's music difficult--not because it is pretentious or obscure, but because it demands active participation from the listener (as well as from the players, who are themselves listeners). As organized sound, this music

> demands from the very beginning active and concentrated participation, the most acute attention to simultaneous multiplicity, the renunciation of the customary crutches of a listening which always knows what to expect, the intensive perception of the unique and the specific, and the ability to grasp precisely the individual characteristics, often changing in the smallest space. . . . The more it gives to listeners, the less it offers them. It requires the listener spontaneously to compose its inner movement and demands of him [*sic*] not mere contemplation but praxis. (*Prisms* 149-50)

The political dimension of Zorn's music, that is, involves the creation of a new form of attention, of listening.[2] Noise, for Zorn, shocks the listener into awareness, provokes just such a creative praxis.

8. But whereas Adorno's Schoenberg and Attali's Cage both defy the repetition inherent in commodification and in forms of social control, Zorn embraces that repetition, as he moves from noise *per se* to what he calls his "block" method of composition:

> I think it's an important thing for a musician to have an overview, something that remains consistent throughout your whole life. You have one basic idea, one basic way of looking at the world, one basic way of putting music together.
>
> I developed mine very early on--the idea of working with blocks. At first maybe the blocks were more like just blocks of sound . . . noisy improvisational statements, but eventually it came back to using genre as musical notes and moving these blocks of genre around. . . . ("Zorn on Zorn" 23)

Zorn's noise, that is, manifests itself in two distinct, though contiguous, forms: the improvisational and the imitative, the creative and the derivative, the chaotic and the parodic. And it is the second of these aspects of noise, particularly as it emerges in chunks of genre-music, that comes increasingly to interest Zorn as

his career progresses.

9. Genre has been taken, as Marjorie Perloff and others have pointed out, as anathema to postmodern aesthetic practice, particularly in its post-structuralist manifestations (*Postmodern* 3). The dissolution of generic barriers has, after all, been a paramount concern of many contemporary writers, painters and musicians. But, as Perloff rightly indicates, that dissolution in fact makes the concept of genericity even "more important," since genre itself is situated at the point of departure for any such negative practice (4). Postmodern genre, she asserts, finally attempting to define that which refuses definition, is

> characterized by its appropriation of other genres, both high and popular, by its longing for a both/and situation rather than one of either/or. (8)

Her key example of such appropriation is John Cage, not the Cage of *4'33"* but the Cage of *Roaratorio* (280 Kb .au file), his award-winning "play" for radio.

10. Cage's "composition" is really a sixteen-track sound collage, based on a version of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* processed into Cagean mesostics through a series of chance operations. In an effort to free himself, as he asserts in an interview published with the text of the piece, from melody, harmony, counterpoint and musical "theory" of any kind, to create a music which will turn "away from [codified, institutionalized] music itself," Cage mixes together ambient sound, Irish traditional music, sound effects ranging from bells and thunderclaps to laughter and farting, and spoken words (*Roaratorio* 89). The finished product is a shifting, restless, decentred panorama of sound and human activity. But Zorn--for whom, as I have already indicated, Cage serves as an antitype, despite their many similarities of method and concern--does not wish to dispense with the trappings of "music itself" so much as to run music itself through his deconstructive compositional mill. Noise, that is, neither cuts across nor undoes genre, as Cage suggests it should in *Silence* (*v*. Perloff 216). Rather, genre becomes noise itself, another form of sound to be appropriated, used and abused.

11. Zorn's *Spillane* (400 Kb .au file), like Cage's *Roaratorio*, is a collage of sorts, based on text; the contrast between the two indicates not only the composers' divergent aesthetics, but also their contrary political stances. Where Cage, for instance, appropriates and transforms a rather exclusive, "difficult" text of high modernism by James Joyce, Zorn uses a cut-and-paste parody of pulp detective fiction as the basis for his work. Cage's work begins softly, with his own almost chant-like voice at a low, subtle level; Zorn's piece begins with an earth-shattering scream. Where Cage's collocated noises (musical and "found") meld together into a shifting, hypnotic soundscape, Zorn's blocks of genre both jar against each other and threaten to come apart from within, as each musician plays his or her set of "licks" and parodies, both in combination with and in opposition to the others. Cage's piece is synchronous, deep, and--considering even the medley of constantly shifting sound--largely static; Zorn's work, by contrast, is linear, immediate and highly dynamic. Zorn's music is somewhat tied mimetically to its "subject," as we travel disjunctively

through the soundscape of Mike Hammer's mind (200 Kb .au file); Cage refuses mimetic links altogether--as Perloff points out--preferring not simply to add appropriate sound effects to Joyce's prose, but to provoke a sense of harmony in difference, through the production of "simultaneous layers of sound and meaning" (216). Again, where Cage wishes to dispense with accustomed musical sound altogether, in favour of synthetic new "field" of musical activity, Zorn is perfectly willing to maintain the trappings of soundtrack and sound effect, but he arranges those parodic reiterations of genre in a disjunctive, disturbing, confrontational manner. Cage's is a politics of exclusion and abandonment, his music demanding a wilful participation which the comfortable, impatient, media-saturated listener is often unwilling to give. Zorn, on the other hand, offers the semblance of that comfort, simulates the attributes of popular culture, in order to confront and to engage that same listener, whose thirty-second attention span, so programmed by television advertising, can be accessed directly by thirty-second blocks of sound. Cage stands aloof from his audience, at a somewhat elitist distance, while Zorn unashamedly baits a hook with snatches of the familiar and the vulgar. In "Mass Society and Postmodern Fiction" (1959), Irving Howe complains that, as Jonathan Arac summarizes, "the post-modern was a weak successor to the vigorous glory of literary modernism, brought about because mass society had eroded the artist's vital distance" (xii). Cage's preference for Joyce, and Zorn's for Mickey Spillane, suggestively reproduce just such a rift between high modern and postmodern artistic practices.

12. The notion of the musical "block" is taken up by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, when they attempt to distinguish what they call "punctual" and "linear" or "multilinear" systems. The punctual, for Deleuze and Guattari, as cognitive structuration, is organized by coordinates, determined points; such systems, they write, "are arborescent, mnemonic, molar, structural; they are systems of territorialization or reterritorialization," of determination and discrimination, of an absolute didacticism. One of their key examples of the punctual is the time-line, which, despite its apparent kinesis, represents closed historical scheme. Linear or multilinear systems, by contrast, are dismantling systems, and oppose themselves to the punctual:

> Free the line, free the diagonal: every musician or painter has this intention. One elaborates a punctual system or a didactic representation, but with the aim of making it snap, of sending a tremor through it. A punctual system is most interesting when there is a musician, painter, writer, philosopher to oppose it, who even fabricates it in order to oppose it, like a springboard to jump from. History is made only by those who oppose history (not by those who insert themselves into it, or only reshape it). (295)

Their example of such a history-maker is Pierre Boulez, whom they see as a kind of radical historian--they may have in mind his forays as a conductor into the history of Western music, although their sense of nonpulsed and serial music here tends to point to Boulez's own compositions as acts of history:

> When Boulez casts himself in the role of the historian of music, he does so in order to show how a great musician, in a very different manner in each case, invents a kind of diagonal running between the harmonic vertical and the melodic horizon. And in each case it is a different diagonal, a different technique, a creation. Moving along this transversal line, which is really a line of deterritorialization, there is a **sound block** that no longer has a point of origin, since it is always and already in the middle of the line; and no longer has horizontal and vertical coordinates, since it creates its own coordinates; and no longer forms a localizable connection from one point to another [as in "punctual" systems], since it is in "nonpulsed time": a deterritorialized rhythmic block that has abandoned points, coordinates and measure, like a drunken boat that melds with a line or draws a plane of consistency. Speeds and slownesses inject themselves into musical form, sometimes impelling it to proliferation, linear microproliferations, and sometimes to extinction, sonorous abolition, involution, or both at once. (296)

What Deleuze and Guattari describe here sounds more like free improvisation than Boulez's meticulous compositions, but they nevertheless point to a disjunctive form of composition in *non sequitur* blocks which displays a surprising kinship to Zorn's method. (Zorn himself practices the kind of proliferative free improvisation toward which Deleuze and Guattari gesture.) The act of freeing line or block, however, does not occur in the absolute dispersal of pulse, tonal centre or convention that Deleuze and Guattari find in Boulez's serial compositions, not in Zorn. In fact, given that the writers want to maintain a "punctual" presence against which they can discover themselves musically free, or within which they can negotiate one of their deterritorializations, such absolute claims--with their a-historicizing move to liberation--are suspiciously reified. Rather than play out a complete liberation, that is, Zorn's music negotiates the doubling of punctual and multilinear which Deleuze and Guattari initially suggest, reasserting--contingently, temporarily--familiar generic boundaries as it simultaneously seeks to extricate itself from closed system or form. Zorn's music, in other words, follows that diagonal trajectory between the reified and the liberated, continually dismantling and reassembling--deterritorializing and reterritorializing, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms--our terms of aural reference, inserting itself into the stream of a musical history only to dismantle immediately that comfortable historical sense. Whereas Boulez, in other words, removes himself from the ironic doublings of that diagonal--in a manner which seems to appeal to Deleuze and Guattari's need for a complete liberation of sound and mind--Zorn, through his amalgam of popular idiom, genre and noise, revels in that irony.

13. Zorn's method, as he has stated, is "filmic." Many of the composers he admires--Ennio Morricone, Carl Stalling and Bernard Herrmann especially--work exclusively on soundtracks for popular movies and cartoons. The blocks of sound emerge in the context of developing shifting moods for

soundtracks; Zorn's recent *Filmworks 1986-1990*, for instance, assembles from three different films a series of blocks of diverse, genre-based compositions. But Zorn's composition, as we have seen with *Spillane* and others, also involve genre-shifts within themselves. The use and abuse of quick blocks of genre to shock the accustomed listener dominates, for instance, Zorn's arrangement of "Hard Plains Drifter" (564 Kb .au file), a composition, or rather series of compositions, by avant-garde guitarist Bill Frisell. The piece, played by Frisell's instrumentally-mixed quartet (cello, electric guitar, electric bass, percussion), shifts abruptly over thirty-six blocks among twelve different keys (suggesting, peculiarly, a block-oriented serialism), numerous tempi and instrumental combinations (trios, duos, solos), "from r&b, to country & western, reggae, hardcore, free-form squalls, and Morricone western psychedelia" (Diliberto 18). At no point does Zorn's arrangement attempt to abandon its generic or conventional musical ties: those ties, rather, are exploited and segmented, to the point where, while retaining their ironic, parodic thrust and remaining recognizable to the t.v.-and-radio-saturated ear, they throw the accustomed listener off balance; the listeners who know their pop-culture, that is, have their expectations jolted, scattered, smashed and re-arranged. Zorn's work is never quite unrecognizable, "boring," or estranging to such a listener, as Cage's--for instance--may tend to be. Rather, the well-worn, commercially-exploited genres remain intact. Zorn himself exploits the expectations of a repetition-hungry consumer culture, turning those expectations, so to speak, on their ears. Zorn's organization of noise consists not in the dismantling or disabling of genre by noise, but rather in the stream of cross-talk between noise and genre.

14. The use of genre within the context of a mass consumer audience thus gives Zorn's music a socio-political character which the music of Cage can only attain, as Attali has indicated, negatively, by forcing the listener away from music *per se* (as an organ of institutional power) and toward the individual, to a new order of music. Zorn, by contrast, uses the "old" order, the status quo of popular culture, to shock his listeners into an awareness of their mired condition. Cage's music, from Attali's perspective, lays claim to a utopian thrust which Zorn's work, unremittingly ironic as it is, will not accept. Composition, then, as the arrangement of sounds (generic, noisy or otherwise), does not necessarily offer us an authentic, contemplative access to "what is," as Cage's Zen-oriented pieces are somewhat pretentiously intended to do; rather, Zorn disrupts all forms of contemplation (especially the listener-passivity encouraged by electronic reproduction and anaesthetic stereo background), and calls instead for an active, deliberate, offensive engagement with the world, a praxis, as Adorno says.

15. Despite Zorn's claims to dislike notation, his music is in fact meticulously structured both in its conception and in its execution. He does not, as Stockhausen has, force musicians unaccustomed to improvisation merely to think about "the vibrations of the stars" and to play what they feel. He composes, he says, for players he knows to be capable of stretching musically without much notated music; his model--surprisingly perhaps--as he repeats in various interviews, is Duke Ellington, whose music is "collaborative," according to Zorn, as it melds the diverse, distinctive voices of Ellington's orchestra into a "kind of filmic sweep" (Santoro 23). Zorn asserts that, when he

composes for his "family" of players, he writes in such a way as not to limit the potentials of those players, while providing a structure within which they can work; the tension between noises--intentional and chaotic, parodic and expressive--which we have been examining in Zorn's music is thus reproduced on a compositional level, as Zorn seeks to balance improvisational freedom with the parameters of a notated structure, a balance discovered, for that matter, within structurality itself.

16. I want, in conclusion, to examine the political implications of one of the most notorious of those structures, the game. Zorn's game pieces, bearing titles derived from various sports and board-games like *Lacrosse*, *Archery*, *Pool*, and *Cobra*, involve complex and often difficult sets of rules to be followed by musicians and freedom. When asked if he has an "overall view" of a game piece he was composing in 1988, Zorn was typically cautious:

> No. Not at all. The thing is not written in time, it's from section to section and in that sense it's being created spontaneously by the players in the group. . . . I have a general idea of what's possible in the piece, the way somebody who writes the rules to baseball knows there'll be so many innings and so many outs. But you don't know how long an inning is going to last and how long the guy's going to be at bat before he gets a hit. So there are a lot of variables, and it should be that way because these are improvisers and that's what they do best. (Chant 25)

Zorn offers a set of rules, and lets the players complete the melodies, tempi, harmonies and transitions. His "composition," in this sense, becomes--to borrow a term from Miles Davis--controlled freedom, or structured freedom, the contradiction-in-terms indicating a both/and rather than an either/or situation in performance.

17. Cage, again, provides an illustrative contrast to Zorn. Whereas Cage's computer-generated mesostics move toward the obliteration of compositional intention almost entirely by establishing strict rules for the processing of phonemes and morphemes of language, as Cage himself indicates, for instance, in his introduction to *I-VI*, Zorn transfers compositional intention largely to the performer, such that he or she is permitted to function within a predetermined context of group interaction, whose only expressive constraints consist in that interaction. Cage, again, moves toward obliteration of the creative will, while Zorn engages that will differentially.

18. The "score" of *Cobra* (371 Kb .au file) illustrates this push toward engagement. It consists of a series of hand signals, each of which corresponds to a type of interaction ranging from quickly-traded bursts of sound to aggressive competitions. Any one of the players may choose at any time to change the direction of the piece and to alter the type of interaction; Zorn's function as conductor is merely to relay that change to the rest of the players, through a hand signal, and to offer a downbeat. Players may also, individually or in groups, engage in "guerrilla tactics," for which there exists a whole new

set of signals, by which they attempt to wrest control of the group from the conductor and to conduct their own series of interactions (for a more complete description of the piece, see Strickland 134-37 or the sleeve notes to the HatART release of *Cobra*). The game itself is thus antagonistic and collaborative, at once reproducing the composer-conductor hierarchy of traditional "classical" music and subverting that hierarchy from within the "composition" itself. No two performances are the same, as the recent double-edition release of the piece indicates, but all performances exist within the same parameters, as collective communal works.

19. Zorn, by refusing the score from within the context of score-bound composition, thus creates, on stage in performance, a functional community, a group interaction in which the individual creative will cannot be subsumed by the collective whole in which it participates; confrontation and shock, while still present in the blocked genre-and-noise-based structure of the piece, give way strangely enough to a form of "utopian" promise, a promise which Zorn--always incredulous--has rather steadfastly refused to admit. But, unlike Attali's utopia, Zorn's community of creative will does not remove itself from the arena of technological replication; rather, it moves from within the economies of consumption and repetition that characterize the mass media and the mass-market to fracture and remake creativity itself. As Linda Hutcheon has asserted of postmodernist parody, a category in which we may include Zorn's generic replication and mass-media noise making, it is "**not** essentially depthless, trivial kitsch," a replay of empty forms to satisfy the hollow consumer strategies of the music industry, "but rather it can and does lead to a vision of interconnectedness" (*Poetics* 24). Cage has indicated that he too wanted to move toward a notion of the non-constraining, communal and participatory score, the score which serves not as an absolute but as a provisional "model" for performance:

> That's what I'd like. It's a fascinating thing and suggests at least, if not a new field of music at least a new field of activity for people who are interested in sounds. (*Roaratorio* 91)

Ironically, Zorn, not Cage, has established just such a "new field," but from within the very forms of consumer and political regulation which have threatened--according to both Attali and Adorno--to obliterate the creative will altogether. The praxis Zorn's music encourages is not new, in the sense that the exhausted avant-garde of modernist practice requires that we "make it new." Rather, that praxis, as Zorn's music demonstrates, exists as potential within all fields of human activity, even those--especially those--which the mass audience, for its own anaesthetic comfort, has consistently managed to turn against itself. Zorn's music, that is, turns its own form against itself, becoming what he calls a stimulating, uncomfortable, "ugly beauty," and emerges remade, having reshaped the fundamental ways in which we listen, both to each other and to the world around us.

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Notes

1.The direct correspondence between theorizing and music assumed by Attali may be illuminated by Adorno's commentary on Mahler. Arguing against programmatic and thematic analyses of Mahler's symphonies, Adorno asserts that:

> Ideas that are treated, depicted or deliberately advanced by a work of art are not its ideas but its materials--even the "poetic ideas" whose hazy designations were intended to divest the program of its coarse materiality. . . . In [Mahler's] work a purely musical residue stubbornly persists that can be interpreted in terms neither of processes nor of moods. It informs the gestures of his music. . . . Mahler can only be seen in perspective by moving still closer to him, by entering into the music and confronting the incommensurable presence that defies the stylistic categories of program and absolute music. . . . His symphonies assist such closeness by the compelling spirituality of their sensuous musical configurations. Instead of illustrating ideas, they are destined concretely to become the idea. (*Mahler* 3-4)

2.Discussing the filmic or "picaresque" shape of his compositions, his uses of blocks of sound and rapid-fire shifts from texture to texture, section to section, Zorn suggests that his music demands a similar attentiveness:

> It's made of separate moments that I compose completely regardless of the next, and then I pull them, cull them together. It's put together in a style that causes questions to be asked rather than answered. It's not the kind of music you can just put on and then have a party. It demands your attention. You sit down and listen to it or you don't even put it on. (Strickland 128)

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