



An Audio Tour of the Solar System – opening up explorations in imagination and audience agency

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Having developed a wide-ranging collection of cultural projects involving art and science, particularly immersive experiences, we at Shrinking Space set out to investigate how intrinsic and translatable any given scientist or engineer working on a particular active space mission's visualisation and comprehension of these far-flung regions of our Solar System is.

This project became Mind's Eye, and set out to take audiences into that scientifically evolved imagination. We interviewed, with the wonderful assistance from Neil Denny at Little Atoms, 15 scientists and engineers on missions from Stereo to New Horizons, an exciting range of voices and characters painting a picture of humanity's tentacles stretching out across our galactic neighbourhood.

We received help from ESA and NASA in reaching our explorers, and asked them a series of questions about the mission, the probe and the locale, including Mercury, Saturn, and Comet Churyumov–Gerasimenko. We aimed to interview 50/50 men and women, and hear young voices as well as scientists with decades of experience.

Once we had gathered these interviews our first port of call for Mind's Eye was Brighton, UK, with the Brighton Digital Festival in the autumn of 2015. This was an arts festival, with a digital focus, and our proposal was to lead the audience through our Solar System guided by the experts.

Shrinking Space's methodology is to give audiences agency in the artistic experience. The reasons are several fold, but particularly we want to understand if this agency aids in giving a deeper comprehension of the science being portrayed, as well as a more individual and unique experience – one where an audience member's choices are key to their unfolding journey.

The venue for Mind's Eye was a large empty warehouse (our Solar System), audiences began their journey on Earth, hearing the voice of Gerhard Thiele, an astronaut elaborating on the experience of rocketing into space, from there they could go where they liked. A traveller could head to Mars, and to the outer Solar System, or inwards via Venus and Mercury to our Sun at the centre. To create the artistic experience each voice was transmitted via a short-range FM radio transmitter, so as you left one celestial body you notionally travelled through empty space, hearing only white noise, before you arrived at your next destination, and therefore scientist whose daily routine perhaps took them to Saturn and her moons.

The feedback from audiences, and discussions after their journey's, was heart-warming to hear how moved they were by the experience. Mind's Eye travelled onto London, Manchester, Bradford, and Bristol, being experienced by thousands across the UK – hopefully excited in the exploration of the unknown and the scientists and engineers carrying out this imagination fuelled research.

Shrinking Space has gone onto curate projects for King's College London, Science Gallery London, and the British Science Association, and future projects include Project Doomsday, a festival about ecosystems and von Humboldt with Wakehurst, Kew Gardens, and My City on Mars – a project exploring how a settlement on Mars might evolve.