over a decade ago in his canonical *Victorian Soundscapes* (2003).

Likewise, the chapters by Alexandra E. Hui, Mark M. Smith and Anthony Enns, while highly readable and interesting in their own right, will be familiar to readers with more than a casual interest in the history of sound. This book is likely to appeal both to entry-level and experienced readers alike, although the former will arguably benefit the most. A related problem is the slightness of each chapter: many run to little more than fifteen pages, the resultant tome reading more as a sampler or showcase rather than a standalone set of historical arguments. Morat’s collection points more to historians than to histories, encouraging supplementary reading rather than declaring any problems conclusively solved. While *Sounds of Modern History* can be readily dipped into, this very slightness will leave some readers wanting more.

Nevertheless, these shortcomings are amply counterbalanced by the text’s strengths. *Sounds of Modern History* is especially valuable for the introduction it provides to promising new European scholarship, much of it—such as the work of Stefan Gauß and Daniel Morat—hitherto unavailable in the English language. It offers a serious treatment of the role of sound in European histories, and cries out for similarly systematic collections in non-Western contexts. Most importantly, *Sounds of Modern History* is an enjoyable primer that cuts through the noise of the burgeoning field, providing a serious and programmatic statement of the value of a methodologically sharp history of sound. Morat’s work holds its own among the key edited collections such as Mark M. Smith’s *Hearing History* (2004), Veit Erlmann’s *Hearing Cultures* (2004) and Jonathan Sterne’s *Sound Studies Reader* (2012).

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**INGRID SYKES**

*SOCIETY, CULTURE AND THE AUDITORY IMAGINATION IN MODERN FRANCE: THE HUMANITY OF HEARING*  
*(Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015)*  
ISBN 9781137455345 (hbk) £55.00

Since the mid-1990s, a wave of interest in sound, hearing and listening has swirled through the humanities lapping at literary studies, history, and politics. Scholars across Europe, North America and Australia have investigated contexts as varied as warfare, architecture, and slavery, often focusing on the significance of particular sounds at specific times or places. Ingrid Sykes is likewise concerned with the past but in *Society, Culture and the Auditory Imagination in Modern France* she has a different objective. This is not a cultural history about the practice of
listening in France, for example the conversation for the honnête homme or the Catholic confessional for the population at large—indeed Sykes declares at the outset that she makes no distinction between hearing and listening (12). Nor has she analysed literary texts despite the reference in the book’s title to the ‘auditory imagination’, a phrase used by T. S. Eliot as ‘the feeling for syllable and rhythm that penetrates far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling’ Sykes’ attention is directed at the concept of audition itself, and echoing Eliot’s sense of something mysterious and powerful she writes in the introduction ‘hearing was an ethical, transformative experience that stitched the private individual with public space’ (6).

Sykes is drawing on a longstanding interest in French thought about the nature of hearing. English language readers have had some introduction to these pioneers from North American scholars Veit Erlmann (Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality, 2010) and Jonathan Sterne (The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction, 2002). Sykes acknowledges their contributions as she delves further into the diverse ways in which the French have been preoccupied with the subject of hearing over several centuries. The purpose of her book is to draw together this thinking more broadly than has been done to date and construct an argument for its contemporary relevance. Now I must confess to being neither an historian of modern France nor a scholar of the history of medicine, music or law—these are all territories the book traverses and it is to be hoped that it will receive due appraisal by specialists in these fields; however for this reviewer, the offer of an analysis of a mechanism so fundamental to Sound Studies was not one to pass up, given its potential application beyond French studies.

The book follows a chronological course, starting with the work of seventeenth-century philosophers who believed an understanding of hearing could reveal ways to improve human society: for instance, Blaise Pascal advocated listening to nature to discover one’s soul, while others proposed hearing as a means to a higher existence. Hearing is complemented by being heard and Sykes goes on to discuss briefly the juge auditeur, a member of the judiciary who quite literally heard civil complaints. In the eighteenth century, the institution of the single, centrally appointed juge auditeur was attacked in the language of a diseased ear, and after the Revolution the position was replaced with a locally selected panel—arguably a corrective for the body politic. The most substantial area to be explored in the book concerns medicine: from the eighteenth century, hearing mediated
the diagnostic encounter of doctors and patients, and in the nineteenth century, sound was used by doctors as a therapeutic tool. There is also a section dealing with a new optimism at the end of the eighteenth century for education of the blind based on their possession of the faculty of hearing.

This is an exhilarating succession of observations, although a sequence of events need not constitute an argument for cause and effect. The book is just over a hundred pages and while a large cast of thinkers from the past and present are cited, it is densely written with little elaboration of circumstances or necessary context. For instance, the job of the juge auditeur was to judge petitioners, as well as hear them: what exactly was at stake here? When doctors recommended ‘active listening’ to music in the early nineteenth century, did they mean any music? References to hearing the collective voice occur only in passing, and the concept of ‘ethical hearing’ would benefit from more clarification.

The strongest sections detail the often bizarre understandings of hearing in the past—for example, the belief by a succession of medical people that hearing was a whole body experience, such that ‘music was not presented as an art form, but as a method for retaining biologically ingrained sonic values’ (99).

The conclusion of the book makes a leap beyond France and the past to discuss hearing in current concerns on a global stage: medical practice, neuroscience, education, and the International Criminal Court (116; presumably this is the intended body rather than the ‘Institutional Criminal Court’ as printed). The rise of oral history is not included, but a suspected link between hearing loss and dementia is. Throughout this catalogue, Sykes champions listening by returning to the work of the early French medical researchers for a model of contemporary relevance. Their stance was bound up with a physiological account of hearing, as opposed to, for instance, a notion of human rights and it is the latter that underpins many of the listening-related practices of the present day. It could be argued that the notion of human rights derives from a respect for hearing—the right to be heard or listened to; however Sykes does not specifically address the subject of rights in her analysis.

Overall, this is a bold account of French scientific and philosophical interest in hearing. The scholarship is imposing but the brevity with which some sections are treated lessens the grip of the overall argument, particularly in relation to the social present. However it is a salutary reminder not to overlook the ear, and confirms Sound Studies as having much to offer across diverse areas.

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