The past decade has seen a growing number of studies of sound design and acoustic technologies. These attempts to engage with the acoustic aspects of culture have brought forth questions concerning noise and silence, communication and resonance, and insulation and transmission, making these into key terms in the investigation of knowledge production. Yet the role of sound in the production of the built environment, and the function of architecture and design in shaping acoustic modalities, remain largely uncharted territory.

Addressing this large gap, the project “Sound Modernities: Architecture, Media, and Design” investigates the ways in which architects have addressed the aural environment in their practice and discourse, with a focus on the relationship between design practices and the technologies of modern acoustics and communication.
During the twentieth century, modern architectural acoustics, in tandem with sound technologies such as the radio and telecommunication networks, gave rise to notions of endless and unproblematic connectivity. Telecommunication networks connected the urban fabric by circulating information, and seemed capable of collapsing geographical, political, and social differences. These new infrastructures and technologies challenged previous theorizations of the public sphere and promised new models of participatory democracy and media transparency. In this context, architects and designers made sound a central field of inquiry, a material to build with and a concept to think with. They recognized that sound actively shaped modern built environments. Approaching architecture as a medium that not only absorbs and reflects other social and political forces, but also produces them, “Sound Modernities” launches a critical discussion on the aural history of space and the spatial history of aurality.