

Transference (51.16 North / 1.04 East) (2007-8)

This work was commissioned by the Sounds New Festival 2008 and was installed in Canterbury's Sidney Cooper Gallery between the 14th and 19th April. Being a relative newcomer to Canterbury, listening to, recording and reflecting on the sounds of the city gave me a chance to make contact with this new environment in ways similar to a photographer assembling a visual montage. I chose nine 'zones' of sound that particularly interested me and then made little studies based on their rhythms, frequencies and motion. Short texts regarding my thoughts on those sounds were distributed through the gallery and the interactive animations contained in this package were projected onto the four walls of the space. Visitors to the gallery could interact with the images and make their own mix of sounds and leave soundclips for me via a microphone or email. Over the course of the week the installation began to document itself and the people who visited it, representing a transference of sound and image from the streets of the city, into the gallery and out to the virtual space of a website.

INSTALLATION NOTES:

Four* computers with mice, running Flash Player 5 or higher.

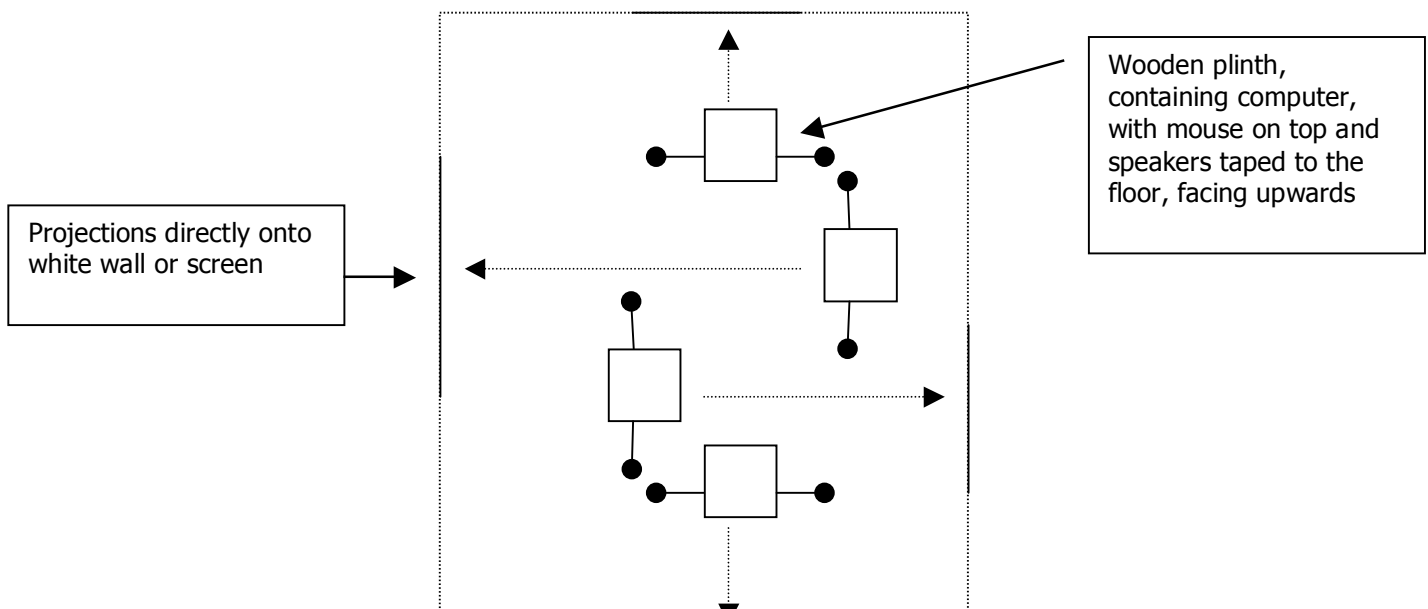
Four* good quality sets of computer speakers.

Four* projectors

Four* white plinths, large enough to cover the computers.

*this installation is flexible and can be adapted to the particular circumstances of the space.

In the Canterbury version, four wooden plinths were constructed with air vents and small holes on the top, through which each computer mouse was threaded. These plinths were then placed in the centre of the space, facing out, with the computer speakers for each plinth taped to the floor, facing upwards towards the ceiling:



The following texts were placed on the walls of the space:

Gate and Doors

'These are the sounds of entrances, openings and movements from one geographic space to another. They also trace movement from one sonic zone to another – from inside to outside, from the High Street into this gallery, for instance. Heard in this way, we often use buildings as large acoustic shelters that block out the sounds of our surroundings. Doors, windows and gates can puncture this illusion, however, and let reality creep back into our ears. Opening and closing a gate in a field reminds us that sound is not always as easily divided as land on a map.'

Trains

'Trains define movement in and out of the city, but recorded from a static point on a platform, train stations are predominately empty spaces, to be filled temporarily by sounds of departure and return. Doors opening on trains offer not just solace from the outside, but also promise a journey from the static to the transitory. This promise of travel is echoed out across the fields surrounding Canterbury and is a constant feature of our sonic experience.'

Traffic

'This cushion of traffic noise that rubs against the edges of the city walls is built from multiple journeys – a diffuse cloud of narratives that disperses and rearranges itself on a twenty-four hour cycle. The sounds of these roads speak of our position in history – our entanglement with nine-to-five trade and commerce, our temporary dependence upon petrol and diesel, and, to get to the point, our need to get to school, to work, to home. Threaded through this, our subconscious habit of stitching these sounds with others is ever present – the sound of the radio, a soundtrack brought from home on an mp3 player, or a voice at the end of a mobile phone.'

Language

'Through the intertwined narrative of languages spoken here we have the opportunity to catch glimpses of cities beyond Kent, beyond the UK, beyond Europe. This is the life blood of the city – the sound of co-operation, disagreement, of people thrown into dialogue. Heard from a distance, these fragments of conversation form an amorphous web of sound that runs down the High Street and disperses into the surrounding area.'

Bells

'Bell sounds and the history of Canterbury are so obviously intertwined that these frequencies have become an unmistakable part of the sonic fabric of the area. The rhythms of these bells are refracted, bounced across walls and thrown out over the rooftops and fields, a phenomenon uniquely affected by your position within and proximity to the architecture of the city.'

Outside the City Walls

'Outside the city walls, and beyond the traffic noise, there are places in the surrounding area of Canterbury that have an internal stillness, a soundscape that is relatively untouched by industry. These spaces provide a counterpoint to the sound of transit that encircles even small cities such as ours, and give us the opportunity to think about the sounds that were here before the city, a chance to measure our 'progress'.'

Pedestrian Crossings

'There is rich rhythmic complexity in the ways pedestrian crossings work. They can function like sonic hinges at the meeting points of two or more streams of transit, signalling the beginning of one traffic flow and the end of another. They also provoke reactions – people can start moving again after temporary stillness, car brakes produce high tones that seem to answer the signals of the traffic lights, and humans and machines meet at right angles for a few seconds.'

Listening through the City

'Listening whilst moving through the city gives us an opportunity to hear familiar sounds from multiple perspectives, catching snatches of lyrics from a busker or hearing a guitar being tested in a second hand shop blending with the sounds of generators and fire alarms. The order of these events, and their placement in our unique definition of left and right an up and down, give us the opportunity to navigate a soundscape that is constantly rotating, evolving and shifting, reinforcing a sense that simply by listening in different way, we can make our own sonic narrative.'

Thanks for playing - MW