

# THE LONG NIGHT TAKES

Steve Bates

September 13 – October 18, 2014

1. Kahn, Douglas. *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2013. 9.
2. Toshiya Tsunoda, "Field Recording and Experimental Music Scene", *Erstwords blog*, 7 July 2009. Web. 8 Sep. 2014.
3. Quote taken from notes provided by the artist.
4. Thibaud, Jean-Paul. "The Three Dynamics of Urban Ambiances." *Sites of Sound: Of Architecture and the Ear* Vol. 2. Ed. Brandon LaBelle and Claudia Martinho. Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2011. 43-53.
5. Pasolini, Pier Paolo, Norman MacAfee and Craig Owens. "Observations on the Long Take." *October 13* (1980): 3-6.

"...nature sounds are familiar, while  
nature signals are not"<sup>1</sup>

## THE BIG NIGHT

**I**n the exhibition *The Long Night Takes*, Steve Bates continues to explore the field of the visible and audible-inaudible coupling. The sound artist examines motion and acoustics through the prism of time passing in two new audiovisual and light installations.

In OBORO's small exhibition room, a split-screen video projection, consisting of several scenes shot in different locations, depicts Bates' site-specific studies of night observations. Through these images and their corresponding sound modulations, the artist conveys the ambience and experience of a hovering darkness.

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A darkened room introduces the main subject of the recordings, the drone of night, considered here as space and as time. *The Long Night Takes*, a title inspired by *Observations on the Long Take*, an essay by director Pier Paolo Pasolini, presents long takes accompanied by an ambient soundtrack composed from field recordings done on location. Equipped with various microphones, such as contact mics and a hydrophone, which can detect a large spectrum of sound waves underwater and above water, audio devices, a radio and a VLF receiver, Bates amplifies and enhances the sounds of the environment, highlighting the acoustics of the sites. Visitors are invited to listen and experience the mix of concrete sounds derived from several sonic phenomena, such as sounds that are at a low frequency or inaudible to the human ear and the vibrations of objects, particularly those of a metal fence, a park bench, a fountain, etc. By recording radio frequency interferences and electromagnetic waves, Bates enables us to perceive the flow of electricity, the unfathomable energy of terrestrial activity. The omnipresence of motion thus made palpable echoes the creative and aesthetic process of the Japanese musician Toshiya Tsunoda, who affirms that “every space is constantly trembling.”<sup>2</sup>

While the sound is textural and suggests daily activity, the image creates a counterbalance by evolving in time: static long takes of slow actions resemble scenes by the Hungarian director Bella Tarr. Bates’ subject is intensified by the contrast: “There is a sort of multi-layered slowing down of the visual image while the sound is accelerated, almost.”<sup>3</sup>

A few images of each site shot at night portray frozen moments of ambient stillness and tranquillity. Night evokes various feelings and states of being such as suspense, desire, fantasy, adventure, and secrecy... French sociologist Jean-Paul Thibaud, whose research focuses on notions of urban ambiances, acknowledges the relation between a site and one’s personal impression of it: “Each ambiance involves a specific mood

expressed in the material presence of things and embodied in the way of being of city dwellers. Thus, ambience is both subjective and objective: it involves the lived experience of people as well as the built environment of the place.”<sup>4</sup>

Filming at night, Bates specifically chose places—a park, a factory, a riverbank, a playing field, a construction site, and a beach—that are marked by the presence of artificial lighting. Inspired by the artist Michael Asher, who merges materials with notions of history, economics and social studies in his projects, Bates critically examines the role of night-time lighting in the urban spaces of the industrialized world. Furthermore, the light installation *Réverbère*, set up at the gallery’s entrance and composed of two hanging lights that blink according to the left/right stereo volume control of the projections inside, acts as a signal and subtly introduces the subject of the exhibition. Since their invention in the 17th century, streetlights have been regarded as surveillance tools supposed to assure safety and stability. The light in Bates’ videos plays with the idea of examining places, whether they are deserted or imply the presence of others, or whether they are full of people and shot from a distance to maintain their anonymity. The light analyzes and witnesses lulls in the activity; the light tensely emphasizes a possible occurrence.

*The Long Night Takes* expresses the visible and invisible details of the environment, while offering an entry to the imagination. Pier Paolo Pasolini deftly identifies the subjectivity that surrounds us: “It is impossible to perceive reality as it happens if not from a single point of view, and this point of view is always that of a perceiving subject.”<sup>5</sup>

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