

Becky Šik

*Mercury*

05.06.21 — 11.07.21

Mercury is the closest planet to the sun. In Islamic astrological writing, Mercury was depicted as a scribe while in Roman mythology Mercury is the god of messages and communication. The element mercury is the only liquid metal. Rotating beds of this “liquid mirror” were, and sometimes still are, used in astronomy to look out into space.

These numerous definitions reflect the multiplicity of themes in the new film *Mercury*, by Glasgow-based artist Becky Šik, who has woven together a kaleidoscope of narrative, conceptual and material motifs.

*Mercury* draws on the history of experimental and artists’ film in foregrounding rhythm and association to structure this work. The film and installation are designed to be immersive, allowing the viewer to fully experience waves of image and sound, tone and texture.

The film is composed of three main elements; digital video with 16mm film; a soundtrack created by the artist with vocals and homemade magnetic

instruments; and a voice-over that interlaces two narrative strands (about an amateur satellite tracker and a hobbyist magnet fisher) with poetic and philosophic ruminations on the nature of communication. Each element is composed from a rich constellation of fragmented source material that loops and echoes across the duration of the film.

Central to *Mercury* is an exploration of the ‘echo’. Both as a physical occurrence - the resonant humming that opens the film and bats echolocating - but also as concept. Every time we communicate our speech refracts and reflects off the objects and people around us:

*“Echos are delayed returns; they are incomplete reproductions, usually giving back only the final fragments of a phrase. An echo spans large gaps of space... and time... but it also creates gaps in meaning and intelligibility... [they are an] incomplete, belated and often contradictory kind of repetition.”*<sup>1</sup>

*Mercury* also proposes vision as an echo: we see through light waves bouncing off things. The light from the stars comes

to us as an ‘echo’ of that star in the past, because of the time it takes for light to travel across the vast expanse of space.

Bats use echolocation to “see” the world, to hunt and to navigate. Constantly emitting high-pitched calls as they fly, bats listen to how these sounds echo back to them and, in the changes they “see” the shape, direction and speed of their prey.

While on residency in the island of Eigg, Becky was lent a petrified bat that had been caught in the gap between the walls of a house. Perfectly preserved, the bat is frozen in time; an echo of its past flight. Becky also spent many night-time hours filming bats in Glasgow in the peripheral spaces of the city (canals, industrial parks) creating the rich and beautiful footage that punctuates the film: Bats circle, swooping in and out of shot, at times falling into sync and mirroring the soundtrack.

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<sup>1</sup> Joan W. Scott, *Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity*, Critical Inquiry, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Winter, 2001).

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The teenage magnet fisher, on the cusp of social and physical transformations, dredges the bottom of a canal with a high-powered magnet, pulling from the depths discarded or hidden detritus that echo from other lives. The amateur satellite tracker uses basic equipment to listen into space to find and identify satellites as they pass overhead. Like the magnet fisher, the amateur trawls space searching for a signal: sometimes classified military technologies or a so-called “zombie satellite” that has become space junk.

This relationship between observer and subject (bat and prey, tracker and satellite) is unique and contingent on the specific moment. Their perception is shaped by the change in the signal. The way the echo of the bat’s call shifts and alters as it bounces back from the insect’s body. The way a satellite signal alters and shifts depending on the specific location of the tracker.

From these specific instances, wider, more probing, questions emerge. How does our unique position define our perception of the world around us? These questions are

not just posed to the nominal “subjects” of this film (the bats, satellite tracker etc.) but also to us as the viewer.

**Becky Šik** is an artist based in Glasgow, whose practice moves between film, sculpture, sound, music and publishing. Recent projects include, *Sharing a View*, group exhibition, Luxun Academy of Fine Arts, Shenyang, China; Creative Lab residency with Sarah Forrest, CCA Glasgow; *Next Top Model*, group show, Govan Project Space; *Fiducial Marker*, solo exhibition, Project Rooms Glasgow; *Human Machine Interface*, group show at Hilbertraum Gallery, Berlin; *A thought Becomes an Announcement* solo exhibition, QPRC, Glasgow. Becky is part of the ongoing collaborative project *Made by ME*.

**Satellites Programme** is Collective’s development programme for emergent artists and producers based in Scotland. The 2020 participants are: Alison Scott, Sulaïman Majali, Holly McLean and Becky Šik.

## *Mercury* (2021) - HD video

Narrator: Virginia Hutchinson  
Magnet Fisher Dan Monaghan  
Camera + editing: Becky Šik  
Camera Assistant: Kevin Pollock  
Field recording + composition + music: Becky Šik  
Final sound mix + mastering: Kim Moore  
Captions: Collective Text (Sarya Wu & Emilia Beatriz)

Thank you: Collective, Stephanie Connelly, Lucy Conway and Eddie Scott, Dan Monaghan, Ross Finnie, Beth Allan & Michael Sherrington and Forest of Black, Sarah Forrest, Kirsty Hendry, James Hutchinson, Virginia Hutchinson, John Lemke, Marie Liden, Kim Moore, Katherine Mackinnon, Sulaïman Majali, Kris Mcconnachie, Holly McLean, Natalie McGowan, Tom Owens, Kevin Pollock, Sigurðst Ragnarsdóttir, Maria Rossi, Alison Scott, Jane and Mike Šik, Helen Simmons, Scott Tilley, Clara Ursitti, Blair Young.

Commissioned by: Collective  
Funded by: Creative Scotland, Edinburgh City Council, Baillie Gifford  
Supported by: RSA, Bothy Project

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