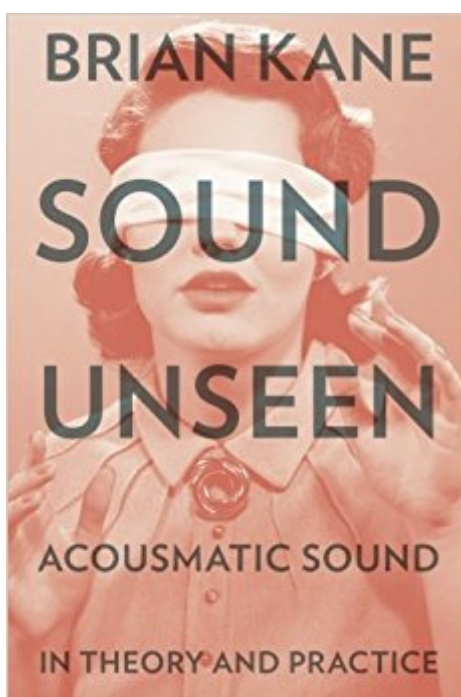


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# Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound In Theory And Practice



## Synopsis

Sound coming from outside the field of vision, from somewhere beyond, holds a privileged place in the Western imagination. When separated from their source, sounds seem to manifest transcendent realms, divine powers, or supernatural forces. According to legend, the philosopher Pythagoras lectured to his disciples from behind a veil, and two thousand years later, in the age of absolute music, listeners were similarly fascinated with disembodied sounds, employing various techniques to isolate sounds from their sources. With recording and radio came spatial and temporal separation of sounds from sources, and new ways of composing music. *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* explores the phenomenon of acousmatic sound. An unusual and neglected word, "acousmatic" was first introduced into modern parlance in the mid-1960s by avant garde composer of *musique concrète* Pierre Schaeffer to describe the experience of hearing a sound without seeing its cause. Working through, and often against, Schaeffer's ideas, Brian Kane presents a powerful argument for the central yet overlooked role of acousmatic sound in music aesthetics, sound studies, literature, philosophy and the history of the senses. Kane investigates acousmatic sound from a number of methodological perspectives -- historical, cultural, philosophical and musical -- and provides a framework that makes sense of the many surprising and paradoxical ways that unseen sound has been understood. Finely detailed and thoroughly researched, *Sound Unseen* pursues unseen sounds through a stunning array of cases -- from Bayreuth to Kafka's "Burrow," Apollinaire to Brecht, music and metaphysics to architecture and automata, and from Pythagoras to the present-to offer the definitive account of acousmatic sound in theory and practice. The first major study in English of Pierre Schaeffer's theory of "acousmatics," *Sound Unseen* is an essential text for scholars of philosophy of music, electronic music, sound studies, and the history of the senses.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Much in this substantive book will resonate with the reader after the concluding page is turned. Recommended." --Choice "Sound Unseen is both successful and provocative precisely because of these constructive dissonances. It is a rare book that can put thinkers as diverse as P. F. Strawson or Bertrand Russell on the same page with Derrida or Heidegger, especially with Kane's unassuming clarity. Furthermore, Kane shows how music studies and philosophy can speak to each other when they are conceived as mutually supplemental--questions about sound infect philosophical questions, and thus a musical answer becomes a philosophical answer. Finally, Kane's tone deserves special mention, as it untangles knotty philosophical questions with remarkably accessible language: despite the density of his topics, his prose treads lightly and patiently, requiring little philosophical acumen yet rewarding those who may have it."--Music Theory Spectrum

"Kane uncovers a history of acousmatic sound independent of the legacy of Schaeffer and Pythagoras in order to articulate a rather distinct approach to the study of sound that transcends the divisions between musicology and sound studies...[Sound Unseen] is an essential text for scholars of the philosophy of music, electronic music, sound studies, and phenomenology." --Journal of Sonic Studies

"Kane's methodology is multi-disciplinary, analysing a variety of cases."--Neural

"Brian Kane...has in Sound Unseen written the definitive explanatory tract on the acousmatic."--The Wire

"Sound Unseen represents a significant contribution to the field of voice studies...Brian Kane succeeds in developing a cogent and flexible explanatory paradigm for acousmatic sound that is clear without being reductive. Kane's account of acousmatic sound allows one to situate the practices of listening within their historical and cultural contexts...Scrupulously researched and conceptually virtuosic, Sound Unseen asks us to rethink the way we listen."--Journal of Musicological Research

"Kane effectively decenters the privileged position of Schaefferian accounts in present discourse and opens the door to a broader survey of acousmatic listening practices spanning a variety of sociohistorical situations...Kane's traversal of the transdisciplinary landscape is graceful and his approach offers a healthy perspective for the field of music research more generally...Without doubt, Kane's book makes a significant contribution to existing literature on acousmatic sound, and it is necessary reading for anyone interested in exploring the fertile

intersection of music, sound, and philosophy."--Music Theory Online"Brian Kane's Sound Unseen: Sound in Theory and Practice directly questions the material constitution of sonic phenomena; however, Kane's methodology is theoretical rather than historical... Upon first blush the book appears topically focused on the work of French composer Pierre Schaeffer and the school of musique concrete; however, its major contributions are to twentieth-century histories of aesthetics and the senses...Kane is also interested in the ways in which incidental subjectivity is interpolated into technologies. For Kane, musical transcendence is revealed time and again to be a phantasmagoric effect of technÃ©, in which the means of production are eclipsed, resulting in a suprahuman category." Contemporary European History

"One would be hard-pressed to find any aspect of contemporary musical life unaffected by acousmatic listening. Brian Kane's book pursues every facet of the acousmatic relentlessly, unearthing critical new findings and reinvigorating old assumptions." -- Joanna Demers, University of Southern California"Brian Kane's Sound Unseen is indispensable for anyone interested in sound - in music, in society and in the media arts. This is a painstakingly researched magnum opus challenging myth and legend, and restoring a history and breadth to the study of acousmatic sound - whose cause cannot be seen." -- Simon Emmerson, Professor of Music, Technology and Innovation, De Montfort University --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

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