

Lobbying for the ear : the public fascination with and academic legitimacy of the sonification of scientific data

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***Lobbying for the Ear: The Public Fascination with
and Academic Legitimacy of the Sonification of Scientific Data***

door Alexandra Supper

1. The public fascination with sonification rests upon the promise of a sublime experience. With the help of rhetorical, spatial, musical and technological strategies, a sense of awe and immersion in complex scientific phenomena is created. In this framing of sonification, emotional experiences are given priority over rational information.
2. In the pursuit of academic legitimacy, the practitioners of sonification have to negotiate the boundaries of art and science. They do so quite flexibly, as evidenced by the sonification researcher who presents his work at a music festival, but welcomes the audience by declaring that what will follow has nothing to do with music.
3. The “stop” button is one of the most important technologies in sonification research.
4. Sonification can be regarded as a breaching experiment, which exposes the hidden conventions of scientific representations. Studying sonification therefore not only teaches us about the role of sound in science, but also adds to our understanding of visual culture.
5. In order to understand the role of the senses in science, the different senses have to be studied in interaction, not in isolation.
6. Rather than assuming that sound is immersive and subjective, while vision is detached and objective, we have to study how these associations are created, reinforced and contested in specific historical and cultural contexts.
7. So much has been written about sound in the last decades that it is no longer adequate to justify sound as a research topic solely on the grounds that it has been neglected to date.
8. Doing ethnographic work in an interdisciplinary scientific community inevitably means engaging in boundary work of your own, as you carefully negotiate your role as an insider or outsider in your field of research.
9. Debates among researchers in science and technology studies (STS) about the normative and societal relevance of their research tend to assume that being relevant means offering directly implementable advice to policymakers and stakeholders. This notion excludes much of the political potential of STS, which can also consist in presenting critical or utopian perspectives.
10. Funding ‘irrelevant’ research is a luxury that our society should afford. This is a normative stance.
11. The idea that *stellingen* should be humorous derives from the misapprehension that proper academic writing cannot be funny, and that humour needs to be restricted to a few well-defined niches of academic work.