

Notes on the Sound Installation created by Felicity Spear for the exhibition, Out There: in light of remote possibilities 2007, Monash University. Also exhibited in Shared Sky at the National Gallery of Victoria, and Beyond Visibility: light and dust, at University of Technology Gallery Sydney, 2009.

The idea behind this work was to create an immersive atmosphere of sound in the gallery space. Through a non-visual sense, the ambient sound data had an integral relationship to the final installation. It created an extra layer or dimension to the other works, all of which refer to our shifting and enculturated engagement with the night sky, and the mapping of the universe at different distances from earth using multi-wavelength astronomy. The sounds were sourced from radio-astronomy data. I was given access to these by Paul Francis from Mt. Stromlo Observatory and the Australian National University, and Michael Kramer from the Jodrell Bank Observatory in the U.K. [1]

I wanted this sound piece to have a raw and authentic sense to it rather than sound like a musical composition. Of course it is still a composition of sounds. However I was more interested in how these sounds are heard at random or by chance, detected through radio astronomy from radiation emissions within the electromagnetic spectrum. They are emitted at a wide range of frequencies (related to the temperature of the stellar object), in many different regions in deep space. With assistance from a sound technician I developed a fifteen minute loop from sounds that I selected from the star radio-frequency samples available, including a number of pulsars. These sounds included a foundational sound that continued through the whole piece. Both Aldebaran and the Red Giant have a deep rumble/hum like the sound one hears from a distant aircraft or when travelling in one. The Vela Supernova has a hollow, bell sound, and Helix has a bell like gong tone that's consistent; Cat's Eye has a metallic machine/gong pitch, Comet is gritty, contrasty and high whistling and Spica is rain like, high pitched and raspy. The Pulsars have a staccato, tapping sound. Other emissions sound like a buzzing blowfly, screeches or sustained organ notes. The raw data from these emissions, recorded in both ground and space based observatories, has been manipulated to enable the viewer/listener to experience the relationships or disconnects, as the case may be, between the visible and invisible, reality and fantasy, data and the senses.

[1] In a previous exhibition titled A Remote Possibility at [Stephen McLaughlan Gallery](#) in 2006, I used a sound clip of Paul Francis's titled *Journey to the Centre of the Quasar* in which he describes a journey to the violent heart of the galaxy. 'We start off flying through the outskirts of a galaxy (hissing noise), passing various stars (different loud hisses), before penetrating the vast nebula surrounding the black hole that lurks in the middle. We penetrate different parts of this nebula, moving steadily closer and closer to the black hole, before hearing the roar of the gas swirling close to the event horizon.' <http://www.mso.anu.edu.au/~pfrancis/Music/showcase.html> 22/04/2007.

Night Journeys

These works together reference the art and science of the journey. Fundamental to way-finding and determining our location is our reliance on the processes of star-finding and more recently satellite technology. This enables navigation and mapping, movement and communication. The installation emphasizes the abstracted nature and resonance between various navigational models, the activity of light, and networks and data, (sometimes beyond visibility and the full range of the senses), which have developed over time and in different cultures. A sound installation created with sound producer David Rogers, was part of this exhibition. This included recordings I had made of waves against the hull of a moving yacht blended with electronic sounds in random short bites superimposed over longer pulses.