

The halo effect

A 2010 work by Auckland based artist, Chris Hargreaves, *Halo* displaces field recordings taken at various locations and repositions these findings into a sound incorporating sculpture. Displayed at the Uxbridge Arts Centre during the Manukau Festival of the Arts, the work creates an artificial 'ecosystem' of sound. Simultaneously analogous to multiple locations, the semi-random juxtapositions created in Hargreave's sculptural mash-up of sound recordings highlight the diversity of the Manukau region and complexity of the contemporary urban soundscape.

Trained both as a pianist and as a visual artist, these two areas of knowledge inform each another in his visual art practice. For instance, Hargreaves' approach to sound as the central component in *Halo* shares an affinity to the theories and practices of phonology and of musique concrete. French composer Pierre Schaeffer, founder of musique concrete in the mid-twentieth century, pioneered the usage of what he called acousmatics (sound one hears without seeing the originating source) in playful creative practice. The interesting juxtapositions of phonographic sounds in *Halo* suggest the hand of the artist is at play with our surroundings and that he is inviting us to engage too, at an experiential level. After all, we each have many thoughts and feelings relating to the innumerable sounds we are constantly experiencing.

Hargreaves notes that he is interested “in the way the interpretation of the familiar object can be changed when it is re-contextualised, in notions of truth and nostalgia, in the way people interact and build relationships with material objects, and how this can alter what we perceive to be real or genuine.” Given this observation by the artist himself, it is fitting that the physical construction of Hargreaves *Halo* and the sound it incorporates offers the viewer a number of ways in which to perceive the artwork. For instance, some viewers may see a metaphorical wink to Uxbridge's previous history as a community church. For others, *Halo* may suggest a metaphor similar to the incredibly popular computer game of the same name, which involves an alien race occupying an artificial planet resembling a ‘halo’ with its living ecosystem spread over an earth-like landscape inside the rim of this unique shaped biosphere.

Involving the audience as both viewers and listeners, *Halo* invites the audience to interrogate individual perceptions around our sense of place through sound. This approach is partially inspired by key works from the conceptual artists, Bruce Nauman and Bruce Barber. These artists employed a binary approach to sound in their respective art practices. In one well known Nauman video work, Hargreaves was drawn to the interplay between two clowns talking at the same time, one saying 'yes' repeatedly and the other saying 'no'. Similarly, in a challenging Barber video, Hargreaves recalls “a couple continually scream at each other”. Both of these seminal works deliberately pit the voices of actors against one another, revealing universal truths about human nature. Hargreaves *Halo* also operates in this vein; not attempting to tell you what to think, but juxtaposing multiple urban noises against one another in a simple yet conceptually rich gesture.

Matt Blomeley, 29 September 2010