

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Space Culture (9)

Author: Ms. Cath Le Couteur
United Kingdom, cath@shootingpeople.org

PROJECT ADRIFT: THE PROCESS BEHIND AN EXPERIENTIAL ARTS PROJECT ABOUT
SPACE JUNK.**Abstract**

In this paper, we will discuss the process that we undertook in the making of 'Adrift,' an experiential arts project about space junk that was funded by The Space, Arts Council and the BBC.

As practicing artists (filmmaker and sound artist), our aim with the project was to experiment with modes for engaging audiences with this hidden enclave of space. An enclave where debris orbits above our heads, monitored by some, unseen by most, unheard by all.

Our initial interest lay in the poetics and stories behind singular pieces of debris; a dropped glove, a spatula, the continuing orbit of the Vanguard, the oldest dead satellite that has since outlived its makers.

We began by asking, what might this debris provoke for those otherwise unfamiliar with this dimension of existence? Might the project resonate with a sense of human 'aloneness', a mirror of what's 'out there', connecting for audiences with what's 'in here'? Could it invite new thinking and understandings on the urgent need for innovations to mitigate debris, as this contemporary crisis continues to grow.

In order to devise a solid framework, we entered into a series of practice-based inter-disciplinary exchanges with computer scientists, space-debris database operators, debris-trackers, astronomers, satellite-makers and designers. We built an orbital mechanics simulator that allowed audiences to adopt a piece of actual debris and communicate with it as it orbited above the earth in real time. We created a physical sound/visual installation that used this live debris data to position the audience sensorially, as though they were experiencing the sound, speed and smell of debris. And we created a film that explored how specific human characters are connecting with debris in their own unique ways.

This paper will consider some of the key decisions we made in seeking to achieve a multi-disciplinary approach for outreach education and will critically evaluate the assumptions that informed these decisions with regard to the notion of public engagement in science.