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# 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.

## Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music Details

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# From Reader Review Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music for online ebook

## Alastair Kemp says

The idea of these reviews is to write while the book is still fresh. Hard to do as it's taken me 18 months to finish. Having said that it is great for dipping into and out of as you have the time, whereas its a hard slog trying to read it as a traditional book.

The writing is for the most part is very theoretical although not necessarily academic, having been written largely by the artists and composers operating in the respective fields covered, with the odd philosopher and music journo thrown in. That said these are artists who know their theory and their music and for that reason is a very rewarding read.

I am not in the music industry; creative, journalistic or academic, I read this for pleasure and so with that proviso understood this is the best, broad ranging book on twentieth century avant garde music I have come across.

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## David Ashley says

[Review originally written for Amazon in 2008 when I was 20... so apologies! Great great reference book which is logically laid out and wide reaching. Very inspirational.]

This book is jam packed full of information and is split neatly (maybe more so than i was expecting) into sections such as 'The Open Work' and 'Noise, Sound, Silence'.

At the beginning of each essay the editors have given a brief account of the author (who in most cases practice(d) work with sound, i.e. Derek Bailey, John Cage, Luigi Russolo, Brian Eno, Steve Reich, Tony Conrad, John Zorn etc etc etc, the list goes on and on!)

The book has 57 essays (admitidly i haven't read everone just yet) which gives a wide scope of different perspectives on the subject.

The title says it all really 'Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music' if this title interests you then the book will! It does exactly what it says on the tin! But don't get confused, this book describes 'modern music' (correctly) as changes that are of interest in audio culture that have appeared through the avant garde, jazz, noise and electronic age. Do not think that 'modern music' refers to Usher or Britney Spears cause you will be disappioted.

Yeah, well worth reading, comprehensive book for anyone interested in the subjects.

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## Evan Cordes says

All sorts of different styles here. Some dry, some quiiiick.

I got distracted halfway through the book. I'm tempted to just read bits & pieces from it, but there's so much good stuff that I don't want to miss any of it.

Glad I went A-Z on this one, even tho it took awhile.

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### **C.Reider says**

This is as good an overview of the evolution of experimental / avant-garde approaches to sound & music as you're likely to find, presented in perfect bite-sized chunks. This could / should be (and I'm told it has been) used as a textbook for a class on the subject of modern & contemporary sound practice.

Even if you've done a lot of reading on this subject, you're sure to find lots here that will be new.

Essential.

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### **Charlie Mcallister says**

lots of really good essays in this book - there is always something missing when this much is written about music, though. i think my favorites are the two by brian eno and the one by steve reich - they seem to be the most about music and the least about themselves. i also found john zorn's explanation for his "games" very interesting, but in admission of my own ignorance, i've never heard any of his music to my knowledge, so i'm even more interested in hearing recordings.

i am also herein fully admitting that i have not read every word of every essay, and i'm sure i will revisit it from time to time, but i've gotten out of it all i am going to at this point, so it is leaving my "currently-reading" shelf.

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### **Kurtzprzezce says**

Jest kilka rzeczywi?cie s?abych tekstów, ale s? to nieliczne wyj?tki, które da si? policzy? na palcach jednej r?ki (tekstów ??cznie jest 56). Bardzo wyczerpuj?ce kompendium, któremu w wi?kszo?ci wypadków udaje si? omówi? nawet te irytuj?ce teksty (Adorno) w przyst?pny sposób. Te m?cz?ce s? okrajane i zaprezentowane jest tylko ich esencja. Naprawd? ciekawy zbiór. Ze ?wiec? szuka? takiego nagromadzenia esejów, manifestów, wywiadów, opracowa? i to w dodatku pochodz?cych od tak istotnych autorów jak cho?by Luigi Russolo, Pierre Schaeffer, Brian Eno, Ornette Coleman, Aphex Twin, Simon Reynolds, John Zorn, John Oswald, Chris Cutler, Steve Reich, Karlheinz Stockhausen... mo?na tak wymienia? w niesko?czono?? (a przynajmniej ca?kiem d?ugo).

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### **Penny says**

Brian Eno: "I can neither read nor write music, and I can't play any instruments really well, either. You can't imagine a situation prior to this where anyone like me could have been a composer. It couldn't have

happened. How could I do it without tape and without technology?"

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### **martina says**

Having read this book extremely slowly over two years, it seems to me that my listening experience (and growing appreciation) of more experimental side of music must have helped in perception of these texts. I would say that this book of essays, articles, interviews and other kinds of strange texts, with extensive chronology, bibliography and discography is a great 'sneak peak' into what was happening in the music of 20th century, especially in the fifties and sixties. If you are open to it, you can find how it can spur further interest in you.

To me it felt like reading parts of a great dialogue that is in fact still going on, with all arguments and impressions not yet processed or understood. I like being part of this audience and I already got a few 'must-reads' out of it. I'd recommend this book to anyone who keeps wondering about what can still count as music and how it is possible that this incredible genre plurality we have now came to be by developing inspiration from the grand old master composers and availability of music from other parts of the world.

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### **Ray Dunsmore says**

This is that rare book that makes you see something you've known your entire life (here, recorded music) in a completely different light. It expands your boundaries farther than you've ever thought and it makes you totally reevaluate everything you know about music. Yeah, it can get incredibly dry and academic, but the fundamental ideas are what counts and those are incredible.

Especially the chapters by William S. Burroughs, R. Murray Schafer, Luigi Russolo and John Oswald.

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### **Mikael Lind says**

A lovely collection of crucial essays on modern music. I use it sometimes like a dictionary, looking for names in the index and read the article they're in, or sometimes I just jump through the pages until I get stuck somewhere. So much material, so many good articles.

The only thing I'm missing is a critical discussion on modern music. Some discussions on atonality, and why it's still not particularly popular among audiences, and perhaps on the obscurity of some electro-acoustic music.

Great achievement, very entertaining book.

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## **Erin says**

This book is a compilation of interviews, articles and statements from key figures in sound art ranging from artist such as Lucier, Cage, Eno and Feldman to academics like Eco, Adorno and McLuhan. Christopher Cox, contributor to Cabinet Magazine, edits this book along side Daniel Warner. Thee variety of text makes the ambiguous line between music and art approachable and easily accessible to varying levels of interest.

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## **Innerspaceboy says**

Audio Culture is a magnificent collection of writings on music theorism, criticism, and analyses spanning the entire age of recorded sound to the present. These writings are offered in their respective chronology and organized into sections - Noise/Sound/Silence, Modes of Listening, Music in the Age of Electronic (Re)Production, etc. Authors featured include everyone from Italian Fututist (and author of the manifesto, The Art of Noises) Luigi Russolo, to Cage and Stockhausen, and on to contemporaries like David Toop and Simon Reynolds with his article coining the term, "post-rock."

Each chapter opens with thoughtful quotes relating to the section and each paper begins with a brief summary of the author's musical and theoretical sphere.

I found it most satisfying that by the final section, the book came full-circle to the visions of the Futurists from Section I in their anticipation of the role noises would play in the future of music and culture. The last section includes an interesting arrangement in which tapes of Aphex Twin and Scanner are sent to Stockhausen for his perspective on modern electronic music and the artists are then presented with his response.

But the circle was truly closed with the final paper - "The Aesthetic of Failure: Post-Digital Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music" by microsound artist Kim Cascone. The article examines the nature of modern glitch music and speaks to its future artists.

Magnificently, the article closes with an excerpt from Russolo's Art of Noises:

"We therefore invite young musicians of talent to conduct a sustained observation of all noises, in order to understand the various rhythms of which they are composed, their principal and secondary tones. By comparing the various tones of noises with those of sounds, they will be convinced of the extent to which the former exceed the latter. This will afford not only an understanding, but also a taste and passion for noises."

A most engaging and inspiring read! Highly recommended.

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## **Scott says**

This book is so phenomenal. I use it frequently in my research. Though I have yet to read every essay collected in these pages, it is the most excellent collection I've found on music.

This book was an important part of the class I taught on music and communication last summer. Though

most of the readings I assigned for the class were articles and book chapters, this was the only entire book I assigned. Frankly, I had a hard time finding any books that provided what I wanted to teach from...until this one.

It is a reader, and so it compiles many of the seminal works regarding music (not really the popular variety, but more experimental composition). Cox and Warner are excellent editors. Not only did they compile and abbreviate some of the best writings on music into compact essays, they wrote excellent introductions for each of the sections. Further, they include compilations of important quotes for each chapter...the book is worth it for the compilation of quotes alone, let alone the tremendously useful list of readings.

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### **kaelan says**

I'm not a huge fan of artists talking about their art, but this book is great. Edgard Varèse, Henry Cowell, Merzbow, Brian Eno, Glenn Gould, et. al. Some real heavy hitters. And their words, which the editors of this volume have culled from essays, interviews and even liner notes, rise above the merely theoretical. I've read this book twice so far—first as a novice and then again with a more substantial knowledge base—and it has honestly bolstered my subjective appreciation for the medium both times.

One segment—perhaps more amusing than edifying—sticks out in my memory. An interviewer, sitting down with Karlheinz Stockhausen, introduces the great composer/electronics pioneer to the music of Aphex Twin, before proceeding, in a subsequent interview, to introduce Aphex Twin to the music of Stockhausen. The ensuing "discussion" only serves to emphasize, albeit unwittingly, the incredible pluralism that defines modern music(s):

Stockhausen: "I think it would be very helpful if he listens to my work *Song Of The Youth*, which is electronic music, and a young boy's voice singing with himself. Because he would then immediately stop with all these post-African repetitions, and he would look for changing tempi and changing rhythms, and he would not allow to repeat any rhythm if it were varied to some extent and if it did not have a direction in its sequence of variations."

Aphex Twin: "Do you reckon he can dance? You could dance to *Song of the Youth*, but it hasn't got a groove in it, there's no bassline."

Highly recommended for those interested in strange sounds of all sorts.

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### **Casey Danielson says**

From the history of the Walkman leading to the urban nomad to Brian Eno's surprisingly readable discussion of ambient music to Cage's dry, dense explorations of sounds and meanings, this is a great choice for anyone interested in electronic music of any kind.

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