

Audiovisual Artist Chris Dooks
Process for Sounding Drawings

Around 15 years ago I started using software like *Metasynth*ⁱ a piece of software that became known for being able to take images and make spectral sounds from them.

As an audiovisual artist, I went through a phase looking for pieces of software - or inventions, which made literal interplays between sound and image. This was because I had become 'a fragmented filmmaker' – my once broadcast TV career had imploded due to health issues. And now I was working in the flotsam and jetsam of the audiovisual artist, too ill to make coherent documentary works any more, but still generating sounds, photographs and moving images. So I became interested in art movements and software that allowed my fragments, my worlds of images and sounds - to hold conversations with each other.

Radio Astronomyⁱⁱ became an interest of mine that sort of does this in reverse, and Vinyl Videoⁱⁱⁱ was a very interesting invention, you play a record and images come on a TV. The nineties was the beginning of a new chapter in how artists engineer those conversations between visual art and sounds under the emerging (but thorny) banner of "new media."

Many other developments of this kind proliferated in the mid to late nineties and you'd see them in festivals like Mutek^{iv}, Ars Electronica^v and Sónar^{vi}.

Many of these projects filtered through to high brow music magazines like *The Wire*^{vii} who highlighted, in these audiovisual times, the artists doing interesting work in this field such as Alva Noto^{viii} and Kanding Ray^{ix} or the longstanding work of Ryoji Ikeda^x. - they became the masters of this field and their

performances generated music and live visual art as co-dependent enterprises. They had/have a group style also and one which I could never emulate or want to.

So in order for me to add something fresh to *this* conversation of 'sounding drawings' or add to the interplay between sound and image, I have to make it personal and supply sound-palattes or soundscapes that are more *personable* than a lot of what I feel is an incredibly dull and out of date "electroacoustic" response to images. So-called 'academic' musicians are stuck in trying to emulate Cage and Stockhausen, and Iannis Xenakis. My contribution is spoken word sound art here, in the main for *Sounding Drawings*.

I'd have sound/image conversations regularly with Robin Rimbaud aka Scanner^{xi}, with whom I made a *South Bank Show*^{xii} in 1997 when my boss was Melvyn Bragg. Robin was also interested in this territory and conversation. So it was something I had fleeting interest in. But now, instead of literal translations of visual images and vice versa I am more interested in cosmological and environmental-sound responses to images and like here, I'm using a 'curatorial' / conceptual response where it's not a literal conversation between sound and image. And that's what I have done.

On a personal level, I have become more of an aesthete and conceptual artist than ever before and I am less interested in looking at the pictures and then seeing what sound that could be. Or putting the image through something like *Metasynth* and seeing what comes out of the other side.

So for me, I am not really interested in using the visual art as a cue for some kind of (literal) score or even following the image much because in that methodology, the soundtrack is directed by the image and unless it is a reciprocal process, it can never

be a true collaboration. It would never be a proper conversation. There is no praxis (unless a dialogue is struck between both musician and visual artist).

So instead, I am interested in working more on the 'domino effect' of being asked to respond to a visual image, like a springboard - but perhaps the results will be like an apple that has fallen far from the tree.

The nub of my response is this - I would rather make a *parallel* work than 'score' the picture.

My 'sounding' of the drawing(s) would be to curate or create works to be seen as equal partners – a parallel - as opposed to a response which travels in one direction. It is this one-direction that could fail the project.

It seems clear that the visual artists in this series are interested in *process*, and in many cases in generative art. I've been making generative sound works all week for this project, but I have been unhappy with how they sounded. I can let you hear them anyway, but rather not tell you which images they are intended to go with!

I'd rather make a piece of work that responds to one or more of the works in a conceptual manner, as a springboard for influence. And so I've made it clear in the folders which work is which.

So as well as sending you my 'working out' I have made six parallel works to be heard alongside Tim DeCourt's work on generative art for twitter that he has been exploring. As it happens I have been working with twitter also in trying to generate statements about the universe, which can be summed up in tweet-length units. Also, as it happens, a book was

released earlier this year called *Tweeting the Universe* and obviously it doesn't mention Katie Holmes like Tim's work. But it does look at the phenomenon of Tweeting and it's amazing how relevant to the news items in Tim's work these astronomical statements can be...

And I often use any opportunity of a public show as an excuse to look at the nature of the universe.

So, I have, for this show, edited/curated a series of tweets from this *Tweeting The Universe* book by Marcus Chown (an astronomer and author) and Govert Schilling (an astronomy journalist). I have permission also from the authors to use these tweets in my own work.

I tracked down the authors earlier this year and asked them to give me statements about the universe that were tweet-length. I hadn't used them in any work until now. So what you will hear is one tweet for every *TwitterOn* image from Tim.

Each spoken word sound is not a literal interpretation of Tim's generative 'drawing' – it is more a parallel enquiry comparing how the brevity of tweets can create bigger and more complex permutations – in other words, how much value can we get from looking at one strata of tweeting and so it's an exercise in both economy and complexity.

As I say, I have adopted a more curatorial stance in this project, one which may disappoint, if you are expecting to hear what a particular image sounds like - but felt it was a way in which we could keep the validity of both artists on an equal footing.

Chris Dooks 24 Sep 2012, Ayr.

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- i www.uisoftware.com/MetaSynth/index.php
 - ii en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radio_astronomy
 - iii www.vinylvideo.com
 - iv www.mutek.org
 - v www.aec.at
 - vi www.sonar.es
 - vii www.thewire.co.uk
 - viii www.alvanoto.com
 - ix www.kangdingray.com
 - x www.ryojiikeda.com
 - xi www.scannerdot.com
 - xii <https://vimeo.com/7892599>