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Could a functional sound be beautiful?

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Considering design and ecological perspectives, a general definition of sound design was proposed: a sound design approach is implemented to create new sounds in order to make intentions audible in a given context of use (Susini et al., 2014). Intentions are of different types: the first intention is to reach efficiently a goal thanks to the sound (functionality), the second one is to produce an harmonious reaction in the environment combining satisfaction of the user (pleasantness), coherence with the product (identity), and, as far as possible, embellishment of the environment (ecology). Successful sound design should be the articulation of the different intentions in order to produce new interactions through sound. However, behind the formal aspects of a sound, there is always intention associated to its function. For example, an alarm sound has a strong spectro-temporal mark corresponding to its warning function that tend to limit the possibility to shape the sound in coherence with the environment. This is the tricky part of the process taken in charge by the sound designer; to be able to combine functional constraints concurrent to aesthetic aspects. The presentation will discuss this articulation between usability and beauty in the sound design practice.