



# Percussion: Drumming, Beating, Striking

*John Mowitt*

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## **Percussion: Drumming, Beating, Striking** John Mowitt

*Percussion* is an attempt—in the author's words—to make sense of "senseless beating," to grasp how rhythm makes sense in music and society. Both a scholar and a former professional drummer, John Mowitt forges a striking encounter between cultural studies and new musicology that seeks to lay out the "percussive field" through which beating—specifically the backbeat that defines early rock-and-roll—comes to matter for raced, urban subjects.

For Mowitt, percussion is both an experience of embodiment—making contact in and on the skin—and a provocation for critical theory itself. In delimiting the percussive field, he plays drumming off against the musicological account of the beat, the sociological account of shock and the psychoanalytical account of fantasy. In the process he touches on such topics as the separation of slaves and drums in the era of the slave trade, the migration of rural blacks to urban centers of the North, the practice and politics of "rough music," the links between interpellation and possession, the general strike, beating fantasies, and the concept of the "skin ego."

*Percussion* makes a fresh and provocative contribution to cultural studies, new musicology, the history of the body and critical race theory. It will be of interest to students of cultural studies and critical theory as well as readers with a serious interest in the history of music, rock-and-roll and drumming.

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