

# Acoustemologies In Contact: Sounding Subjects And Modes Of Listening In Early Modernity

## Sounding Subjects and Modes of Listening in Early Modernity

In the early modern era, sound played a central role in shaping human experiences and understandings of the world. From the cacophony of urban environments to the ethereal strains of sacred music, sound permeated every aspect of life. This article explores the multiple ways in which sound was experienced and understood in early modernity, focusing on the ways in which people listened to and made sense of their sonic environments.

## Sounding Subjects

In early modernity, the notion of the sounding subject emerged. This concept refers to the idea that individuals are not simply passive recipients of sound, but rather active participants in the process of listening. People listened in specific ways, with specific expectations and biases, which shaped their interpretations of the sounds around them.



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For example, the urban environment was often characterized by a cacophony of sounds. These sounds could be overwhelming and disorienting, but they could also be a source of pleasure and excitement. People who lived in cities developed strategies for coping with and making sense of this sonic environment. They might learn to ignore certain sounds or to find ways to create their own sonic spaces within the city.

Similarly, music played a central role in early modern life. Music was used for a variety of purposes, from religious devotion to entertainment. However, people did not all listen to music in the same way. Some people might listen to music attentively, while others might use it as a backdrop for other activities. The ways in which people listened to music shaped their experiences of it.

## **Modes of Listening**

In addition to the sounding subject, the concept of modes of listening is also important for understanding how sound was experienced in early modernity. Modes of listening refer to the different ways in which people engage with sound. These modes include:

- **Attentive listening:** This mode of listening involves paying close attention to sound. Attentive listeners focus on the details of the sound, such as its pitch, timbre, and volume. They may also try to identify the source of the sound or to understand its meaning.
- **Casual listening:** This mode of listening is more relaxed and informal. Casual listeners are not necessarily paying close attention to the

sound, but they are aware of it and may be able to identify it or to respond to it in some way.

- **Embodied listening:** This mode of listening involves the whole body. Embodied listeners experience sound not only through their ears, but also through their skin, their muscles, and their bones. They may move their bodies in response to the sound or they may use the sound to create a sense of place.
- **Analytical listening:** This mode of listening involves analyzing the sound. Analytical listeners are interested in understanding the structure of the sound and how it is produced. They may use tools such as musical notation or sound recordings to help them analyze the sound.

People often use multiple modes of listening in their everyday lives. For example, they might listen attentively to a piece of music in a concert hall, but they might listen more casually to music in the background while they work or study. They might also use embodied listening when they dance to music or when they feel the vibrations of a loud sound in their bodies.

Sound played a central role in shaping human experiences and understandings of the world in early modernity. People were not simply passive recipients of sound, but rather active participants in the process of listening. They listened in specific ways, with specific expectations and biases, which shaped their interpretations of the sounds around them.

The concept of the sounding subject and the concept of modes of listening provide a framework for understanding how sound was experienced and understood in early modernity. By exploring the ways in which people

listened to and made sense of their sonic environments, we can gain a deeper understanding of the early modern world.



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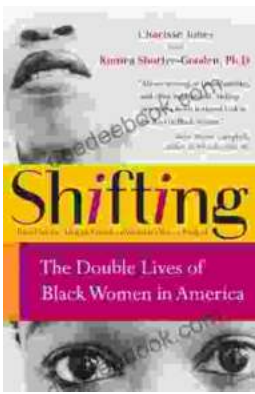
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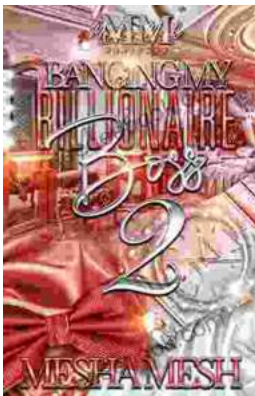
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