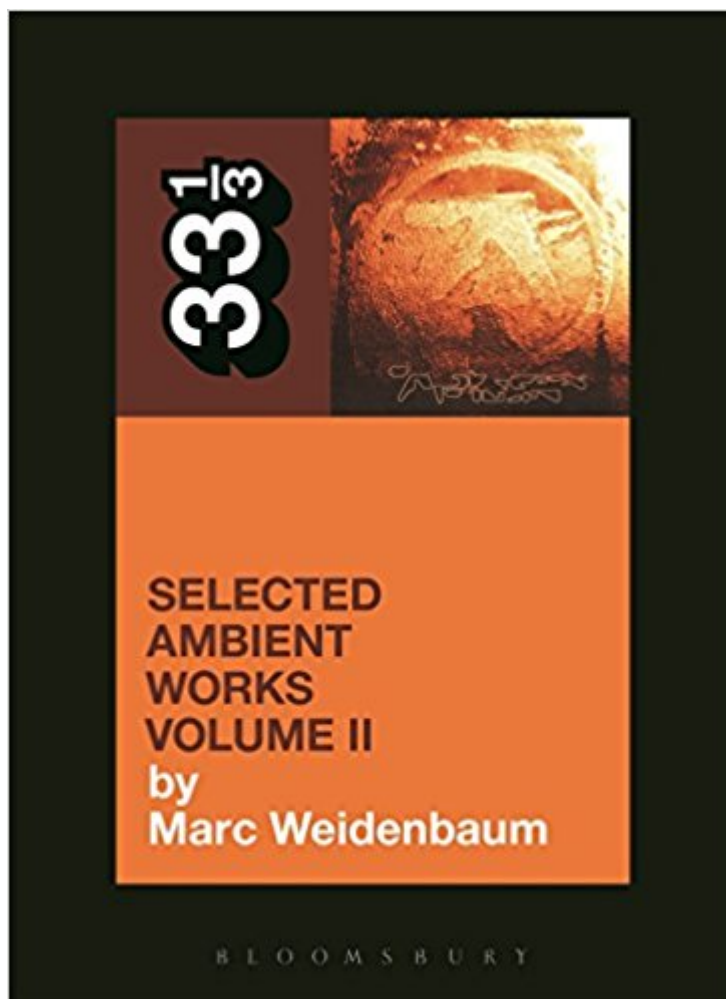


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# Aphex Twin's Selected Ambient Works, Vol. 2



## Synopsis

Extravagantly opaque, willfully vaporous – Aphex Twin's *Selected Ambient Works Volume II*, released by the estimable British label Warp Records in 1994, rejuvenated ambient music for the Internet Age that was just dawning. In the United States, it was his first full length on Sire Records (home to Madonna and Depeche Mode), which helped usher in Richard D. James, for whom Aphex Twin is but one of numerous monikers, as a major force in music, electronic or otherwise. Faithful to Brian Eno's definition of ambient music, *Selected Ambient Works Volume II* was intentionally functional: it furnished chill out rooms, the sanctuaries amid intense raves. Choreographers and film directors began to employ it to their own ends, and in the intervening decades this background music came to the fore, adapted by classical composers who reverse-engineer its fragile textures for performance on acoustic instruments. Simultaneously, "ambient" has moved from esoteric sound art to central tenet of online culture. This book contends that despite a reputation for being beat-less, the album exudes percussive curiosity, providing a sonic metaphor for our technologically mediated era of countless synchronized nanosecond metronomes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Mentioned on "Line Out" (The Stranger.com), February 2014 "If you're already a fan of Aphex Twin, you'll revel in Weidenbaum's deep dive into one of the artist's signature works. If not, you'll be surprised to learn that you've likely already heard his music in one form or another." - S.T.

Vanairsdale "I love how it evokes the way music circa 1994 was suffused with unknowable data."  
--Rob Sheffield "The chillout room masterpieces of Aphex Twin get the business from incisive writer Marc Weidenbaum. And really, the pairing couldn't be any more delicious." --Marke Bieschke, San Francisco Bay Guardian "A must-read for those interested in the artist." --Alarm Will Sound "Like all good critical studies, Aphex Twin's Selected Ambient Works Volume II doesn't provide the illusion of closure; rather, it expands minds, fostering the creation of textual meaning. I can offer no higher praise" - Paul Gleason, "Caught in the Carousel"

Marc Weidenbaum founded Disquiet.com, which is focused on the intersection of sound, art, and technology, in 1996. A former editor of Tower Records' Pulse! magazine, he's written for Nature, Boing Boing, and the website of The Atlantic. He's commissioned compositions from such musicians as Scanner, Steve Roden, and Stephen Vitiello, and lectures on the role of sound in the media landscape. He lives in San Francisco.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book about one of my favorite albums of all time. There were a lot of stories that I previously knew, but never understood the context behind them (such as the pictures correlating with the track "names"). Mr. Weidenbaum looks at every minute detail of what makes this album truly magnificent and dissects them in a thoughtful way. Initially I was a little concerned that by reading all of the aspects that lead up to its creation, it would somehow tarnish the magic of this album, however that is not the case with this book (If anything it augmented it!) I highly recommend to any Aphex Twin fan (any anyone who appreciates music for that matter).

I was hoping for a bit of inside dirt on Aphex Twin's composition practices or explanations in what went into creating particular songs. While this is more of a discussion of the discourse surrounding the album as well as a snapshot of the industry and scene that provided its context, it's still a fun read. Would recommend to SAW II / Aphex diehards, but not sure if it has broader appeal.

More than just a track-by-track descriptive essay, Marc Weidenbaum's recent entry in the 33 1/3 series is a collection of thoughtful, interrelated essays that also delve into the behind-the-scenes activity relating to the creation of Aphex Twin's classic album (as well as the electronic music scene in general) and shows how this album has influenced other aspects of our culture (film, dance, classical music, etc.).

It's not full of revelations on the album from Richard himself, but it's a good easy read about the circumstances surrounding him signing to WEA, why the album is so different from the rest of his catalogue, the impact it's had, etc. The writing can be a little dry sometimes, but still a good analysis overall.

If you're an Aphex Twin fan, or just a fan of ambient music, you'll really enjoy this book. The extent of Weidenbaum's research is readily apparent, but his engaging writing style keeps things moving. This is one of my favorite volumes in 33 1/3 series.

perhaps reflecting the author's nationality, i felt this was a little too american-centric. it focussed too much on the american distributor of saw 2, and how that label dealt with it, and not enough on warp or rdj himself and putting the album in the context of what was happening in the uk at the time. it felt strangely detached as a result, and thus a little underwhelming. the discussion of the album's content, and what ambient/"beat-free"/minimalism means, was excellent, so it was somewhat disappointing that the more practical side missed the mark. i know rdj can be recalcitrant when it comes to the media, but not having a more recent discussion with him (or with people from warp, or with any of the plethora of artists who sprang up after him) hurts this book.

An interesting read about this milestone work...I am almost finished and then plan to pick up the new Dilla book in this series.

These 33 1/3 books are always a mixed bag since you don't know what angle(s) the author will choose to take. I consider this volume on Aphex Twin's SAWII one of the better ones because of how Weidenbaum positions the album in the context in which it was released. The early- to mid-1990s were a time of strange popularity for all kinds of electronic music (even though electronic music has been composed since the 1960s and continues to be composed now) and SAWII is one of the strangest albums within the period because it bucks so many of the trends of the time: it's not dance music, it doesn't "rock", it's not showy in terms of composition or performing skills, yet it's also unlike the happy/dubby/bubbly ambient music of The Orb, FSOL and other '90s contemporaries. If I am disappointed in one thing about Weidenbaum's book, it is that he spends so much time talking about what this album is *\*not\**, at the expense of spending more time talking about what it *\*is\**. I would have liked to read more of a track-by-track breakdown/commentary, but as it is, the author only discusses 7 or 8 of the album's 25 pieces at length. (There is also no discussion of how the

music was made, but to be fair, I did not expect that since Richard D. James is famously secretive about his methods.) I still enjoyed the book, however, as a snapshot of a period in the history of electronic music, as well as a welcome prompt to revisit a favorite album with fresh ears.

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