



shruti (2008)
audio installation

Shruti is an audio installation that uses as its source material the notes of the *tanpura*, a 4 stringed drone instrument that is arguably one of the most recognized sounds in South Asian music, presented alongside binaural field recordings made on the streets of Kolkata, India. By manipulating the playback of each discrete note in the drone, *Shruti* re-presents the intention of the *tanpura* (to manifest the infinite number of possible notes in the universe from which the musician plucks the ones needed for a performance). The mixing in of binaural field recordings from Kolkata further contextualizes the remix of the *tanpura*, as background to both displaced and familiar “reality”, a gesture to the *tanpura*’s function as accompaniment to the improvisational performance (in this case, the sound of our lives, and of the lives of others). Finally, it brings to bear sounds and processes used in glitch, electroacoustic, and electronic music to re-present the possibility of traditional sound beyond its original intention and context while still remaining connected to it. In *Shruti*, we listen to sound that is both connected to the past and is firmly rooted in the present, an illustration of the new global context of art, innovation, and tradition.

Technical notes

Each note of the drone (ie the sounding of each string) is binaurally recorded from an actual instrument. Binaural recording is a process where sounds are recorded through microphones placed in the ears, resulting in a startling clarity of sound and an almost unearthly sense of “being there”, due to the replication of the natural delays that we experience when listening in the air. In *Shruti*, the ratios used to determine pitches in the overtone series are applied to the length of the recorded note, that is, the original note is cut into 1/2 its length, 1/3, 1/4, etc. Further pitch processing will be applied to reveal other (digital) harmonic content. Binaural recordings of the streets of Kolkata, selected for their general fit with the *tanpura* remix, are also played back concurrently.

For the initial installation, during a festival of South Asian culture in Toronto, a microphone was placed outside in the exhibition site and mixed in to the sound installation.

The machinery for playback is hidden under a (preferably white) pedestal or similar structure, with 2 sets of headphones for listeners to use. One light is focused on the surface where the headphones and the title of the piece is stencilled/placed. Playback equipment may also be hidden behind a wall or other architectural feature.

Exhibitions:

RE-GENERATION (group exhibition of South Asian Visual Arts Collective), Toronto, Canada (2008)