
The Enormous Radio

Visual description and experience information | Access Guide

About the work

Chamber Made's The Enormous Radio is a large-scale immersive audio installation created by Roslyn Oades and Bob Scott, with collaborators: production designer Jenny Hector, dramaturg & text processor Sarah Walker and technology designer Kevan Atkins.

This documentary-inspired experience explores the possibility of communicating with the non-human world. Drawing on Australian wildlife field recordings, spatialised sound, translation software and techno-spiritualism, it imagines an interconnected machine capable of seeking, receiving, translating and transmitting messages from wild animals.

Techno-spiritualism blends technology with spiritual or mystical ideas, exploring how technology might create new ways of connecting with the unseen, non-human or unknown.

This communal listening experience comprises six transmissions from the animal world, each featuring the calls and sounds of Australian wildlife.

The installation brings together scientific curiosity, technological experimentation and our human desire to communicate with the natural world. Against the backdrop of climate change and the endangerment of wildlife, it asks: what if we could tune into the non-human, the endangered and the wild? What might they say?

Before entering: Foyer video

A four-minute film plays on a screen in the downstairs foyer before visitors enter The Enormous Radio installation. The film is presented without sound, with captions displaying the spoken content.

The video features interviews with co-creators Roslyn Oades and Bob Scott, as well as dramaturg Sarah Walker and tech designer Kevan Atkins alongside footage and proof-of-concept materials from the work's earlier creative development at The Substation.

The film offers an introduction to the ideas, creative processes and technological experimentation behind the installation.

Visual description of the installation

The installation is located in The Substation's Main Space, which has wooden floorboards. The circular installation itself sits on thin carpeting, creating a change in floor surface as you enter the structure.

The installation is dominated by a large circular structure made from old and vintage radios, arranged on industrial-style metal shelving and frames. The radios face inwards around the perimeter, creating the appearance of a large, interconnected machine.

There are many different types, sizes and shapes of radios, including small mantle-top models and larger cabinet-style units. Their casings are made from wood, metal, bakelite and plastic, in colours including brown, cream, black, grey, pink and muted green. Many have rectangular speaker grilles, tuning dials, knobs and illuminated displays characteristic of older radios.

Screens and monitors of various sizes are interspersed among the radios, displaying text and graphics associated with the animal transmissions.

The radios sit on four upper shelves. The lower third of the shelving structure features a band of LED strip lighting, illuminating the electrical leads, wiring and technical equipment beneath the radios.

12 Antennas positioned evenly around the circle extend upwards from the backs of the shelves, moving up and down throughout the experience. Planet lamps, also known as desk lamps, are dotted throughout the installation, illuminating the faces of the radios.

Some radios have glowing dials and displays, including warm amber, orange and yellow lights. Other technology features include CRT field monitors, oscilloscopes and several motorised radio dials reminiscent of Ouija boards, with needles that shift in response to different transmission frequencies.

A central light, known as the Ghost Light, descends from the ceiling at the beginning of the experience and hovers above the circular seating inside the installation.

The circular structure surrounds an open central area containing a circular wooden bench. A second, straight bench, approximately three metres long, is positioned outside the installation. Behind this outer bench is another row of shelving containing radios and equipment that also emit sound, light, text and signals.

Together, the many radios, screens, lights, moving antennas and electronic components create the appearance of a single, complex machine, revived and repurposed for a new form of communication.

How the work operates

Although the installation is made from old radios and broadcast test gear, they have been hacked, revived and repurposed to operate together as an interconnected listening and communication system.

The work draws on recordings of Australian wildlife. These sounds are processed, composed and spatialised, creating a rich, high-fidelity listening experience.

Layers of sound emerge from the radios, speakers positioned throughout the installation and overhead, moving around and above the audience. The sounds may appear close or distant, shift between different parts of the space, or surround listeners from multiple directions.

The imagined process of the machine is to seek, receive, translate and transmit.

Rather than broadcasting conventional radio programs, the installation uses sound and technology to speculate on what communication with animals might be like.

The six wildlife transmissions

The listening experience runs for approximately 45 minutes and comprises six transmissions, presented in the following order:

1. Tasmanian Devils: Recordings of Tasmanian devils in the wild at Loongana, Tasmania, and in captivity at Copenhagen Zoo.
2. Swamp Life: Pobblebonk frogs recorded in Little Desert, Victoria, and the buzzing wings and drill-like sounds of march flies recorded at Wonboyn Lake, New South Wales.
3. Red-tailed Black Cockatoos: Black cockatoos recorded in the Atherton Tablelands, Queensland, and the raucous calls of a channel-billed cuckoo recorded in Dharug National Park, New South Wales.
4. Blue Whales: Silver gulls recorded at Phillip Island, Victoria, and Antarctic blue whale calls presented at various speeds.
5. Dingoes: A night parrot recorded in the Little Sandy Desert, Western Australia, and a chorus of dingoes recorded at dusk in Ormiston Gorge, Northern Territory.
6. Boobook Owls: Recordings of boobook owls.

On-screen text and animal translations

Throughout the 45-minute experience, text appears intermittently on some of the screens integrated into the radio installation.

These animal translation texts were generated by feeding wildlife field recordings into readily available voice enhancement software and asking the program to identify spoken-English words.

The resulting texts are what the machine interpreted or 'heard' in the animal recordings. They are not verified translations of animal languages, but English words and phrases generated through the software's interpretation of the sounds.

The text may appear as individual words, short phrases or fragmented sentences. Some sections contain incomplete or unrecognisable words, reflecting the machine's attempts to decode animal communications and translate their meaning.

For example, during the Tasmanian devil transmission, the sounds of crunching bones, sniffing and wind accompany the following fragments of text:

"Enough."

"Enough food."

"Hard life."

"Health."

"We cold."

"My pouch tired."

"I grow old."

"Better eyes."

"Hush for a while."

These fragments provide an example of the language and character of the animal translation texts. They are not a complete transcript of the transmission.

Experiencing the installation

The Enormous Radio is primarily an immersive listening experience. There is no requirement to visually inspect every radio or object to engage with the work.

Visitors are welcome to enter the circular installation and sit on the central wooden bench, move around the space, or experience the work from outside the structure.

A second, three-metre-long bench is positioned outside the installation for those who prefer to sit and listen from there.

The most intense sound, lighting and vibration effects are experienced inside the circular installation. Experiencing the work from outside the structure offers a

different sensory perspective, with more space between you and the surrounding sound, light and vibration.

As you move around the installation, you may notice changes in the sound, including differences in where sounds appear to originate, their intensity and how they travel through the space.

You are welcome to choose where you would like to sit or stand and experience the work in a way that feels comfortable for you.

Wheelchair-accessible space within the installation can be accommodated. Please let us know when booking your ticket so that arrangements can be made for your visit.

Please do not touch the installation. The radios and associated equipment contain sensitive and delicate wiring and electrical components that may present electrical hazards.

If you would like assistance orienting yourself to the installation or navigating the space for any access reason, Front of House staff can provide guiding assistance and information about the physical layout, seating options and accessible pathways. Staff will have training in blind and low vision awareness and guiding practices.

Content and sensory information

The Enormous Radio contains flashes of light, loud noise and periods of sustained darkness. It may be anxiety inducing for audiences with sensory sensitivities.

The installation features rich, layered and spatialised audio content, alongside sound-responsive lighting and physical vibrations that vary in intensity throughout the experience.

Some transmissions feature particularly intense combinations of sound, light and vibration:

Transmission Three- Red-tailed Black Cockatoos: Multiple radios and screens activate in rapid succession, producing an intensified sequence of flashing lights and visual activity throughout the installation.

Transmission Four- Blue Whales: This transmission features some of the strongest low-frequency sound and physical vibrations in the work, which may be felt through the body and seating.

These sensory elements may contribute to the immersive experience for some visitors, including Deaf and hard of hearing audiences, while others may find particular sounds, lighting effects or vibrations overwhelming.

Visitors are welcome to move to the outer seating, change their position or leave the installation if they wish.

The work contains mild coarse language and is recommended for audiences aged 14 years and over.

A quiet room is available in Studio 7, located on the same floor as the installation. Visitors are welcome to use this space if they need a break from the sensory experience. Front of House staff can provide directions or guiding assistance to the quiet room.

If you have any questions about the installation, access requirements or navigating the space, please speak with Front of House staff.

About The Substation

The Substation is a contemporary arts venue in Newport, Melbourne, housed in a former electrical substation built in 1915 to power Melbourne's suburban railway network. After closing in the 1960s and falling into disrepair, the building was restored and reopened as an arts centre in 2008.

The imposing, three-storey red-brick building features Edwardian Baroque and Neoclassical architecture, with tall arched windows, decorative rendered details and high ceilings. Inside, its industrial character is retained through expansive open spaces, exposed structural elements and timber floors.

The venue contains multiple exhibition, performance and studio spaces across its three levels, including a large Main Space, galleries and smaller studios.

The Enormous Radio is presented in the Main Space, located on Level 1.

Contacts and further information

For information about getting to The Substation, venue accessibility and other visitor information, visit:

<https://thesubstation.org.au/visit/>

To contact The Substation or enquire about anything ahead of your visit, please call (03) 9391 1110 or email info@thesubstation.org.au

For more information about Chamber Made, visit:

<https://thesubstation.org.au/artist/chamber-made>

Feedback about your experience

We welcome feedback about your experience of The Enormous Radio, including this Access Guide and the accessibility of the installation. Email: info@chambermade.org

End.