

ELECTRA

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Sound Escapes

25 July – 15 August 2009

Preview Friday 24 July 6.30 – 8.30pm

Peter Cusack, Simon Elvins, Fédération Internationale des Chasseurs de Sons, Nikolaus Gansterer, Stephen Gill, Dan Holdsworth, Jacob Kirkegaard, Camille Norment, Dawn Scarfe, Thomson & Craighead

Curated by Angus Carlyle and Irene Revell; produced by Electra

SPACE, 129 – 131 Mare Street, London E8 3RH

www.spacestudios.org

Sound Escapes examines the very nature of sound. Why is one person's disturbing noise another's intriguing sonic landscape? In what ways are our emotions affected by sound? Are plants affected by music? Can you hear a photograph? Do ears make their own sounds? Does the microphone never lie? These are just some questions explored by the works on show.

The exhibition marks the culmination of an extensive interdisciplinary research project that has coupled artists with acousticians, engineers, and social scientists across the UK to explore how we can move beyond negative noise towards the idea of positive soundscapes. Posters illustrating the findings of this research – scans of the brain, measurements of the heart and the lungs, maps of city sound-walks and representations of the choices people make when thinking and talking about sound - are also hung on the gallery walls.

Thomson & Craighead's new work *A universal machine for testing everything* invites visitors to the gallery to make outgoing calls using a telephone line connected to a commercially available lie detector. Alongside the telephone and pinned to the wall are test reports documenting previous calls the artists made to a series of speaking clocks while traveling in the UK and abroad. The work is a playful engagement with the notion of speech intelligibility but also a statement of the ultimate futility of any mathematical algorithm to read the emotional affect of sound. **Nikolaus Gansterer's** piece, *The Eden Experiment*, also plays with the inherent subjectivity of the listening experience, in setting out the laboratory conditions in which two mouse ear cress plants are subjected to Bach and 'heavy metal' respectively during the course of the exhibition, all other parameters of the plants' treatment being equal. By contrast, **Dan Holdsworth's** *No Echo* is a series of large-scale photographic works of anechoic chambers, and presents an almost voyeuristic glimpse of these eerily arcane environments.

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Peter Cusack's *Soundscape Sequencer*, the main artistic commission from the research project itself, allows visitors to mix surround sound into their own sonic panorama based on field recordings from different cities around the world. Using noise pollution statistics from DEFRA, **Simon Elvins'** *Silent London* shows a contoured landscape of the quietest parts of the city.

Camille Norment's work *Driveby* gives the visitor a phantom impression of a car driving past outside the gallery, through a physical experience transmitted at low frequencies from a gallery window, with a heavy bass giving the impression of an exaggerated onboard speaker system. In an examination of the listening process itself, **Jacob Kirkegaard's** work *Labyrinthitis* is a ceiling mounted installation of a series of 16 helicoidally spaced speakers, mimicking the shape of the inner ear. These speakers emit tones which trigger 'otoacoustic emissions' – a little known phenomenon where the ear itself resonates sound. If subjected to the right combination of frequencies the inner ear vibrates and emits sound. The tones making up *Labyrinthitis* are recorded otoacoustic emissions from Kirkegaard's own ears, which he has composed into a musical piece. Complementing Kirkegaard's installation is a new selection of **Stephen Gill's** *Audio Portraits* which draw out the human act of listening in photographic form.

Other pieces in the exhibition include **Dawn Scarfe's** *listening glasses* which recreates mysteriously shaped Helmholtz resonators in glass (an example of Helmholtz resonance is the sound created when blowing across the top of an empty bottle), which visitors are invited to use in and around the gallery.

Members of the **Fédération Internationale des Chasseurs de Sons** have been tracking down sounds for over half a century and the flag of this association of amateur recordists flies in the gallery courtyard as an emblem for those for whom sound is always a positive force.

A new publication will accompany the exhibition, available free of charge in the gallery. The publication will document in more detail the six strands in the research project itself, as well as the works in the exhibition.

Note to editors

Sound Escapes is an exhibition that marks the end of the Positive Soundscapes Project funded by The Engineering And Physical Science Research Council (EPSRC). Alongside a public interpretation of the central research strands of the project, the exhibition also includes new and existing artwork by artists who, whilst not involved in the research project directly, work with soundscapes across a wide range of practices and whose work is in conversation with the scientific and sociological questions posed in the research.

The research itself breaks down into six interrelated but distinct strands, each with their own disciplinary area and research methodology:

1. Psychoacoustics – fMRI scanning of the brain's responses to auditory stimuli (University of Manchester and University of Nottingham).
2. Physiological Acoustics – Measuring changes to heart, respiratory rate and galvanic skin response during exposure to auditory stimuli (Manchester Metropolitan University).
3. Sociology – Soundwalking and focus group research to explode attitudes to sounds in two cities (University of Salford)
4. Perceptual Acoustics – Using laboratory listening to rate and rank peoples' preferences for sound quality (University of Warwick).
5. Artistic Research – Using a variety of creative approaches to make the soundscape visible, legible and (most importantly) audible (University of the Arts London)
6. Environmental Acoustics – Extending speech intelligibility research as a tool for sound-mapping (University of Salford and University of Manchester)

More information can be found at www.positivesoundscapes.org

About Electra

Electra is a UK based contemporary art agency that specialises in curating, commissioning and producing ambitious cross-disciplinary projects by artists working across sound, moving image, performance and the visual arts. Projects produced and curated by Electra to date include group exhibition *27 Senses* (2009, Norway); series of site-specific commissions *Offer & Exchange* (2008 – 2009, London); performance programme *Art Now Live* (2007, Tate Britain); *The Wire* 25 season of performances and events to mark *The Wire Magazine's* 25th anniversary (2007, London); group exhibition *Her Noise* (2005, South London Gallery; touring 2006 - present); commissioned performance and film production *Perfect Partner* by Kim Gordon, Tony Oursler and Phil Morrison (2005, The Barbican Centre and 6 venues across the UK and Europe); Christian Marclay's *Sounds Of Christmas* (2004, Tate Modern). Electra is funded by Arts Council England. www.electra-productions.com

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