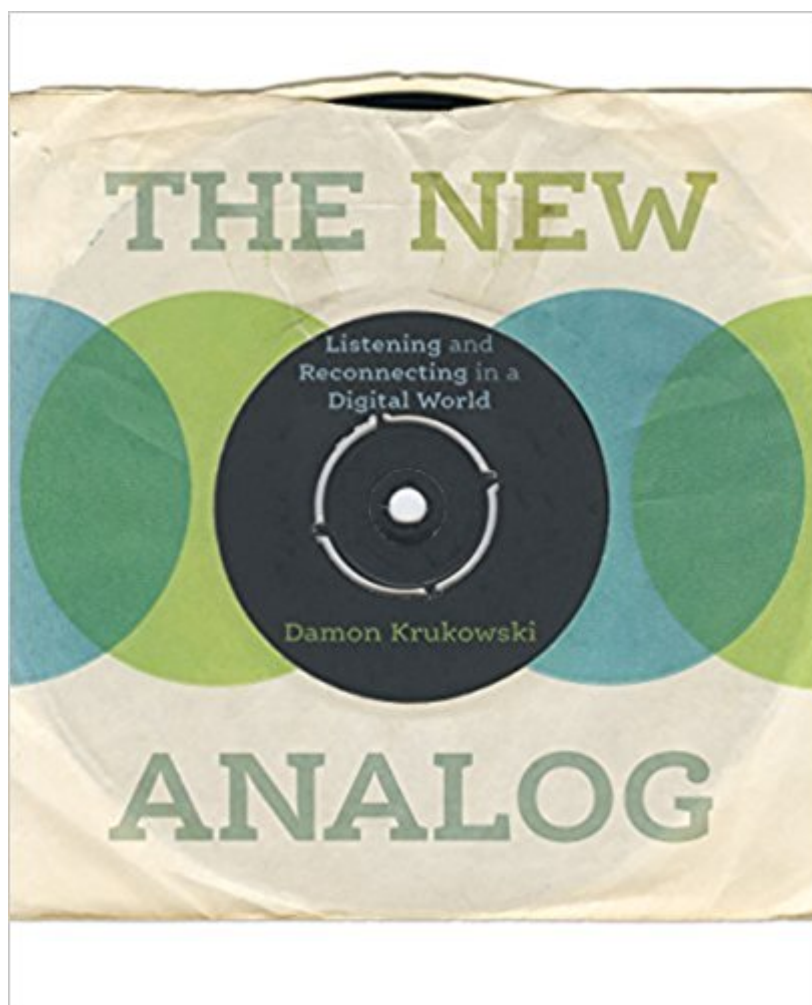


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# The New Analog: Listening And Reconnecting In A Digital World



## Synopsis

What John Berger did to ways of seeing, well-known indie musician Damon Krukowski does to ways of listening in this lively guide to the transition from analog to digital culture. Having made his name in the late 1980s as a member of the indie band Galaxie 500, Damon Krukowski has watched cultural life lurch from analog to digital. And as an artist who has weathered the transition, he has challenging, urgent questions for both creators and consumers about what we have thrown away in the process: Are our devices leaving us lost in our own headspace even as they pinpoint our location? Does the long reach of digital communication come at the sacrifice of our ability to gauge social distance? Do streaming media discourage us from listening closely? Are we hearing each other fully in this new environment? Rather than simply rejecting the digital disruption of cultural life, Krukowski uses the sound engineer's distinction of signal and noise to reexamine what we have lost as a technological culture, looking carefully at what was valuable in the analog realm so we can hold on to it. Taking a set of experiences from the production and consumption of music that have changed since the analog era—the disorientation of headphones, flattening of the voice, silence of media, loudness of mastering, and manipulation of time—as a basis for a broader exploration of contemporary culture, Krukowski gives us a brilliant meditation and guide to keeping our heads amid the digital flux. Think of it as plugging in without tuning out.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: The New Press (April 25, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1620971976

ISBN-13: 978-1620971970

Product Dimensions: 6.7 x 0.9 x 8.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 11 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #79,708 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 in Books > Arts &

Photography > Music > Theory, Composition & Performance > Philosophy & Social Aspects #26

in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Civil & Environmental > Acoustics

#37 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Recording & Sound

## Customer Reviews

Praise for *The New Analog*: "If you're a devoted music fan who's dubious about

both rosy nostalgia and futuristic utopianism, Damon Krukowski's *The New Analog* is for you." •The New York Times Book Review "A pointedly passionate look at what's been lost in the digital era." •Los Angeles Times "Pink Floyd, meet Jane Jacobs. Elegantly written . . . *The New Analog* could also be put next to Susanne Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key*, Jaron Lanier's *You Are Not a Gadget*, Amiri Baraka's *Jazz and the White Critic*, and any number of other texts that try to bring the professionalized notions of *data* and *information* (and, by extension, *signal*) into balance with the sometimes undervalued notion of lived experience." •Ben Ratliff, *4Columns* "A wonderful new book, which uses the history of sound to explore the more personal side of our current technological rupture." •Pitchfork "Comfortably discusses both rarefied aesthetic theories and gritty rocker realities. Krukowski turns the basic dichotomy of audio engineering, the ratio of signal to noise, into a complex metaphor for the loss of history and ingenuity represented by the replacement of analog recording and culture with digital media." •Kirkus Reviews "Damon Krukowski, who has a special gift for lucid explanation, shows how in favoring signal to the detriment of noise, we have sold our birthright for a handful of magic beans. His defense of noise is stirring, detailed, and above all useful. " •Luc Sante, author of *Low Life* and *The Other Paris* "I learned something new on each page of Damon Krukowski's delightful book. At its core lies an original argument for how analog *noise* can enhance our understanding of music and each other in this digital era. Clear prose, deep research (he finds all the good stories), and great illustrations combine to make *The New Analog* a smart, fun read." •Jace Clayton, aka DJ /rupture, author of *Uproot: Travels in 21st-Century Music and Digital Culture* "In the recording world we worry about signal to noise we strive to capture performances where the messages are clear and failures of technology don't obscure the desired content. In *The New Analog*, Damon Krukowski observes that the real changes for the future of audio are not the traditional (and shortsighted) *digital vs. analog* but changes in how we interact with signal and noise, which include how we find and enjoy music. It will never be the same. " •Larry Crane, founder and editor of *Tape Op Magazine* "Musician and poet Damon Krukowski offers a thoughtful and thought-provoking examination of what has been lost as well as gained in the shift from analog to digital sound. Written for anyone who listens and thinks about what they hear, *The New Analog* eloquently argues for the significance of noise in a world perhaps too attuned to tuning it out." •Emily Thompson, professor of history, Princeton University, and author of *The Soundscape of Modernity* "Millions of music-lovers have

acquiesced to the shiny juggernaut of digital-age technology without asking its economic and cultural price. Damon Krukowski is an incisive, passionate, and, above all, rational critic of this new realm. No nostalgic conservative, he offers a radical defense of analog craft in the face of the digital hard sell." —Alex Ross, author of *The Rest is Noise* and *Listen to This* "The New Analog is a delightfully intelligent and idiosyncratic book, one tuned into a mind-expanding frequency that emphasizes the wonders of noise, hiss, feedback, and distortion. In contrast to all the buzzword- and cliché-riddled writing about the digital revolution, Krukowski's accessible and engaging survey of our current media landscape provides a wholly original perspective rooted in the author's deep knowledge of, and love for, recorded music. The New Analog offers even the most tin-eared reader a not-to-be-missed opportunity to see the world anew through sound." —Astra Taylor, author of *The People's Platform* and director of *Examined Life* and *Zizek!* Praise for Damon Krukowski's band Damon & Naomi: "I feel pretty confident in saying that listening to Damon & Naomi gets you laid. I can think of no higher praise." —Vice "Flawless. Whatever small world Damon & Naomi inhabit they have created and decorated it in such a beautiful, perfect manner that the listener feels honored to be invited." —Popmatters "Heartbreakingly beautiful psychedelic folk-rock." —Chicago Sun-Times

Damon Krukowski was in the indie rock band Galaxie 500 and is currently one half of the folk-rock duo Damon & Naomi. He has written for Pitchfork, Artforum, Bookforum, Frieze, The Wire, and on his blog International Sad Hits. He has published two books of prose poetry, serves as co-publisher of the literary press Exact Change, and is the author of *The New Analog* (The New Press). He has taught writing and music at Harvard University and lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

First, a warning about the Kindle edition. I don't know if it's by design or not, but the Kindle version is broken. The pages don't resize correctly, and reading on a tablet or phone or e-reader is a bad experience. Aside from being contrary to the spirit of the book, it just doesn't work. Buy the beautifully put together hardback instead. Ok, with that out of the way, let me tell you where this book fits. There's a cult of us who believe Evan Eisenberg's "The Recording Angel" is one of the great music books of the last 30+ years. Eisenberg wrote about how recording changed music, and now Krukowski writes about how "digital" has changed sound. And Krukowski's book is every bit a worthy successor to Eisenberg's, and to another quirky, oblique book about music I cherish, Ted Gioia's "Jazz: The Imperfect Art." But what's it about? Over a series of linked essays, Krukowski

writes how digital, with its promise of perfect sound everywhere, forever, has diminished music. We were promised heaven; what we got was a weirdly unpleasant knockoff, where there's simultaneously too much to listen to and not enough in the pure digital signal we're fed, after all the sloppy, imperfect real world noise is subtracted. Krukowski goes at it from a bunch of different angles - he does deep dives on loudness and on how time works in the digital realm, how digital deprives you of a sense of "place" in the music, and - again - the crucial role of noise. One thing it's not: this is not a "the old days were better and isn't it good you can buy turntables again" screed. It's much deeper, stronger than that. There's some year to go yet, but so far this is my favorite music book of 2017.

Damon Krukowski is a musician, poet, and publisher who has written a book exploring the ways that the move from analog recording and distribution of music to digital has effected the way in which music is experienced. In *The New Analog: Listening and Reconnecting in a Digital World* (The New Press, 2017, 224 pages, \$24.95/15.48) he examines, in some detail, the history and development of transmitting both print and recorded versions of sound to make it available to those wishing to reproduce and hear it. From printed notation to player piano rolls, wax cylinders, records, CDs, to broadcast from radio signals to streaming digital, he examines copyright issues as well as the complex nature of sound and its reproduction. Along the way, he discusses copyright issues as they affect those wishing to make a living from recording (musicians, writers, engineers, recording companies, sound distribution) providing the most cogent explanation of "mechanical royalties" I've ever read. I'm not a techie. I haven't understood what's meant when my more knowledgeable friends talk about the compression or lifelessness of CD's as compared with earlier vinyl recordings. I've even suggested double blind listening tests to determine whether even highly sensitive listeners can actually tell the difference, but I've never read or heard of any being conducted. Krukowski, almost talking in two languages, techno speak and fan, makes these issues clearer for me. He writes about context, signal, and noise in ways that make sense to me. Krukowski is able to make most technical issues clear, only losing me a few times. Written with an eye to clarifying certain issues in recording and hearing the distribution of those sounds, *The New Analog* helped me to understand much of what I have been missing, in trying to understand this revolution. According to Krukowski, human beings hear in stereo sound. Having two ears allows us to make the minute mental distinctions placing us in space and providing context for the world around us. He describes a woman bike rider falling down while riding a bike with earbuds because, focused on the sounds being delivered to her ears, she was unable to

integrate other cues. Our stereo hearing is remarkably accurate at providing context for what we hear while our brains separate signal from noise. Signal is the foregrounded sound we are supposed to concentrate on...the music. Noise is the supposedly unnecessary sound that interferes with our being able to focus on signal. The role of the technology in separating signal from noise gives us the purer sound that comes to us through digital transmission, eliminating noise. But is music without noise what we really wish to hear? The studio itself becomes a character in this dichotomy. A wooden studio provides a warm, wood-like sound. But a completely baffled and sound-dead studio, for a listener inside it, is still filled with sound, as one's internal functioning — respiration, heartbeat, blood flowing in the veins — can be heard. There is no silence. But the digital studio seeks to eliminate noise, while increasing and layering signal. The work of the studio technician is to take a series of signals, layer and sequence them, and create a larger complex work that turns out to be all signal with no differentiation about what to foreground or background — no sense of context. Loudness has become a substitute for subtlety. Along with the changes in sound have come a change in the delivery system of those sounds. The invention of file sharing, though Napster, while only lasting for two years, spelled the end of record stores and will soon sound the death knell of the compact disk as a means of distributing music. All our music will be downloaded to digital devices to be heard through ear-buds simulating stereo sound, but actually have no separation and providing no contextual cues. Furthermore, those features record lovers, and even CD purchasers no longer have available the kind of information once provided by liner notes. Planned noise has been substituted for by social media, a very noisy place. However, the algorithms of FB, Twitter, Snap Chat, Goodreads, etc) quickly limit exposure to only the noise you wish to hear, increasing isolation and tribalism. We are not fully exposed to the range of noise that once took place in the record store, or other gathering places where people discussed and debated the values of content. However, the algorithms of FB, Twitter, Snap Chat, Goodreads, etc) quickly limit exposure to only the noise you wish to hear, increasing isolation and tribalism. Older mail lists, for instance, were relatively unfiltered, providing more choices of what to consider for the receiver. Who decides what the noise surrounding the signal will be? Damon Krukowski is the editor/publisher of Exact Change, an independent publishing house, along with Naomi Yang, with whom he performs as David & Naomi. He has been a member of rock band Galaxie 500, a 1980's and early nineties indie rock band, as well. He attended Harvard University and lives in Boston. He blogs at International Sad Hits. *The New Analog: Listening and Reconnecting in a Digital World* (The New Press, 2017, 224 pages, \$24.95/15.48) by Damon Krukowski examines the physiology, acoustic science, and effect of the changes from analog to

digital sound in the rapidly changing media environment. By placing our audio experience of recorded music into a larger context of how human beings interact with the world, he offers a more nuanced view than many who decry the emergence of digital music as it's experienced through devices like head phones and iPods. He recognizes that digital delivery of music has been responsible for the loss of community represented by the teeming record store where people could hang out and discuss the music, as well as the quickly developing death of the CD as a means of delivering music. He calls for the re-introduction of the noisy environment once surrounding music, which would lessen the isolation with which people now experience it. While he sometimes gets caught up in the tangled weeds of detailed technology and psycho-physiology, he nevertheless delivers a thoughtful and readable examination at how rapid technological change leads to unanticipated social disruption. I received the book at an Advanced Reviewers Copy from the publisher through Edelweiss. I read it on my Kindle app.

The New Analog is a fascinating rumination on what changed, and more specifically what was lost, when we moved from analog to digital. Damon Krukowski's book is not technical although it touches on technical developments that have changed the way we consume music (and I say consume because this is not just about what we hear). His arguments are delivered in a very readable style but don't lose any of their impact because of that. He discusses what constitutes "noise" in music; how digital has often thrown this out and how, without this "noise", we have lost more than we would think! The book is also rather beautiful looking, and illustrated throughout to help give some context to this intriguing subject. Mr Krukowski isn't taking a Luddite's "old good, new bad" position but is rather pointing out that some of the "old" might be worth hanging on to and that we possibly need to think how we can get some of this "noise" back into our lives. I highly recommend this book to anyone who has an interest in modern sound and music; in how technology and commerce can have an unexpected impact on our lives; and anyone who puts in their earbuds, listens to Spotify and thinks they might be getting the full picture.

What a nice read, 200 pages that didn't get boring or overly technical to make you want to put it down. Clearly the Kindle people don't get the basic idea of this book, that digital copies are poor representatives of the analog version of the same master ;) If you thought music recordings were all better back in the day and digital music is the equivalent of a Big Mac, this book shows why you are correct.

Really liked this book. I also bought one for my "audiophile" stepson who is 16 and my dad who is 69 y.o. Very interesting read on the history of audio production in various genres.

Alternate title for this book could be "Ways of Hearing." A wonderful read.

Very good generally

Excellent read- insightful

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