

Revoicing the Striated Soundscape

By: Jordan Lacey

The project, Revoicing the Striated Soundscape, is a proposal for the creation of a sonic space in which air-conditioners speak, chant and sing to passers-by. The project conceptualises the city soundscape as the *voice of the city*. The ubiquitous air-conditioners in Melbourne's laneways create a homogenised voice. Residents and visitors to laneways are subjected to a one-way listening experience: an unchanging monologue of turgid drones. In this project voices will emerge from the drones creating a sense of dialogue between the *voice of the city* and the inhabitants of the city. The term, striated soundscape, is sourced from Deleuze and Guattari, who used striations as a visual metaphor to describe sedentary urban space; spectral visualisations of air-conditioning sounds show parallel lines existing in the soundscape, thus the term striated soundscape. By re-composing these striations a new voice can begin to emerge. The project is site-specific, to be placed in Rainbow Alley, an excellent location with its large number of air-conditioners creating a strong sonic presence. The images contained in the video are of Rainbow Alley.

Sound samples are created in Metasynth, an image-to-sound platform in which the spectral characteristics of sound can be deconstructed and manipulated in various ways. Of particular interest is the harmonic content of air-conditioners. The key concept for the sound design of this project is the reimagining of air-conditioning harmonics as formants. Speech formants can be applied as a filter to recorded air-conditioning sounds, which convolves its harmonic structure with the spectral characteristics of the human voice creating the illusion of singing, talking and chanting air-conditioners. There is some creative license with the notion of an air-conditioner's voice. Some sounds will be discernable as human voices emerging from the air-conditioners. Other voices are modulated sounds and rhythmic sounds that emerge from the harmonic structure of the air-conditioners. The introduced sounds will not play permanently; there are also segments of silence. The intention is to create diversity in the artwork so people have a different experience each time they enter the site. This avoids the issue of listening fatigue caused by some sound-art works.