

"This fantastic new collection of essays confirms that Seth Kim-Cohen writes about sound and unsound, sense and nonsense, like no one else. Kim-Cohen polarizes—not just his readers, but his subjects and, inevitably, himself. The Big One-Thing is always cracked in two. Easy magic can't get a break. But make no mistake. Kim-Cohen is a lover of intensities: litany becomes a hard bright joy, pleasure heaves its darkness into view. That love of intensity—faith, really—is what lets him break down the 'superjoke' of rock 'n roll without spoiling its punchline. An astonishing feat. We could all take a page."

Seth Brodsky, Assistant Professor of Music and the Humanities,  
The University of Chicago, USA

"*Against Ambience and Other Essays* is like one of those bombs the anarchists dreamed of back at the birth of modernism: exploding whole worlds with a single throw. In their case, some wood panelling was splintered, tuxedos were spoiled, and a few (usually the wrong) people injured. But Kim-Cohen here, once again, pulls off the more utopian dream—and with aplomb."

Craig Dworkin, Professor of English, The University of Utah, USA

"A polemical air horn that might just wake celebrants of ambient art from their nostalgic dream of decontextualized sensory immersion."

Lytle Shaw, Professor of English, New York University, USA

Summer 2013: New York's art spaces are inundated with sound and light. James Turrell at the Guggenheim, Soundings at MoMA, Robert Irwin at the Whitney, Janet Cardiff at the Met, a group show in Chelsea, titled ambient. Exactly one hundred years clear of Duchamp's first readymades, why should we find ourselves in thrall to immersive, non-discursive aesthetics?

Building on the foundations of his *Against Ambience* (2013), Kim-Cohen argues that we deserve an art equal to our conflictual times. Expanded with additional talks, texts and an interview, *Against Ambience and Other Essays* fleshes out the critique of ambience, spurning the soothing wash of sound and light, in favor of an art that refuses to shroud its own methods and intentions, taking responsibility for its position in the structures of cultural power.

Seth Kim-Cohen is Assistant Professor of Art History, Theory and Criticism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA.

#### SOUND STUDIES

[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)

Cover design by Rebecca Cohen // CO Projects  
Cover image © 2013 Rebecca Cohen

ISBN 978-1-6289-2135-9



Also available  
from Bloomsbury



# SETH KIM-COHEN

SETH KIM-COHEN

AGAINST AMBIENCE  
and other essays

# AGAINST AMBIENCE

and other essays



B L O O M S B U R Y