



Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment

Leigh Eric Schmidt

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“Faith cometh by hearing” so said Saint Paul, and devoted Christians from Augustine to Luther down to the present have placed particular emphasis on spiritual arts of listening. In quiet retreats for prayer, in the noisy exercises of Protestant revivalism, in the mystical pursuit of the voices of angels, Christians have listened for a divine call. But what happened when the ear tuned to God’s voice found itself under the inspection of Enlightenment critics? This book takes us into the ensuing debate about “hearing things”—an intense, entertaining, even spectacular exchange over the auditory immediacy of popular Christian piety. The struggle was one of encyclopedic range, and **Leigh Eric Schmidt** conducts us through natural histories of the oracles, anatomies of the diseased ear, psychologies of the unsound mind, acoustic technologies (from speaking trumpets to talking machines), philosophical regimens for educating the senses, and rational recreations elaborated from natural magic, notably ventriloquism and speaking statues. *Hearing Things* enters this labyrinth—all the new disciplines and pleasures of the modern ear—to explore the fate of Christian listening during the Enlightenment and its aftermath. In Schmidt’s analysis the reimagining of hearing was instrumental in constituting religion itself as an object of study and suspicion. The mystic’s ear was hardly lost, but it was now marked deeply with imposture and illusion.

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