



# Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music

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The groundbreaking *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (Continuum; September 2004; paperback original) maps the aural and discursive terrain of vanguard music today. Rather than offering a history of contemporary music, *Audio Culture* traces the genealogy of current musical practices and theoretical concerns, drawing lines of connection between recent musical production and earlier moments of sonic experimentation. It aims to foreground the various rewirings of musical composition and performance that have taken place in the past few decades and to provide a critical and theoretical language for this new audio culture.

Via writings by philosophers, cultural theorists, and composers, *Audio Culture* explores the interconnections among such forms as minimalism, indeterminacy, musique concrète, free improvisation, experimental music, avant-rock, dub reggae, Ambient music, HipHop, and Techno. Instead of focusing on the putative "crossover" between "high art" and "popular culture," *Audio Culture* takes all of these musics as experimental practices on par with, and linked to, one another. While cultural studies has tended to look at music (primarily popular music) from a sociological perspective, the concern here is philosophical, musical, and historical.

*Audio Culture* includes writing by some of the most important musical thinkers of the past half-century, among them John Cage, Brian Eno, Glenn Gould, Umberto Eco, Ornette Coleman, Jacques Attali, Simon Reynolds, Pauline Oliveros, Paul D. Miller, David Toop, John Zorn, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and many others. The book is divided into nine thematically-organized sections, each with its own introduction. Section headings include topics such as "Modes of Listening," "Minimalisms," and "DJ Culture." In addition, each essay has its own short introduction, helping the reader to place the essay within musical, historical, and conceptual contexts. The book concludes with a glossary, a timeline, and an extensive discography.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

"Audio Culture is the best introduction to the long historical fades and theoretical jumpcuts of what millions in the 21st C. now listen to as music: overwhelming noise and disturbed silences, unfettered Improv and indeterminate obstacles, the performance of recording, electricity, eclectics, mistakes and just the thought of music."-Douglas Kahn, author of *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, and Director of Technocultural Studies at the University of California, Davis

"[Audio Culture] is an indispensable primer full of the theories behind noise, Free-jazz, minimalism, 20th century composition, ambient, avant-garde and all the other crazy shit your square-ass friends can't believe you actually like. With writing and interviews from all the players in question (quoting Stockhausen is five points in hipster bingo), this book deconstructs all the essential ideas: Cage's themes, Eno's strategies, Zorn's games and Merzbow's undying love of porno." –CMJ New Music Monthly, 7/04

"The contributors include composers from the worlds of avant-garde classical music, pop, and jazz – e.g. John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Pauline Oliveros-as well as cultural historians like Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Barzun and literary experimentalists such as William Burroughs....Students of contemporary music will find this compendium useful." -Library Journal, September 15, 2004

"Writings on the new music are frequently hidden away in hard-to-find, ephemeral publications, so a collection like this is welcome just by the fact that it brings all these items together....A collection like this encourages us to realize how really vibrant and successful new music has been and continues to be – both because of and in spite of its 'marginality' – and how fortunate we are to live in a time of its ascendancy. Cox and Warner have included well-organized discographies and bibliographies, and provide brief introductions to the individual entries, giving some background to each author's work and ideas. Audio Culture will certainly be a useful teaching tool in the field of cultural studies, aesthetics and musicology; and fans and devotees of new music will find a lot here to mull over as well." –Signal to Noise, Fall 2004

"It's a hideous fate to wish on an anthology as fine as Audio Culture, but if anyone's planning a college course on modern music, they couldn't find a better set text . . . All in all, a wonderful book . . . the glossary, bibliography and discography are exemplary, guaranteeing Audio Culture is going to be used rather than merely dipped or cribbed. Though you can bet that'll be happening to it as well."-Brian Morton, *The Wire* (Brian Morton)

"Cox's and Warner's book is a wonderfully accessible anthology of essential readings for anyone-academics and enthusiasts alike-interested in the histories of experimental music and sound art."-Debra Singer, Executive Director, *The Kitchen*

"Cox and Warner's book is warmly recommended. It's highly unlikely that readers will have original copies of all the books and articles featured therein, so the simple fact that the editors have gone to the trouble of bringing them together in one volume is to be praised to the skies....Audio Culture is well worth the price of admission for the writings of Russolo, Cowell, Cage, Schafer, McLuhan, Reynolds, Eno and Cutler, to name but a few." —Paristransatlantic.com January 2005

"Ever wondered how modern music in all its mesmerizing diversity really works? If so, then this is the book

for you....An endlessly fascinating read, a major reference resource, and great value for the money."

—Julian Haylock, *Classic FM Magazine* (UK) Feb. 1, 2005

"To be honest, no one looking at the collection of 57 well-chosen essays written by some of the biggest names in music and reprinted from books and publications well-noted for their contribution to music theory will be able to resist reading and buying the book. In fact, there is just so much that makes this book valuable that it is difficult to name them all. Both the content and the structure of *Audio Culture* add to its strength.... The end result is a complete and cohesive treatment of modern music. Anyone who has edited a collection knows that such an outcome is not an easy one to attain, but it is certainly achieved here.... With growing interest in sound on web-based environments and the ease with which to produce it, Cox and Warner's *Audio Culture* stands as a must-read for both aspiring artists and music theorists alike." —Leonardo: *The Journal of the International Society for the AAS, Sciences and Technology*, October 7, 2004

"*Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* is a cannily collected anthology of seminal music writing, your one-stop shopping destination for ear-opening essays on the nature and recent history of music. The obligatory pioneers and almost-pop icons are all there... *Audio Culture* coeditors Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner range boldly and widely, embracing noise, soundscape listening, minimalism, glitch, plunderphonics, and collective music making... *Audio Culture* passes the test of a good music book: It's easy to read, insightful, and inspiring." —*The Stranger*, October 7, 2004

"Growing steadily alongside a music-writing canon loaded with the likes of Greil Marcus and Lester Bangs, the body of work sampled in *Audio Culture* wanders far afield from rock and ponders questions that are less than concerned with ideals of human expression. In this sphere of influence, John Cage is Elvis Presley, Brian Eno's cerebral musings trump Lou Reed's tangy antagonism, sonics mean more than lyrics, and movements have yet to be surveyed entirely through a year view.... The best book of its kind, *Audio Culture* compiles essays and excerpts from artists, critics, and academics given to staring down music with no eyes to return the gaze.... From there, *Audio Culture* spreads to survey various facets of music and its production, and interpretation. The table of contents reads like a greatest-hits collection: Cage, Eno, Ornette Coleman, Steve Reich, David Toop, Kodwo Eshun, Simon Reynolds....*Audio Culture* dangles intellectual threads fit to tie lifers and open-eared wonderers alike." —*The Onion*, November 17, 2004

"indispensable....this is a book that should be read in its totality—it's truly absorbing stuff." —Stuart Nicholson, *Jazzwire* (UK), February 2005 issue (Stuart Nicholson)

"In *Audio Culture*, editors Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner bring to readers an educated, timely and much needed critical perspective of our contemporary musical experience through the writings of some of the most important musical thinkers, including Jacques Attali, John Cage, Umberto Eco, Brian Eno, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Edgar Varese, just to name a few. *Audio Culture* offers a collection of essays that filter a range of experimental musical practices in an unusually refreshing way. Maybe not since Gregory Whitehead's reader *Wireless Imagination* (1994) which recorded the 'silent' history of audio, has literature on this subject sufficiently captured the attention of both the sound enthusiasts and academics at the same time.... The result is an elegant anthology that compiles the manifestos of 'old masters' such as Italian Futurist Luigi Russolo and statements by Edgard Varese and John Cage while also spotlighting an interview on integration of technology into artistic production by Christian Marclay... It is to the credit of the book that it keeps up with the most interesting key texts and ideas in the field and does not make a huge demand on our Windows-culture-inflicted patience. The book is ambitious enough to cater to a broader audience and manages to respond to the numerous demands made upon it....makes the writings very accessible to readers who are not familiar with the author or topic under discussion. Texts and ideas come from a variety of sources...*Audio Culture* succinctly captures the last fifty years that has been the most fascinating times for avant-garde

experimentation, performances and sonic landscapes, By treating the existing rhizomic dots and lines between myriads of practices in a progressive fashion, it gives the last decade...its attention and maybe its future vocabulary.” –Rhizome.org, 1/28/05

“...offers a collection of essays that filter a range of experimental musical practices in an unusually refreshing way....an intriguing selection of articles from a range of significant radio-sonic heroes as well as important thinkers and philosophers...an elegant anthology...ambitious... Audio Culture guides the readers an intellectual journey from the year 1877 when the first recording fundamentally transformed sound, towards almost better understanding our present culture of omnipresent ipod-users, polyphonic cell-phone ringers and Bjork’s Medula, helping both the experts and enthusiasts to new ways of thinking, tracing, developing and presenting audio culture.” –rhizome.org (Weekly Digest), 2/05

“...this is a book that should be read in its totality – it’s truly absorbing stuff.” –Jazzwise, Stuart Nicholson, 1st February 2005

Review –Sonic (Scandinavia)

“...eminently readable...experimental music enthusiasts and the pipe-and-elbow patch crowd should find plenty in here to peak their interest.... Audio Culture doesn’t limit itself to traditional ways of looking at music, just as it doesn’t limit its rogue’s gallery of contributors...topics such as minimalist compositions and noise-based music are finally given some long-overdue critical attention.” –Creative Loafing (Charlotte), 3/05

“...Audio Culture’s assemblage of key writings, texts, and manifestos spanning over a century tells that story better than just about anything else in print, while discovering new tributaries in the process.” –Frieze (U.K. art magazine), 3/9/05

“Audio Culture is a book to provoke thought...This is an excellent selection of texts.” –Radical Philosophy 133, September/ October 2005 (*Radical Philosophy*)

"It's a hideous fate to wish on an anthology as fine as Audio Culture, but if anyone's planning a college course on modern music, they couldn't find a better set text . . . All in all, a wonderful book . . . the glossary, bibliography and discography are exemplary, guaranteeing Audio Culture is going to be used rather than merely dipped or cribbed. Though you can bet that'll be happening to it as well."-Brian Morton, The Wire (Sanford Lakoff)

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About the Author

Christoph Cox is Professor of Philosophy at Hampshire College and a faculty member at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College. Daniel Warner is Professor of Music at Hampshire College, where he teaches electronic and computer music.

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**Alberto Meyer:**

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