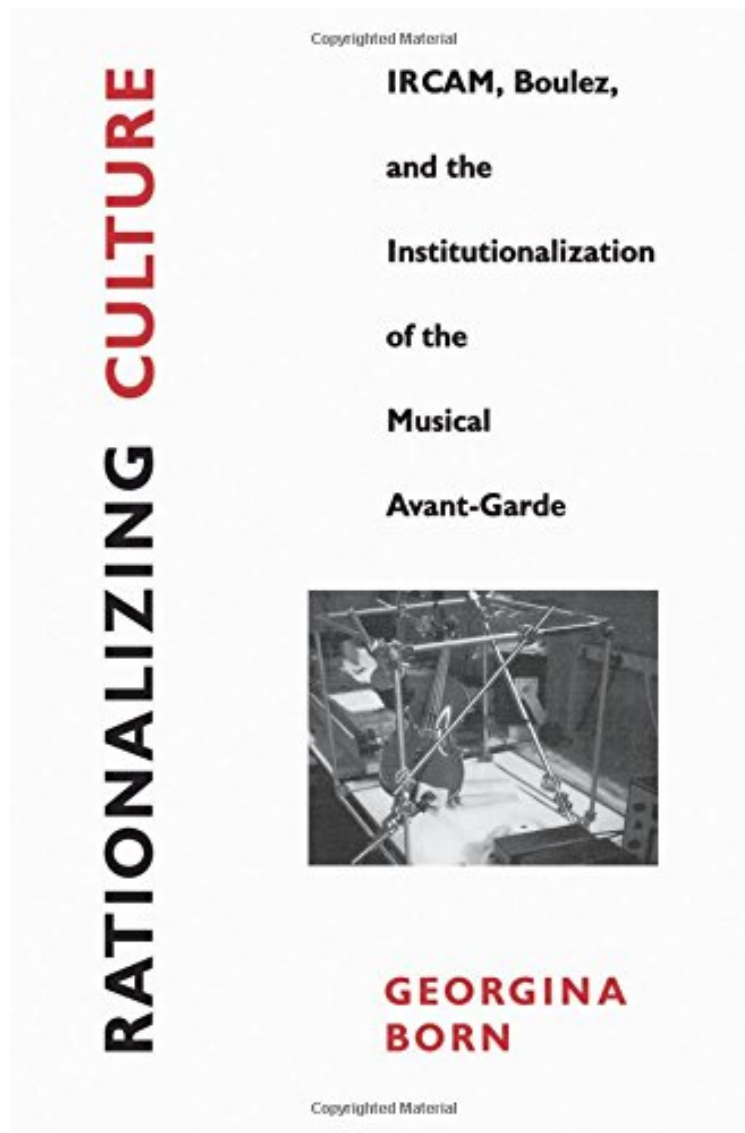


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Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde (Association)

Georgina Born

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Georgina Born : Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde (Association) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde (Association):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating glimpse inside By kolekatkrush If you know anything

about the French contemporary music scene over the last 30 years or so, or even about the American contemporary music scene during the same period, you'll find this fascinating. This is the "anthropologist from Mars" approach to examining the bizarre intersection of politics, money, and art that existed at CNMAT in Paris under Pierre Boulez. I'm not sure of the interest for anyone outside of that international, yet somewhat small and inbred world. Those inside it will have fun decoding the aliases given to some recognizable French and American musical figures, and will delight as the "good guys" espousing small, portable and personal music systems go up against those who insisted that giant mainframe computers (which can only be maintained by large organizations with big budgets!) were the wave of the future. And I suspect that anyone in the arts administration biz will enjoy the description of the battles for power, influence, and money.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An absolute delight. By carttay As a composer who uses technology extensively, I have found this book an absolute delight. When I first heard of it, many years ago, I thought, "That's for me." I recommend this to my students all the time (but have certainly learned not to loan it out). By the way, another reviewer identified a black American composer as Alvin Singleton, which I had not considered. I just assumed it had to be George Lewis, but I'll have to go back and read this more carefully. Trying to figure out who is who is a large part of the fun. It's a classic, as far as I am concerned.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Tired and dated. By Erwin In his fierce review of *Rationalizing Culture* (cleverly entitled *Born to Die*), Ben Watson, a Marxist music writer, points to a tendency that successively appears throughout the book: *Rationalizing Culture* retails the familiar postmodern narrative: the bad European father underestimated the Yankee son, and modernist centralization (aka the Communist Party/the welfare state) lost out to low-tech, the Apple Mac and the Internet (aka market liberalism).³⁴ He further adds: [Born] accuses avant-garde artists of refusing the general audience gratification, as if audiences are a ready-made constituency, and not created by specific economico-artistic vectors.³⁵ Indeed, Born's arguments throughout the book make the false assumption that postmodernism represents a definitive step towards individual liberation, when in fact most postmodern thinkers either avoid or neglect the critique of the greater socioeconomic logic.³⁶ Similar issues also arise from *Born's On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity*.³⁷ As she describes, [music] favors associations or assemblages between musicians and instruments, composers and scores, listeners and sound systems that is, between subjects and objects.³⁸ It is certainly relevant to discuss what the relationship is between these entities, but one cannot address the topic by vilifying modernism and the avant-garde. Moreover, it is infantile to make the assumption that popular music (and jazz, in the case of this particular article) inherently questions aspects of musical production such as ownership, agency, and hierarchy. Popular music and avant-garde music are not packages that have been already determined by some sort of demiurge; these are approaches to music that are in constant processes of self-definition and cannot be separated from their socioeconomic contexts. Cultures do not live within a vacuum. As Watson suggests in relation to *Rationalizing Music* (the same claim can be made about her article), commitment to anthropological science means Born's book is devoid of any aesthetic judgements, apart from between-the-lines hints that everything at IRCAM is mandarin bulls***, and that her own involvement with pop is infinitely worthier; but this is moralistic pomp-populist point-scoring, not critique. (...) The treatment of Frank Zappa exemplifies anthropologists' squeamishness about facing the musical object. Born says that Pierre Boulez conducting Zappa was a moderation of Boulez's rejection of popular music. This remark could only be made by someone who has not seen or heard Dupree's *Paradise*. If this is pop, then *Tempo* is *Smash Hits*.

Anthropologist Georgina Born presents one of the first ethnographies of a powerful western cultural organization, the renowned Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM) in Paris. As a year-long participant-observer, Born studied the social and cultural economy of an institution for research and production of avant-garde and computer music. She gives a unique portrait of IRCAM's composers, computer scientists, technicians, and secretaries, interrogating the effects of the cultural philosophy of the controversial avant-garde composer, Pierre Boulez, who directed the institute until 1992. Born depicts a major artistic institution trying to maintain its status and legitimacy in an era increasingly dominated by market forces, and in a volatile political and cultural climate. She illuminates the erosion of the legitimacy of art and science in the face of growing commercial and political pressures. By tracing how IRCAM has tried to accommodate these pressures while preserving its autonomy, Born reveals the contradictory effects of institutionalizing an avant-garde. Contrary to those who see postmodernism representing an accord between high and popular culture, Born stresses the continuities between modernism and postmodernism and how postmodernism itself embodies an implicit antagonism toward popular culture.

From the Inside Flap "Shows what can be learned from an in-depth study of a very remarkable cultural institution." Paul Rabinow, author of *Interpretive Social Science* "The finest application yet made of critical theory to contemporary music. . . . It would be hard to imagine a more important book." Richard Taruskin, author of *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* "This work, intrinsically fascinating as is the subject matter, is eminently worth consulting as a model for researchers and students of all varieties about how to produce ethnography within institutions, but on the

most lively issues of culture theory."George Marcus, coeditor of Writing Culture