

Curated by Damien Simon and Anne Zeitz in collaboration with Clélia Barbut

Échos magnétiques – Christina Kubisch

An Exhibition at the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes



Fig. 01: Christina Kubisch, Emergency Solos, "Weekend" (photograph), 1974–75, © Christina Kubisch Archives, Courtesy of Christina Kubisch.

The exhibition *Échos magnétiques—Christina Kubisch* took place at the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes /France from 15 February to 14 April 2019. It was curated by Damien Simon and Anne Zeitz in collaboration with Clélia Barbut. The following texts stem from the exhibition booklet realized with students from the seminar *Écouter l'archive/University Rennes 2* (directed by Séverine Cauchy, Yann Sérandour and Anne Zeitz). The authors of the texts are Anne Zeitz and Clélia Barbut excepting the *Cloud* text written by Damien Simon.

General introduction

The trajectory of the German artist Christina Kubisch, born in 1948, unfolds in this exhibition through several constellations of documented insights into moments or aspects of her work. After studying art with a focus on painting, then music in the 1960s and early 1970s in Germany and Switzerland, Kubisch enrolled in elec-

tronic music and composition courses in Milan. In the 1970s, her approach was based on experimental music, performance, video and feminisms. She developed a series of performative pieces that disrupt the relationship between body and musical instruments, associating mouthpieces and gas masks or thimbles and keys. Her concerts or actions also took the form of detailed protocols, documented by means of drawings, scripts and scores. Already at that time, but especially during the following decade, her interest was in the translation of imperceptible phenomena into perceptual sonic experiences. She developed installations and appropriated marginal or marked spaces in particular, but also galleries and museums. Using receiving cubes or headphones, she made electric and electromagnetic fields audible, notably in a series of projects called *Listening to Walls*. Since then, her work has continued to explore the thresholds of what is perceptible. The relationship between sound and light, and in particular ultraviolet light, was the subject of various projects from the 1980s to the 2000s. Kubisch generates subtle transformations in the perception of interior and exterior spaces through networks of threads, labyrinths and plant forms. From encounters with John Cage and Mauricio Kagel in the 1970s, to artistic exchanges and friendships with Rolf Julius and Terry Fox in Berlin in the 1980s and 1990s, her career has integrated reciprocal transfers that have emerged from the exchange of practices. Group exhibitions, sound walks and "concerts on tables", these inspirations are retraced through the multiplicity of different types of work on display. The exhibition is organized around the work *Cloud* (work in progress since 2011), which makes waves imperceptible to the naked ear audible and questions the relationship between the visible and the audible. Presented for the first time in France, this installation is accompanied by constellations of documents – scores, photographs, drawings,

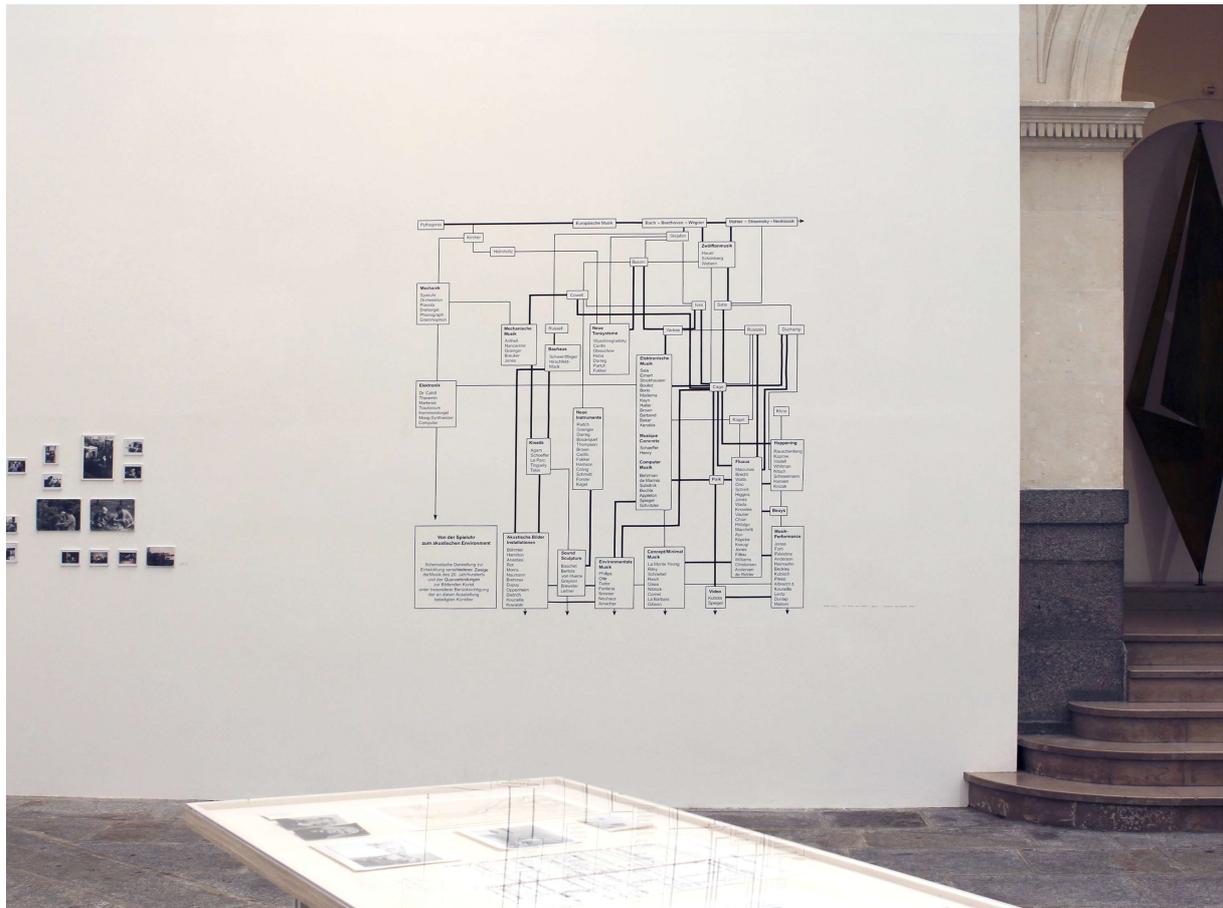


Fig. 02: View of the exhibition *Échos magnétiques* (2019) with an enlargement of René Block's schema from the exhibition catalogue *Für Augen und Ohren*, Berlin, Akademie der Künste, 1980, photo: Anne Zeitz.

vinyl records, cassette tapes – from the work of Christina Kubisch and related artists, as well as the collections of the INHA-Archives de la critique d'art.

René Block's schema

In 1980, the German curator René Block organized the exhibition *Für Augen und Ohren* (For the Eyes and the Ears) at the Akademie der Künste Berlin, a collective exhibition featuring some fifty works and questioning the place of sound in art history. The schema was published on one of the first pages of the exhibition catalogue. It is an attempt to trace the development of sound practices from Pythagoras to contemporary artists and composers. Christina Kubisch participated in this exhibition and her work was located between Joseph Beuys, Fluxus and video work, in the box at the bottom left entitled "Music and performances". The exhibition travelled to the Musée d'art moderne de la

Ville de Paris the same year with a reduced corpus of works entitled *Écouter par les yeux: Objets et environnements sonores* and an eponymous catalogue.

1. Influences, friendships and transfers

This constellation developed around Christina Kubisch's meeting with the artist and composer John Cage in 1978 at Stony Point near New York.

Fig. 03: Christina Kubisch with John Cage, Stony Point, (photograph), 1978, © Christina Kubisch Archives, Courtesy of Christina Kubisch.





Fig. 05: View of the exhibition *Échos magnétiques*, Constellation #2, Performances, 2019, photo: Anne Zeitz.

walk in St. Petersburg during a group exhibition *Interferences – West Berlin Art 1960–1990* (two artists whose joint projects with Kubisch are the subject of constellation 6). Another photograph shows Kubisch with the curator Bernd Schulz who supported the three artists and, more generally, artists interested in the field of music and sound in the context of numerous exhibitions organized at the Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken in Germany.

2. Performances

This constellation brings together documents from Christina Kubisch's practice during the 1970s and early 1980s. Her approach, rooted in composition, instrumental practice and electronic music, then came into contact with other currents in the avant-garde and especially performance. This is reflected in the letter Annea Lockwood wrote to her in 1975 about *Women's Work* magazine, which she was then creating with

artist Alison Knowles, inviting Kubisch to send her "scores, designed for performance": i.e. documents that aim to give a graphic form to the development of an action. The documentary ensemble presented is structured around a series of performative pieces that critically, ironically and sometimes sensually question the relationship between the musical instrument and the performer's body. *Identikit* was composed and performed during one of the summer courses on contemporary music in Darmstadt in 1974. It is a composition for five pianists playing simultaneously on the same piano and following rhythms listened to through headphones. In the *Emergency Solos* "for flute and objects" (*It's so touchy*, *Weekend*, *Break*, 1974–75), gas masks, mittens or boxing gloves, and thimbles disrupt the classical fingering. In *Vibrations*, a piece for string quartet, vibrators replace the bows. The compositions *Water Face*, *Tempo Liquido*, *Liquid Piece* (1975) are populated by fluid materials and water sounds.

3. Biennale de Paris – *Écouter les murs*

The *Écouter les murs* project was carried out twice in France in the early 1980s: in 1982 for the Symposium d'Art Performance organized by Hubert Besacier and Orlan at the Goethe-Institut in Lyon, and in the "Sound and Voice" section coordinated by Monique Veaute and Marie-Noël Rio, at the 12th Biennale de Paris. The previous year, in 1981, the installation was presented in Martina Franca in Italy.

In this constellation, we find the traces of these events: a map of the installation at 13 rue François Dauphin in Lyon, indications concerning the realization, a table of selected participants in the Biennale section, a letter from Veaute to Kubisch, a letter from the latter explaining *Écouter les murs*, photographs of the installation in Italy and the Espace Donguy, partner of the Biennale de Paris. The audio document, a radio tour given by the artist within the installation, allows sound echoes to be heard. *Écouter les murs* is the

result of research into the principle of electromagnetic induction that Kubisch discovered when she attended evening electronics classes in Milan in the late 1970s. It focuses on the reception of electromagnetic fields that are inaudible to the naked ear which she makes audible. In the early 1980s, Kubisch had specific receivers manufactured in the form of cubes, and later headphones, through which listeners could listen to the sounds of *Écouter les murs* by approaching cables glued to the wall.

The hybrid documentary ensemble of this constellation first informs us about the work itself: *Écouter les murs* is described and explained orally and in writing by Christina Kubisch and the sounds of her installation on rue de la Roquette can be heard. This constellation proposes not only to expose the archival richness that can be deployed around a specific work, but also the variety of content to which the different media provide access. Voices and sounds, handwritten texts, official

Fig. 08: View of the exhibition *Echos magnétiques*, Constellation #3, Biennale de Paris – *Écouter les murs*, 2019, photo: Anne Zeitz.



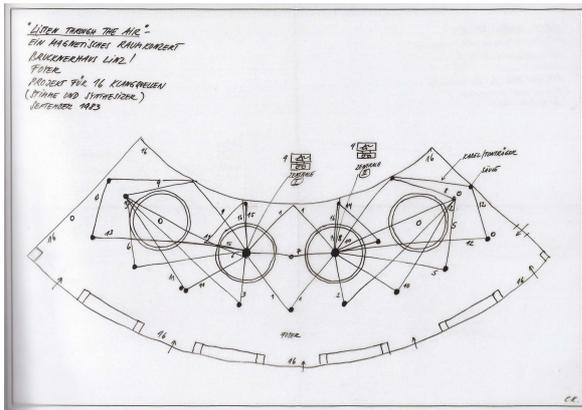


Fig. 09: Christina Kubisch, *Listen Through the Air, Linz*, (drawing), 1983, © Christina Kubisch Archives, Courtesy of Christina Kubisch.

letters, press clippings, photography [...]. This set of documents gives us access to different spaces and times that have marked the design and realization of this installation.

4. Listen Through The Air - Electromagnetic installations, concerts and operas

Based on the works *Écouter les murs*, Christina Kubisch deepened her research on the sonic translation of electromagnetic phenomena in various projects from the 1980s to the present. Instead of inserting cables along the walls, she suspended them up high in a series of projects, notably in *Ocigam Trazom* in 1985. On the drawing, the lines that cross the floor plan of the room correspond to the positions of the cables and the colours to the different electromagnetic fields thus created. When the visitor passes under the cables with one of Kubisch's headphone sets, they pass from one electromagnetic field to another and hear successive fields of sound. This work was conceived for the Palazzo della Permanente in Milan as part of the Mozart Festival and is based on the composition of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Each of the twelve voices from Mozart's opera is translated into sounds recorded, transformed and/or created electronically by the artist. "Mozart Magico" or *Ocigam Trazom* backwards is thus conceived as an electromagnetic opera that can be traversed spatially by the listener. *Listen Through The Air*, a drawing on a floor plan of the exhibition space in Linz, Austria in 1983, also takes the form of the reinterpretation of a concert situation into a new spatio-temporal composition or a "spatial magnetic concert". Another set of

drawings from this constellation shows the artist's inspiration from the plant world, gardens and trees.

For the installations *Klangbaum* (Sound Tree) and *Vogelbaum* (Bird Tree), she confronts sounds produced in natural environments with electronic sounds. The sounds, which are always audible only through headphones, are intertwined. The artist is interested in the more or less minimal difference between the squealing or whistling of animals and the sounds produced by different technical means and how this difference transforms the way we listen to our environment.

5. A History of Sound Cards

This project is based on an orientation plan (*Orientierungstafel*) by a nineteenth-century German music encyclopedia, *Die deutsche Musik des 19e Jahrhunderts*, which intrigued the artist during her studies. For her

Fig. 10: Christina Kubisch, *A History of Sound Cards*, (reproduction of a schema), 1978, Christina Kubisch Archives, Courtesy of Christina Kubisch.

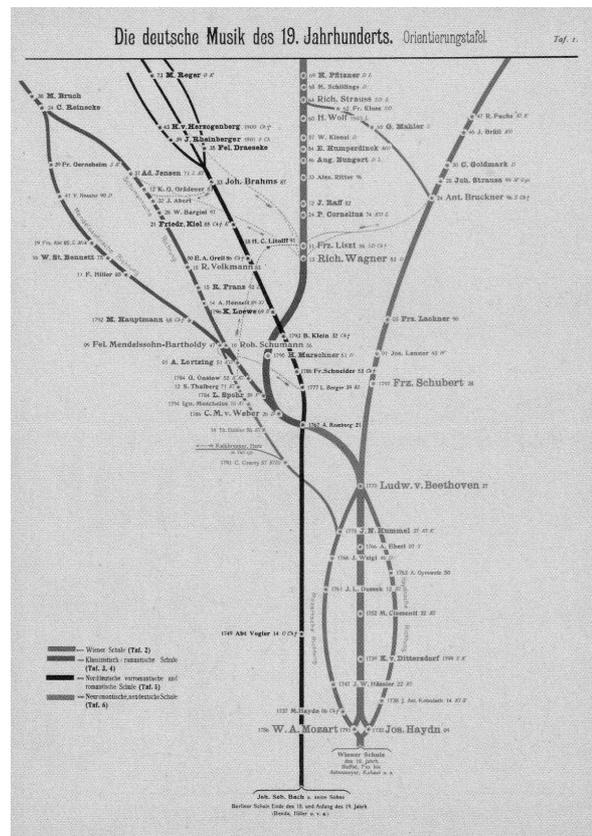




Fig. 11: View of the exhibition *Échos magnétiques*, Constellation #4, 4. Listen Through The Air - Electromagnetic installations, concerts and operas, 2019, photo: Anne Zeitz.

Fig. 12: View of the exhibition *Echos magnétiques*, Constellation #5, A History of Sound Cards, 2019, photo: Jean-Manuel Salingue, © Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes, Jean-Manuel Salingue.





Fig. 13: Rolf Langebartels, *Tischkonzert mit Personal-Computer*, Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen, (photograph), 1987, © Christina Kubisch Archives, Courtesy of Christina Kubisch.

project *A History of Sound Cards* (1978), Kubisch reworked the information and classification trees in the plan into an analytical schema. It brings together the main international – exclusively male – composers of the nineteenth century in a temporal succession from Giacomo Puccini to Ferruccio Busoni. From these analyses and with sound postcards from the 1970s (on which animals were initially depicted), she made a composition of squeaks. Each card and sound produced corresponds to one of the composers in the scheme. The constellation around *A History of Sound Cards* includes the plan taken from the book of musical studies, the diagram drawn by Kubisch, photographs of a performance of the project, as well as the postcards associated with Georges Bizet, Josef Haydn, Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner.

6. “Concerts on the table” and group exhibitions from the 1980s and 1990s

This constellation focuses on two exhibitions that brought together sound works in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1987, the *Gesellschaft für Ak-*

tuelle Kunst (Society for Contemporary Art) in Bremen organised the exhibition *Klanginstallationen (Sound Installations)*, which included both installation works and performances and concerts. Kubisch participated with the installation *Iter Magneticum*, a funnel-shaped structure stretched between the floor and the ceiling and made of partially illuminated cables. She also played in the “concert on the table” (*Tischkonzert*) proposed by the German artist Rolf Langebartels with, among others, Rolf Julius, the Japanese artist Takehisa Kosugi and the French artist Robin Minard, as shown in three photographs in this constellation. These were not only installation and exhibition spaces, but also moments of sharing, exchange and confrontation of practices. The open pages of the exhibition catalogue show Rolf Julius during his reading/performance using various objects and devices including cassettes and magnets. By modifying the voltage and interrupting contacts in electrical circuits, Julius creates



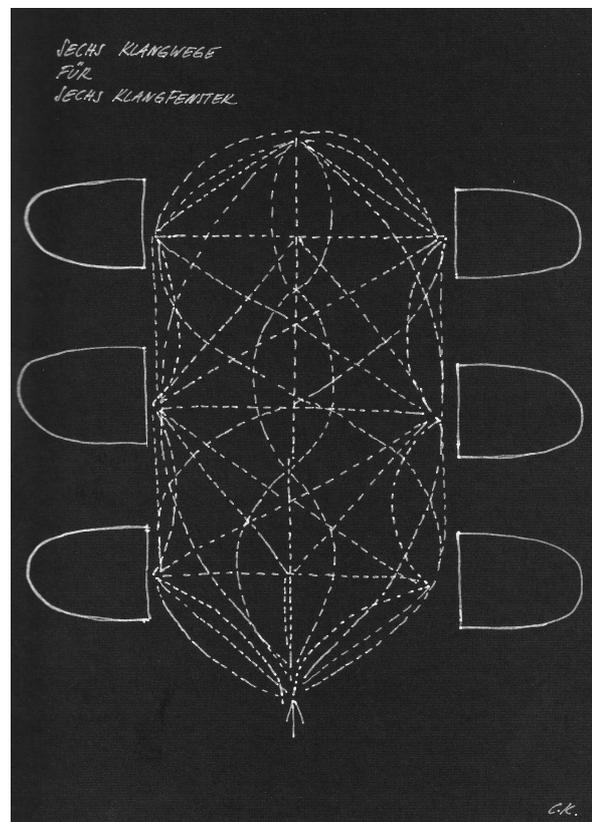
Fig. 14: View of the exhibition *Echos magnétiques*, Constellation #6, "Concerts on the table" and group exhibitions from the 1980s and 1990s, 2019, photo: Jean-Manuel Salingue, © Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes, Jean-Manuel Salingue.

sounds that change constantly. The *Amphion* exhibition, held in 1992 in Cologne and Potsdam, brings together six artists including Kubisch, Fox and Julius. "Artists develop concepts that accentuate the specific character of exhibition spaces and transform them into instruments based on the acoustic and visual elements inherent in spaces," explains curator Marita Loosen-Fox in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue. While Fox focuses on the sounds produced by flames and their resonances in the cellar of a former factory, Kubisch occupies a former bunker built on the site of a synagogue destroyed in 1938. Her *40kHz* work combines sound – the emission of very high frequencies – and light – neon and ultraviolet lights – in this underground space.

7. Listening paths

From the early 1980s, when Kubisch abandoned her performative practice and developed *Écouter les murs*, she became interested in the way in which the audience moves through her pieces. Sometimes the listener's movement is suggested by labyrinthine or spiral forms, sometimes no form leads the listener into the space and a potential listening. *Drei Klangwege*

Fig. 15: Christina Kubisch, *Sechs Klangwege für Sechs Klangfenster, Düren*, (drawing), 1987, © Christina Kubisch Archives, Courtesy of Christina Kubisch.



(Three listening paths), was created while observing visitors in one of her installations. From one window to another, from one sound field to another, the drawing *Sechs Klangwege*, (Six listening paths) shows the potential paths of the space from her installation in Düren in 1987.

Parcours Poitiers is of particular importance in this constellation and illustrates Kubisch's interest in the processes of crossing and wandering in urban space. While, since the 1980s, Kubisch made it possible to listen to electromagnetic fields that she created herself, since the early 2000s, the artist has discovered the omnipresence of electromagnetic fields in today's environment generated by cash dispensers, security corridors, billboards, etc. Her *Electrical Walks* make it possible to listen to a composition made with these fields. Equipped with headphones and city maps, participants are invited to follow the routes traced by the artist or to diverge from them and wander freely, which is reflected in the drawing associated with the walk in Poitiers in 2010.

8. Christina Kubisch, *Cloud*, 2011–19 (work in progress)

Metal structure, electrical cables, multi-track readers, multi-channel composition, induction headsets.

The Cloud installation is part of a series of works based on electromagnetism and induction phenomena developed by the artist since the 1980s.

The *Cloud* version presented in Rennes consists of several hundred metres of black cable suspended at ear height, forming the evocative shape of a cloud. Thanks to headphones, the visitor, while moving around the work, hears a variety of crackles, whispers, whistles from recordings made by Kubisch of electromagnetic fields generated by information systems such as hard disks, electrical transformers and internet networks. From these sound materials, the artist has developed a specific multi-channel composition intended to be broadcast through the fourteen circuits that

Fig. 16: View of the exhibition *Echos magnétiques* (2019), installation *Cloud*, 2011-2019, work in progress, photo: Anne Zeitz.

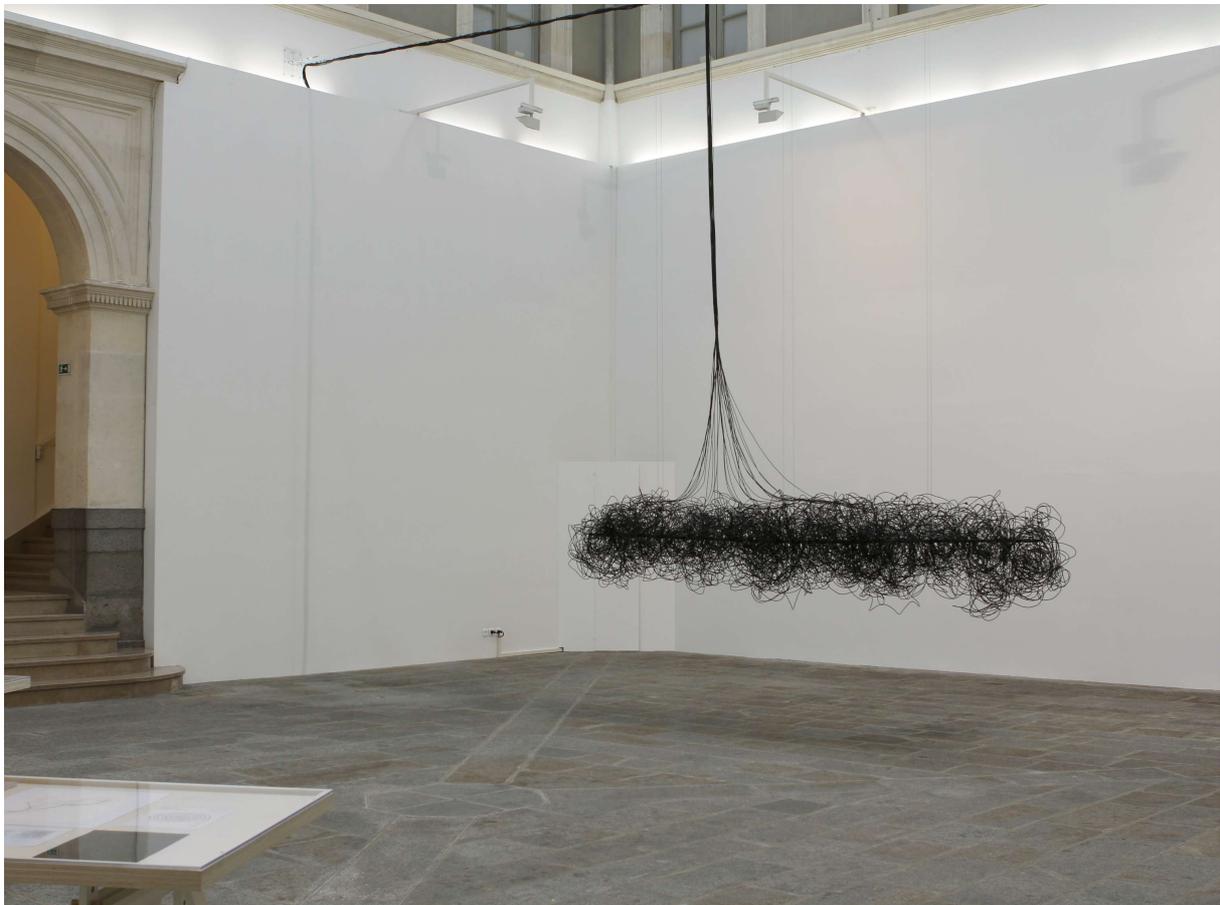




Fig. 17: View of the exhibition *Echos magnétiques, Vinyl Records and Playlist*, 2019, photo: Anne Zeitz.

make up the “cloud”. Depending on their position, movements and pauses, visitors shape their own composition and auditory experience of the work: the different audio tracks overlap, become more or less intense in fade-in and fade-out effects. By making the inflation of radio emissions related to information and communication technologies audible, but also visible through the work’s almost two kilometres of cable, the artist explores the musical and visual potential of the sounds these broadcasts can generate. From the perspective of information and communication theory, Kubisch’s sound composition reverses the signal-to-noise ratio. Here, the noise due to the technology becomes the signal; the background noise (crackles, whispers) becomes the main focus of the listening. Combining sight and hearing, the installation functions as a synecdoche that puts what would be a globalized venous network within reach of the eyes and ears, in which electron flows constantly pulse: a complex, invisible global signal that reflects our technological environment.

9. Playlist

“ZeroMachine”, *Dichte Wolken*, Edition Museum Ostwall, volume 03, 2012 (4:05)

“Magnetic Flights”, *Magnetic Flights*, Important Records, 2011 (18:30)

“Unter Grund” Christina Kubisch & Eckehard Güther, *Unter Grund*, Gruenrekorder, 2016 (23:47)

“Nine Magnetic Places”, *The Secret Life of the Inaudible*, Christina Kubisch & Annea Lockwood, 2018 (13:26)

“Below Behind Above”, *The Secret Life of the Inaudible*, Christina Kubisch & Annea Lockwood, 2018 (22:32)

“Licht Himmel”, *Licht Himmel*, Gasometer Oberhausen, 2006 (49:08)

“Hommage with Minimal Disinformation”, *Invisible Inaudible. Electrical Walks*, Important Records, 2007 (4:40)



Fig. 18: View of the exhibition *Echos magnétiques*, part of Constellation #5, A History of Sound Cards and Projects in Rennes, 2019, photo: Jean-Manuel Salingue, © Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes, Jean-Manuel Salingue.

- # "Security", *Invisible Inaudible. Electrical Walks*, Important Records, 2007 (4:01)
- # "Djungle Walk", *On Air*, Die Schachtel, 1984 (7:24)
- # "Speak & Spell", *On Air*, Die Schachtel, 1984 (8:23)
- # "Circles II", *On Air*, Die Schachtel, 1984 (5:18)
- # "Listen Through the Walls", *On Air*, Die Schachtel, 1984 (9:04)
- # "Djungle Walk alt. mix", *On Air*, Die Schachtel, 1984 (7:12)

10. Vinyl records

SOUND, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, 1979

Tesla's Dream/Ohmage/Resistor, in collaboration with Eleh, Lacquer Cut At, 2017

Liquid Piece/Identikit, published on the occasion of the exhibition *Vibrations*, Rumpsti Pumsti (Musik), Berlin, 2015

11. Projects in Rennes

Three documents on display come from projects in which Kubisch participated in Rennes between 1985 and 1990: as part of the performance of the opera *Le*

nauffrage du Titanic at the Maison de la Culture (now the Théâtre National de Bretagne) in 1985, the 1988 Festival des arts électroniques with a work in the Église Saint-Étienne, and the exhibition *La part des anges* organised by Pierre Braun at the Galerie Art & Essai of the Université Rennes 2 in 1990.

Archive holdings

Archive of Christina Kubisch - Berlin/Hoppegarten

INHA - Collection Archives de la critique d'art : Fonds Biennale de Paris, Hubert Besacier, François Pluchart, Pierre Restany

Akademie der Künste - Berlin

Galerie Art & Essai, Université Rennes 2

Théâtre National de Bretagne - Rennes (Maison de la culture de Rennes)

Terry Fox Estate - Cologne

Edition Block – Berlin

Additional Information

Exhibition at the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes

15 February – 14 April 2019

Curators: Damien Simon and Anne Zeitz in collaboration with Clélia Barbut

The exhibition was co-produced by the Bon Accueil-Lieu des arts sonores and the UFR Arts, Lettres, Communication, University Rennes 2. It was organized in collaboration with the Archives de la critique d'art Rennes and with the participation of the following students from the Master seminar *Écouter l'archive* directed by Séverine Cauchy, Yann Sérandour and Anne Zeitz, Department arts plastiques, University Rennes 2, research laboratory PTAC: Romane Boucly, Jules Guillaume, Mathilde Lusso, Fleur Mothe Bardy, Laurence Nadal, Alma Oskouei, Paola Andrea Pardo Diaz, Tegan Payne, Marine Pierre, Laura Rossi and Mélodie Vaye.

Abstract

The exhibition *Échos magnétiques — Christina Kubisch* took place at the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes /France from 15 February to 14 April 2019. It was curated by Damien Simon and Anne Zeitz in collaboration with Clélia Barbut. The following texts stem from the exhibition booklet realized with students from the seminar *Écouter l'archive*/University Rennes 2 (directed by Séverine Cauchy, Yann Sérandour and Anne Zeitz). The authors of the texts are Anne Zeitz and Clélia Barbut excepting the *Cloud* text written by Damien Simon.

Authors

Damien Simon is the director of the art space Le Bon accueil, Lieu d'art sonore in Rennes/France dedicated to exhibitions, workshops and programmes concerning sound art since 2008. He concentrates on works that have a sonic or musical dimension in solo and group shows. He regularly collaborates with regional and international institutions as Interstices, Maintenant, Festival de Flandre and Singuhr Gallery and has exhibited numerous artists as Sébastien Roux + Cocktail

Designers (FR), André Gonçalves (PT), Michaël Aschauer (AT), Tilman Küntzel (DE), Eddie Ladoire (FR), Cédric Eymenier (FR), Felicia Atkinson (FR), Steve Roden (USA), Aernoudt Jacobs (BE), Artificiel (CA), Pierre-Laurent Cassière (Fr), Pascal Broccolichi (FR) and Stefan Roigk (DE).

An art historian and sociologist, Clélia Barbut is associate researcher at EA Histoire et Critique des Arts, Université Rennes 2, where she also teaches in the Art History Department. After a PhD on the emergence of performance art in the 1970s in France and the United States, she turned to performance art documentation and archives. She now works on methodological and historiographical issues raised by the uses of archives in contemporary art history, and her research questions the modes of transmission and memory, using feminist and affective epistemologies. She is in the process of producing a series of interviews about performance art. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Le Générateur in Gentilly, funded by the Fondation de France.

Anne Zeitz is associate professor (maître de conférences) at University Rennes 2, a member of the Pratiques et Théories de l'art contemporain (PTAC) research lab at Université Rennes 2 and an associate member of TEAMeD/Université Paris 8. Her recent research focuses on auditory attention and distraction in contemporary art and on practices and writings tackling the notions of the inaudible and the unheard. She received a research grant from the INHA and Institut Français in 2016 and is directing the research project *Sound Unheard* (including the co-organization of exhibitions at the Goethe-Institut Paris, the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes and a performance programme at the Gaîté Lyrique in 2019).

Titel

Damien Simon and Anne Zeitz with the collaboration of Clélia Barbut, *Echos magnétiques — Christina Kubisch, An Exhibition at the Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes* in: *kunsttexte.de*, Nr. 1, 2020 (15 pages), www.kunsttexte.de.



Fig. 19: View of the exhibition *Échos magnétiques*, with (from left to right) Séverine Cauchy, Anne Zeitz, Damien Simon, Jean-Roch Bouillé, Christina Kubisch and Clélia Barbut, 2019, photo: Jean-Manuel Salingue, © Musée des beaux-arts de Rennes, Jean-Manuel Salingue.