Suspension of Disbelief

The representation of poetic faith through time-based media

Matthew Warren

MFA, Simon Fraser University, BC, Canada

Grad Dip. Art Craft and Design, University of Tasmania

BFA, University of Tasmania

Statement of originality

I declare that this thesis presents my own original work and contains no
material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any university
or other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it incorporates
no material previously published by another person except where
acknowledged in the text.

Matthew Warren
October 2009

Statement on Authority of Access

This thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the *Copyright Act* 1968.

Matthew Warren

October 2009

Abstract

Samuel Taylor Coleridge described a suspension of disbelief as "poetic faith". In a contemporary environment, is it possible to have an experience of childlike or innocent wonder? Are we so cynical, so sceptical or so 'knowing', that a sublime experience, a sense of poetic faith at the beginning of the 21st century is impossible? A secular, materialistic existence may well point to the answer being no.

However, even within such an existence, it is possible to realise that although one's knowledge base may increase with age, there is still much 'out there' that is not understood; that within the realms of the unknown, there are potentially profound experiences waiting to be had. There is a multitude of energies and entities surrounding us, invisible to the eye and silent to the ear. The revealing of such entities may lead one to experience a suspension of disbelief, a poetic faith that has little to do with organised religion, but rather, a form of spiritual understanding sustained by a sense of the incorporeal.

The outcome of this research project is a submission made up of a body of work and supporting exegesis in which I have investigated how one may best represent the concept of poetic faith using time-based media. Through visual and aural representations, this research explores the gap between the secular and the spiritual, without specific reference to any dogma. These time-based media works and experiential installations have been developed as spaces between these two 'locations'. My studio-based investigation has defined three broad categories of conceptualisation that in combination best represent and explore these 'spaces'. These are classified under the headings of "ambient environments","video abstractions" and "exposure of the hidden".

The paper describes my chosen media, my works, my process and provides references to the work of other artists, writers and theorists that contextualise my research. Utilising the above headings I draw a line from Coleridge's statement of poetic faith, through the ambient aural works of Mick Harris and Brian Eno, Guglielmo Marconi's notion of never-ending soundwaves, to the crackling buzz of works by Christina Kubisch and Joyce Hinterding, and to Jung's theories on the subject of faith. These references provide a visual and theoretical context for the works that make up this submission.

To the memory of my friend Stuart Brockmann who encouraged me much more than he knew.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following for encouragement, support and contribution throughout this research project;

Sean Bacon, Hilary Binder, Monica and Brian Coates, Jo Cook, Scot Cotterell, Noel Frankham, David Haines, Tom Hall, Andrew Harper, Mick Harris, my supervisors Leigh Hobba and Jonathan Holmes, Stephen Hurrell, Sean Kelly, Maria Kunda, Colin Langridge, Jay and Emolin Lind, Mish Meiers, Brigita Ozolins, Carl Pace, Petra Podlahova, Deborah Pollard, Naomi Potter, Chris Rankin, Felix Ratcliff, John and Ruth Rees, Angela Reeve, Neil Rowe, Raef Sawford, Pip Stafford, Lena Stuart, Jean-Yves Thériault, David Toop, Tricky Walsh, Graeme Warren, Jayne Warren, Melanie Warren, Nick Warren and all those I interviewed for the works *Whitepinkblack Noise*, *In Haunted Attics* and *Until We Sleep*.

A special thank you to Sally Rees for assistance throughout all facets of this project, moral support, patience and continual inspiration.

Contents

Introduction and central argument.

> In this idea originated the plan of the 'Lyrical Ballads'; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.[1]

In a post-modern environment, is it possible to have this 'poetic faith', an experience of childlike or innocent wonder? Are we so cynical, so sceptical or so 'knowing', that a sublime experience at the beginning of the 21st century is impossible?

I am interested in exploring these questions through experiential time-based media installation, using materials from the contemporary world to create an environment that may prompt a sense of non-dogmatic spiritual experience and timelessness.

With this submission and my practice generally in the last few years, I consider my contribution to a field of ethereal and ambient time-based works lies in the creation of environments where the aforementioned states are invoked. Hopefully, within that environment, comes a desire to wonder; to explore the outer reaches of rationality; to ask questions. With my works, I hope to take the viewer and the listener to a place where they might feel at one with the notion of poetic faith.

Within a greater context of works that explore esoteric science-based imagery and sound; video and sound field recordings of the actual; sound and imagery that exposes the hidden and interview-based exploration, my work combines elements from all these, aesthetics associated with them and

---

[1] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria. Vol 2.* Chapter XIV. Wiley and Putnum. NY, USA 1847. Pg. 442.

abstracted representations of everyday obscurities to create a space for contemplation.[2]

Influenced by my cultural and political leanings, I began to be suspicious of organised religion in my late teens and early 20s leading to a growing cynicism. My interest in art and art-making (in many and varied media) has continued and my desire to temper this cynicism has increased. Although a degree of scepticism has remained, I have become interested in possibilities. It is through my art practice and research that I have (and will continue to attempt to) become open-minded, and believe that if I remain so, and leave sufficient space in my work for interpretation, that I may create something that transcends my own point of view and engages with an audience on their own terms. Susan Sontag has argued:

> Through it [art], the artist becomes purified – of himself and, eventually, of his art. The artist (if not art itself) is still engaged in a progress toward the "the good". But formerly, the artist's good was master and fulfilment in his art. Now it's suggested that the highest good for the artist is to reach that point where those goals of excellence become insignificant to him, emotionally and ethically, and he is more satisfied by being silent than by finding a voice in art.[3]

It may be a little too florid to exclaim that this research has been a 'spiritual journey' and I believe a certain degree of scepticism to be useful when manoeuvring through issues of spirituality or other esoteric territory, but I also feel that more and more this scepticism must be balanced by a sense of open questioning, musing or wondering.

As children we are more susceptible and open to suggestion, to esoteric ideas and to concepts of faith without requiring solid proof. As a child, I

---

[2]   For example, the flickering light projecting through a crack in the wall, the little moments of audible voices on a detuned radio or video static on a 'dead air' TV broadcast.

[3]   Sontag, Susan *The Aesthetics of Silence* (1967 essay) from "Styles of Radical Will" Dell Publishing Co. Inc. NY. USA 1978. Pg. 6

found it just as easy to believe that UFOs were alien spacecraft as to believe in the Christian idea of a singular God. As one grows older, knowledge, facts and truths are absorbed and with these, a growing scepticism. Much is gained, but perhaps much more is lost.

In a short online essay designed as an introduction to his book, *The Secular Age*, the author Charles Taylor speaks about the difference between the rational and faithful by way of the identification of a buffered self and a porous self. Are we living in a less 'enchanted' world simply because we are more buffered, more learned, sceptical, secular?

> Perhaps the clearest sign of the transformation in our world [Taylor writes] is that today many people look back to the world of the porous self with nostalgia, as though the creation of a thick emotional boundary between us and the cosmos were now lived as a loss. The aim is to try to recover some measure of this lost feeling. So people go to movies about the uncanny in order to experience a frisson. Our peasant ancestors would have thought us insane. You can't get a frisson from what is really in fact terrifying you.

And he goes on to say:

> The second facet is that the buffered self can form the ambition of disengaging from whatever is beyond the boundary, and of giving its own autonomous order to its life. The absence of fear can be not just enjoyed, but becomes an opportunity for self-control or self-direction.[4]

There is a lot out there we do not understand; a lot of energy and entities surrounding us that are invisible to the eye and silent to the ears. And yet a traditional 'faith' has no attraction for me. Perhaps it comes back to my mistrust of organised religion; a dissatisfaction with their offering of an absolute dogma that seems to be closed rather than open.

---

[4]   Taylor, Charles *A Secular Age: Buffered and Porous selves*
      http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame/2008/09/02/buffered-and-porous-selves/
      Accessed: January, 06, 2009.

The other end of the spectrum of human experience appears to be an indulgence in material superficiality - a blandly secular existence - that is equally unattractive.

It is not my intention for this research project to be a critique of either organised religion or of materiality. I hope to transgress any perceived arrogance of the former or flippancy of the latter, by presenting works that allow the audience to contemplate an experience outside their own corporeality. Is there more than meets the eye or the ear? Is it possible to have a profound experience through time-based art?

My research project explores this gap between the secular and the spiritual, without specific reference to any dogma. I've used time-based media experiential installations to develop a space between these two positions, with the intent of evoking a suspension of disbelief for the viewer. Ultimately these environments where the space between rationality and faith is extended might become not only an antidote to my own scepticism, but also to the overt scepticism and sometimes crippling cynicism that is seemingly inherent in a post-modern world.[5]

My studio-based research has defined three broad categories of conceptualisation that in combination, best represent and explore this 'space'. These can be classified under the headings of *ambient environments*, *video abstraction* and *exposure of the hidden*.

This paper describes my chosen media, my works, my process and provides references to the work of other artists, writers and theorists that contextualise my research. Utilising the above headings I draw a line from Coleridge's statement of poetic faith, through the ambient aural works of

---

[5]   My use here of the term 'post-modern' refers specifically to contemporary times that seem to exemplify a distrust of ideology and a scepticism of anything 'un-proven'.

12

Mick Harris and Brian Eno, Guglielmo Marconi's notion of never-ending soundwaves, to the crackling buzz of works by Christina Kubisch and Joyce Hinterding, and Jung's theories about faith. These references provide an aesthetic and theoretical context for my own works in this submission.

Chapter 1: The Medium is the Message[6]

In this chapter I will firstly describe my chosen media, what inspired the choices, the aesthetic qualities I enjoy and employ with the media I choose to use and how my experience and use of the media have evolved over time. Some key works created before I began this research project in 2006 will be discussed and this section will consider the conceptual concerns informing the works, although these concerns will be further developed in the following chapters. The chapter also considers the work's cultural context and the visual artists, filmmakers, musicians and writers that have informed and influenced my research will be introduced. These contextual descriptions will also be elaborated on throughout later chapters.

Moving Light

I first taught myself to edit using two domestic VCRs in 1990. I began making video works after the realisation (as a result of viewing *Un Chien Andalou*[7]) that film has more than direct narrative possibilities. I understood it as a medium that could carry the development of abstract images and ideas.

Over the years my video and sound work has run the gamut of linear narratives, self-portraiture and the recording and representation of performance. Very occasionally I used video as a tool to create abstraction. Rather than representing something 'real' I would use video as a source for moving light, a conduit for creating a mood. In 1995 whilst my conceptual concerns were based around the representation of the machinations of memory, I created a video and sound installation called *Our Forgotten Memories*. This work was presented in a dark room and contained a small rectangular window frame at about head height, atop two large rectangular

---

[6]   Attributed to Marshall McLulan in the 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.

[7]   Surrealist short film created by Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali 1926

speakers. These speakers emitted a low rumbling ambient drone, punctuated occasionally by the sound of a car passing on a distant road. At these times, small shafts of light would move by, seemingly outside the window frame. This effect was produced by placing a small video monitor behind the glass of the window. Rather than showing video of a car driving past on a lonely road, this moving light source seemed less didactic and potentially more open to interpretation. In fact I was intrigued to overhear someone at the opening of the show it was exhibited in say to their friend; "Oh, it's a bit like the *X-Files* isn't it?" This was a response I was not expecting, but willingly accepted as it showed me that my use of video in this way could reach people. An audience is able to find their own references within my work, despite of or perhaps because of its abstraction.

Approximately nine years later in 2004 I created another work that used video in an abstracted way. Viewing out of the corner of my eye the moonlight as a rippled reflection in a river flowing into the sea at Turner's Beach in the north of Tasmania prompted the work *The Angels are Coming*. For a moment, thinking that I saw something else, I grabbed my video camera and shot the reflection, panning and tilting so the reflection danced moth-like within the blackness of the frame. I later overlayed numerous shots of the same moving reflection creating a troupe of entering and existing 'angels', each one with their own musical tone creating a harmonic cluster.

The work was eventually shown as a projection in a darkened space, with the angels bouncing off the wall and beams. It was also shown, rear-projected inside three street-facing glass walls, almost as if the angels were entering and exiting a glass trap.
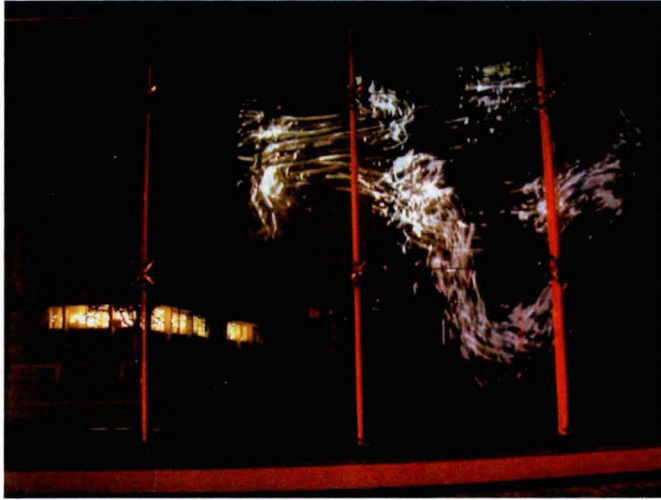
The Angels are Coming. Frankston Arts Centre,Victoria. 2005
Image: Amanda Slack-Smith

This work resonated with people in a way that was experiential, intuitive and non-didactic. The work was open to interpretation. The combination of its sound, its light and the title was enough to allow an audience to meditate on the potential meaning and experience of a new and unusual place.

I began to be more interested in this 'place', this meta-space that is afforded by the use of more abstracted imagery and sound. Images and sounds that are familiar enough to be not overtly alienating and yet abstracted enough to be intriguing and to draw one in to investigate further.

I was especially encouraged to travel further down this path by visiting the excellent group exhibition *White Noise* at ACMI in Melbourne in 2005. I will speak more about a specific work in this exhibition later in the paper when talking about context for my research. *White Noise* featured a series of time-based media installations that contained abstracted video imagery that hinted at possibilities, but never gave definitive answers. What I appreciated about the work in this show was the permission it gave to the audience to interpret, to intuit and to wonder. Although some works were literally interactive (in the traditional meaning of the word), the more satisfying interaction came from the fact that the viewers were not simply passive consumers of information. There was an experiential engagement, rather

than a passive viewing or listening; a willingness to be open, to wonder and to contemplate.

An all-encompassing sound

Sound has always been an important part of my practice. My childhood memories are full of long periods of listening intently to music on headphones with the signals transporting me into another place. Much of what I listened to was popular music, not art-music, avant-garde, or experimental work, but now it is both music and sound across the full spectrum of possibilities as an art medium that 'moves' me the most. Perhaps it is the intangibility of how it is projected and how one receives it, is to me what makes its effect so 'magical'.

A key aural moment happened some time around 1983, when a piece of film sound design entered my head and stayed there. This has in many ways informed my 'sound world' ever since. The film was *The Elephant Man,* a kind of biopic about Joseph Merrick[8] set in the industrial age of Victorian London and directed by David Lynch.[9] The incessant industrial drone, repetitive thuds of machinery and hissing of steam permeates the whole soundtrack for pretty much the entire duration of the film.

Long after the film had finished I continued to hear that soundscape in my inner ear and although it disturbed me as if an aural hallucination, it seemed to fit with the darkness of the night. It could be that the soundscape became important to me because something like it was subtly around me all the time, since my childhood home was in the (then) industrial town of Burnie. Maybe it took a heightened, constructed version of such a soundscape for me to notice and be moved by it.

---

[8]   Called 'John' Merrick in the film.

[9]   This was his second feature made in 1980. Lynch continues to be one of my biggest influences.

Although not as blatant or incessant as in *The Elephant Man*, all of Lynch's films contain that dark drone to some extent, and always contain immaculate sound design, mainly created with Alan Splet.[10]

Whilst an undergrad in 1991, I saw Lynch's first feature film *Eraserhead*.[11] I realised that the soundscape in *The Elephant Man* was not the first time Lynch had used that particular sound world. In fact the industrial soundscape in *Eraserhead* could be seen to be an invisible character itself, or at the very least a representation of the main character Henry's inner turmoil and psychic machinations.

Soon after seeing this film I discovered a way to approximate this factory rumble, the industrial drone that so captured me. I was at the time editing on UMATIC variable shuttle machines. One could run the tape slowly when cuing up and still hear the sound recording on the tape. The sound of wind, breathing, or just room tone/ambience slowed down, created the dark ambience that I required at the time. Now digitally it is very easy to achieve this result by pitch shifting and tempo adjustment.

Over the years I have become interested in more abstract music - work that is less conservative and less concerned with conventions of specific genres or subcultures. My interest in hard rock guitars and drums gave way to music containing interesting texture, combinations of sounds and abstract melodies. By the late 1980s and early 1990s I had begun listening to industrial, ambient, psychedelic and the tightly crafted majestic pop of Brian Wilson. All of which has informed my installation-based art practice.

---

[10]   San Francisco based sound designer, worked on all of Lynch's films up to 1990's *Wild At Heart* at which point, Lynch began designing his own sound in collaboration with various engineers. Splet worked on many commercially successful films, notably *Dead Poet's Society* (Dir. Peter Weir 1988) before passing away from cancer in 1995.

[11]   The film was completed and released in 1977.

Entering the world

For me, experiencing a time-based installation can be like entering another world. It is like situating yourself in an active cinematic moment except that you are a participant rather than a passive viewer. The combination of sound, light, video and time/duration is an alchemy that can produce an emotional response or a mood in the viewer, different to what they were experiencing prior to entering. With all my work, but particularly with my installations, I aim to present a place of meditation and musing; a place suitable for ritual; an environment that encourages a suspension of disbelief – a place where the viewer can contemplate the intangible.

Chapter 2: Things around us – context

In this chapter I will speak of a selection of artists and composers/musicians that I feel share similarities with my own ideas and areas of research. Where applicable I will reference theoretical writers and texts that elaborate the practices and processes of these artists. I have organised this chapter into four sections. The first three sections outline some specific areas of interest within the cultural context I see my work existing. The sections and the artists therein will speak of both conceptual and aesthetic qualities that relate to my practice. In relation to sound artists and composers, works referenced are available for listening on an accompanying CD. Some of these artists and writers will be referenced again in the following chapter about my own works. The final section outlines a specific exhibition with a curatorial premise related to my own research.

Gathering from the Ether - Exposing the Hidden

A conceptual element that interests me in relation to creating an environment for musing is the revealing of the hidden. I feel by exposing the elusive elements that are potentially around us all the time, we are presented with possibilities, and with possibilities comes enchantment. The artists I will refer to in this section do this by technological means, often taking a scientific approach to gather the parts that make up the sound or image. I differ in that I make reference to the aesthetics loosely associated with this more scientific approach, using them as a palette to draw from, a texture that although abstracted is somehow familiar.
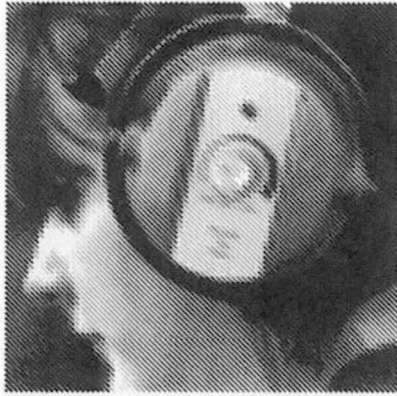
E-legend Christina Kubisch. Limited Edition CD. Ikon Gallery .2006[12]

Whilst writing parts of this paper, I was listening to the CD of a German sound artist. Christina Kubisch's *E-legend* is a recording of her aural map of Birmingham, England. The drones, electrical hums, beeps and crackles were surprisingly calming. Is it because these sounds (though in-audible without the artist's specially designed technology) or the electrical entities that make these sounds are around us all the time? Or is it that we are drawn to the elemental, the white noise, the static, the electrical hum? Is it comforting once it is harnessed in a finite environment? Using her electromagnetic headphones, Kubisch creates a map, a legend of the city, signposted by the sounds, previously hidden to the human ear.

At Birmingham's IKON gallery reception, in exchange for a driver's license or passport, I was given a set of large headphones and a simple map of the city. Once the headphones were on, whilst not entirely cutting out 'the real world', it was sufficiently muted to allow this new city soundscape to be the main focus. One was encouraged to walk around the city and go to specific aural landmarks, the train station timetable screen, a multi-ATM vestibule, neon signs. It was designed primarily for the people of Birmingham and as a local it would likely allow you to experience the city anew. As a visitor, it shaped my understanding and experience of the city. The work created a meta-space, a phantom sound stratum where a participant could walk and hear another world that others could not, even though they were surrounded

---

[12]   An excerpt from this release can be heard on the accompanying CD.

by it. It made one realise that there are more layers to existence than we initially see or hear and gave a new heightened awareness of one's environment.

This realisation in turn may conjure up philosophical, existential and spiritual questions. This work temporarily opens a doorway to a hidden reality, showing you something, once intangible. So although you cannot live there all the time, you now know it's always there around us, perpetually buzzing.

Kubisch writes:

> The magnetic headphones with their built-in coils respond to electrical fields in the environment. At first I tried to filter the soft hum of the electrical wires out of the headphones. Then, in 2003, the constant increase and spread of "unwanted" electrically-produced sounds triggered a new cycle of works: Electrical Walks. With special, sensitive headphones, the acoustic perceptibility of aboveground and underground electrical currents is thereby not suppressed, but rather amplified.
>
> The palette of these noises, their timbre and volume vary from site to site and from country to country. They have one thing in common: they are ubiquitous, even where one would not expect them. Light systems, transformers, anti-theft security devices, surveillance cameras, cell phones, computers, elevators, streetcar cables, antennae, navigation systems, automated teller machines, neon advertising, electric devices, etc. create electrical fields that are as if hidden under cloaks of invisibility, but of incredible presence.[13]

There are similarities with the work of Australian artists David Haines and Joyce Hinterding, in that the work is 'occult' in nature. In his catalogue essay for the exhibition *Remembrance and the Moving Image*, curator Ross Gibson opens with this when speaking of Haines and Hinterding's work:

> In contemporary English usage, the word 'occult' has a few different meanings. In its most literal, technical sense, it refers to anything

---

[13]   http://www.christinakubisch.com/english/klangundlicht_frs.htm
   Accessed: January 06, 2009

22

that is occluded, covered up or kept out of clear sight. Its more sinister meaning suggests phenomena from the malevolent reaches of the spirit world.

Over the past decade or more, David Haines and Joyce Hinterding have been deliberately and quite joyously embracing all the word's connotations. In their paradoxically brooding and buoyant installations, they have 'liberated' many occult images, sounds, ideas and emotions. Haines, for example, has an enduring fascination with the history of the horror movie, while he is also a specialist in the more arcane end of audio research and music production, and scientific uses of the moving image. Hinterding has become an expert in very low frequency sound signals, magnetic and audio-visual manifestations of the 'wild' electrical energy that surges through the earth and its atmosphere.

In the early 1990s Hinterding began to conduct field experiments that were also artworks. She become well known in Australia for her downright spooky installations that hissed, sparked and boomed in direct response to the electromagnetic energy that viewers carried in their own bodies. Hinterding showed how the world is a live entity that is always responding to people's presence and actions. The fact that these responses were occult or hard to discern in normal circumstances made them no less real and all the more fascinating.[14]

Haines and Hinterding, both separately and in collaboration present a hidden reality with their works, worlds that are around us all the time, but are invisible or silent to us in this realm, this corporeality. That is not to say their work is religious or spiritual, or is it? Does this work open up our eyes and ears to another place? Does it remove that need for a leap of faith? My interest in their work coincides with my interest in the transcendent in art. That is to say, like Kubisch, Haines and Hinterding I present the viewer and the listener with something hidden, something profound, something sublime. But what is wonderful about this type of work is that it does not give answers, but instead leaves space for interpretation. It may even open up more questions, yet somehow we reach an understanding, based on intuitive responses.

---

[14]   Gibson, Ross "Remembrance and the Moving Image" Australian Centre for the   Moving Image. 2003. Catalogue entry for *Undertow* by Haines, Hinterding and Scott Horscroft. Pg. 75
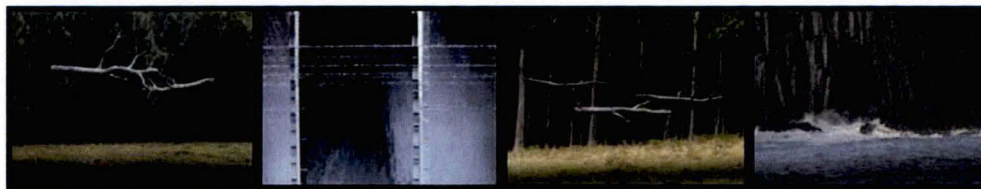
Stills from *The Levitation Grounds* by David Haines and Joyce Hinterding.

In her essay/review of the 1999 work *The Levitation Grounds*, Anne
Finegan writes:

> *The Levitation Grounds* is the product of a residency at the remote
> lighthouse station of Bruny Island, deep in the southern ocean and
> off the remotest point of Tasmania. Initially, Hinterding and Haines
> set out to produce a landscape-driven work, one in which activity in
> the landscape was to be tapped to trigger the interfaces (satellite
> monitoring, digital tracking of sonoral and visual sources) which
> would record the event of Nature in progress. However, their
> immersion in the landscape was to become itself, a factor.
> Hinterding and Haines found themselves, like many early explorers,
> no longer third party facilitators of the expedition or experiment, but
> absorbed into a landscape which turned inwards. Into itself and into
> themselves. Haines began to email bulletins of odd sightings, as he
> and Hinterding began tuning into the landscape, which was working
> its affects on their psyches.[15]

As quoted on the *Sigma Editions* label website, The Wire magazine said this
about Joyce Hinterdings's *Spectral*, a CD release of the sound component of
The Levitation Grounds[16]

> A white hot crackle of condensed energy, VLF transmissions recall
> the work of code-crunching glitch wranglers such as Pimmon or
> Fennesz. Hinterding couples these sounds with rhythmic pings of
> signals from passing satellites and the hushed breath of static
> electricity. All of these slowly ebb and flow against the warm,
> diffused modulation of her receiver's own electrical components.[17]

In relation to the aesthetic idea of drawing sounds from the ether or the
revealing of the hidden, I would briefly like to mention two other sound

---

[15]   Finegan, Anne. *The Levitation Grounds* (essay 2000).
       http://www.sunvalleyresearch.com/dhlev.htm Accessed: January 13,
       2009
[16]   An excerpt from this release can be heard on the accompanying CD.
[17]   http://sigmaeditions.com/ANSI001.html   Accessed: January 06, 2009

artists/musicians as a means of further explaining the aural context within which my own work operates. They are Robin Rimbaud (AKA Scanner) and Dub music pioneer Osborne Ruddock, otherwise known as King Tubby.

Rimbaud quite literally lives up to his stage name, scanning the ether for sound fragments and hidden information to use for his audio constructions.[18] Rimbaud, commenting on his work, writes:

> Somewhere beneath the surface we are finally revealing acoustic data and information, voices formed from the distortions in digital recording. It is in even the most subtle passages that one hears the most dramatic parts, the hidden shifts in detail and language we are searching out. A space will thus be orchestrated in which the audience can experience the essence of these voices from beyond, a densely orchestrated hiss of information.
>
> All of my works have explored the hidden resonances and meanings within the memory and in particular the subtle traces that people and their actions leave behind. The "ghosts" within sound and memory point to where I am currently propelling myself. Capturing these moments, storing them and redirecting them back into the public stream enables one to construct an archaeology of loss, pathos and missed connections, assembling a momentary forgotten past in our digital future.[19]

Latvian psychologist Konstantin Raudive pioneered the idea of EVP, (Electronic Voice Phenomena), the recording of 'spirit voices' onto analogue audiotape from radio broadcasting 'dead air' or silence in a room.[20] This has greatly influenced Scanner and has also been influential in

---

[18] An example of this artist's work can be heard on the accompanying CD.

[19] Robin Rimbaud AKA 'Scanner' quoted: Toop, David, *Haunted Weather, Music, Silence and Memory* Serpent's Tail, London 2004. Pg.85

[20] An excerpt of Raudive's recordings can be heard on the accompanying CD.

my own research and practice.[21] Fact or fiction, the aesthetic qualities of the sounds give the impression of revealing some hidden information.

King Tubby, the pioneering engineer/producer of Dub reggae music, may seem at first an odd choice to include in this section on the revealing of the hidden. His use of delay, reverberation and the stripping back of the original tracks in the re-mix not only relates to and has inspired some of the aesthetic textures of two of my works, but provides a link to the theory put forward by Guglielmo Marconi, the pioneer of wireless radio transmission, that soundwaves never die, but simply become too faint to be audible.[22]

Creating a new Ether - ambient environments

The type of music that English musician/artist Brian Eno created under his 'ambient' banner was enveloping, non-intrusive, emotive and non-didactic. This work is not simply pleasant background music; it can take you, if you allow it, to another place, an imaginary landscape. In his liner notes for the *Ambient 4: On Land* album from 1982 Eno states:

> The idea of making music that in some way related to a sense of place – landscape, environment – had occurred to me many times over the years preceding On Land
>
> From Another Green World (1975) onwards, I became interested in exaggerating and inventing rather than replicating spaces, experimenting in particular with various techniques of time distortion. This record represents one culmination of that development and in it the landscape has ceased to be a backdrop for something else to happen in front of: instead, everything that happens is a part of the landscape. There is no longer a sharp distinction between foreground and background...We feel affinities not only with the past, but also with the futures that didn't

---

[21]   Scanner contributed to a compilation CD of remixes and reconstruction works based on Raudive's original recording of "ghost voices". *Konstantin Raudive : the Voices of the Dead.* Sub Rosa Records SR66
[22]   The works *Until We Sleep* and *Cantus 35* will be discussed in the following chapter.

materialise, and with the other variations of the present that we suspect run parallel to the one we have agreed to live in.[23]
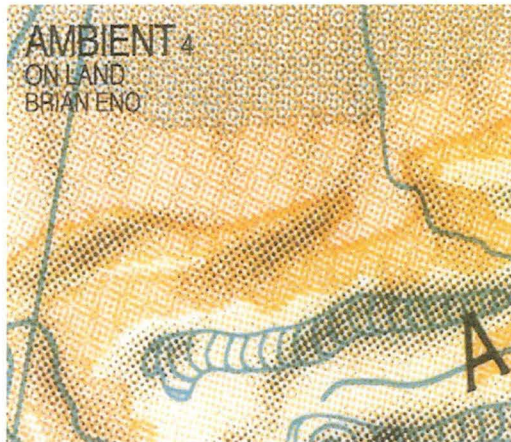
Ambient 4: On Land Brian Eno. EG Records 1982[24]

These places, these landscapes, these soundscapes are an environment where as David Lynch would say there is a 'place to dream'; somewhere in between reality and imagined spaces.

UK musician/composer Mick Harris has been involved in a wide variety of music projects. He helped create what was known as 'grindcore' (a combination of hardcore punk and death metal) with the band Napalm Death, created dark minimalist drum and bass with the project Quoit and continues to this day with the dub-inspired 'dark-hop' project Scorn. For my research I have concentrated on his dark ambient, 'isolationist' project called Lull.

Lull is cinematic in scope, sounding not unlike a soundtrack to a fictional film full of sweeping barren landscapes. Yet it also has a distinctly internal feel to it. This landscape is inside your head. Harris speaks about a dream state that has informed his work as well as the aerial point of view when one is flying over vast landscapes.

---

[23]   Eno, Brian – *Ambient 4: On Land* (liner notes) EG records UK 1982
[24]   An example from this release can be heard on the accompanying CD.

There's always empty spaces from dreams. A reoccurring dream of trying to escape from a place that I'm trapped in, that's always desolate, there's always empty buildings. Big vast spaces. They're open spaces, landscapes. I've always been one when touring, for looking out of the window, looking at landscapes, because they change from country to country. Flying, looking down, seeing vast landscapes. I'm trying to create my soundtrack to a 'space', wether it's something I'm thinking of or something that I've seen.[25]
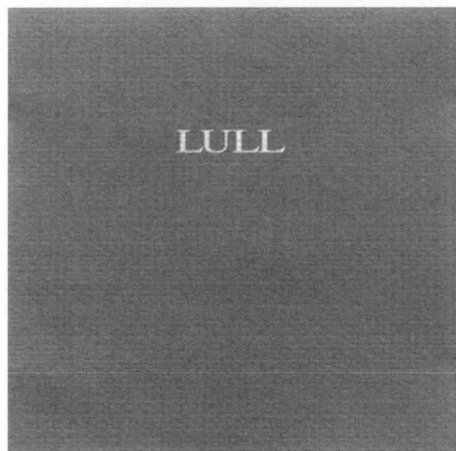
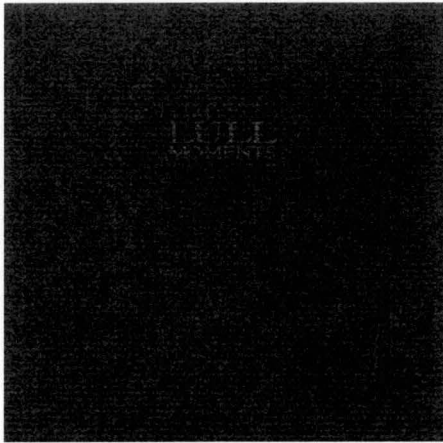*Continue* Lull. Release/Relapse Records 1996[26]

Within the project Lull, Harris produced the album *Continue*, a single 62 minute soundscape from 1996, and *Moments* in 1998, a 70 minute album, indexed into 99 separate tracks. *Moments* was designed in such a way that it could be played on 'random play', creating a seemingly infinite variety of possible narratives. It was reviewed by the mysterious and single named 'Jasper' of the now defunct *Ambience Publishing* website in this way:

One feels as though one is moving from one room to another, filled with obscure and abandoned machinery, perhaps many of them with no other purpose than to consume electricity and to emit vibration. Perhaps there is no longer a hand to flick their switches. Then, almost with relief we emerge into an emptiness of sustained notes with metallic resonance. Perhaps we are confined within the claustrophobic parameters of an abandoned space vehicle? Or perhaps we find ourselves deep within the Earth's core - her magnetic field playing havoc with our comfort zones. There are too many "perhaps", and herein lies the beauty and genius of Moments -

---

[25]   Harris, Mick. Transcription of interview conducted by the author, Birmingham, England. September 2006.

[26]   An excerpt from this release can be heard on the accompanying CD.

its ability to awaken your imagination into adventurous and limitless directions.[27]

Moments Lull. Release/Relapse Records 1998.[28]

Harris' most recent Lull piece, a collaboration with US sound artist/musician Beta Cloud (Carl Pace) is a continuous 20 minute track called *Circadian Rhythm Disturbance* and was released as a very limited edition 3" CD. The combination of Harris' dark drones and Pace's crackling, glitchy beeps and clicks appeals to me greatly in that it is a combination I employ at times with my own work. In this case, one has to imagine being in a dimly lit glass cube filled with fog with a city outside that you can vaguely hear through an air vent. It sounds as if Pace's technological entities are flitting about in Harris' organic environment. But although often Harris' ambient work does sound organic, almost subterranean, technology plays a part in not only the creation, but inspires the work and is sometimes the source.

---

[27] http://www.mickharris.net/discography/moments.html Accessed February 09, 2009

[28] An example from this release can be heard on the accompanying CD.

LULL *&*
BETA CLOUD

*Circadian
Rhythm
Disturbance*

Circadian Rhythm Disturbance Lull & Beta Cloud. Laughing Bride Media 2008.[29]

David Toop writes about Harris:

> Mick Harris, ex-drummer with *Napalm Death*, now recording
> unsettled, unmoored electronic pieces under the names of Lull and
> Scorn, sent me a letter describing his working methods: "My sounds
> are source sounds from fridges to radiators, (I'm a big fan of
> Eraserhead etc etc, that type of radiator drone, drift sound)".[30]

In fact it could be said that Alan Splet and David Lynch's sound design for

Eraserhead is at least 50% of the film's success.[31] As mentioned

previously, the sound design work of Alan Splet has been very influential to

my practice. In films such as *Eraserhead* and *The Elephant Man*, Splet's

sound becomes a character or rather signifies the mood or state of mind of

the character. This is related to what Lotte H. Eisner calls "Stimmung"

when writing about the composition of light and objects in the cinematic

frame in German Expressionist film.

> In any German film [she writes] the preoccupation with rendering
> Stimmung ('mood') by suggesting the 'vibrations of the soul' is
> linked to the use of light. In fact the Stimmung hovers around
> objects as well as people: it is a 'meta-physical' accord, a mystical
> and singular harmony amid the chaos of things, a kind of sorrowful

---

[29] An excerpt from this release can be heard on the accompanying CD.
[30] Toop, David – *Ocean of Sound – Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and
      Imaginary Worlds.* Serpent's Tail, London. 1995. Pg.180
[31] An excerpt from the sound design of this film can be heard on the
      accompanying CD.

nostalgia which for the German, is mixed with well-being, an imprecise nuance of nostalgia, languor coloured with desire, lust of body and soul.[32]

Although much of this cinema was made prior to sound films, what Splet's film sound, and Harris' drone work do is similar to what the German Expressionist directors such as Wiene, Murnau and Lang did with light, shadow and placement of objects within the frame. It sets a scene, constructs an environment where one can experience an emotion, it creates *stimmung*. This is something I have sought to achieve in this research project.

Soft edges and flickering lights – abstraction and space

By softening the edges, removing specifics whilst referencing the concrete so that one may still find something vaguely readable, you allow space for interpretation. To abstract something pure or concrete, to obscure a representation of reality is not a new idea, but one that seems to have had a degree of resurgence in video and time based art.

The 2005 group exhibition at ACMI in Melbourne called *White Noise* had a profound impact on me and on my practice. Although some of the more complexly abstract works in the show were emotive and experiential, the most striking piece was the sound and light environment by Japanese artist Ryoji Ikeda called *spectra II* from 2002.

This was a long narrow corridor that only one at a time could enter. The black space was given an occasional hint of spatiality when an intense white light and high-pitched tone would strike for a split second, seemingly moving through the space, although one was never certain if this was real or an optical (and aural) illusion.

---

[32]   Eisner, Lotte H. – *The Haunted Screen*. University of California Press. 1952-1977. Pg. 199
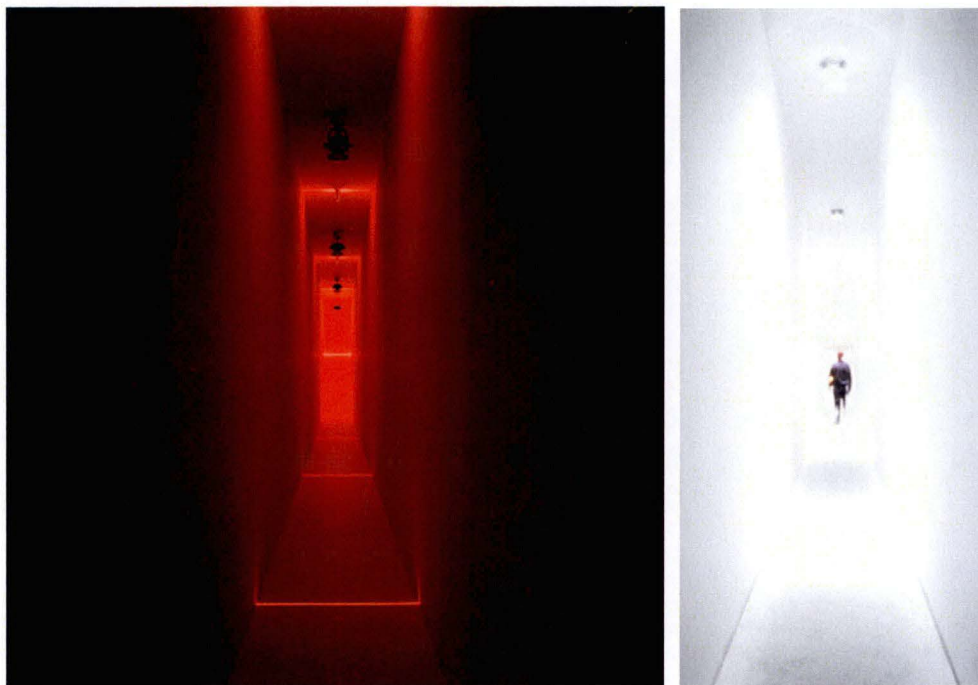
spectra II Ryoiji Ikeda. 2002

The work was abstract enough in concept and aesthetics to induce any number of readings, but I felt as if I was situated between two planes of existence within the walls. Depending on one's own point of view philosophically and spiritually as well as one's own sensitivity to visual and aural stimuli, I suspect that the experience would have been unique to each individual, stripped down to bare elements as the work was. That is not to say the work was under-whelming. On the contrary the 'less is more' ethos rang very true in this case.

> The work was built as a narrow, ceiling-covered corridor, allowing only one visitor to enter at a time. Visitors can hardly recognise the dimensions of the space, which is almost invisible due to its intense darkness/brightness and inaudible due to its ultra-frequencies. However, as they pass through the corridor, subtle oscillation patterns occur around their ears, caused by their own movements interfering with the sounds. The sound becomes the means by which the visitor can perceive and navigate the space.[33]

---

[33]   *White Noise*. Australian Centre for the Moving Image. 2005. Catalogue entry for *spectra II*, author not listed. Pg. 78
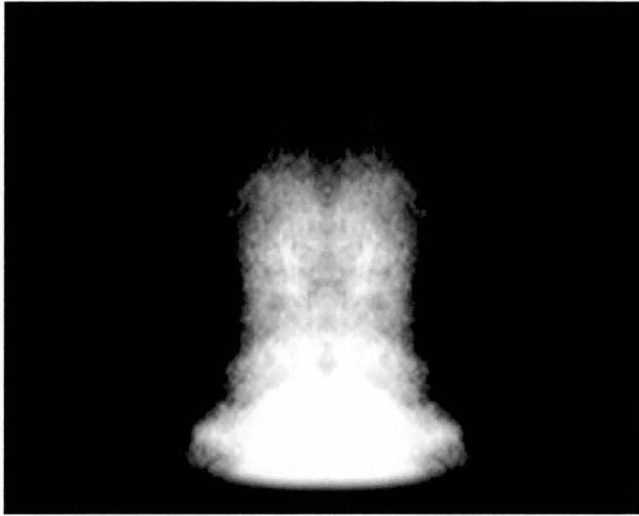
1+1=1 Jordan Baseman. 2002. Still from video

The video work of UK-based Jordan Baseman, straddles an unusual barrier between abstract video art and narrated documentary. Three works specifically take this approach; *1+1=1*, *More Than Religion* and *Perfume Disco Coma*.

Each contains a series of abstracted video imagery accompanied by a narrative voiceover, the basis of which is an interview. Be it a near-death experience during surgery, UFO encounters, or sensory experiences whilst in a coma, the voices tell stories accompanied by obscure, but hypnotic images playing before the audience.

> Jordan Baseman combines objective and subjective states to create seemingly simple yet deeply moving videos that invite us to contemplate the big questions – life, death, immortality. He juxtaposes the personal narratives of everyday people with scientific or found images that suggest the presence of unseen energies and forces.
>
> In the extraordinarily moving "1+1=1", we hear a man relate the story of his near death experience after a heart and lung transplant and the impact this has had on him psychologically and physically. The text is accompanied by haunting images of body scans that

make manifest the tunnel of light he never saw when he was technically dead.[34]

A general context

As opposed to *White Noise*, which although touching on certain aspects of my research, was dealing primarily with abstraction in electronic media, I would like to point out a large group exhibition that dealt with concepts similar to my own as a curatorial premise. I will briefly make reference to some of the key artists in this exhibition that I feel are treading similar ground to my own. This is to illustrate a general 'ambience' of enquiry into similar subjects. Later in the theoretical context chapter I will make reference to other exhibitions and the related curatorial premises.

The Sydney Biennale explored a similar subject base to my own current one with 2002's *(The World May Be) Fantastic*, curated by Richard Grayson. Fantastical worlds, scientific anomalies, works of randomness are all covered in this exhibition. Canadian artist Janet Cardiff in collaboration with George Bures Miller contributed a work of surreal narration, a video projection viewed within a wooden structure and heard through headphones, called *The Muriel Lake Incident*.

Although I was not witness to this specific work, I am fully aware of Cardiff's incredible attention to aural and visual detail from experiencing the installation work *The Paradise Institute* (2001) at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, Germany. Cardiff is able to draw you into her surreal and film-noir like narratives, by the use of voice, realistic sound design and her illusionary use of video within structures.

---

[34]   Ozolins, Brigita – *The Everyday World is Not What it Seems* (essay from) "Parallel" exhibition catalogue. Salamanca Arts Centre INC. 2008 Pg. 11

The Muriel Lake Incident Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller. 1999
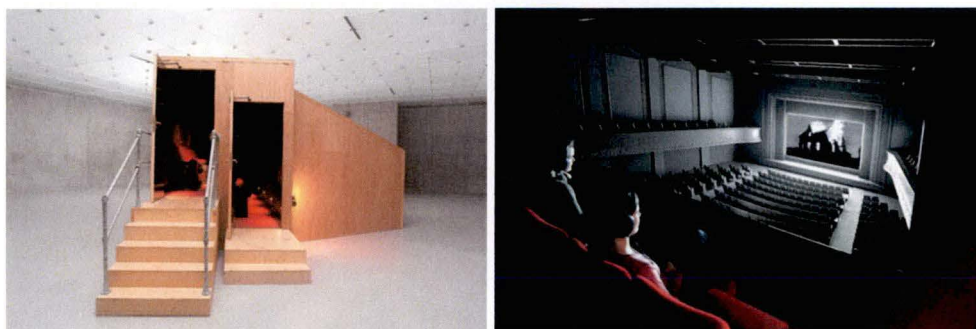
The Paradise Institute Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller. 2001

From my experience it is the clarity rather than abstraction of image and sound, that draws you into Cardiff's work, but that is because of the narrative nature of the pieces. I was inspired by Cardiff when creating the sound piece *Follow Me* (discussed later), as it was essentially a narrative work.

Another artist, using voice in this exhibition is Susan Hiller with her installation *Witness*. This is a multi-speaker installation containing multilingual first-person recitations of UFO sightings and encounters. Not only is the subject matter of this work something that interests me greatly, but also the installative and compositional use of spoken voice. This will be discussed later in relation to my own works, specifically *Whitepinkblack Noise*, *In Haunted Attics* and *Cantus 35*.
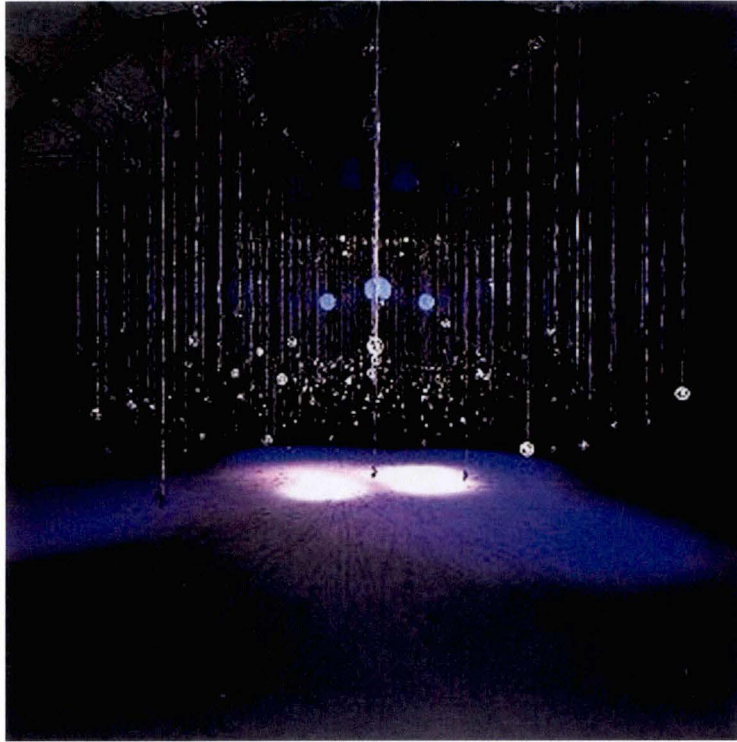
Witness Susan Hiller 2002.

Both David Haines and Joyce Hinterding contributed works to this exhibition as well, but were spoken about earlier in this chapter. Generally speaking, this exhibition does give an impression that contemporary artists in 2002 were thinking along similar lines to my current research and that this was one of the first major exhibitions of the new millennium to address these concerns.

Chapter 3: The Air Is Full - my works

In this chapter I will describe and discuss the major works that make up my submission, occasionally making reference to artists mentioned in the Context chapter as well as some theoretical or critical writing relevant to the works and my research. Where applicable I will also make brief reference to some of the earlier works that have contributed to the development of the research, not submitted as major pieces.

Run Out Groove (communiqué) 2006. Images: Colin Langridge

Run out Groove (communiqué) - text and sound work (2006)

An early work in this research project – *Run Out Groove (communiqué)* is about revealing hidden or elusive messages (mostly of no real consequence) scratched into the run-out groove of vinyl records.[35] This was coupled with the somewhat paranoid notion that recording artists also placed back-masked messages into main body of their songs for people to discover.[36] The work takes the form of a large rectangular sheet of black perspex in which I have hand-inscribed as many of the run-out groove messages I could find in my own record collection. The messages were written backwards, like a mirror image. This is accompanied by a soundtrack on headphones of myself reciting the messages phonetically backwards, and then reversed to create a kind of 'key' or translation to what is seen on the perspex.

---

[35] The blank section of vinyl nearest to the label.

[36] Back-masking refers to sung messages or spoken dialogue that is aurally reversed.

The importance of the content or intent of these messages is not of any real consequence. They are more concerned with revealing a potential question or clue to a possible meaning. What is important is that moment of uncertainty, the suspension of disbelief, (is this really a profound message from unknown regions hidden then revealed?), where most things are possible; where our guards are let down, is what is important.

Cantus 35 - surround sound installation (2007)

When invited to produce a work for the *Port Arthur Project*, a large exhibition of installations created as part of *Ten Days On The Island*, I had the idea of exorcising an aural memory of the tragic Port Arthur massacre of 1996. I had heard a radio report, more than likely broadcast from outside of the state. At the time there was a media 'blackout' locally as the trial of the gunman who killed 35 people at the Port Arthur Historic site was in progress. What I heard on the radio was audio taken from a tourist's video recording, the soundscape of Port Arthur punctuated by gunshots echoing in the distance. It was an aural moment that stayed with me, haunting me for a long time.

At the time I began working on this piece, I discovered *Cantus in memory of Benjamin Britten* composed by Arvo Pärt in 1977.[37] I was deeply moved by this piece of music and marvelled at the use of simple melodic lines overlapping to create an overall mood. I envisioned creating a collection of notes made up of an A minor triad, over three octaves, but soon realised that there were not enough notes within that, to create 35 individual tones that were audibly separate - that could exist in their own space and yet work together.[38] This problem was solved by basing the cluster of tones on the Am7 chord.[39]

---

[37]   This can be heard on the accompanying CD.
[38]   35 tones were created as one for each life lost in the massacre.
[39]   Short of using a fourth octave, which would potentially produce a much harsher aural outcome (this work required a meditative quality) simply

Cantus 35 Sentry Hut, Port Arthur Historical Site – the location for original installation. 2007. Image: Sally Rees

Using the Sentry Hut on the foreshore of the Port Arthur Historic Site as the location I designed the work to be listened to by one person at a time, seated in the doorway of the hut, looking outside. I created a 20 minute composition made up of 5 sets of 7 tones. These were played back through 5 speakers placed around the inside roof of the hut. Each tone was made from either a single plucking of an electric guitar string or a single striking of a keyboard key then delayed (echoed) with a guitar effect set on infinite delay and recorded digitally onto the computer.[40] I knew which four basic frequencies I would use and transposed them over three octaves to create 35 tones. I chose to record each track separately and to manipulate parameters

---

adding another note (a G), solved the problem of not enough notes. Not only did this allow more tonal variation, but it also added a sense of suspension, and a slight dissonance or un-resolve.

[40] In fact the delay set at the longest decay setting is still reasonably audible for around 7 minutes. Some manipulation and extending of the delay had to take place in the mixing/construction period so the first tone would last for 20 minutes. Each subsequent tone could be a little shorter in duration.

such as timbre and delay decay time without reference to any of the other recorded tones. This was so each tone became a symbol of a unique life - a representation of individuality. Each recording was then reversed and mixed so a single tone would first appear, play for 30 seconds then fade slowly before a new tone would appear. The previous note would fade slightly to create a bed of notes, a throbbing chord of Am7.

The very nature of reversing an echo, meant the volume gradually increased following every attack. At the 18:30 minute mark all tones are play at full volume, reaching a crescendo that to the listener feels like all the sounds swirling within the space have found a way out, leaving the hut and revealing the everyday ambience of the site. This state of quietness remained for 10 minutes before the whole cycle began again.

The work was very much in keeping with my research and, in thinking about the work's content and concept, it has in fact greatly informed the overall research project. Pioneer of wireless radio transmission, Guglielmo Marconi, believed that sound never dies, but in fact just grows fainter. Can we change memories? By revealing the echoes, interrupting them at some point and reversing them? Can we start with the ghost, the residue that haunts us and make our way back to the start? If sound is indeed infinite, the moment we break into the cycle of audible reverberation is it the end or will it keep going?

Note on submitted version:
The version shown in my submission will simply be the surround sound tones, with a seat before an image of the point of view from the hut and a recording of the ambience of the original location.

*Cantus 35* 2007. Point of view from the Sentry Hut. Video still.

Any showing of this surround-sound installation work outside of its original
Port Arthur historic site incarnation could only be described as a
documentation or at best, a re-interpretation. That is not to say that the 35
interrelated tones surrounding the listener may not have any power to move
the listener, to elicit an emotional response away from the original setting.
But since the work was prompted by a specific occurrence at a specific
place, it suggests that the work should ideally be experienced in that space.
It was originally intended as a site-specific, public sound artwork. Indeed
the point of view from the hut looks across to the former site of the Broad
Arrow café, now dismantled and replaced by a memorial to the victims.[41]
This point of view undoubtedly contributed to the emotional potency of the
work. However the combination of the original surround-sound component
and imagery of the view from the hut, re-interprets the work in a gallery
setting, whilst hopefully retaining something of the original intention.

Whitepinkblack Noise - sound and video installation (2007/2008)
Upon entering a darkened space, a visitor may place on a pair of
headphones from which can be heard the white noise-like sound of steady
falling rain amongst which a cluster of voices exist. This internal dialogue, a

---

[41]   The massacre commenced at this café.

monitored reception of a multitude of hidden broadcasts is heard over the external dialogue, the coloured noise ether of white, pink and black noises in the room, each with their own images, abstracted video noise, clouds and the moon.
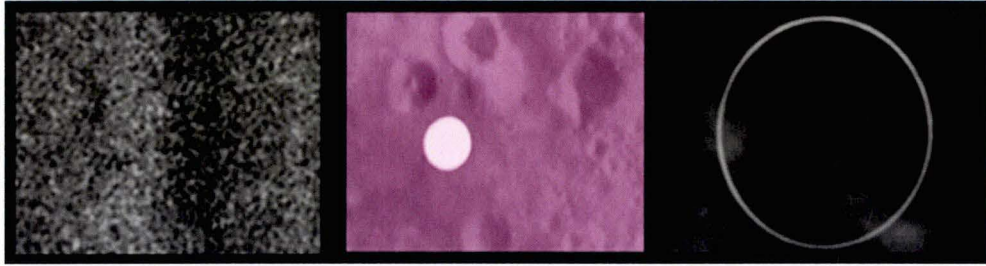
Whitepinkblack Noise 2007/2008. Video stills.

When I first conceived of this work, I had only heard of the existence of white noise and pink noise. But I made an assumption that if one took the notion of frequency difference between white and pink noise and applied that mathematically to the visual tonal difference between white and pink, then I could conceive of black noise. I eventually discovered that black noise does exist along with many other colours of sound.[42]

Essentially this work is about the spaces in between: what can exist there and how they affect our lives. What the colours of sound and the images of static make us feel, remind us of or conjure up. These things are around us all the time and how they affect us, even on an unconscious level, is intriguing.

We are seemingly covered in layers, some invisible, some silent, but they are phenomena that affect our lives. When one enters a room, where some form of intense activity has taken place, an argument, sexual tension or emotional upset for example, that energy can be physically and psychologically tangible. It was thought that the latent sexual energy

---

[42]   Information can be found online at the following sources:
http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~cuddingt/pubs/proceedings99.pdf
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colors_of_noise   Accessed: February 9,
2009

inherent in pre-pubescent teenagers was the cause of many 'hauntings' by poltergeists.[43]

This installation is an environment where mood and atmosphere can be affected by sound and image and an audience member's own interpretation of, experience of and sensitivity to such sounds and images, simple and abstract as they are.

## *In Haunted Attics* - sound and video installation (2007/2008)

For this work, I created a dark and misty environment with four spots of lights indicating the edges of a haunted space. A simple bass, low frequency drone is occasionally punctuated by a preverbed[44] voice reciting a creed, a statement or a piece of advice that the person lives by or believes in. The voices appear to affect the light, making it flicker, as if an electrical current is interrupted by an interfering element.

---

[43] Wilson, Colin, *Mysteries - An investigation into the occult, the paranormal and the supernatural*, Panther, Granada Publishing.UK 1979. Pg 66.
A poltergeist can be defined as a mischievous spirit thought to move objects around homes, sometimes violently. I was first made aware of the theory from the film *Poltergeist*, directed by Tobe Hooper in 1980. The story by Steven Spielberg, was allegedly based on reported cases and scientific theories.

[44] Sound of a reversed reverberation. One technique for this is to take a sound, say a piece of recorded dialogue, and reverse it so it plays backwards. Then one adds a reverberation effect to that backwards voice. Then reverse it again so the dialogue sounds correct, but a fading in of a reversed artefact of the voice precedes it. This is sometimes used in cinema to indicate an imagining, a voice from the past entering the present or a presence entering from another realm. The popular music technique of the fade out gives an indication of the song continuing on ad infinitum, but moving out of range of hearing. By contrast the fade in gives an impression that a song may have already been playing for some time before we 'began listening' and is only now coming into our aural world. A preverb on a voice gives this impression as well, indicating that the words were spoken some time before we heard them.

This work became an environment where peoples' utterances all exist together, almost like a sound trap where people's most profound statements are stored.
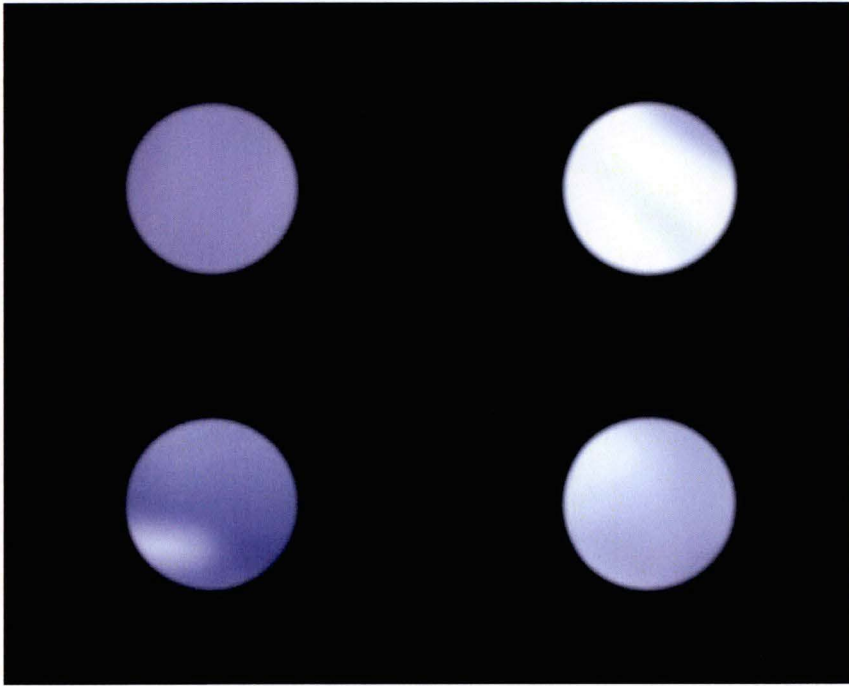
In Haunted Attics 2007/2008. Video still.

The work was always intended to be a quite sound environment.
Using the interviews conducted (also for the works; *Whitepinkblack Noise* and *Until We Sleep)* I collected recordings of individuals' creeds or statement of belief and clustered them all together in a room until the air is full of remembered voices. This was again inspired by Marconi's idea of eternal sounds.

Portal Lux Aeterna (after Ligeti) - sound and video installation (2007/2008)

I set up a darkened area with a black curtained backdrop. Hanging in front of the curtain is a square black canvas surface. Onto this is projected, a circular 'opening' within which a multitude of flickering points of light appear and disappear at varying speeds and interval. A surround soundscape contains a deep throb, and a collection of rising and falling vocalisations. At certain points a series of reverberating 'clicks' sounding like objects

colliding with a surface, indicates a moment when the imagery reveals what appears to be shooting stars or points of light traveling in straight trajectory into and out of view.
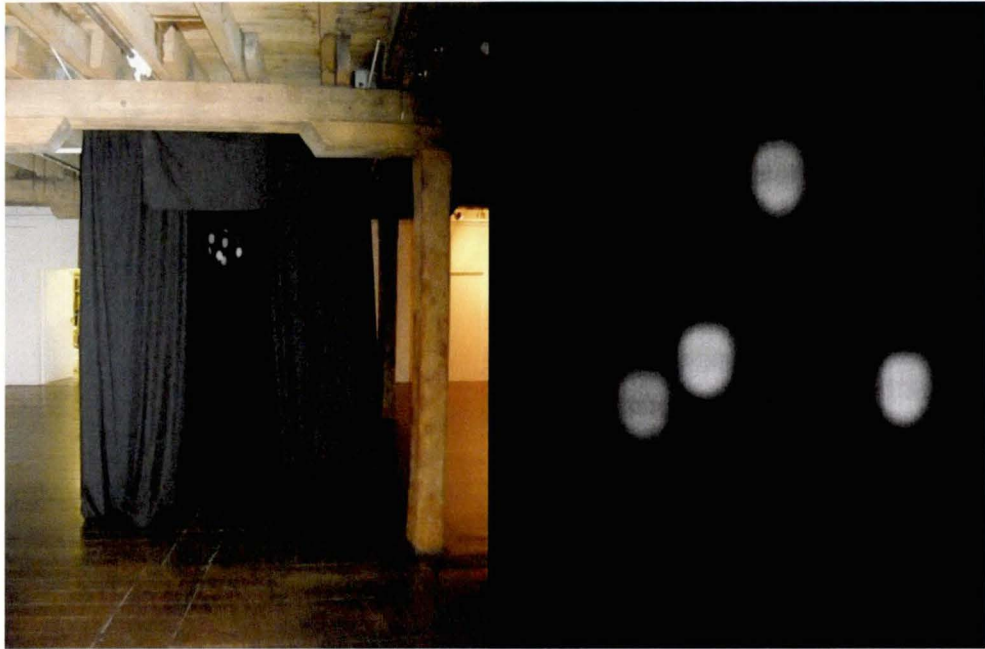
Portal Lux Aeterna (after Ligeti) 2007/2008. Installation shot and video still.

This is a meditative, ambient work. It has been inspired by Gyorgy Ligeti's composition for unaccompanied voice *Lux Aeterna*, a collection of ghostly voices, sounding as if they exist on another plane or are trapped within another realm. I was first made aware of this music on the soundtrack to the film *2001: A Space Odyssey.*[45]

Bill Viola's essay *Video Black - The Mortality of the Image* has also inspired this work where he speaks poetically of after-images appearing on black screens as if they are memories of events.

> Without a memory to give it a life, events flicker across its image surface with only a split second to linger as afterimages, disappearing forever without a trace.[46]

---

[45]   This can be heard on the accompanying CD
[46]   Viola, Bill – *Video Black – The Mortality of the Image* (essay) from "Reasons For Knocking at an Empty House". MIT Press, USA. 1995. Pg 197

Like *Cantus 35*, it references Guglielmo Marconi's notion of undying sound waves: somewhere out 'there' are all the sounds and all the words ever uttered. I have taken this concept and expanded on it and used it before; the notion of entities, energies and invisible 'others' in *Whitepinkblack Noise* and the signifying of an individual soul with a single harmonic tone collected in one place and then released in *Cantus 35*. In this case I represent individual entities, souls with small spots of light, little moments of energy existing together in a dark hidden plain, revealed through a portal. This is further illustrated with a collection of voices moving in and out of aural focus.

The basis for the content of the work is simple. The lights are minute moments of energy, abstracted interference static on 'video black' from cable television (a station that was active, but not broadcasting anything). The shooting stars, also representing a fleeting life, are marbles shooting across a black bass drum skin and hitting the rim. The voices are simple improvised experiments of attempts at throat singing, pitched up and down.

Stimmung Ton - collection of sound works (2006-2008)

Stimmung Ton is a collection of nine sound works created during the period of my research. It will be presented with this paper as a CD, but will be exhibited in the gallery as nine listening stations with headphones. The imagery shown with the stations and within this paper relate to the construction or content of the sound as a way of showing my process and research for each piece. The following sections will speak about each sound piece that make up the body of work, but prior to that I will speak briefly of the title for the collection.

'Stimmung Ton' is German for Mood Tone/sound, but it is a particular kind of 'mood'. I first became aware of the word stimmung when reading about German Expressionist cinema in a book called *The Haunted Screen* by Lotte

H Eisner.[47] She describes the technique employed by many of the key filmmakers of that period of composing within the cinematic frame.[48] Using light, shadow and objects the director does not simply include them as a means to an end, but to create a mood, a sense of the film protagonist's being and state of mind, the character's *stimmung*. Each sound work in the collection has at its core a sense of mood, to create an atmosphere, a psychological environment wherein one can create one's own place.

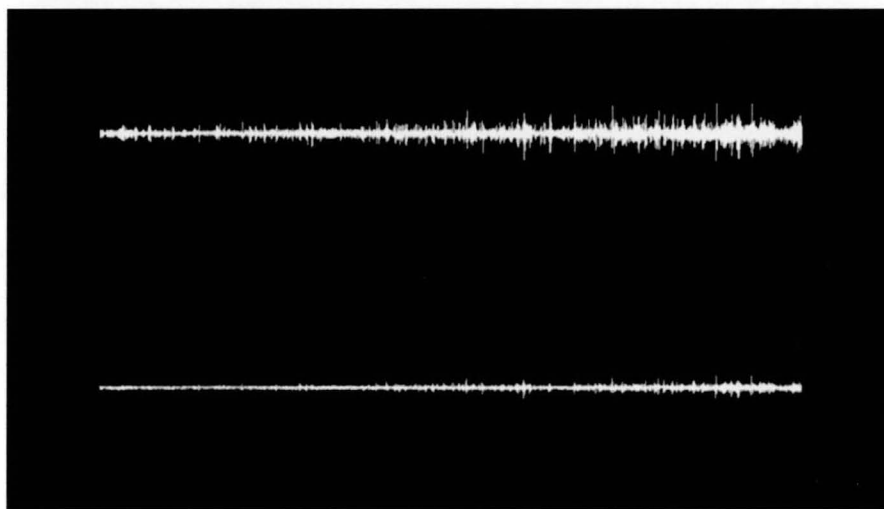1. *Searching for Voices (Between the Stations)* (2006)

This is an audio montage of intermediate sections (between radio stations) just on the fringes of audible voices from broadcasts. The use of slight tuning movement when voices become too audible to move them back into dead air, noise gating and reverberation has been used. An audio drone, made up of harmonising frequency hums creates a bed in which this crackly montage lies. I began this work around March/April of 2006 with the idea of creating a soundscape based on the aesthetics of radio static and its associations with EVP (Electro Voice Phenomena) as pioneered and popularised by Latvian psychologist Dr Konstantin Raudive.[49] With this piece as with all of my works I did not want to take a specific standpoint, believer or sceptic, but simply to use the aesthetics associated with this phenomenon to create a work that provokes a sense of wonder and musing about what the listener is hearing and the possibilities of what can be revealed by listening to an abstracted sound-world. Interestingly I approached a German festival of sound art for and about radio, soon after

---

[47] Somewhat fantastical cinema with political and/or social overtones with key works being *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, Nosferatu, Metropolis* and *Dr Mabuse.*

[48] During Germany's Weimar Republic period between WWI and WWII.

[49] EVP is the recording of what is supposedly voices of the dead or spirits, originally on magnetic audio tape. One technique is to record a section of 'dead air', a piece of radio non-broadcast as a passive signal in order to pick up these voices. Often one needs to greatly increase the amplitude to hear the anomalies. Raudive's book *Breakthrough* was originally published by Taplinger Publishing in 1971. It is currently out of print.

conceiving and producing the work. There was some initial interest and was I led to believe that the work would likely be broadcast as part of the program. After sending a CD to the Radio Revolten address I did not receive any further communications regarding the inclusion or exclusion of the work. But it is interesting to wonder if my constructed static was broadcast on the radio throughout Germany.

Waveform image of a *Searching For Voices (Between the Stations)* excerpt

2. *Voices From* (2008)

In 2008 I was fortunate to receive the Marie Edwards Travelling Scholarship in Visual Arts, Craft and Design, which funded a research trip to Montreal, Canada to work with electronic composer and musician Jean-Yves Thériault. Other specific outcomes of this research will be discussed later in relation to the relevant works, but during my time in Montreal, Thériault alerted me to shortwave 'numbers stations' and this strongly informed *Voices From*. Numbers stations are mysterious broadcasts of voices, of many different languages, primarily reciting numbers as a code into the shortwave ether. Only one tuned in with a decoding key can ascertain what message or information is being communicated, though anyone with a shortwave receiver and enough range can chance upon these eerie-sounding, crackling voices. Thériault played me both recordings he had discovered and also showed me information on The Conet Project.[50]

---

[50]   http://www.irdial.com/conet.htm Accessed February 9, 2009.

This is a small archival community who compiled and released a 4 CD box set containing a vast collection of recordings with copious liner notes about where the broadcasts possibly originated from, the languages spoken and other facts and suppositions.[51] The following is a description drawn from the notes and essays for the CD set:

> Numbers Stations are radio broadcasts that appear in the Shortwave bands twenty-four hours a day, on many different frequencies. They are used to transmit short text messages. There are three different types of broadcast; voices reading groups of numbers or phonetic letters, Morse transmissions sending groups of numbers or letters and noise stations, transmitting several different types of noise.
> How Do Numbers Stations Work?
> Numbers Stations send enciphered messages in the form of groups of figures or letters using a cryptosystem known as a one time pad. In this system, two identical sets of random numbers, printed on numbered sheets are generated (the pad); one pad is kept by the sender and the other is kept by the recipient. When a message is to be sent, the original message or plain text, is mathematically added to one of the random numbers on the pad. The random number used is pre-determined by the sender and recipient so that both are in sync. When the message is sent over the air, the recipient transcribes it by hand, and then subtracts the random number on her pad from the message she has just received. The random number is then discarded. In her hands she now has the original plaintext message, sent to her over an open channel with zero possibility of enemy decryption.[52]

These broadcasts appealed to me, not only conceptually in that they were mysterious, hidden, encoded communiqués sent out into the ether, but also because the aesthetic quality of the recordings was very much in keeping with my own ideas about the use of the crackly, glitchy sounds that sit amongst the calming ambient drones of my soundscapes. I decided to create a sound work that used this aesthetic quality and I also loosely referenced the concept. I took a simple sentence, a kind of personal ethos or mantra that

---

[51] An example of the recordings can be heard on the accompanying CD.
[52] A.O Fernandez; liner notes/essays from "The Conet Project" CD box set. Irdial-Discs PO Box 424 London, SW3 5DY. 1997. (Currently out of print).

49

is "There Is Something Important to be Said"[53] and used two coding systems; Morse code and then transcribed the letters that make up the sentence into numbers according to where they fall within the alphabet.[54] I made three Morse code versions and three number recitation versions (using a manipulated TextEdit software voice), mixing them amongst various recordings of shortwave broadcast drones and noise. The six aural components were placed on mp3s players with their own individual speaker and placed in trees and bushes along a section the jogging track in the Queen's Domain, Glebe, Hobart. This was partly to give a sense that they were somehow being broadcast into the open air, but also because when I recorded the result for the finished work, there was a natural, environmental ambience that contained these crackling voices and tones. The final recording gives an impression these cryptic sounds are being broadcast into the ether, and emerging from the everyday-world for people to discover.

Field recording for *Voices From*, Queens Domain, Hobart. Image: Sally Rees.

---

[53] Dating back to sometime in 2003, this sentence alludes to an unspoken statement of importance. It could be said to be an ongoing 'rule' to my work in that I try not to ever definitively say what my art means or how it should be interpreted. That is up to the viewer or listener and stops them from being a passive audience. There is something important to be said, but it's you, not I, who will say it.

[54] 20, 8, 5, 18, 5 - 9, 19 - 19, 15, 13, 20, 8, 9, 14, 7 - 9, 13, 16, 15, 18, 20, 1, 14, 20 -
20, 15 - 2, 5 - 19, 1, 9, 4

3. S.O.S (Speed Of Sound) (2008)

This is a simple, short work that emerged out of discussion with my supervisors. And although simple, in many ways it symbolises what I hope to achieve with all of my work - that is, to extend a moment. A long thin metal tube is swung at high speed through the air, left to right and then right to left nine times nearby a stereo microphone. At full speed the 'swish' that is heard is barely a second in duration. It is a key moment however and by slowing the sound down by four octaves one can here this moment extended. As simple as this work is, it conceptually encompasses much of my research, the extending of that suspension of disbelief, that space between two states.
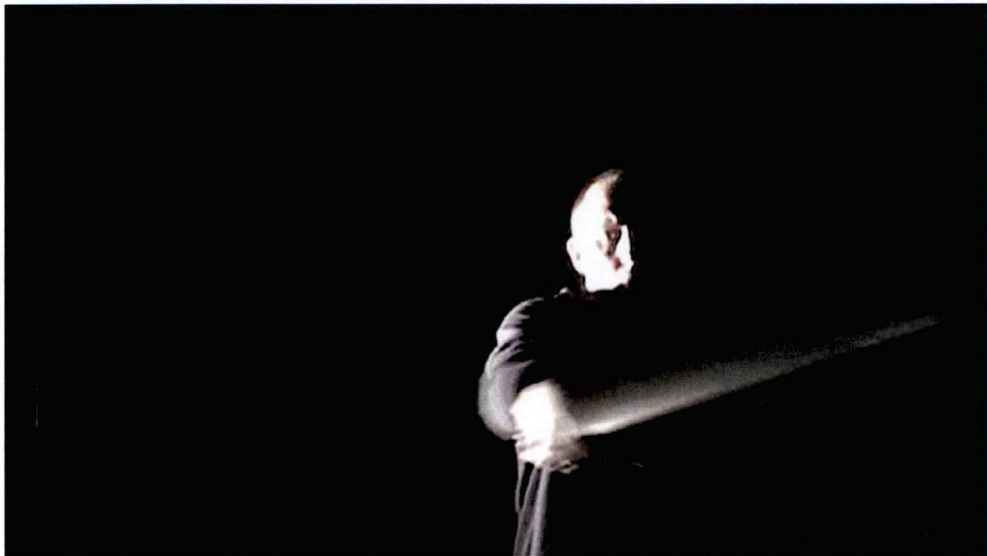
Video still from documentation video for *S.O.S (Speed Of Sound)*

4. Follow Me (2008)

Follow Me was designed for mp3 player and headphones and to be listened to whilst walking down the trail beside the Rivulet in South Hobart towards the city of Hobart. It originally appeared as part of the Mountain Festival's *Sculpture Trail*. Outside of that context, it remains an ambient work, giving an impression of incorporeal entities (footsteps, voices, mysterious radio static and distant drones) entering the everyday landscape. It is related to *Voices From* in that it places alien sounds amongst a familiar environmental soundscape. However due to the use of headphones, what is heard is much

more of an internal dialogue that an audience member hears individually. Of course the sounds that are heard (in particular the footsteps and whispered voices) are not too far removed from what may be heard naturally within that environment: a public park with a walking trail.

Using the location itself as a source and site for field recordings, an ambient bed was created. The sounds of a slight wind, rustling leaves and running rivulet established a sense of place, a construct melding seamlessly with the actual. The aural, concrete reality assists in the success of this illusion while the manipulation and placement of sounds within that 'reality' creates a sense of impossibility. The occasional sound of footsteps on the gravel approaching from behind or ahead initially gives a sense of narrative logic. This is upset by the fact that no one can actually be seen. This sense of phantasmagorical activity is further heightened by voices whispering: "follow me". Initially these voices follow the sound of footsteps, but after a while, the voices appear out of the blue, startling the listener, invisibly haunting the location. Both Christina Kubisch and Janet Cardiff create 'audio walks' and this piece was in part, inspired by them.

Rivulet trail, South Hobart. Where *Follow Me* was in part recorded and originally presented.

5. *Hiss – Silence in a Burnie House* (2007)

6. *Hiss – Silence in a Turner's Beach Shack* (2007)

Again inspired by Raudive's EVP recording aesthetics as well as John Cage's various ideas about silence, I recorded two locations in the north of Tasmania as test recordings. I had initially came up with a compositional concept, (further explained with *Silence Triad - Industry (Montreal Trinity)*) that required the recording of 'nothing' in various spaces of various ages and mixing them together. These two spaces were - an old (but still inhabited) house in South Burnie and an abandoned and derelict shack in the tiny beachside town of Turner's Beach.

The Burnie house (l) and the derelict shack in Turner's Beach (r) used for the field recordings for the following works. Images: Sally Rees.

The 'nothing' (impossible of course) was recorded in each place and then amplified at approximately 60dbs above the original. Although recorded digitally, there is much hiss amongst the ambience of the locations. The idea that one may hear something previously unheard or hidden is what drives this piece and hopefully what appeals to the audience.

7. *Microverse* (2008)

This work, somewhat experimental in nature, was originally intended to be a mix of field recordings of found stones hit percussively together, like miniature planets colliding. Whilst in Montreal, I was fortunate, to discover, quite by accident the public sound-art work on the port waterfront called "The Silophone". This is a simple, elegant work that overlooks the large Silos across the water, created by an artist(s) known as [The User] in 2000. The work allows visitors to speak or make sounds into a contained

microphone, which is then broadcast into the interior of what is known as Silo #5. It is then re-broadcasted back to the visitor via two speakers. It was very fortuitous to discover this work in relation to my own research into empty disused buildings and what might be contained in the silences. Using the Silophone as an instrument I performed *Microverse* using pebbles found nearby.
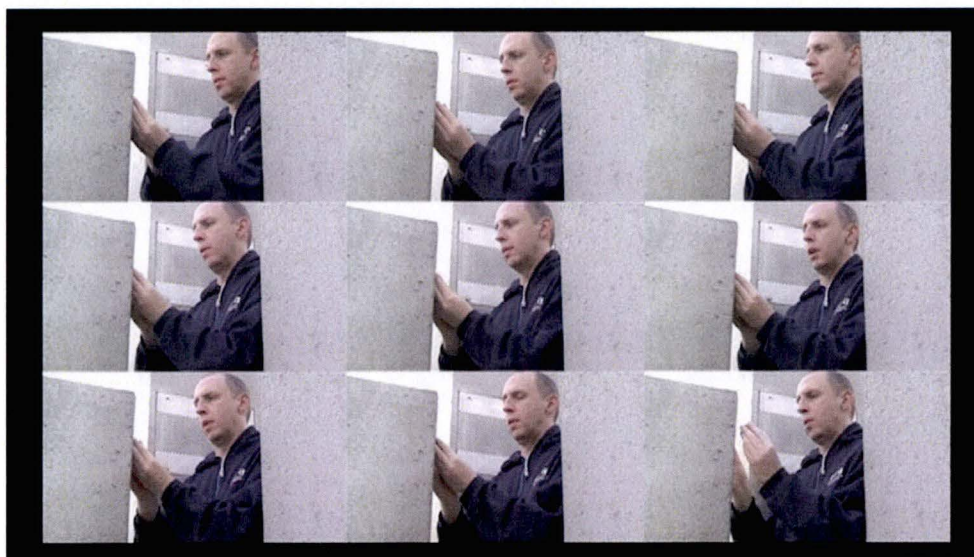
Still from documentation video for *Microverse*, at the Silophone, Montreal, Canada.

The pebbles were hit together nine times and recorded. That cycle was repeated nine times (though at different, random tempos), Back in the studio the nine separate recordings were then overlayed and mixed to create a single stereo track.

8. *Silence Triad - Industry (Montreal Trinity)* (2008)

I conceived a composition technique for an ongoing series of soundworks to be titled with the prefix *Silence Triad* and this was the first outcome. The original idea is as follows. Record moments of silence in rooms. Mix 3 rooms together over a period of time. The rooms should be places where a lot of 'profound' sound has previously been heard; places of worship (singing of hymns, chanting in churches and temples), places of power (debates and discussion in political meeting rooms) and places of learning (class rooms), but recorded (high quality) when nothing is happening.

As I intend this work to be an ongoing project, I created a short composition manifesto for the scoring, recording, construction and editing process.

Manifesto for Composition rules/structure:
Determine the age of the building in years. Change those years to seconds (eg 20 years = 20 seconds). That is the amount of recorded time per silence/room. The longest time will be the base sound. Try to evenly space the sound, (see example of score).

When mixing, all sounds should be amplified at least 20db over the original sound.

"Place of Worship"
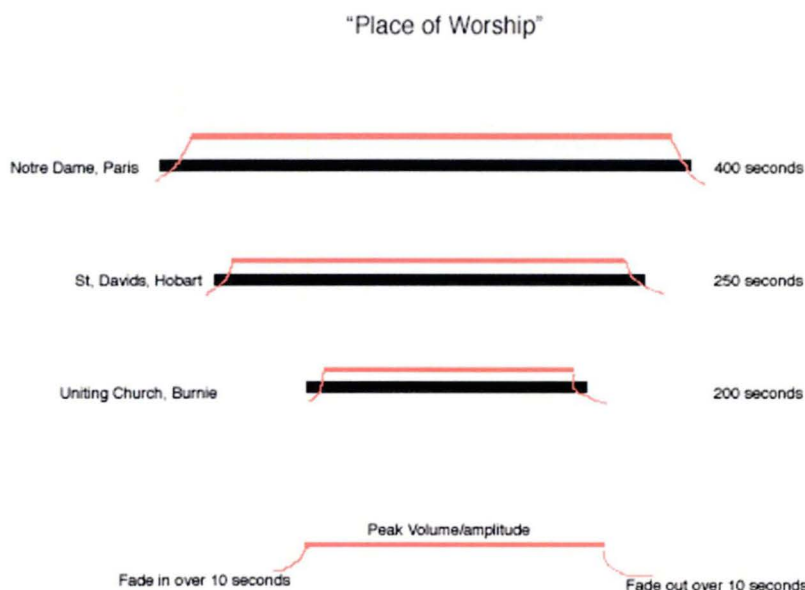
Rough example of *Silence Triad* scoring technique.

In Montreal, with assistance from Thériault, I recorded sounds in abandoned factories. The first site was a burnt out textile/fabric factory in the Lachine area. For the construction/composition of the final work, the age of each building had to be determined. The Lachine building was built around 1948. The second building was formerly the vast Northern Electrical Company factory built in 1880. It was now completely renovated and I found it to be a series of apartments and offices. Interestingly the 'silence' this building produced, when amplified, contained a strong electrical hum. Despite the renovations, as this was the oldest of all the buildings, I used this recording as the base audio for the work. Building 3 was the disused CN Wellington

Changing Station (for trains) now used by squatters. This building was first used in 1918 and therefore became the second oldest building we recorded.

Composite image of the three buildings used in *Silence Triad - Industry (Montreal Trinity)*. Original images: Sally Rees.

The initial idea was to record locations in different cities, however I gathered enough material to create a Montreal-only based sound triad.

9. *Stille/Silence* (2006)

This work is a 20-minute recording of dead air radio frequency, between two stations (a technique used in EVP recording). It consists of crackles, tones and interference. I equalised and cleaned up the sounds to enable it to be played at high volume.

I mixed this with a 20-minute recording of sleep–like breathing. This was produced by slowly breathing into a cardboard tube with a microphone at the other end and manipulating this recording to mimic internal hearing of one's own breathing (as if both ears are blocked). It is a meditative piece, where using the context of the EVP aesthetics enhances the expectation that something will happen.

This work originally had a video component inspired by 'ghost hunting' surveillance video and EVP aesthetics. The image above is a 'night vision' shot of a hallway at night from the video.

Still from original video for *Stille/Silence*

Until We Sleep - sound and video installation (2007/2008)

The work relates to that state between being awake and being asleep, a kind of no-mans land of consciousness and directly relates to the overall idea of my research - that moment between rationality and faith - the suspension of disbelief. Is the state of being awake a form of rationality and does the state of sleep, the dream world represent faith? It is the experience between these two places that interests me.

I am not a good sleeper and I often adopt various visualisations to assist in lulling me to sleep. One is a point of view as if floating in a star-scape, another is slow moving plumes of smoke. These mental images have been recreated for this work to present a meditative space for the viewer. A deep drone is something that I also find soothing. As the basis of the soundscape and to give a somewhat elemental quality to this work, I used a 50hz electrical hum, something that is around us most of the time.
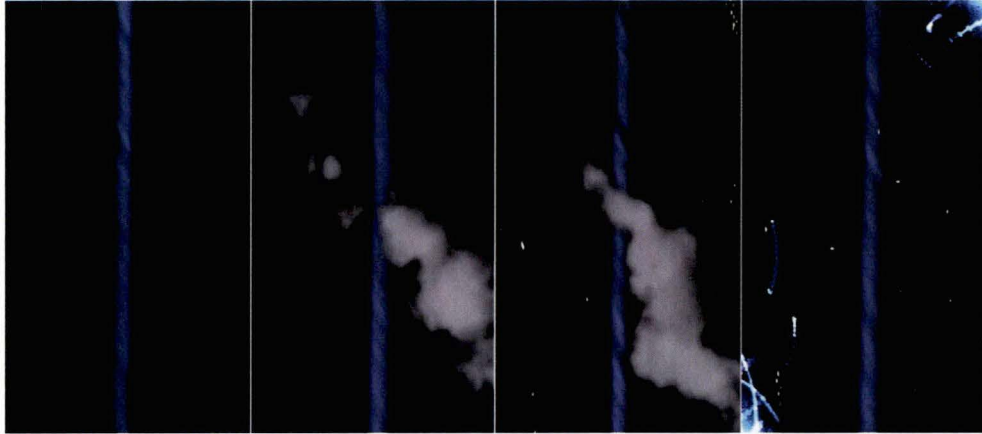
Until We Sleep 2007/2008. 4 video stills from the main projection video cycle.
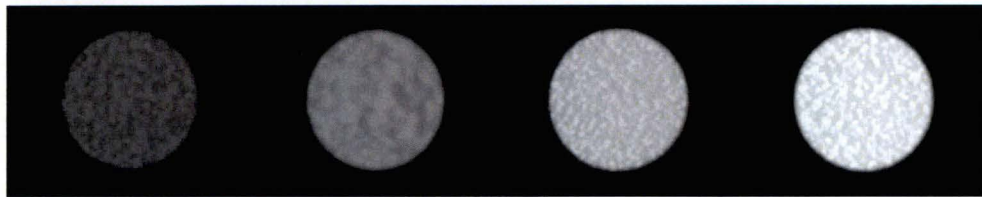
Until We Sleep 2007/2008. 4 video stills of circular light projection cycle.

The viewer sees a wavering blue line against a black background with the 50hz accompanying hum, projected onto a freestanding black surface. A light source throws a circular pattern on the floor, like a flickering white noise spotlight. The hum and the line are the elemental, the things that are there all the time. There is an overlay of my first visualisation, the smoke plumes, accompanied by a harmonically detuned version of the electrical hum. This represents a move into a deeper, more profound layer of sleep. Slow-moving stars accompanied by a deeper drone fade in and out, replaced by a quiet drone of a bed of voices. The circle of light begins to brighten almost imperceptibly with its own sound slowly becoming more audible. As the state of sleep becomes lighter, the voices begin to reveal themselves and the light from above brightens. The work climaxes with a sudden shift in brightness from the circular light into darkness and silence.

Of all of the works submitted, this was the one that evolved the most. The work felt correct when the narrative of the image sequence and the reasons for the way the images were used revealed themselves.

It is important to me that an audience member also gleans their own meaning from the work as I have over time deliberately removed didactic statements and voices from the audio component.[55] Susan Sontag has been influential in this regard. In *The Aesthetics of Silence* she writes:

> Language seems a privileged metaphor for expressing the mediated character of art-making and the art-work. On the one hand, speech is both an immaterial medium (compared with, say images) and a human activity with an apparently essential stake in the project of transcendence, of moving beyond the singular and contingent (all words being abstractions; only roughly based on or making reference to
> concrete particulars). But, on the other hand, language is the most impure, the most contaminated, the most exhausted of all the materials out of which art is made.[56]

---

[55] This is elaborated on in the conclusion along with changes in construction and content.

[56] Sontag, Pg. 14

Chapter 4: Theoretical and critical references.

As with the Context chapter I have separated these critical or theoretical references into three sections. These are related to various concepts within my works, often existing in the single work to create a sense of the suspension of disbelief. However, prior to that I will begin by speaking about the secular and the spiritual, the conceptual genesis of my project, by elaborating on subjects mentioned briefly in the introduction.

Faith and enchantment

One thing that has emerged from the interviews used for both research and the gathering of aural content, is the intersection of philosophy and science, and the merging of rationality and faith. Humans are complex and potentially contradictory. Our rational side wants the full story - to have explained to us what is confusing, or difficult to understand. But perhaps there is that beautiful moment just before order and rationality is restored or an irrefutable explanation is given when one allows oneself a moment of abstracted thought, where faith is 'enough'. Some of us want to stay in that moment. Some of us drift between faith and rationality and oscillate from one end of the spectrum to the other, depending on need. This is where I situate myself.

As a child, I did not have any strong religious upbringing or spiritual education. Like many children at a public primary school, we would have a weekly Scripture class and as mentioned previously, for a short time I attended Sunday School and the Boys Brigade.[57] I wasn't sure what to believe, but then who does at the ages 5-10? Throughout my late-teens and early twenties I became 'anti-religion', mainly as a result of political agendas associated with punk and other subcultures I was interested in. Of late I have tried to be more open to people's beliefs, to their various faiths,

---

[57]   A kind of Uniting Church equivalent to the Boys Scouts.

primarily because of a realisation that human beings do not really have a definitive grasp of 'what's going on'.

I want my work to present a space between the rational and the faithful because these two absolutes seem to me to be deeply problematic. It is my belief that human beings should not assume they know the be-all end-all on both sides of the fence.

So that being said, do we have a need for faith, to believe in something intangible? Do we still want to be enchanted? Can we recapture this sense of childlike wonder, this experience of the sublime and the unknown? Can we keep our scepticism (which may lead to a growing cynicism) at bay in a post-modern environment? After all we have learned, all we have seen, can we still be genuinely be moved by something marvellous?

In the first Manifesto of Surrealism in 1924, Andre Breton bemoans a loss of this childish wonder, that ability to be enchanted.

> At an early age children are weaned on the marvellous, and later on they fail to retain a sufficient virginity of mind to thoroughly enjoy fairy tales. No matter how charming they may be, a grown man would think he were reverting to childhood by nourishing himself on fairy tales, and I am the first to admit that all such tales are not suitable for him. The fabric of adorable improbabilities must be made a trifle more subtle the older we grow, and we are still at the stage of waiting for this kind of spider....
> But the faculties do not change radically. Fear, the attraction of the unusual, chance, the taste for things extravagant are all devices which we can always call upon without fear of deception. There are fairy tales to be written for adults, fairy tales still almost blue.[58]

Short of calling my work fairy tales, I do feel that my interests lie in trying to provoke a similar response to how one might feel as a child reading something fantastic, a 'what if' moment. I am not necessarily trying to

---

[58]   Breton, Andre – *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (1924) University of
      Michigan Press. USA 1969. Pg. 15

create illusions or tricks to fool the viewer into believing, nor am I trying to create a new religion; an environment for worshipping an esoteric deity. It could be said that in actuality I situate myself between these two things. This research project is an attempt to create an ambient place that allows, rather than forces the viewer and the listener to speculate.

The starting point for images and sounds that I use often come from a very intuitive sense of what is correct for each work. Perhaps a form of channelling? I am learning that I must trust that those images and sounds will resonate with others, and will indicate that Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious has at least a degree of truth.[59]

Jung has spoken about reasons for esoteric beliefs in the book *Flying Saucers* with this section having been written in 1958:

> We have indeed strayed far from the metaphysical certainties of the Middle Ages, but not so far that our historical and psychological background is empty of all metaphysical hope. Consciously, however, rationalistic enlightenment predominates, and this abhors all leanings towards the "occult". Desperate efforts are made for a "repristination" of our Christian faith, but we cannot get back to that limited world view which in former times left room for metaphysical intervention.[60]

Jung continues, explaining that the reason ordinary folk witness UFOs is because of this inherent, but suppressed and unquenched need. He declares the sight of UFOs as an archetypal projection.

> This attitude on the part of the overwhelming majority provides the most favourable basis for a projection, that is, for a manifestation of the unconscious background. Undeterred by rationalistic criticism, it thrusts itself to the forefront in the form of a symbolic rumour, accompanied and reinforced by the appropriate visions, and thus

---

[59] A set of inherited modes of expression, feeling, thought, and memory that are seemingly innate to all human beings. Jung saw the collective unconscious as being made up of so-called "archetypes" or processes, behaviours and imaginings all human beings are predisposed to.

[60] Jung, CG. *Flying Saucers*. MJF Books. NY, USA 1978. Pg. 22

activates an archetype that has always expressed order, deliverance, salvation, and wholeness.[61]

The archetype Jung is referring to here is the circle (the traditional shape of a flying saucer), also referred to as a mandala, a symbol of totality. Where some of Jung's suppositions fall down in relation to the sighting of UFOs is his degree of generalisation. How for example does he explain UFO photography? Surely one's desire to project or hallucinate an archetype that symbolises salvation cannot burn the image onto film or videotape simply by means of faith, regardless of what is in fact being photgraphed. However it is perhaps no accident that a range of my works in this project contain circles as an aesthetic choice, whilst dealing with this notion of a space between rationality and faith.[62] I should reiterate that the starting point for most of my work is based on an intuitive force. These works were conceived prior to fully grasping the Jungian notion of the mandala archetype.

A more contemporary investigation into the comparison between faith and rationality has been undertaken by Charles Taylor.

> Almost everyone can agree that one of the big differences between us and our ancestors of five hundred years ago is that they lived in an "enchanted" world, and we do not; at the very least, we live in a much less "enchanted" world. We might think of this as our having "lost" a number of beliefs and the practices which they made possible. But more, the enchanted world was one in which these forces could cross a porous boundary and shape our lives, psychic and physical. One of the big differences between us and them is that we live with a much firmer sense of the boundary between self and other. We are "buffered" selves. We have changed.[63]

---

[61] Jung, Pg. 22

[62] *Portal Lux Aeterna (after Ligeti), In Haunted Attics* and *Whitpinkblack Noise* all contain circles or variations on what Jung psychologically refers to mandalas (Sanskrit for 'circle')

[63] Taylor, Charles *A Secular Age: Buffered and Porous selves*
http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame/2008/09/02/buffered-and-porous-selves/
Accessed January 06, 2009.

Although I agree with Taylor that we have changed, I believe we still do have a desire for enchantment, but perhaps it is what enchants us that has changed, or to relate back to what Breton states, our fairy tales need to be constructed and presented in a more subtle way. I believe we still have the ability to be moved by this space between.

An exhibition; *Spirit and Place – Art in Australia 1861-1996*, curated by Nick Waterlow for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney in 1996 dealt with notions of spirituality as represented through historic and contemporary art. One catalogue essay deals with issues of specific relevance my research – the possibility for someone with a sceptical standpoint to have a spiritual experience through viewing an artwork.

Essayist Virginia Spate says:

> I know that sometimes, when looking at works of art, strange things have occurred in my consciousness that, to me hint at other levels of being than those appropriate to everyday life. Would I call them spiritual? I'm not sure, and I'm certainly distrustful of the easy use of the word. I know that I believe in this world and in what we do in it. Is that all? I don't know.[64]

What 'we don't know' and Spate's willingness to admit this, allowing herself to say it openly is something with which I am sympathetic. This is a description of the 'what if' moment I strive to elicit with my work.

Spate's essay speaks about the work of Kandinsky and his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art, and Painting in Particular*.[65] With his paintings, he was, through abstraction pointing towards a representation of a spiritual realm, and was less concerned with concrete, earthly

---

[64] Spate, Virginia *'Concerning the Spiritual in Art'. A Sceptical Essay* (catalogue essay) "Spirit and Place. Art in Australia 1861-1996". Museum of Contemporary Art. 1996. Pg. 76.

[65] From which Spate has deliberately referenced with her own title.

representations of nature and the world. Inspired by Theosophy[66] Kandinsky developed a vocabulary of symbolic forms and geometric shapes that represented this spiritual personality or 'thought forms'. [67]

Several Circles Wassily Kandinsky 1926.

Spate comments from a sceptical point of view, arguing that perhaps we cannot travel on a spiritual journey with Kandinsky, purely because these 'thought forms' and what has prompted them is of no relevance to our conscious everyday life. And yet she points out:

> Of course they don't 'float': they are flat circles of paint on a flat ground. But as I keep looking, I experience the circles as floating in infinite space. It's easy to 'see' how this is done: the change in scale suggests the larger circles are near; the smaller infinitely distant... I can see the device, but sometimes if I continue to look – and this always means intensive looking – there is an extraordinary moment when my perception seems to fall over some threshold, as if my mind is falling into this space; this emptiness.[68]

---

[66] A movement that was an alternative to materialism and based upon a combination of the 'truths' of many of the great religions.

[67] I propose this is likely related to Jung's notion of the archetype inherent in Collective Unconsciousness and in particular, the 'mandala', especially in reference to Kandinsky's *Several Circles* of 1926

[68] Spate, Pg. 76.

This reinforces the idea that through openness of mind, and time to speculate, one can have these moments of transcendence: a suspension of disbelief, even if initially coming from a sceptical standpoint.

> Perhaps the fact that I cannot share Malevich's or Kandinsky's beliefs – worse, I find them awkward and sometimes even silly. But, as I have tried to show above, I can find something that I might call spiritual, after long and intensive looking, through my experience of the materiality of their works.[69]

Finally Spate concludes with specific reference to the media:

> The experiences given by intensive involvement in the materiality of painting and sculpture may explain the significance of what is increasingly presented as demoded modes of expression.[70]

Although speaking primarily about painting and sculpture, the basic concept that Spate speaks of is relevant to my own media. In fact, the enveloping nature of sound and video projection allows the visitor to enter the work, rather that look at it from a distance, potentially enhancing the experience she speaks of. Spate points out that a meditative experience cannot be rushed. Time is central to my practice, which extends to control over the duration of interaction with my work.

Exposing the Hidden

A trace of something left behind, the video afterimage imposed on an old screen, a crack in the pavement, the water ripples from a rain drop on a river, the indentation of a body in an empty bed and the echo of a sound - these are all evidence of an event passed, of something happening, of a moment in time.

---

[69]   Spate, Pg. 80.
[70]   Spate, Pg. 76.

Could they be considered supernatural? If the answer is yes, then we are constantly surrounded by ghosts, everything and everywhere could be suitable to visit on a ghost tour. Are we followed by the supernatural?

Maybe not, but these residuals do haunt our environment. The ripple, the crack, the indentation and the reverberation are all remnants of a point in time or a repeated action, since departed. Perhaps for only a short time period, they haunt the place after the action has ceased.

Like a detective, we dust for residue of the past, searching for what happened before. We attempt to reveal something. We try and re-trace the steps but we cannot actually turn back time. Or like Kubisch and Haines/Hinterding we use technology to reveal what is always around us.

As mentioned previously Guglielmo Marconi, believed that sound never dies, but in fact just grows fainter. By that very definition we are surrounded by inaudible utterances from time immemorial. That idea both frightens me and pleases me, as it means somewhere out there is all the good and all the bad ever spoken, by you, by me, by everyone. Every sound ever made remains. In the last few years of his life, Marconi was trying to invent a listening device so sensitive that it allowed him to hear Jesus delivering the Sermon on the Mount - a crackpot idea perhaps, but a wonderful concept nevertheless with interesting consequences when one considers how words spoken to us or actions taken by us or towards us in the past continue to inform our present, a kind of infinite delay. Edmund Burke speaks of an experience of the sublime through infinity in the following way:

> Whenever we repeat any idea frequently, the mind by a sort of mechanism repeats it long after the first cause has ceased to operate. After whirling about; when we sit down, the objects about us still seem to whirl. After a long succession of noises, as the fall of waters, or the beating of forge hammers, the hammers beat and the water roars in the imagination long after the sounds have ceased to affect

it; and they die away at last by gradations which are scarcely perceptible.[71]

The memory of hearing of Marconi's listening device invention haunted me as I could never find out anything about it. I first heard about Marconi's planned invention at a lecture given by composer Gavin Bryars. Or did I imagine it? Are supposed memories sometimes confused with imaginings. Yes they often are. "Did that happen or did I dream it?" I did eventually find two vague internet references to Marconi's twilight years attempts, but no specific information about how far he actually got or if it was simply the musings of an elderly inventor. But it confirmed that it was indeed a memory and not an imagining.

In the sound design of cinema, the use of reverberation signifies an event in the past or a memory, haunting the present. This is often accompanied by imagery abstracted by soft focus or bathed in some other kind of distortion, signifying a breakdown or interruption of linearity. It has become a cliché that is still used. Do we experience remembered voices in reverberation? Do we see mental images from our past in soft focus? Not necessarily. But could it be due to this cliché that we accept that this signifies the past or a revealing of some kind of spirit world or metaphysical plane?

As we physically move further away from someone their outline and their features soften. If they are speaking to us, their voice becomes less audible over the distance. Does the cinematic cliché reveal a combination of the way we see someone in the distance and the amplification of a past-uttered word floating in a space, as a metaphorical manifestation of memory? The clichéd image of a ghost is a soft focus figure an echoic voice.

---

[71]   Burke, Edmund – *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.* Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited. Reprinted 1967. Pg. 73

The aesthetic use of a reversed reverb and delay/echo in such works as *Cantus 35*, *In Haunted Attics* and *Until We Sleep* has been employed to give a sense of breaking into an infinite aural cycle and interrupting it and revealing it or drawing it in from the ether.

Admittedly there is something somewhat nostalgic about some of the aesthetic quality of *Whitepinkblack Noise*, for example. But seemingly the obsolescence of certain technologies does not detract from the intuitive interpretations of those I interviewed and recorded for this work and hopefully for the audience as well.

Viewing video white noise is becoming a rarer occurrence day by day. A true, video signal, be it simply video black[72] or another piece of video imagery will play through to a receiver, television or projector. Dead air would once show white noise, static or "snow" as my family used to call it. Contemporary televisions for example tend to default to a flat blue colour during the loss of a video signal, where they once would dip in and out of white noise, where static dots or lines would swim over the image. By all accounts, Australian television will be completely digital by 2010, therefore eliminating video white noise. Interruptions or lapses in digital video signal tend to result in harsh glitches or freezes, creating a hard-edged abstraction. Similarly the interruption of a digital audio signal, (on a CD for example) results in a stuttering sound, or a harsh clicking interference.[73] By contrast, a slightly detuned analogue radio would have a warm distortion overlay, a

---

[72] As described in Bill Viola's essay; *Video Black – The Mortality of the Inage* as such:
'Well, there's video black, as in "fade to black." Then there's snow, when the set is on but there is no signal present-you can also see this as a blank, dark screen on video monitors. And then there's nothing, when the plug is pulled out and the set is cold. In terms of our bodies, these are like closing your eyes, sleep, and death." "Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House." MIT Press, USA 1995. Pg. 208

[73] German electronic composer/sound artist Markus Popp has capitalised on this aesthetic, in his project Oval and particularly on his album *Diskont*

frequency drone or whine. A scratched vinyl record might have a regular repeat, or a crackle over the song, (a worn stylus might create an underwater-like distortion). An irregular analogue tape might cause a 'wow' or 'flutter' in the sound. [74]

David Toop speaks of moments when digital audio glitches betray the illusion of aural 'reality' as such;

> The first LP I ever bought, Chuck Berry Live On Stage, used to stick at the beginning. I solved this by loading coins onto the arm until the needle gouged its way through the obstruction. Naturally, the groove was swiftly worn down, transforming "Sweet Little Sixteen" into a blurred, low frequency noise, though this seemed quite compatible with the record as fake documentary, since each track was an audio recording overdubbed with audience applause and released while Berry was in jail.
>
> Audio CDs don't allow this interactivity. Their workings and faults are invisible and inaccessible, and the sticking is either non-sequential, jumping from track 5 to 3 to 7 in random bursts, or a repeating glitch that no longer bears any relation to the original sound of the music. [75]

It should be stated that I am not specifically retroactive in my attitude to technology. On the contrary, although not always working with the 'cutting edge' of technology when art making, (I tend to use technology that the work requires, not using new technology for the sake of it), I do also embrace advances in multimedia and use it. In fact I would like to think I can bridge a gap, using the cold, clinical world of technology to create works that have a warm 'human-ness' to them.

Whitepinkblack Noise is work that uses noise, but does not necessarily celebrate it. Nor does it disregard it. Depending on your own aesthetic tastes, these noisy sounds and images are either pleasant or unpleasant. It

---

[74] An aesthetic quality often employed digitally in techno dance music, sounding not unlike moving from the room where the DJ is into another room (a slight muting of frequencies) and back again)

[75] Toop, David - *Haunted Weather – Music, Silence and Memory.* Serpent's Tail, London 2004. Pg. 181

also uses an ambient overlay, (the internal dialogue on headphones) that is mediative in nature. The mix of noise and voices amongst the calm of the drone (rain) indicates an interference, a haunting of the corporeal, by the incorporeal.

Guglielmo Marconi's notion of the never-ending radio signal, brings up the idea of communiqués sent out into the ether and lost, not reaching their intended destination or recipient for months, years, light year or never.

> The formal definition of a dead letter is: *a letter which can neither be delivered nor returned.* After spending several days interviewing handwriting specialists deep inside the U.S. Central Post Office, I began to think of the Dead Letter Office as a warehouse of undelivered feeling. The fate of the dead letter is essential for all radio producers to contemplate, because in the wrong hands, the cave of the imagination can easily assume the functional identity of the DLO.[76]

One wonders, is there an aural and visual equivalent to the Dead Letter Office for radio signals, sent out and not retrieved or retrieved and disregarded? And what of the multitude of 0s and 1s that make up those millions of pieces text (via email for example) and digital happy snaps out there in the virtual ether of the internet. We have all sent things via email that never arrived, but did not 'bounce'. Some kind of silent noise floats, a virtual Dead Letter Office contains the lost 0s and 1s. A tangled web indeed.

When thinking about my works, such as *In Haunted Attics* (with the idea of a creed heard in the memory forever), *Cantus 35*, (a soul signified by a tone, forever echoing) and *Portal Lux Aeterna (after Ligeti)* (where small blinking spots of light are existing as symbols of souls clustered together) I refer not only to a kind of metaphysical dead letter office informed by Marconi's notion, but also the idea of *Stimmung*, put forward by Lotte H. Eisner:

---

[76] Whitehead, Gregory - *Who's There? – Notes on the Materiality of Radio.* Art & Text 31, Melbourne, Australia. December-February 1989. Pg. 13

Thoughts whose presence is almost tangible seem to lurk
everywhere; they are like dead souls deprived of rest; they are the
'distant memories' we find in Novalis, 'youthful desires, childhood
dreams, all the brief joys and vain hopes of a lifetime, approaching
robed in grey like the evening mist.' (The poet also remarks that the
notion of 'Stimmung' alludes to 'musical conditions of the soul' and
that it is bound up with 'physical acoustics and a harmony of
vibrations'.)[77]

Ambience, space and time

Following on from the first section of this chapter, what is our sense of

wonder or enchantment replaced with? One-stop online information, instant

facts, a fast-tracked opinion? Technology evolves very quickly and we are

made to feel inadequate if we do not keep up. Seemingly the 'here and now'

is what is most important in a secular, materialistic point of view. There is

no time for musing or wonderment. Socially, politically, environmentally

and emotionally, this short attention span is targeted and reinforced by

commercial media.

Fast snappy advertising or MTV influenced concepts of editing and duration

inform the way some of us work. These techniques can be useful in that a

lot of information can be communicated in a short amount of time. But how

much are we taking in? Is it a deep understanding or a superficial glance?

As Virginia Spate points out, contemplation leading to a 'spiritual'

realisation does take time - it should not be rushed. One needs to be in an

ambient space where the 'here and now' is not as important as the

possibilities that may emerge through time. Narratives evolve, images and

sounds appear in and out of darkness and a period of time is required for

that to be experienced. For my work, a slower duration and a meditative

environment is important. This slowing and elongating of a moment is the

main concern of the *Long Now Foundation* and this ethos is deeply

---

[77]   Eisner, Pg. 200

appealing to me. From their website the Long Now Foundation have the following as a kind of mission statement;

> The Long Now Foundation was established in 01996* (* The Long Now Foundation uses five digit dates, the extra zero is to solve the deca-millennium bug which will come into effect in about 8,000 years) to develop the "Clock and Library" projects, as well as to become the seed of a very long term cultural institution. The Long Now Foundation hopes to provide counterpoint to today's "faster/cheaper" mindset and promote "slower/better" thinking. We hope to creatively foster responsibility in the framework of the next 10,000 years.
>
> **The Name**
> The term was coined by one of our founding board members, Brian Eno. When Brian first moved to New York City he found that in New York 'here and now' meant 'this room' and 'this five minutes', as opposed to the larger here and longer now that he was used to in England. We have since adopted the term as the title of our foundation as we are trying to stretch out what people consider as 'now'. [78]

As indicated in the book *Stone Age Soundtracks* by Paul Devereux, the acoustics of a space and by extension, the sound in an environment, were key elements in the experience of a religious ritual or spiritual ceremony. Relating back to how attitudes have changed from the spiritual to the rational in relation to the ritualistic use of sound he says;

---

[78] http://www.longnow.org/about Accessed: January 9, 2009.
Founding board member Stewart Brand argues the following in an excerpt from his essay also posted on the website when speaking about the 'Clock and Library Projects';
"Long Now proposes both a mechanism and a myth. It began with an observation and idea by computer scientist Daniel Hillis: *I think it is time for us to start a long-term project that gets people thinking past the mental barrier of an ever-shortening future. I would like to propose a large (think Stonehenge) mechanical clock, powered by seasonal temperature changes. It ticks once a year, bongs once a century, and the cuckoo comes out every millennium.* Ideally, it would do for thinking about time what the photographs of Earth from space have done for thinking about the environment. Such icons reframe the way people think."

How people once thought of sound was very different from our automatic understanding of it today as being due to pressure waves vibrating in the air (or some other medium). Instead, strange noises and echoes would have been associated by ancient peoples with spirits and the non-physical otherworld.

Emerging in the last centuries BC, ancient Greeks can be viewed as a kind of cross-over culture, straddling the shift between the archaic "dreamtime" past, when sounds were thought of in this spiritual way, and the beginnings of rationalistic thought in which the acoustical properties of structures such as theatres were beginning to be considered.[79]

And yet even though we do automatically understand sound in a scientific way, we are still emotionally (and physically) moved by sound and music. Devereux continues;

Beyond ritual sounds, noises and simple percussive rhythms, there are the effects of what we would more readily recognise as music and song. Most people enjoy music, whatever their favourite kind happens to be, because it moves them emotionally, evokes spiritual feelings, inspires and consoles. But why? It is "just" patterned sound, after all. It is an enigma that has fascinated people for centuries.[80]

In relation to Infrasound and the physical and psychological effects it may have;

Audible sounds reaches the primary processing centres of the brain along certain channels that are not used by the "silent sound" of infrasound.[81] Sound is processed in the brain's temporal lobe as is language and some aspects of memory. Associated brain structures are involved in feeling, which would include religious ("numinous") sensations and impressions of spookiness.[82]

---

[79] Devereux, Paul – *Stone Age Soundtracks – The Acoustic Archaeology of Ancient Sites*,Vega Books, London 2001. Pg. 17

[80] Devereux, Pg. 55

[81] Usual human distinguishable hearing is within the range of 16Hz to 20kHz. Generally speaking infrasound covers all sound below 20Hz. It can be considered a secondary 'silent sound', often felt or experienced rather than heard.

[82] Devereux, Pg. 44

In combination, sound and imagery within a space can have a powerful effect and construct an environment and perhaps, given time, "reframe the way people think".

> Sound can define the phases of a ritual, create appropriate moods, signal events and transitions, provide contrast with periods of deliberate silence, enable the ritualist to contact the spirit world, and it can, of course move the mind and soul emotionally. Anthropologists have noted that while blind ritual specialists are not uncommon, deaf ones are rare. Rituals are often conducted in dim or flickering lighting, or even at night, which in itself causes participants to be more sensitive to the auditory aspects of a ritual.[83]

Although I have explored the idea of ritual in the process and content of some of my minor works[84] within the research project, the major body of work is not specifically about ritual. However I hope to imbue my installations with a sense of a 'place of ritual'.

In an imaginary, ideal world, where my installations would be permanent environments, I would hope they could be used as such, not unlike my experience of the The Silophone.[85]

Certainly when the ambience of a space is constructed with various components, that is to say the *stimmung* is composed, the potential for a sublime, transcendent or spiritual experience of a visitor may be enhanced.[86]

---

[83]   Devereux, Pg. 29

[84]   Works such as *Channel, Ritual 5 : Watch the Skies* and *Exhalation* are referenced in the conclusion and all appear on a DVD of experimental, research, support work.

[85]   The *Room of Silence*, a permanently installed space for non denominational meditation designed by artist Hager Ritta is located at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate. I was fortunate to experience this calming place on a noisy, sweltering day in July 2003.

[86]   How German Expressionist film directors placed objects, light, shadows and people in the cinematic frame greatly enhanced the mood of a piece and as previously mentioned, signified the character's state of mind.

> This 'Stimmung' is most often diffused by a 'veiled' melancholy landscape, or by an interior in which the etiolated glow of an hanging lamp, an oil lamp, a chandelier, or even a sunbeam shining through a window, creates penumbra.[87]

I tend to not only use video projection as a way of showing imagistic abstracts, (elaborated on in the next section), but it is also simply a source of moving light. It catches the eye and moves the emotions. Seemingly, despite our sophistication when encountering technology, we are still fascinated and drawn to mysterious light in the darkness. Edmund Burke speaks of the sublime experienced as a result of combinations of environmental content:

> With regard to light [he writes] to make it a cause capable of producing the sublime, it must be attended with some circumstances, besides its bare faculty of shewing other objects. Mere light is too common a thing to make a strong impression on the mind, and without a strong impression nothing can be sublime.[88]

This last statement is in my opinion, arguable, but he continues with the notion of contrast that may redress this;

> A quick transition from light to darkness, or from darkness to light, has an even greater effect. But darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light.[89]

Certainly this contrast of extreme states works in relation to Ryoji Ikeda's work, *spectra II,* in the *White Noise* exhibition and I also adopt a sudden change from light to darkness at the conclusion of the 10 minute cycle in *Until We Sleep.* In this case it signals a change of state, as does the aural equivalent at the end of *Cantus 35.* These kinds of state changes tend to be more appropriate for durational or narrative works. However, for the most part I do not want to startle the viewer or listener. The darkness of the space has two elements. Firstly the practical concern of video/data projection. Secondly, the ambient atmosphere is enhanced in a darker environment

---

[87]   Eisner, Pg. 199
[88]   Burke, Pg. 80.
[89]   Burke, Pg. 80

A lot can be said for the way a specific mood created in a space enhances the profundity of an experience. In an installation setting, I try to bring in both ambient aural and ambient visual elements that allow an experience to occur. By trying to be non-dogmatic or not aligning the work to any specific organised religion, it is important to have an element of the 'everyday' in the aesthetics I use. That is why elements such as video white noise (*Whitepinkblack Noise*), dead air static from video and audio (*Portal Lux Aeterna (after Ligeti)* and *Looking For Voices*) and other everyday rudiments (that make up the abstract elements in *Until We Sleep*) are used.

Abstraction

Many people think of abstraction primarily in relation to painting with Kandinsky only one such example. Language, video and sound can all be abstracted. David Lynch abstracts narratives in film for example. The beauty of abstraction is that it can 'free the mind', make one more receptive and perceptive. Consider Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt's *Oblique Strategies* a series of cards printed with abstract instructions designed to help artists and musicians when they have a creative block or are in need of advice when making their work. A randomly chosen card will present a question or a statement that will perhaps change the direction of the work. Predating Eno, Cornelius Cardew's *Scratch Orchestra* produced a list called *1001 Activities* that similarly gave seemingly random instruction in order to free the creative mind. [90] Abstraction by adding a degree of randomness also encourages creativeness and perception. The Dada approach to automatic writing, the Surrealism approach to the *Exquisite Corpse* and writer William S Burroughs' 'cutup' technique all abstract the concrete. An abstraction opens the work to an audience and allows that audience space to interpret. An audience is no long simply a passive consumer, but complicit in the work.

---

[90]   Cardew, Cornelius (ed), *Scratch Music,* The MIT Press. USA 1974

Hard edges and concrete language do tend to close things. When something is written in the definitive, seen plainly or heard clearly, the conscious mind and the senses work together to 'tell the story'. If something is obscured, aurally, visually or linguistically there is more room to dream. In relation to the concreteness of the written word, Susan Sontag says the following;

> Sometimes the accusation against language is not directed against all of language but only against the written word. Thus Tristan Tzara urged the burning of all books and libraries to bring about a new era of oral legends. And McLuhan, as everyone knows, makes the sharpest distinction between written language (which exists in "visual space") and oral speech (which exists in "auditory space"), praising the psychic and cultural advantages of the latter as the basis for sensibility.
>
> If written language is singled out as the culprit, what will be sought is not so much the reduction as the metamorphosis of language into something looser, more intuitive, less organized and inflected, nonlinear(in McLuhan's terminology) and – noticeably – more verbose. But of course it is just these qualities that characterize many of the great prose narratives written in our time. Joyce, Stein, Gadda, Laura Riding, Beckett and Burroughs employ a language whose norms and energies come from oral speech with its circular repetitive movements and essentially first person voice.[91]

But what of moving images and sounds that are abstracted? How are they read? Like the 'freeing of the mind' inherent in the abstract instructions of Brian Eno, or Cornelius Cardew, and William Burroughs' "cutups", abstract video and sound remove the concrete that may be creatively or imaginatively constrictive. Essentially, time-based abstraction points to the idea that there may not be simple yes or no answers to what is happening around us. Particularly in a contemporary context, there is a degree of complexity to our lives that once did not exist.

> If modernist art followed modern science in reducing the mediums of art and our sensorial experiences to basic elements and simple structures, contemporary software abstraction instead recognizes the essential complexity of the world.

---

[91]   Sontag, Pg. 28

It is therefore no coincidence that time-based software works often develop in a way that is directly opposite to the reduction that over the number of years took place in Mondrian's paintings – from a detailed figurative image of a tree to a composition, consisting of just a few elements. Today we are more likely to encounter the opposite: animated or interactive works that begin with an empty screen or a few minimal elements that quickly evolve into a complex and constantly changing image.[92]

Of course I do see my work in this contemporary context in terms of media, but also in relation to how the work evolves and moves. Still, it should be said that I endeavour to keep my works fairly simple in content and structure, as overfilling them with details tends to close them. Quite simply, if there is space, one can enter.

---

[92] Manovich, Lev – *Abstraction and Complexity* (essay from the *White Noise* exhibition catalogue. Australian Centre for the Moving Image 2005. Pg. 39

Chapter 5: There is something important to be said, but...

A Conclusion

In moments of philosophical despair I often consider that as an artist, the greatest contribution I can make to the world is silence as there is already a multitude of noise, both visual and aural, cluttering up the space. Susan Sontag has said: "Silence is the artist's ultimate otherworldly gesture."[93] Should I also not explain why I do what I do, like the artists Ryoji Ikeda[94] or David Lynch[95] for fear that the banality of language will detract from potential interpretation of the viewer by informing too much? The Indian spiritual leader Meher Baba spent at least half of his life not speaking as a means of explaining that God's words are corrupted by man speaking them. Whilst in the grip of psychosis, the Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky in his last known public appearance stared at his audience, not moving, for at least a half hour.

Silence itself may not be the definitive answer,[96] but it is often appealing. Perhaps leaving enough space (silence) within the works and explanations is sufficient to get across what needs to be said.

---

[93] Sontag, Pg. 6

[94] As mentioned previously, he appeared in the *White Noise* exhibition and does not only use silence as a conceptual starting point for his work, but for many years politely declined interviews and/or supplied artist statements.

[95] "You start thinking about articulating a certain thing, and then you suddenly see it for what it is and the magic goes away a little bit. It's tricky. When you talk about things – unless you're a poet – a big thing becomes smaller." Quoted in *Lynch of Lynch*, edited by Chris Rodley. Faber and Faber Ltd. UK 1997. Pg. 27

[96] John Cage and others influenced by him would argue that it is impossible anyway.

Refinement

Over the period of research and refinement, I have a worked towards a succinct and disciplined body of work. I have stripped back various research threads and some works completed earlier.

Too much information

Much of the refinement of aural and visual content was that of removal or further abstraction. During the period of research I began to understand, that quite simply, less can be more. This is a dictum that I have always considered, but often one needs to first 'over-make' a work before realising the need to remove the superfluous elements. More space within the content of the work allows more space for the audience to enter and explore. This is outlined and reinforced in the context chapter section about abstraction. The removal of elements, the leaving of spaces, is indeed a form of abstraction and with that comes room for the work to breathe.

The work *Cantus 35* was initially called *The Sound of Light* and planned as a multiple sound and light performance work. The audience was to be located on the shore of Point Puer looking over to the Isle of the Dead, as overlayed recordings of the elongated sound of a different pitched tolling bells in reverse would be heard, as a series of lights flickered on the island. As the concept evolved, so did the work. This original envisioning was logistically problematic and in many ways was simply not right for what I wanted to project with the work. The use of light in many ways was too obvious, too didactic, as was the use of the bell – both because of what they symbolised.

The evolution of *Whitpinkblack Noise* was also a case of simplification. It was the first of three works for which I interviewed a number of people. Not only was I hoping to gather the thoughts and opinions of interviewees for research purposes, but also their voices would be used as part of the

soundscape of the installations.[97] Following an exhibition of an in-progress version of *Whitepinkblack Noise*, I was to realise that explicit use of the voices was detrimental to the overall experience. The sound element became somewhat didactic and as one visitor pointed out, the work was having a critical and explanatory dialogue with itself, leaving little room for the audience to interpret or intuit their own meaning. In the final version, the voices form a kind of ambient bed, a murky chattering texture that exists as a kind of internal dialogue.[98]

Until We Sleep was the work that was 'stripped back' the most. It was originally much more complex in terms of construction and installation, but during the research and testing period, the physical manifestation has gradually been stripped back. This has resulted in a work that achieves something closer to what I had originally hoped. Originally this work was to be multi-channel video and audio installation, experienced in an alcove, surrounded by sound and images. As with *Whitepinkblack Noise*, a starting point for this work was an interview where various questions about the pre-sleep state was asked and responses recorded.

Initially *Until We Sleep* was going to tread a similar aural ground to the original *Whitpinkblack Noise* sound aesthetic, using voices in a somewhat descriptive and illustrative manner. But again, as was apparent with *Whitepinkblack Noise*, too much was being said. Eventually a large degree of 'stripping down' took place. One reason for this was the unfortunate occurrence of accidentally deleting data and therefore having less to work with.[99] But once the decision was made to minimise the content, I was able

---

[97] The plan was also to utilise the recorded vocal responses as part of the soundscape.

[98] Listened to on headphones within the environment of the installation and obviously only heard by those with headphones, whilst an external dialogue, the sound of the coloured noises, white, pink and black, exists within the actual space for all to hear.

[99] The un-edited digital recorded voices for *Until We Sleep* were deleted when I accidentally 'trashed' a folder containing the data thinking it

to move forward. I did however want to include some vocal elements in the soundscape for this installation. The vocal sound used, was usually the most poetic or abstract line of dialogue spoken by an interviewee. Admittedly I have made aesthetic choices here. Rather than putting forward a statement that speaks some factual 'truth', the words spoken tell some poetic truth that is correct for the world that the installation creates.

When all the chosen pieces of dialogue are layered together they become a bed of abstracted and droning sound. Each subsequent sentence emerges from this bed to speak in a way not dissimilar to the tones in *Cantus 35* or Susan Hiller's voices in *Witness*. This bed of voices begins to be audible at the 5 minute mark, about half way through the duration. Conceptually this is important, as this work is like a compression of a sleep cycle into an abstracted 10 minutes, rather than 8 or so hours. So although it could be seen to be narrative in that it has a beginning and an end, the work is a continuum, a cycle.

The day after the data loss, whilst over at the Long Gallery at Salamanca Arts Centre documenting *Portal Lux Aeterna (after Ligeti)* in the "Parallel" exhibition, I witnessed a bluish horizontal line flickering on a gallery wall. It was light reflecting off the road outside, distorted by the heat and entering the space via a small exposed part of the blacked-out window. I captured this on video to use for *Until We Sleep* as it appeared to be designed for the work. It became the visual equivalent of the elemental hum.

Physically the work was simplified because it began to feel too cluttered. The first elements to go were the side projections and the idea of rear projection onto a surface was dropped. My original thought was that viewers could stand very close to the screen and feel enveloped by the imagery. However at close quarters the rear projected images do not have

---

was an unimportant, non-linked icon. Using data retrieval software, I was only able to retrieve about 50% of the recordings.

the sufficient clarity needed, nor does it allow the opportunity to see the 'big picture'. The work is all the better for this simplification. As has been pointed out throughout the paper, there is more room to enter when there are more spaces in the work.

A Loose thread

There was also a research thread that, in this final submission, was abandoned for reasons of clarity. That thread was based on performed ritual as a potential means of transcendence and/or the creation of artworks through abstraction and randomness. Although some works were created (some never passing the 'sketch' stage), I currently would only consider them support work. This is because, in relation to the notion of transcendence; an otherworldly state for the performer, this was simply not achieved. This is likely due to under-researching notions of duration and at this time only the work *Exhalation*[100] has that potential. The participatory work *Ritual 5: Watch The Skies* was related to *Provocation*[101] in that participants were invited to video themselves simply staring at the sky in a public place. The hope was that the elongated staring may prompt an experience not usually had.[102] The undertaking of this in public was an attempt to prompt passers by to do the same, mainly out of curiosity. I then montaged the submitted videos along with my own in a grid-like configuration. As I invited people from around the world to undertake this ritual, the configuration was gave the impression of a global ritual taking place.

---

[100] A performed sound work using elongated exhalation of breath
[101] An instruction to undertake two or more tasks of visual or aural stimuli that may encourage a new, potentially sublime experience. This work was inspired by *Oblique Strategies* which in turn was likely inspired by Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra *1001 Activities*, both of which are mentioned elsewhere.
[102] Even though the sky is there to look at all the time, our attention span towards it is seemingly limited to checking the state of the weather, whereas in our day dreaming youths, we were often encouraged to interpret images in the clouds (for example).

The drawing rituals/performances that included an element of randomness such as *Channel* and *Lightning Strike* again created minor works, that at the end of the day did not contribute significantly to the overall submission, neither conceptually nor aesthetically. Having said all that, I consider that perhaps some of these ideas and techniques may be explored in the future. I do think that *Ritual 5: Watch the Skies* and *Exhalation* could well be ongoing projects. I see the possibility of producing further *Provocation* instructions also.

My contribution to the field.

I consider that my work contributes to this area of research (as outlined in the context chapter) by giving a visitor a place for ritual, an electronic, non-denominational church that prompts questions about the incorporeal and may be seen as an antidote to an overtly sceptical and cynical contemporary existence. Having been inspired and influenced by various artists' works, I see myself using similar elements, combining and infusing them with my own conceptual and aesthetic sensibilities.

From the aural exposure of the hidden by Kubisch and Hinterding, the ambient works of Harris and Eno, the use of voice by Janet Cardiff and Susan Hiller, the abstracted video of Jordan Baseman and experiential environments of Ryoji Ikeda, I see my work as a relative amalgam and yet hopefully a unique contribution to this context.

The art works that make up the research submission are informed and enhanced by the esoteric idea of Marconi's perpetual soundwaves, Paul Devereux's research into ancient ritual acoustics, and Edmund Burke's simple explanations of sublime experience. Along with David Toop's ongoing research into ambient sound and silence[103], Charles Taylor's thoughts on the spiritual evolution/devolution of humanity, Virginia Spate's ability to have a sublime or 'spiritual' experience (through art), even with a

---

[103] Itself heavily informed by John Cage.

sceptical standpoint and finally the idea of 'poetic faith' as put forward by Coleridge has given this research a degree of credence. Perhaps more importantly, this combination of contemporary and historical references point out that the interest in the esoteric and the incorporeal, is ongoing and quite possibly timeless.

With the intention that these environments are not escapist never-never lands, I hope that visitors to my work take away with them the feeling, the questions and a sense that there is more to find and experience, rather than what is just on the surface.

Finally, I would like to address three questions as a means of concluding this research project.

In a sceptical contemporary world, is it possible to experience 'poetic faith' through time-based media?

From my own experience it appears that although we are generally a sceptical generation, under the right circumstances it is possible to experience 'poetic faith' through time-based media. As indicated by Virginia Spate, one can experience something that could be considered a 'spiritual' experience by concentrating on an abstract painting. I would argue that time-based media artworks may indeed evoke a similar response. It should be stated that when these moments arise, it might depend on one's own sensitivity, interests or other psychological aspects to what these moments lead to in terms of thoughts and interpretations. It could be said that although an artwork may 'move' you to have such an experience, one may need to already desire such an experience. Seemingly it may well be an ingrained or an unconscious decision to experience poetic faith, as pointed out in the theoretical chapter of this paper.

I personally have had moments whilst looking at or listening to artworks that do indeed fill me with a musing about the incorporeal and possibilities.

A sense that there is something else 'out there'. And in the end I can only hope that what I contribute to this field of interest and research does a similar thing. It does seem there may still be a need of wonderment, enchantment and that suspension of disbelief in the world.

Do my works provide that experience?

When I objectively consider the conceptual basis of *Cantus 35* for example, I am dealing with esoteric ideas, souls signified by tonal clusters and reversed echoes as informed by an obscure notion from Marconi. Yet I know for a fact that people were 'moved' by various works, willing to sit or stand with the works and breathe them in.[104] Does this signal a need on their part to believe? Or is it nothing to do with the conceptual content and more to do with the context and the composition. I believe it may be a combination of the two.

What I have realised is that the composition of the installations do require a degree of subtlety, not unlike the fairy tales spoken of by Breton. A stripping down to the essentials, that allows space to enter, both physically and mentally. An example of this is the previously mentioned, in-progress installation version of *Whitepinkblack Noise*, when it not only become obvious to me that the narrative, didactic voices had to be removed, but visitors to the work said this as well. So too, the evolution of the content and construct of *Until We Sleep* has been one of simplification and stripping back, based on a combination of my own intuitive response and others' comments. One wonders if looking back on my own work in 10 years time, will I decide that they were still not subtle enough. It is as hard to second-

---

[104] To again consider the idea that my works could possibly be permanent installations, I was pleased to hear the suggestion from American curator Mary-Jane Jacob that *Cantus 35* could exist in the Sentry Box for a longer duration than the life of an exhibition as a place for meditation. Mary-Jane's report on the "Port Arthur Project" can be heard on ABC's Radio National's "Artworks" podcast, dated April, 15, 2007.

guess your future self, as it is to second-guess how someone may read your work in the present.

What next?

As I have mentioned, I hope that one's art life, in terms of ongoing researching, learning and exploring, never ends with the conclusion of a specific project. I suspect this research I have undertaken has put me in a good position for future exploration of similar subjects and aesthetics. I am interested in how the evolution of an experiential installation is produced by the introduction of random elements through interactive technology. I have learned from this project that space for intuitive interpretation and abstract images allows a viewer and listener the opportunity to explore and wonder. If one takes the notion of random combinations such as that explored by Burroughs, Cage and Eno and how they can contribute to a new way of thinking, I would like to incorporate that into an experiential space. I feel the next step will be to create installations that respond subtly to the visitor, using sensors or other interactive devices, to randomly insert new elements to an installation, giving that viewer a unique experience. I see my future works continuing in a similar aesthetic vein, whilst creating evolving, abstract, ambient installations. A place where possibilities can occur.

Bibliography

Breton, Andre, *Manifestoes of Surrealism (1924)*, University of Michigan Press. USA 1969.

Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited. Reprinted 1967.

Cardew, Cornelius (ed), *Scratch Music*, The MIT Press. USA 1974

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Biographia Literaria. Vol 2*, Chapter XIV. Wiley and Putnum. NY, USA 1847

Crowley, Aleister, *Magical Diaries of Aleister Crowley, Tunisia 1923*, Samuel Weiser Inc, York Beach ME. USA 1996

Cuddington, Kim M. and Yodzis, Peter, *Black noise and population persistence,*
Department of Zoology, University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada 1999
http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1689925

Devereux, Paul, *Stone Age Soundtracks – The Acoustic Archaeology of Ancient Sites,*
Vega Books, London 2001.

Eisner, Lotte H., *The Haunted Screen*, University of California Press. 1952-1977.

Gibson, Ross, *Remembrance and the Moving Image*, Australian Centre for the Moving Image. 2003.

Grayson, Richard, "Grasshopper Worlds" (essay). *(The World May Be)*
Fantastic, exhibition catalogue. Biennale of Sydney Ltd. 2002

Jung, CG, *Flying Saucers,* MJF Books. NY, USA 1978.

Kafka, Franz, *The Complete Stories,* Schocken Books, New York 1971.
Reprint 1995.

Manovich, Lev, "Abstraction and Complexity", *White Noise* exhibition
catalogue. Australian Centre for the Moving Image. 2005.

Ozolins, Brigita, "The Everyday World is Not What it Seems" (essay from)
Parallel, exhibition catalogue. Salamanca Arts Centre INC. 2008.

Pernoud, Régine, *Hildegard of Bingen,* Marlowe and Company, New York.
1998.

Reynolds, Simon, "Haunted Audio", *The Wire* magazine # 273. November
2006.

Rodley, Chris (ed), *Lynch on Lynch,* Faber and Faber Ltd. UK 1997.

Sontag, Susan, *Styles of Radical Will,* Dell Publishing Co. Inc. NY. USA
1978.

Spate, Virginia, " 'Concerning the Spiritual in Art'. A Sceptical Essay",
(catalogue essay) *Spirit and Place. Art in Australia 1861-1996*. Museum of
Contemporary Art. 1996.

Strachan, Françoise, *Casting out the Devils,* The Aquarian Press, London
1972

Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age: Buffered and Porous selves,*
http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame/2008/09/02/buffered-and-
porous-selves/
Accessed - January, 06, 2009.

Toop, David, *Haunted Weather - Music, Silence and Memory,* Serpent's
Tail, London 2004.

Toop, David, *Ocean of Sound – Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary*
Worlds, Serpent's Tail, London. 1995.

Viola, Bill, *Reasons For Knocking at an Empty House,* The MIT Press,
USA. 1995.

Waterlow, Nick (curator and essayist), *Origins Originality + Beyond.*
Biennale of Sydney Ltd. 1986.

Whitehead, Gregory, "Who's There? – Notes on the Materiality of Radio",
Art & Text 31, Melbourne, Australia. December-February 1989.

Wilson, Colin, *Mysteries – An investigation into the occult, the paranormal*
and the supernatural, Panther, Granada Publishing.UK 1979.

Discography

Eno, Brian, *Ambient 4: On Land*, Brian Eno. EG Records 1982, Virgin 1997

Hinterding, Joyce, *Spectral*, Sigma Editions 2003

King Tubby, *King Tubby Meets the Aggrovators at Dub Station*, Trojan Records, Sanctuary. 2007

Kubisch, Christina, *E-legend*. Limited Edition CD-R. Ikon Gallery, 2006

Lull, *Continue*, Release/Relapse Records 1996

Lull, *Moments*. Release/Relapse Records 1998

Lull & Beta Cloud, *Circadian Rhythm Disturbance*. Laughing Bride Media Limited Edition 3" CD-R 2008

Lynch, David and Alan Splet, *Eraserhead – Original Soundtrack*, IRS Records 1982, 1989

Pärt, Arvo, *Tabula rasa*, EMI Classics 1997

Raudive, Konstantin, *Breakthrough*, Vista Records 7" 1971

Various artists, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, original motion picture soundtrack, Rhino Movie Music 1996

Various artists, *The Conet Project*, CD box set.
Irdial-Discs PO Box 424 London, SW3 5DY. 1997. (Currently out of print)

Various artists, *Indiscreet Stereo Test Record*, Discreet/Indiscreet.1995.

Filmography

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968). Directed by Stanley Kubrick
Screenplay by Stanley Kubrick & Arthur C. Clark.
Warner Bros. USA

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (1919). Directed by Robert Weine
Written by Hans Janowitz & Carl Mayer.
Decla-Bioscop/UFA. Germany

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1978). Written and directed by Steven
Spielberg
Columbia Pictures. USA

The Elephant Man (1980). Directed by David Lynch.
Screenplay by Christopher De Vore, Eric Bergren & David Lynch
Brooksfilms. USA

Eraserhead (1977).Written and directed by David Lynch
American Film Institute. USA

M (1931). Directed by Fritz Lang
Written by Thea Von Harbou & Fritz Lang
Vereinigte Star-Film. Germany

Metropolis (1927). Directed by Fritz Lang
Written by Thea Von Harbou & Fritz Lang
UFA. Germany

Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror (1922). Directed by F.W Murnau
Written by Henrick Galeen from Bram Stoker's "Dracula"
Film Arts Guild. Germany

Poltergeist (1980). Directed by Tobe Hooper

Screenplay by Steven Spielberg, Michael Grais & Mark Victor

Warner Bros. USA

Stalker (1979). Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky

Written by Arkadi Strugatsky & Boris Strugatsky

Mosfilms. Soviet Union

List of Works for submission.

Run out Groove (communiqué) - text and sound work (2006)

Cantus 35 - surround sound installation (2007)

Whitepinkblack Noise - sound and video installation (2007/2008)

In Haunted Attics - sound and video installation (2007/2008)

Portal Lux Aeterna (after Ligeti) - sound and video installation (2007/2008)

Stimmung Ton - collection of sound works (2006-2008)
Includes the following:
Searching for Voices (Between the Stations) (2006)
Voices From (2008)
S.O.S (Speed Of Sound) (2008)
Follow Me (2008)
Hiss – Silence in a Burnie House (2007)
Hiss – Silence in a Turner's Beach Shack (2007)
Microverse (2008)
Silence Triad - Industry (Montreal Trinity) (2008)
Stille/Silence (2006)

Until We Sleep - sound and video installation (2007/2008)

Content of accompanying discs

Disc 1:

Support Audio CD containing soundworks referenced throughout exegesis.

1. Christina Kubisch – *E-Legend* (excerpt) 03:06
from"E-Legend" Limited Edition CD-R Ikon Gallery 2006. Referenced in Chapter 2.

2. Joyce Hinterding – *Spectral* (excerpt) 02:18
from "Spectral" Sigma Editions CD 2003. Referenced in Chapter 2.

3. Scanner – *Cubic Field* 05:16
from "Indiscreet Stereo Test Record" Discreet/Indiscreet CD 1995.
Referenced in Chapter 2.

4. Konstantin Raudive – excerpt from recordings (with narration) 03:58
from "Breakthrough" Vista 7" vinyl 1971. Referenced in Chapter 2.

5. King Tubby – *Don't Take Another Man's Life Version* 02:47
from "King Tubby Meets The Aggrovators at Dub Station"
Trojan/Sanctuary CD 2007. Referenced in Chapter 2.

6. Brian Eno – *Lizard Point* 04:33
from "Ambient 4: On Land" EG Records 1982/Virgin CD 1997.
Referenced in Chapter 2.

7. Lull – *Continue* (excerpt) 05:01
from "Continue" Release/Relapse Records CD 1996. Referenced in Chapter 2.

8. Lull – *Moments (track 1)* 02:09

from "Moments" Release/Relapse Records CD 1998. Referenced in Chapter 2.

9. Lull & Beta Cloud – *Circadian Rhythm Disturbance* (excerpt) 01:20

from "Circadian Rhythm Disturbance" Laughing Bride Media Limited Edition 3" CD 2008. Referenced in Chapter 2.

10. David Lynch & Alan Splet – *Eraserhead* (excerpt from soundtrack) 02:59 from "Eraserhead – Original Soundtrack" IRS Records 1982, CD 1989. Referenced in Chapter 2.

11. Arvo Pärt – *Cantus in Memoriam for Benjamin Britten* 06:12

from "Tabula rasa" EMI Classics CD 1997. Referenced in Chapter 3.

12. Gyorgy Ligeti – *Lux Aeterna* 07:52

from "2001: A Space Odyssey – Original motion picture soundtrack" Rhino Movie Music CD 1996. Referenced in Chapter 3.

13. The Conet Project – track from archive 01:39

from "The Conet Project" CD box set Irdial Discs CD 1997. Referenced in Chapter 3.

Disc 2:

DVD of submitted works

1. *Run out Groove (communiqué)* - text and sound work (2006)

Documentation of installed work with audio.

2. *Cantus 35* - surround sound installation (2007)

Documentation of installed gallery version and original 'Port Arthur Project' version.

3. *Whitepinkblack Noise* - sound and video installation (2007/2008)
Documentation of installed work.

4. *In Haunted Attics* - sound and video installation (2007/2008)
Documentation of installed work.

5. *Portal Lux Aeterna (after Ligeti)* - sound and video installation
(2007/2008)
Documentation of installed work.

6. *Stimmung Ton* - collection of sound works (2006-2008)
Documentation of installed listening stations in gallery.
For full sound works see Disc 3 (Audio CD *Stimmung Ton)*

7. *Until We Sleep* - sound and video installation (2007/2008)
Documentation of installed work.

Disc 3: Audio CD
Stimmung Ton **- collection of sound works (2006-2008)**
1. *Searching for Voices (Between the Stations)* (2006) 10:00
2. *Voices From* (2008) 07:52
3. *S.O.S (Speed Of Sound)* (2008) 02:45
4. *Follow Me* (2008) 30:03
5. *Hiss – Silence in a Burnie House* (2007) 01:18
6. *Hiss – Silence in a Turner's Beach Shack* (2007) 00:50
7. *Microverse* (2008) 00:30
8. *Silence Triad - Industry (Montreal Trinity)* (2008) 02:08
9. *Stille/Silence* (2006) 20:01

Disc 4: DVD

Various Works 2006-2008 (support and research works)

1. *Ritual 5: Watch the Skies* (2007/2008)
Single channel video based on performed ritual.

2. *Exhalation* (2008)
Documentation of performance.

3. *The Lull* (2008)
Documentation of installation.

4. *Channel* (2006/2007)

Single channel video based on animation of 365 'blind drawing' self

portraits and improvised vocalisations.

5. *Ritual 3: Lightning Strike* (2007)

Split screen documentation of performance. Artist could not hear thunder on

soundtrack. An assistant was provided with headphones and shook the artist

when a thunder clap was heard, interrupting the drawing of a straight line.

6. *Provocation* (2007)

Single channel video – Federation Square, Melbourne version.

Video version of text/instructional work, designed to play on video screens

in Federation Square for Melbourne Writers Festival, April 2007.

7. *Provocation* (2006)

Documentation of responses.