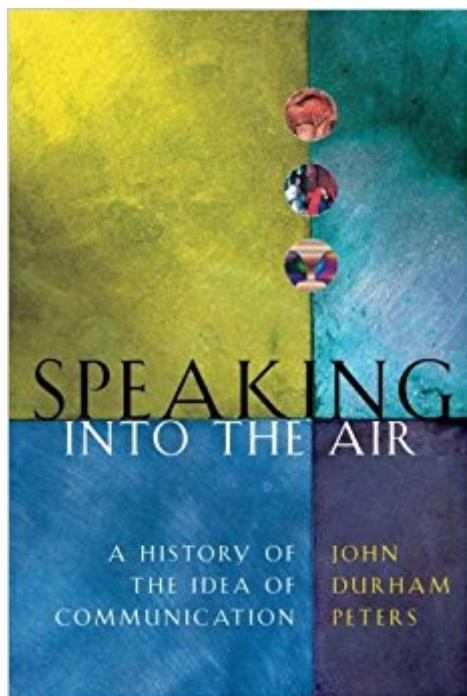


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Speaking Into The Air: A History Of The Idea Of Communication



Synopsis

Communication plays a vital and unique role in society—often blamed for problems when it breaks down and at the same time heralded as a panacea for human relations. A sweeping history of communication, *Speaking Into the Air* illuminates our expectations of communication as both historically specific and a fundamental knot in Western thought. "This is a most interesting and thought-provoking book. . . . Peters maintains that communication is ultimately unthinkable apart from the task of establishing a kingdom in which people can live together peacefully. Given our condition as mortals, communication remains not primarily a problem of technology, but of power, ethics and art." —Antony Anderson, *New Scientist* "Guaranteed to alter your thinking about communication. . . . Original, erudite, and beautifully written, this book is a gem." —*Kirkus Reviews* "Peters writes to reclaim the notion of authenticity in a media-saturated world. It's this ultimate concern that renders his book a brave, colorful exploration of the hydra-headed problems presented by a rapid-fire popular culture." —*Publishers Weekly* "What we have here is a failure-to-communicate book. Funny thing is, it communicates beautifully. . . . *Speaking Into the Air* delivers what superb serious books always do—hours of intellectual challenge as one absorbs the gradually unfolding vision of an erudite, creative author." —Carlin Romano, *Philadelphia Inquirer*

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Customer Reviews

In this erudite history of an idea, Peters, a professor of communication studies at the University of Iowa, writes with good form and style in a welcome break from the jargon-muddled work of many academics who tackle the notion of communication. Following Walter Benjamin, Peters approaches

the writing of history not as a linear continuum but as a simultaneity, a wormhole. What Peters is after is communication, with all its "misfires, mismatches, and skewed effects." To this end, he is just as likely to reference Paul Newman in *Cool Hand Luke* as he is to turn to Jesus or St. Augustine or Phaedrus or John Locke. The result is a cultural polylogue. Peters is bent on exposing how new media and faster modes of transportationAanything that contributes to the shrinking of the worldAaffect communication, and how their impact gives rise to increasing incommunicability. Not just literature and cultural history but also outtakes from the annals of physics, philosophy and spiritualism are important to his project. Finally, Peters writes to reclaim the notion of authenticity in a media-saturated world. It's this ultimate concern that renders his book a brave, colorful exploration of the hydra-headed problems presented by a rapid-fire popular culture. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Guaranteed to alter your thinking about communication. Peters (Communication Studies/Univ. of Iowa) begins this delightful essay by observing that ``Only moderns could be facing each other and be worried about 'communicating' as if they were thousands of miles apart.'' For Peters, the concept of communication has evolved in tandem with its technology, leaving us chasing a moving target rather than closing in on a fixed ideal. It appears unavoidable that human beings divide the world into ``me'' and ``not me'' in distinct ways, creating both the joy of a world populated by individual personalities and the frustration of an insuperable barrier to transfers of unmodified meaning from one person to another. Intensifying the quest for ``genuine'' communication, whether introspectively through therapy or socially through increasingly powerful forms of media, expands our expectations along with our capabilities and can produce a crisis of communication in the midst of an information age. Peters is excellent at finding novel ways to illustrate this continuing ``project of reconciling self and other.'' The range of options is presented through contrasting the interactive and selective approach of Socrates (dialogue) with the one-way and all-inclusive approach of Jesus (dissemination). The essential association of communication with existence emerges in consideration of spirits and spiritualism in everything from philosophy to sances. The scope of communicative ambition is underlined by consideration of attempts to interact with animals and aliens. In the end, Peters concludes that the fears of isolation, which have pushed us to pursue communication as the true meeting of minds, have too often overshadowed our appreciation of what is unique. Touch, the ability to come into direct contact with another being, and time, the expression of our mortality, are ``the two nonreproducible things we can share, our only guarantees of sincerity'' through which we can ``face the holiness and wretchedness of our finitude.'' Original, erudite, and

beautifully written, this book is a gem. -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I don't even know where to start. This is such a beautiful book. If you are interested in communication or media in general, it's going to be a treat. If you're not, you'll find out you actually are, by the time you finish this book. Written in a haunting poetic prose that nonetheless delivers the highest analytical level, Peters will have you sitting in the verge of your seat as you go with him through a story of humanity's discoveries in matters of sound and media.

An excellent polemic on the historical changes in the ways people have thought about communication. Some readers may need to be familiar with the texts the author cites. The language is rich. I wish he would have spent more time with Dewey and with the process nature of communication, but you can't do everything.

I read this book. Very interesting read. I bought it for a grad school course I took earlier this fall. The shipper was prompt with delivery of this item.

I'm getting my PhD in communication studies, and this is possibly the most fascinating and creative book I've read in the field. Highly recommend.

Wonderful work of well-written scholarship cutting across many fields

This is a story about the history of the idea of communication. By telling it, John Durham Peters invites us to consider how we can ever truly connect with each other.

Anyone interested in media and communication should read this book. Peters is brilliant in his defense of dissemination as a model of communication. Foundational textbook that has changed the discipline of communication and media studies forever

I can't think of another book that expanded my understanding as profoundly as this one did. Buy three copies, so that you have two to give away after you finish.

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