

23 The Recording That Never Wanted to Be Heard and Other Stories of Sonification

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Abstract

This article uses the story of the phonautograph as a way of investigating the development of a cluster of practices called “sonification,” or the transformation of nonsonic data into audible sound. It begins with introducing the phonautograph and reasons as to why its study is relevant under the field of sound studies. It considers the possibility of listening to a phonautograph recording as marking an aesthetic and epistemic shift in the history of sound. It then reviews a range of practices of sonification, all of which move data and experience between the sonic and nonsonic registers. This study advances three nested methodological propositions. It argues for attending to the modularity of sensory technologies, modularity of the relations between senses, subjects, and technologies, modularity of the senses themselves. Finally, the article concludes by returning to the case of the phonautograph in order to advance some speculative propositions regarding the present conjuncture in the history of sound.

Keywords: [phonautograph](#), [sonification](#), [nonsonic data](#), [audible sound](#), [modularity](#)

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