

Aural Monads: Headphones, Music 's Material Qualities and Public Space

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for the STS Conference, Graz, Austria, 11 - 12 May, 2015

Section: Social Change in Science and Technology

Session 14: Music, Materiality and Subjectivities

Headphones have moved from the parlors and living rooms of the early 20th century to the streets, trams and offices of the 21st. Their usage changes the way we perceive and use music and public places at the same time. They have become so fashionable that they are sold at clothing stores and boutiques. Headphones allow for the creation of a private auditory bubble which gives individuals some control over their sonic environments. In symbolically blocking the ears, they also change how individuals interact in public or semi-public places.

Based on ethnographic research and qualitative interviews conducted in the Rhein-Main area in 2011/12 as well as work by DeNora, Bull and Adorno, this paper shows how the specific usage of an everyday technology modifies the boundary between public and private space as well as what it means to listen to music.

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