

# CHAPTER

## Sound description

### COMMS FAIL

#### Introduction

COMMS FAIL includes several different sound works encountered across the exhibition. These include a recorded spoken audio work titled *COMMS FAIL (monologue)* in Gallery 1, a three-channel composition distributed across the *Red Shelters (Andrew, Anya, Elodie)* in Galleries 2, 3 and 4, and a two-channel stereo composition performed by the pair of sculptures titled *Sound Particles (Anya)* in Gallery 5.

Each sound work has been described separately. Where compositions are distributed across multiple sculptures or shelters, no single listening position contains the complete work. Instead, sounds emerge, disappear and continue between them, encouraging visitors to move through the exhibition as different parts of each composition become more or less prominent.

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#### Gallery 1

A pair of wireless headphones plays a recording of the artist reading *COMMS FAIL (monologue)*. The monologue forms one iteration of the wider *COMMS FAIL* narrative unfolding across 2026. A printed transcript of the complete text is available from the reception desk.

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#### Gallery 2

One channel of the three-channel composition is heard from the loudspeaker within the shelter in Gallery 2.

This section begins with a rapidly accelerating drum roll made from kick drum, snare and crashing cymbals. A deep horn enters beneath the percussion, introducing a sustained low bass note that continues through the opening minute before gradually thinning away.

Around one minute and twenty seconds into the recording, the horn returns, growing in resonance before being interrupted by rapid electrical discharges that move quickly through the composition. Beneath these, a low pulsing bass frequency appears intermittently while short, quivering notes from a processed string instrument emerge in brief bursts.

Following a short pause, the low bass note returns beneath accordion-like sounds that descend rhythmically through a musical scale. These are interrupted by another rapid surge of electrical noise.

At approximately three minutes and ten seconds, the composition falls into an extended period of silence. During this time, the distributed nature of the installation becomes more apparent as recordings from the neighbouring shelters continue elsewhere in the exhibition.

At around four minutes and ten seconds, the opening materials return. Drum rolls, sustained horn tones and low frequencies reappear before giving way to a slower passage in which descending accordion-like phrases are accompanied by rolling drums and cascading cymbals.

Towards the end of the recording, the percussion gradually reduces to isolated floor tom strikes before fading into silence.

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## Gallery 3

One channel of the three-channel composition is heard from the loudspeaker within the shelter in Gallery 3. Together with the loudspeakers in Galleries 2 and 4, it forms part of a distributed composition that unfolds across the exhibition. No single listening position reveals the complete work, allowing sounds to emerge, disappear and continue between the shelters.

This section is characterised by long sustained electronic tones separated by periods of silence. Rather than introducing recognisable musical rhythms, the composition gradually accumulates layers of electronic sound, allowing attention to move between this shelter and the neighbouring galleries.

The recording opens with fourteen seconds of silence. A low-frequency sine wave then emerges, rising gently in volume before gradually fading away. This sustained tone repeats several times, each separated by a brief pause.

Around one minute and thirty seconds into the recording, a rapid electrical discharge cuts across the quieter tones. This is followed by short, quivering sounds resembling processed string instruments accompanied by intermittent low bass pulses.

A continuous low electrical hum gradually develops before another brief electrical burst passes through the recording.

From approximately three minutes and ten seconds, the composition changes character. Highly processed distant vocal sounds emerge alongside delicate bell-like tones. These blend into short, repeated electronic pulses resembling distorted Morse code.

Around four minutes and forty seconds, regular keyboard-like patterns begin to appear beneath the existing layers. Shortly afterwards, a deep low-frequency rumble enters, followed by another rapid electrical surge.

Towards the end of the recording, the keyboard patterns rise gradually in pitch while the electrical hum returns beneath them. A dense, distorted high-frequency crescendo develops from around five minutes and thirty-five seconds before slowly diminishing into silence.

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## Gallery 4

One channel of the three-channel composition is heard from the loudspeaker within the shelter in Gallery 4. Together with the loudspeakers in Galleries 2 and 3, it forms part of a composition distributed across the three shelters. No single listening position reveals the complete work, allowing sounds to emerge, disappear and continue between the shelters.

This section begins with fourteen seconds of crackling, broken static. A low-frequency sine wave then emerges, rising gently in volume before gradually fading away. This sustained tone repeats several times, separated by brief pauses. Across these repeated tones, bursts of electrical discharge pass through the composition before fading again.

Around one minute and thirty seconds into the recording, accordion-like sounds enter alongside intermittent hand-drum rhythms resembling rolling tabla strokes. These are occasionally interrupted by brief glitches, as though short fragments of recorded music have been played backwards.

A gradual crescendo builds towards approximately three minutes before returning to the crackling static heard at the beginning of the recording. From around four minutes and fourteen seconds, this static continues beneath softer oscillating electronic tones that move more fluidly through the composition.

At approximately five minutes, another crescendo begins. Rather than introducing entirely new material, this passage carries partial versions of sounds heard elsewhere in the installation. Low-frequency textures appear as underlying layers of fuller crescendos heard in neighbouring shelters. Shortly afterwards, accordion-like phrases return, descending rhythmically through a musical scale as a complementary layer to similar material distributed elsewhere in the three-channel composition.

The final minute becomes increasingly dense as these layers overlap. Two brief electrical discharges pass through the recording before the composition falls into silence from around six

minutes and ten seconds, allowing sounds from the neighbouring shelters to become more prominent.

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## Gallery 5

Each of the two sculptures carries one channel of a two-channel composition. Parts of the stretched plastic within each sculpture vibrate to produce sound, driven by transducers attached to their reverse sides. Together they form a stereo composition distributed across the pair. Sounds pass between them, sometimes appearing to answer, echo or extend one another.

The recording opens with amateur radio transmissions carried primarily by one sculpture. Frequency artefacts, electronic bleeps and bursts of static surround a heavily processed human voice speaking what sounds like a non-English language. The words are partially obscured by interference and remain difficult to distinguish, leaving the rhythm and texture of the speech more audible than its meaning.

These transmissions are repeated at a lower volume by the second sculpture. Across four exchanges, the recordings appear to pass back and forth between the pair until approximately two minutes and forty-four seconds into the composition.

Following a pause, the second sculpture introduces a creaking, squeaking sound made by a heavily processed marker pen lid being twisted open and closed. This sound is passed between the sculptures alongside delicate percussive sounds resembling small shells or bells being shaken together.

From approximately four minutes and thirty-two seconds, sustained sine-wave tones gradually fade in before slowly degrading and fading again. These tones also move between the two sculptures, becoming part of the ongoing dialogue.

Around five minutes and five seconds, a brief burst of radio interference appears across both sculptures. Rather than disappearing, this interference continues beneath the remaining sounds while the sine-wave tones gradually rise in pitch and become increasingly discordant.

The composition concludes with approximately one minute and forty seconds of silence before the recording begins again.