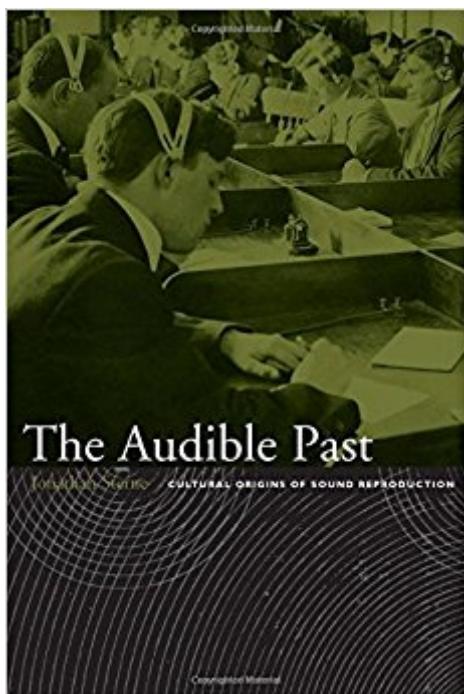


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# The Audible Past: Cultural Origins Of Sound Reproduction



## Synopsis

The Audible Past explores the cultural origins of sound reproduction. It describes a distinctive sound culture that gave birth to the sound recording and the transmission devices so ubiquitous in modern life. With an ear for the unexpected, scholar and musician Jonathan Sterne uses the technological and cultural precursors of telephony, phonography, and radio as an entry point into a history of sound in its own right. Sterne studies the constantly shifting boundary between phenomena organized as "sound" and "not sound." In The Audible Past, this history crisscrosses the liminal regions between bodies and machines, originals and copies, nature and culture, and life and death. Blending cultural studies and the history of communication technology, Sterne follows modern sound technologies back through a historical labyrinth. Along the way, he encounters capitalists and inventors, musicians and philosophers, embalmers and grave robbers, doctors and patients, deaf children and their teachers, professionals and hobbyists, folklorists and tribal singers. The Audible Past tracks the connections between the history of sound and the defining features of modernity: from developments in medicine, physics, and philosophy to the tumultuous shifts of industrial capitalism, colonialism, urbanization, modern technology, and the rise of a new middle class. A provocative history of sound, The Audible Past challenges theoretical commonplaces such as the philosophical privilege of the speaking subject, the visual bias in theories of modernity, and static descriptions of nature. It will interest those in cultural studies, media and communication studies, the new musicology, and the history of technology.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[Sterne's] prose moves gracefully and nimbly beneath the academic robes. . . and the topic is so intimately connected to the way we experience the world around us that it can't help resonating. . . . Forget what you think you know about ours being a visual culture, in which sight is the privileged sense." - Ruth Walker, *Christian Science Monitor*"[A] stimulating and provocative work. . . . Sterne excels as a writer. . . . [T]his book will amply reward readers who want a broader perspective on the culture of sound. Sterne's book will no doubt reach the wide readership it deserves." - David Hochfelder, *Business History Review*"[P]rovocative. . . . Sterne breaks new ground, focusing on the need to understand sound and listening as issues of history." - Leon Botstein, *Los Angeles Times*"[M]eticulously researched. . . . One of the book's most significant achievements is that it revisits a fairly well-worn territory, finds a new and noteworthy story to tell about that territory, and manages to open up a sizable vein of important, yet unexplored, questions about that territory for future research." - Gilbert B. Rodman, *Cultural Studies*"[E]xcellent. . . . [A] critical and long-overdue intervention. . . . [B]rilliant. . . . Sterne's research is wide ranging and impressive. . . . This is a book that all scholars of sound should read, to overturn some of our neat assumptions about sound and its technological and cultural manifestations and to clear the ground for new approaches." - Michele Hilmes, *American Quarterly*"Jonathan Sterne confronts what is certainly the most challenging topic in the study of auditory cultureâ•what happened when modern technologies came crashing into ways of sound making, communicating and listeningâ•with outstanding results. Through disciplined arguments bolstered by plenty of original research and with refreshing critiques of many cherished notions, *The Audible Past* forms a basis from which to address central questions of communication studies, musicology and music history, film sound and media studies, perception and culture, all those areas where listening and sound impinge upon cultural history and theory." - Douglas Kahn, author of *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*"Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past* boldly stakes out a largely neglected but important topic, the history of sound in modern life." - John Durham Peters, author of *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*"Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past* has come along to set the record straight on the cultural origins of sounds and systems, on machines and the mechanisms of culture. He's come here to give us the lowdown on how the technology evolved. Think of the book as a kind of sonic map of the origins of the way we listen to things around us, as a primer for the sonically perplexed." - Paul D. Miller a.k.a. Dj Spooky that Subliminal Kid"[A] stimulating and provocative work. . . . Sterne excels as a writer. . . . [T]his book will amply reward

readers who want a broader perspective on the culture of sound. Sterne's book will no doubt reach the wide readership it deserves." (David Hochfelder *Business History Review*) "[E]xcellent. . . . [A] critical and long-overdue intervention. . . . [B]rilliant. . . . Sterne's research is wide ranging and impressive. . . . This is a book that all scholars of sound should read, to overturn some of our neat assumptions about sound and its technological and cultural manifestations and to clear the ground for new approaches." (Michele Hilmes *American Quarterly*) "[M]eticulously researched. . . . One of the book's most significant achievements is that it revisits a fairly well-worn territory, finds a new and noteworthy story to tell about that territory, and manages to open up a sizable vein of important, yet unexplored, questions about that territory for future research." (Gilbert B. Rodman *Cultural Studies*) "[P]rovocative. . . . Sterne breaks new ground, focusing on the need to understand sound and listening as issues of history." (Leon Botstein *Los Angeles Times*) "[Sterne] prose moves gracefully and nimbly beneath the academic robes. . . and the topic is so intimately connected to the way we experience the world around us that it can't help resonating. . . . Forget what you think you know about ours being a visual culture, in which sight is the privileged sense." (Ruth Walker *Christian Science Monitor*)

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good book

## Amazing Book!

Got hooked on this book after reading chapters for my anthro class (Technology Media and Perception). Sterne's writing style is quite informative but without being quite as dry as a lot of cultural theory you might read (have read). If you are into music recording, editing, production, playing, media studies, cultural studies, anthropology, or are just looking for some interesting nonfiction then this is a good book to check out. Really, really cool stuff.

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