



Do(n't)

John Wynne

abstract

This 3-part audio piece for the web (see www.ephemeraweb.org) is part of my ongoing research into the design and use of auditory warnings. Although electronic alarms and reminders, ranging from the blaring to the barely audible, pervade contemporary life, most people don't realise that *someone somewhere* has actually designed (sometimes well, sometimes poorly) each and every beep and siren we hear. I have constructed all of the sounds in my work electronically, from scratch – that is, they are not samples of existing alarms. Such is the potential psychoacoustic power of these sounds that my first public work with them was banned by the City Council of Copenhagen for “frightening and confusing” visitors to the Town Hall Square.

Auditory Warnings introduces some of the key concepts in the design, use and effects of auditory warnings.

The second piece is a quote from a confidential report made by an airline pilot following an in-flight incident which highlights the need for auditory warnings in critical environments to be designed not only to convey clear information but also to work effectively in noisy situations and in conjunction with each other.

Orange Alert makes use of an excerpt from ‘The Sound of Sirens’, the work banned in Copenhagen, to animate a text from The Onion, an online magazine, read by Dr Michael Orgel. The text refers to the US Department of Homeland Security’s Advisory System, which lists 5 colour-coded ‘Threat Conditions’ with regard to the risk of terrorist attacks (Low, Guarded, Elevated, High and Severe) and urges citizens to “remain vigilant, prepared and ready to deter terrorist attacks” at all levels (<http://www.dhs.gov>). The piece speaks for itself.

the author

Sound artist and composer John Wynne’s recent work moves in several very different directions. He is engaged in a series of ‘sonic portraits’: the first of these, *James Kamotho Kimani*, was selected for the ISCM World Music Days in Copenhagen, webcast by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, released on CD by Unknown Public in London and broadcast in Berlin, London, Toronto and San Francisco. The second piece, *Upcountry*, premiered in the Purcell Room in London and at the AGON Festival in Milan and has been widely broadcast, most recently on Radiotopia Kunstradio as part of Ars Electronica in Vienna. John has recently returned from a research and recording trip to the Kalahari Desert which will provide materials for new work including a sonic portrait to be released by ElectroShock in Moscow, a gallery installation and an experimental ‘composed documentary’ commissioned by BBC Radio 3. Funded by a research grant from the London Institute, John worked with linguist Dr Andy Chebanne and his field recordings from this trip have been donated to the University of Botswana to aid in research and literacy projects with some of the disappearing ‘click languages’ of the Khoisan peoples. An article about John’s work with his recordings from Africa has been published in the book *Sonic Geography Imagined and Remembered*; a recent conference presentation at the Tate Modern in London can be viewed at <http://www.tate.org.uk/audiovideo/fieldworks/default.htm#27>. Wynne also

designs auditory warnings for installations. His first work with electronic alarms and reminders was for the LYD/Galleri in Copenhagen's Town Hall Square, using 25 speakers hidden under the paving stones: *The Sound of Sirens* was banned by the city council, which claimed that some members of the public were "frightened and confused". The piece was later released by Underwood Audio, curated in a concert at the Goethe Institute in London and broadcast in London, Berlin and Toronto. Further work with auditory warnings includes *Cry Wolf*, which made use of a huge installation using 25 computer-controlled speakers installed in a vertical grid against the 4-storey central wall of Kiasma, Helsinki's Museum of Contemporary Art (see <http://www.kiasma.fi/arkisto/transience>). In 2000, he designed tiny interactive audio devices for the gallery installation *Grasping and Clinging* in collaboration with visual artist Denise Hawrysiw in Bangkok, Thailand. *Response Time*, a large-scale, site-specific octaphonic installation in the urban park at Toronto's Metro Hall followed his residency in the Sound Travels Studio in that city in the summer of 2001 and was described in one review as "an ambient, ghost-like presence". *Do(n't)* was an installation for the European Group for Organisational Studies in Barcelona in 2002. *Untitled (Auditory Alarm Study 6.03)* was installed in the Wapping Hydraulic Power Plant as part of the Society for the Promotion of New Music's Sixtieth Anniversary celebrations in 2003. Work for film and TV includes soundtracks for films selected for the London Film Festival, the BBC Short Film Festival, the Whitechapel Open and the European Media Art Festival, as well as for the documentary *The Trial of Freedom*, which aired on Channel 4 in the UK and on CTV in Canada. Wynne has been visiting artist on four occasions in the Tila/Aika (Time/Space) department of the Helsinki Academy of Fine Art and is doing his PhD at Goldsmiths College, London. He is currently Senior Lecturer in Sound Arts at the London Institute's LCP School of Media and was recently awarded Lottery funding for an experimental radio documentary about African gospel churches in South London. He has a fortnightly radio programme called *Upcountry* on ResonanceFM, London (<http://www.resonancefm.com>).
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