

In Oslo's glittering new Gardermoen airport, **Anna Karin Rynander's** sound sculpture installations merge with the needs of travellers, offering an aural washdown for the tired and weary. These 'Sound-Showers' also suggest a routeway into reimagining sustainable transport for both new media art and soundscaping communities.

Sound for airports: washdown time in the departure lounge

For the first-time arrivée, Oslo's Gardermoen airport is an overwhelming experience. Initial surprise as you peer out of the plane's windows at the long gantry of lit-up glass-cased buildings, is overtaken by astonishment once you find yourself inside. The swish escalators, and monumental concrete pillars; the central atrium with its high, high ceiling, and the hi-tech information screens, all give off an impression of Nordic public building modernism, updated for the twenty-first century. What is particularly noticeable though, (and such a contrast to the ramshackle updatings of British airports) is the ubiquitous use of wood; from the massive girders, and office wall cladding, to the floor. The airport has been one of Europe's largest building projects of the nineties, yet it remains hardly known outside Scandinavia.

To complement an entirely new building complex, the airport instigated a public art programme. Of the various differing pieces from sculpture, to the multi-coloured fabric piece reaching up into the central concourse's roof, the most commented upon pieces are the new media installations, known as 'Sound-Showers'.

Sited unobtrusively round different parts of the airport, the Sound-Showers sit waiting for people to enter their 'focus centres'. Thereupon the person triggers sensors which start up the installation, and as they stand there, the wash-down from quiet, slightly eery, whispering voices begins. Stand under the shower, and soft, intimate voices begin to massage you: "The future is sound", followed disquietingly by "The machine is my friend" and a few moments later a phonetic "uh uh uh uh...", ripples inside the head. Inside, the showers are a slightly disconcerting experience; hearing the voices as if from inside your cranium.

These very intimate voices range from whispered voices to babies, in both English and Norwegian. The intimacy contrasts poignantly with the authority



of the terminal's flight departure and arrivals announcer. Any of the 2 million people who use the airport annually could take a Sound-Shower, and although it's a very direct experience for the public, it does not disturb the rest of the airport. The Sound-Showers' existence in the downtime space of a building is a surprise: another world inside the sound of airports.

Sound-Showers are the creation of the Swedish born sound-artist, Anna Karin Rynander, who in the last ten years, has engaged in a variety of intriguing sound based artworks which have been explicitly related to the different forms of travel, mainly in Norway, where she spent her student days.

These works, part way between installation, new media and public art, also contribute to the well being of the passing traveller and are part of the small, though expanding, activity of artists testing public spaces, and specifically transit spaces, as an arena for



experimentation. Together they convey one of the principle concerns of the new media artist; exploring the new spatialities engendered by the technology. Explorations, no doubt, inspired by many an art college new-media course. At Gardermoen, Rynander's Sound-Showers feel like a foretaste of how new media might be integrated into a possible future transport infrastructure. An airport, however attractive its design, is perhaps not an obvious place to go looking for the beginnings of an aesthetic that fuses new media with acoustic ecology: a hybridising which could encourage a different sensibility towards travelling, indeed, be supportive of sustainable and ecologically-aware travel. But Sound-Showers are in no way restricted to use only in airport lounges, they could form a representative part of a new media repertoire underscoring a futuristic sustainable transport agenda; one which not only seeks to change travelling patterns, but is also sensitive to, and aiming to transform, the present day aural environment.

For if the present day outdoors acoustic environment is considered, it has been the sound transformations which have occurred around travel which are, by definition, the most far reaching. Today, the most ubiquitous outside sound is that of car wheels on tarmac. This is quickly followed by other vehicles, and next by the soundworlds which emanate from trains and airplanes. Indeed the automobile engine has been blamed