

Competitive Soundscapes as Noise in Early Modern Germany

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Although a few new, exciting studies about early modern soundscapes and noise have appeared in recent years to supplement some of older scholarship, such as Alain Corbin's study of bells and bell ringing or E.P. Thompson's work on rough music, there is still room for thinking about how both the conceptualization and the experience of sound and noise shaped social life in the pre-industrial world. We may not ever be able to hear the way that women and men in the 17th or 18th centuries heard, both because the soundscape has changed and because the cultural web of meanings about sound and noise has changed. But we can still try to metaphorically listen to our sources, where we will find that the instantiation of the "sonic" as a set of social conditions and relations erupt into our texts more frequently than we might recognize, and, to flip to the other side of the coin, the silences of texts to sound is itself a telling absence. In this paper, I will first discuss what brought me to thinking about noise, then I will consider noise as a product of the social conditions and cultural meanings of home and household, ending with a consideration of "things that go bump in the night," namely the noise of the ghosts and monsters that haunt and threaten (from within) the household as a particular form of social order.