extensive testimony to this formative period of Australian history.

Alex Chorowicz
University of Melbourne

Daniel Morat (ed.)
Sounds of Modern History: Auditory Cultures in 19th- and 20th-Century Europe
ISBN 9781782384212 (Hbk) £68.00

In 2005, media historian Michele Hilmes memorably observed that the study of sound has been touted as an ‘emerging’ field for a century or more. Numerous historians, musicologists, anthropologists and linguists have long been concerned with sound and aurality, but the past decade has witnessed the emergence of something more significant: a veritable interdisciplinary entente, a coalition of research interests whose common thread is that they self-consciously place sound at the centre of scholarly attention.

It is evident that the field has already crystallised, if not ultimately ‘emerged.’ By all traditional metrics, Sound Studies is now fully institutionalised. It is replete with international conferences and organisations, themed ‘readers’ (including 2011’s sterling Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies and Routledge’s multi-volume Sound Studies series) as well as a host of common theoretical problems and methodologies.

The place of history within this boisterous interdisciplinary conversation is a complex and sometimes uneasy one. Work on sound is replete with ringing pronouncements about the importance of historical changes in the world soundscape, shifting listening techniques and historically ingrained cultural preoccupations. Scholars often draw on historical lineages or analogies to inform their investigations of contemporary phenomena. Yet the question that remains is: where does a history of sound belong? Can it carve out a theoretically sharp room of its own among the Sound Studies literature, while simultaneously holding its own in wider national and transnational historiographies?

German historian Daniel Morat answers both questions in the affirmative with his recent edited collection, Sounds of Modern History. Emerging out of the proceedings of a 2012 conference, this highly readable and well-sequenced text synthesises key research on the history of sound, bringing the work of the burgeoning field’s seminal figures into dialogue with that of emerging scholars of the history of European sound cultures.

The editor’s introduction sets out a bold program for a modern history
of sound. Positioning the work explicitly in relation to ‘auditory culture’ studies—a terminological gesture to Michael Bull and Les Back’s influential *Auditory Culture Reader* (2003)—Morat eschews the usual transhistorical statements as to sound’s social importance. Rather, sound and aurality are meaningful insofar as they can be located within specific, often national, cultural contexts.

Methodologically, the editor asserts, a history of sound calls not merely for thick description, nor the addition of extra texture to existing narratives. Rather, the aim of a critical sound history must be ‘to open up “new storylines,”’ to ‘find new explanations for historical problems’ and to ‘disclose previously unknown historical connections’ (1–2). The thirteen essays included herein rise to this challenge, integrating the current concerns of the wider aural humanities into the analysis of such well-worn topics as nineteenth-century medicine, early phonograph and gramophone cultures, and the effervescence of public parade and protest.

If Morat takes the *history* of modern sound seriously, another welcome feature of *Sounds of the Audible Past* is that it subjects the *modern* to an informed critical ear. Taking cues from such totemic works as Jonathan Sterne’s *The Audible Past* (2003), Emily Thompson’s *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2002) and Karin Bijsterveld’s *Mechanical Sound* (2008), this book takes a sophisticated and fluid approach to the concept of acoustic modernity.

Sterne’s influential argument that over the long nineteenth century, sound was reconfigured as a specific object of Western knowledge provides the starting point for a sharp discussion of the role of sound—conceived as such—in European life in the long nineteenth century. The book’s content is arranged chronologically into seven sections that move from the early nineteenth century (Chapter Two) through the Second World War (Chapter Thirteen).

Some of the most vital and innovative scholarship comes from emerging scholars such as Annelies Jacobs, whose work investigates the ‘ecology, semiotics, and politics’ of urban sound in Amsterdam (305–23), and James G. Mansell, whose chapter canvasses the intersection between popular psychology and noise abatement campaigns in interwar Europe (278–302). These chapters reveal the contours of a fruitful future for sound historiography, and make for a more refreshing read than the truncated contributions of more established historians. John M. Picker’s chapter, for instance, amounts to little more than a restatement of arguments made
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).

Henry Reese  
*University of Melbourne*

**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