Benoît Maubrey

Sound Sculptures

N.B.:
Texts and pictures in the following chapters are provided with **QR codes** that can be scanned for documentary videos, sounds, and texts.

Participative Sound Sculptures

Politics of Participation in Benoît Maubrey's Speaker Sculptures

Dr. Vadim Keylin

In this essay I will focus on the participatory processes which Benoît Maubrey's use of communication technologies brings about. My methodology is also borrowed from media studies rather than art studies, as I will be analyzing the affordances of Speaker Sculptures. Originated in James Gibson's ecological psychology project, the notion of affordance refers to an opportunity for agentic action that an artifact offers – in other words, the different ways an object can possibly be used (Gibson 1979). Applying the concept of affordance to sound art allows for an analysis that avoids two major risks in dealing with participatory aspects of sound art works. On the one hand, the affordance-based approach does not require limiting the range of possible audience experiences to a clearly verbalized artistic intent. On the other hand, it does not reduce sound art to "just" a social situation, emphasizing the connections between structural, perceptual and technological aspects of an artwork and the participatory processes involved.

Speaker Sculptures employ existing communication technologies – landlines, smartphones, wireless networks – as their "interfaces" for interaction. The primary affordance of these technologies is to allow communication without necessarily being present in the same space. In the case of Speaker Sculptures, the two spaces on the opposite ends of the line are of a different nature: one is public, and the other is, at least in some way, private – either the space of one's home, or the personal space of the participant.

Thus, the artworks extend the public space, making it accessible both to those who are present in it physically, and to those who are not. What is most interesting here is that they do it by the means of electronic media, whose relationships with urban space has been traditionally understood antagonistically. Prior to the mass mediatization of the late 20th century, city streets, parks, cafes etc. were the primary sites of social interactions. However, the electronic media stripped such places of their function. According to Richard Sennett, "electronic communication is one means by which the very idea of public life has been put to an end. The media have vastly increased the store of knowledge social groups have about each other, but have rendered actual contact unnecessary" (Sennett 2002, 282). While the introduction of online participatory media rekindled the need for contact, it now happens outside of physical spaces (Sennett 2010, 262). Together with growing mobility, this has led to the emergence of what Marc Augé calls "non-places", public spaces that do not facilitate social interactions.

These are places one simply passes through, in as quick and uninvolved fashion as possible, on the way from one familiar – essentially private – place to another (Augé 1995, 77–81). Sound installations are often used to rejuvenate such "non-places", as art infuses them with the "charisma" they lost and facilitates the public's engagement with them (Föllmer 1999, 226). However, Speaker Sculptures go further than this: they situate the interactions, happening in the electronic media, in the physical urban space, reconciling and merging the two. Maubrey's works subvert the antagonism of the physical public space and the public sphere of media. Instead of "stealing" the functions of public space, electronic media expand and enhance it, facilitating involved social encounters. By arranging loudspeakers in architecture-like forms, the artist makes the technologies "blend in" with the urban space, emphasizing their unity as the space of communication. Through Speaker Sculptures the urban space becomes augmented, existing both in physical and virtual planes that become inseparably connected by the social relations that emerge between the participants situated on both ends.

In Hannah Arendt's concept of the public life, any public action is necessarily political – and vice versa, any political action is necessarily public. Political life is the life of the "ptólis", the city, and therefore happens in its open spaces (Arendt 1958, 22–78). While for Arendt her approach to the political was necessary to extend the notion to include spheres outside of institutionalized politics, her insistence on the "public-ness" made it "non-inclusive" as well. Judith Butler in "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance" notes that "all public assembly is haunted by the police and the prison. And every public square is defined in part by the population that could not possibly arrive there; either they are detained at the border, or have no freedom of movement and assembly, or are detained or imprisoned" (Butler 2014, 9). The artist Joanna Hevda extends this category of those to whom the equating of the political and the public denies political agency, to people suffering from physical and mental disabilities that prevent them from leaving home (Hevda 2016). In Arendt's paradigm, political action requires a body to be publically present, however it is often the very same body that prevents one from political action.

In that regard, the most interesting aspect of Speaker Sculptures is that they permit performing in the public space without leaving one's home. They do not only merge the physical public space with that of electronic media, but also through their unity connect the public space with a multitude of private spaces. This offers a possibility of political presence that is both embodied and anonymous, thus expanding the reach and scope of possible political activities. Maubrey likens the space created by his sculptures to the corner of London's Hyde Park famous for its history of political debates and demonstrations (Maubrey 2014). Since the late 19th century, the park's north-western corner – the so-called Speakers' Corner – has been known as a place where everyone can speak their mind without fear of prosecution. However, unlike Speaker's Corner, Speaker Sculptures do not require the speaker to be present in the flesh, but lets his/her voice be heard from the safety of the private space.

At the same time, a question arises as to whether the presence of the voice in the absence of the body holds as much political weight. In Speaker Sculptures, this concern is addressed explicitly by the tangible physicality of the sculpture and its scale. The voice of the distant speaker is given weight by lending it the "body" of the sculpture, which is commensurate with its architectural surroundings. The voice thus becomes one with the space it fills. Moreover, Speaker Sculptures make up for the lack of bodily presence with electronic amplification. In any public event, the one with the megaphone is the one with power, as their voice can drown out the other voices. Speaker Sculptures give the participants a megaphone the size of a building, allowing those who are locked out of public discourse by their personal circumstances to be heard.

On a deeper level, an argument can be made that the speaker's presence in Speaker Sculptures is not entirely ephemeral, but embodied. In his analysis of telephone communication, Barthes notes that "the order of listening which [it] inaugurates invites the Other to collect his whole body in his voice" (Barthes 1991, 252), which is then transmitted through the cable to the listener, or in the case of Speaker Sculptures – into the urban space. Media scholar Frances Dyson calls this phenomenon telepresence: while the speaker is not physically on site, their body is present in "the grain of the voice" – tone and cadence of speech, idiosyncratic noises, breath – carried through technological channels and made tangible by sound

waves (Dyson 2009). Speaker Sculptures provide the caller with the opportunity of remote, but nevertheless embodied engagement with the space and all who are physically present in it. In other words, they afford performing politically – performing in public – without leaving the safety of a private space. The body is present in the voice, but it is absent in the space and therefore cannot be removed from that space, ostracized or harmed. The anonymity of telepresence in a public space makes communication across class, race and gender barriers, that Arendt envisioned as possible (at least to a certain extent), while at the same time not requiring one to forgo one's identity.

Moreover, the audio channels do not discriminate between voice and other sounds. This allows for a new, acousmatic mode of self-presentation in public space that previously has only been possible in electronic media. One's musical preferences are as much a reflection – and a part – of one's identity as visual features, such as fashion and hairstyles. Nevertheless, this part is usually reserved for private spaces – sometimes all too private, like the space of one's head enclosed in headphones. Music in headphones serves to dissociate the listener from the surrounding space, escaping engagement with strangers and encouraging perception of the public space as a "non-place". Speaker Sculptures allow the participants to share publicly what has usually been shared privately, through compilation tapes and online playlists. Music contextualizes the voice in the same way clothing contextualizes the body, thus making a "telepresent" self-presentation as comprehensive as one performed in public space in the flesh.

It is interesting to contrast Arendt's approach to the political to Barthes' understanding of the term "as describing the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world" (Barthes 1972, 143). The urban space as a site of human relations has been redefined not in terms of physical structure of space, but as a structure of relations that form and inhabit it, as "a space of flows" (Castells 2004). Sound being a relational phenomenon (LaBelle 2015, xi–xiii), this relational structure finds a parallel in a certain kind of sociality specific to sound art – one that relies on sound being heard and answered. The agoras of Speaker Sculptures act as hubs where relations that form the public space intersect with those happening in the space of electronic communication media, forming a new kind of relational topography that transcends the boundaries of physical space.

In that regard, they can be described in terms of Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. For Bourriaud, art objects in the contemporary world have no intrinsic value and serve only as a catalyst for a certain kind of sociality. The true matter of relational art is the system or relations emerging between the participants as a result of this sociality of art (Bourriaud 2002, 107). Speaker Sculptures fit this narrative perfectly. Their impressive gargantuan forms aside, their primary function is precisely to facilitate social encounters in this newly created augmented space of relations. Thus, another political aspect arises to Speaker Sculptures. As Bourriaud puts it, the role of relational art is "no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever scale chosen by the artist" (Bourriaud 2002, 13). Speaker Sculptures offer new modes of social interaction and connect many private and public spaces into a relational structure, thus providing a means to overcome the atomization of urban life.

However, as far as adopting this strategy to urban acoustic design goes, the downsides of having such sculptures as permanent features of urban space must be considered. Critiquing the concept of public space as open to all, Butler points at its gatekeepers – the police and the authorities – that decide who gets access (Butler 2014, 9). In the case of Speaker Sculptures, access to public space is exercised through technological channels, thus making the technologies themselves the gatekeepers. While the volume of one's voice passing through audio channels can exceed that of those physically present, the speaker has no control over it. Speaker Sculptures give a lot of power to those who operate the technologies – not only to increase or decrease the volume, but also to disconnect the caller completely. I would speculate that a solution to limit this power might lie in further automation, relying on distributed peer-to-peer computing rather than the human factor. Moreover, the idea of technological expansion of physical public space into a virtual one does not account for the accessibility of required technologies, thus putting up a class-and-income barrier for this kind of political participation. Many of those whose voices desperately need to be heard, are locked out not only of the public space, but of communication channels as well, and Speaker Sculptures cannot do anything to remedy their situation. Their political effect transcends some barriers but not others.

Another aspect to be considered is the effect such works have on everyday functioning of the local soundscapes, which can be rather disruptive. As Christabel Stirling notes in her article "Sound Art / Street Life", sonic interventions in public space, contrary to their supposed mission of bringing communities back together, often bring about conflicts and discontent. To Stirling, however, this is a positive effect, as such conflicts bring to the foreground "the existence of resilient personal, social and cultural differences". She refers to the political theorist Chantal Mouffet's belief that "the social world [...] consists of conflicts that cannot be suppressed, and for which no rational solution or consensus would ever exist" (Stirling 2016). Making these conflicts explicit, sound art in public spaces makes the inhabitants reassess their claims to the city.

Here, a peculiar dialectics emerges. On the one hand, the function of sound art in public spaces is to break the routine of the everyday to force the inhabitants to engage with the space and each other, i.e. it needs to be disruptive to be effective. The same can be said of political actions, such as demonstrations or protests: to be heard one must generate enough noise. On the other hand, demonstrations and sound art projects have an end, while the long-term effect of breaking the established sonic routines is uncertain. Urban ecologies will have to restructure themselves around these new conditions, and not necessarily in the desired way. Changes in urban space always walk a fine line between gentrification and ghettoization, and acoustic design is no different in that regard.

Another metaphor Maubrey uses to describe the participants' interactions with Speaker Sculptures is "oral graffiti" (Maubrey 2014). In my opinion, this metaphor perfectly sums up the diverse participatory aspects of Speaker Sculptures. Just as city walls provide a canvas for graffiti artists, Maubrey's sculptures serve as a means for anonymous acoustic self-expression in urban space. And just like graffiti, the result of this self-expression can be as much art as vandalism – often at the same time.

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Liberator
Open Art Biennial, Örebro, Sweden. 2024
Situation photo with visitor.
photo: F.B.Esbjörnsson

Liberator
Open Art Biennial, Örebro, Sweden. 2024
Visitors can express themselves through: 800 connected loudspeakers,
2 automatic telephone answering machines, 3 Bluetooth receivers,
microphone and input jacks.
Sculpture is wrapped around an older „Befriaren“ sculpture at Henry Allards Park.
photo: Maubrey

Liberator (construction situation)
Open Art Biennial, Örebro, Sweden. 2024
Visitors can express themselves through: 800 connected loudspeakers,
2 automatic telephone answering machines, 3 Bluetooth receivers,
microphone and input jacks.
Sculpture is wrapped around an older „Befriaren“ sculpture at Henry Allards Park.

Liberator (photo right)
Open Art Biennial, Örebro, Sweden. 2024
Situation with listeners.
photo: F.B.Esbjörnsson

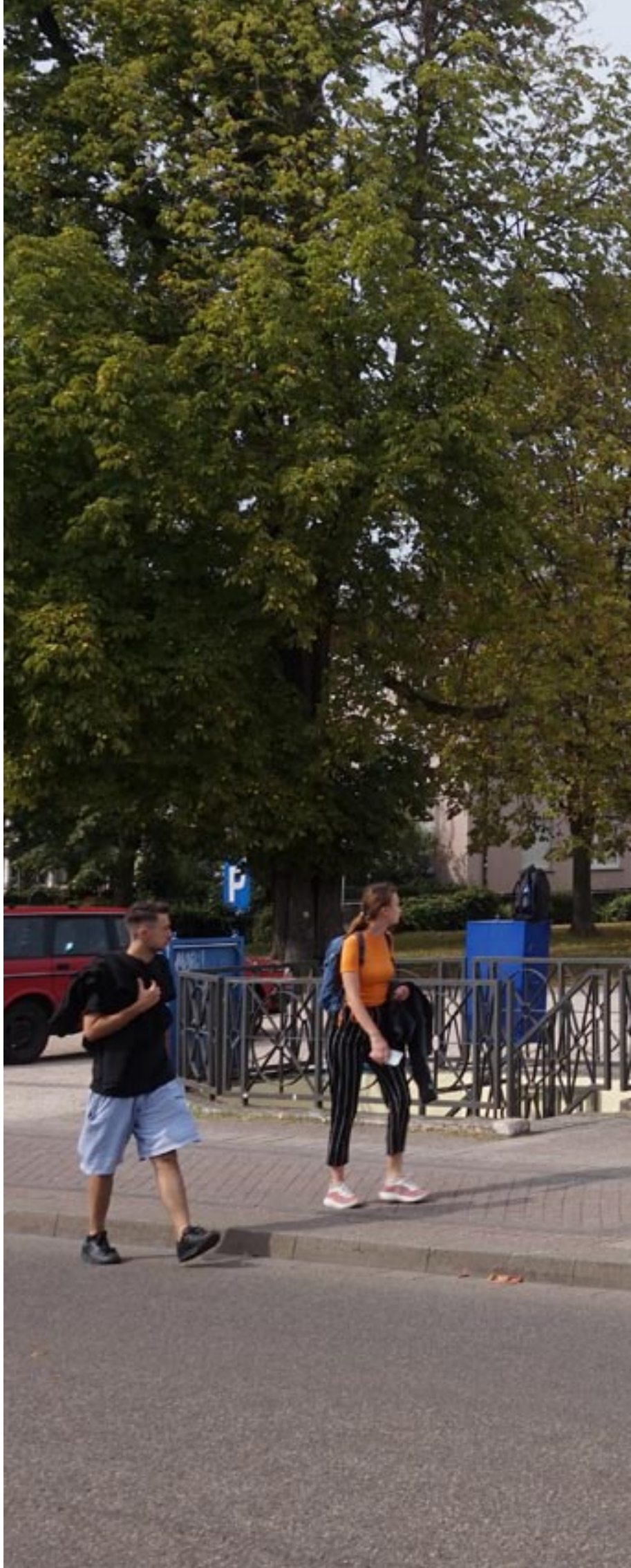
Liberator
Open Art Biennial, Örebro, Sweden. 2024
Visitors can express themselves through: 800 connected loudspeakers,
2 automatic telephone answering machines, 3 Bluetooth receievers, microphone and input jacks.
Sculpture is wrapped around an older „Befriaren“ sculpture at Henry Allards Park.

photo: F.B.Esbjörnsson

Ship
Fusion Festival, Lärz, Germany. 2023
Visitors can express themselves through:
350 connected loudspeakers, line in, Bluetooth receivers, microphone and sampler machine/ Loopbardo (Subardo/ Andreas Frieser).


FRED

Streamers
Karlsruhe, Germany, 2022 .
Media Art is Here Festival, ZKM (Center for Art and Media)
Visitors can express themselves through:
350 connected loudspeakers, tube radios, e-waste, live video streaming, “audio“ twitter, 2 automatic telephone answering machines, microphone and input jacks.
Spectators, passersby, and the public anywhere in the world can express themselves live and direct through the sculpture.



STREAMERS
Karlsruhe, Germany, 2022 .
Media Art is Here Festival, ZKM (Center for Art and Media)
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Spectators, passersby, and the public anywhere in the world can express themselves live and direct through the sculpture.


Media
Art
is here

Reference: original Plague Column Memorial
erected in 1679 on the Viennese Graben

STREAMERS: a COVID Sculpture.
Anita-Müller-Cohen Square, Vienna. January - May 2022 .
In reference to the original Plague Column (1679).
350 connected loudspeakers, tube radios, e-waste, live video streaming, “audio“ twitter, 2 automatic telephone answering machines, microphone and input jacks.
Spectators, passersby, and the public anywhere in the world can express themselves live and direct through the sculpture.
Production: Tonspur e.V./ Georg Weckwerth
photo right: Frank Paul

Speakers Arena. Berlin 2019 (after 6 months standing)
Pallasstrasse 3, Berlin.
320 connected loudspeakers, amplifiers, 2 telephone answering machines, 3 Bluetooth receivers, audio Twitter, 2 input jacks, 1 microphone, mixingboard. The public (passersby) and local musicians can participate "live" through the sculpture.
Production: Galerie Zwitschermachine. Photo: Trevor Good. Main electronics: Thomas Berndt.

Speakers Arena
CAFKA, ContemporaryArt Forum, Kitchener, Canada 2017
Passages Insolites Festival, EXMURO, Quebec, 2022.

320 connected loudspeakers, 2 amplifiers, 2 smartphones,
3 Bluetooth receivers, audio Twitter, 4 input jacks, 1 microphone,
mixingboard.
The public (passersby) and local musicians can participate “live”
through the sculpture. Grafitti Sprayers are also welcome.

QR code: open mike situation

The SPEAKERS ARENA concept won first prize at the Hacking Urban Furniture contest at the Institute for Art and Urbanistics in Berlin in 2017 and was selected for realization at the Cafka (Contemporary Arts Forum Kitchener and Area) Biennale in Kitchener, Ontario Canada in 2018.
A series of concerts with local musicians and artists were organized.
During the day the public could participate in three ways:
— by calling either one of two telephone numbers (limited for 3 minutes).
— by logging one of 3 Bluetooth addresses and playing music.
— or simply by using an available microphone.
The structure is constructed in four pie-like quarter sections that can be transported via a forklift and 33’ flatbed truck.
Production: Rex Lingwood. Electronics: Jago Whitehead and Johnny Camara.


FATAR

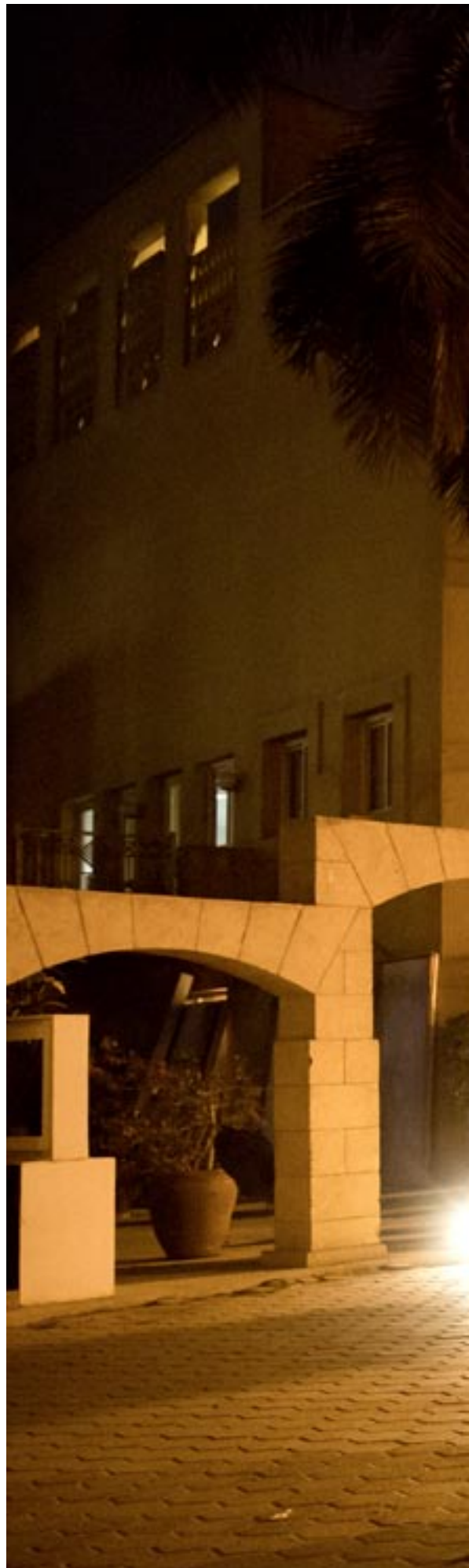
Speakers Arena. Berlin, Pallasstrasse 3, 2019.
320 connected loudspeakers, amplifiers, 2 telephone answering machines, 3 Bluetooth receivers, audio Twitter, 2 input jacks, 1 microphone, mixingboard. The public (passersby) and local musicians can participate “live” through the sculpture.
Production: Galerie Zwitschermachine.

LEUCHTTURM (Lighthouse)
FUSION Festival, Lärz, Germany. 2022
In cooperation with Subardo Group / Leipzig.
Visitors can express themselves through:
400 loudspeakers and radios (connected),
2 amplifiers, line in. With circling light at the top.
Sound: LoopBARDO, an interactive 8 track, loop based music and performance station (Andreas Frieser).
Construction: DaLi, Vilte Gustyte, Albert Amerioun, Philipp Steinkellner, Emmanuel Ott.
Photo above: E. Ott   Photo right:: Jens Winter

Temple. 2013
Sound Art exhibition, ZKM/ Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe.
Visitors can express themselves through: 3000 connected loudspeakers and assorted electronic parts, 10 recycled amplifiers, 10 recycled radios/tuners, 1 mixing board. These are all soldered together as an “active” public sound sculpture. By calling a telephone number people can express themselves freely through the sculpture for 3 minutes. Temple is a replica of the ancient Greek Temple at Delphi, a “sacred place for communicating with the Gods, the symbol for contact beyond the realms of people’s imagination...” (ref.: AT INVENTURE Forschung & Entwicklung GmbH).
Assistants: Gerrit de Vries, Jago Whitehead, Marko Gutmann, Jan Fuhrmann. Design: Jan Fuhrmann.

Temple
Sound Art. Sound as a Medium of Art Exhibition. 2012-2013
ZKM | Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany.
Visitors can express themselves through:3000 connected loudspeakers, 4 amplifiers, 6 radio receivers (white noise), 1 mixing board, 1 telephone answering machine.

Obelisk
Cairotronica Festival, Palace of the Arts, Cairo 2018.
Visitors can express themselves through: 350 connected loudspeakers, micro-phone, plug‘n play (line in), Bluetooth receivers, amplifier.



Obelisk
Cairotronica Festival (official opening)
Palace of the Arts, Cairo 2018
350 connected loudspeakers, microphone,
plug‘n play (line in), Bluetooth receivers, amplifier.
photo: A. Muñoz


وزارة الثقافة
Ministry Of Culture
قطاع الفنون التشكيلية
Sector Of Fine Arts
قصر الفنون
Palace Of Arts

Shrine
Kobe Biennale 2015
Visitors can express themselves through 300 recycled loudspeakers (connected), 3 Bluetooth receivers, 1 microphone, line in, 4 amplifiers, 1 mixing board.

Photo: courtesy of Kobe Biennale.

Karaoke Torii
Kamiyama, Japan 2017
Visitors can express themselves through 300 connected loudspeakers, 2 Bluetooth receivers, microphone, and line-in (plug‘n play).

Shrine
Kobe Biennale 2015 (situation photo)
Visitors can express themselves through: 300 recycledand connected loudspeakers,
2 Bluetooth receivers, 1 microphone, line in, amplifier, 1 mixing board.

Photo: courtesy of Kobe Biennale.

Audio Igloo
Singuhr Gallery, Parochial Church, Berlin. 2004.
300 connected loudspeakers, tuners, record players and receivers.
Sound: white noise.

Gateway. Berliner Festspiele. Main theatre house lobby.
MaezMusik Festival. Berlin. 2014
700 connected loudspeakers, two Bluetooth receivers and telephone answering machine.
Photo: Walter Fotografie


Jamo D 160
Jamo D 170

Speakers' Wall (collage) 1985
Prize-winning proposal for the competition "Overcoming the Wall by Painting the Wall"
Museum Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, West Berlin.
Collage of a cardboard Wall with six loudspeakers and a microphone that people can use to talk through.

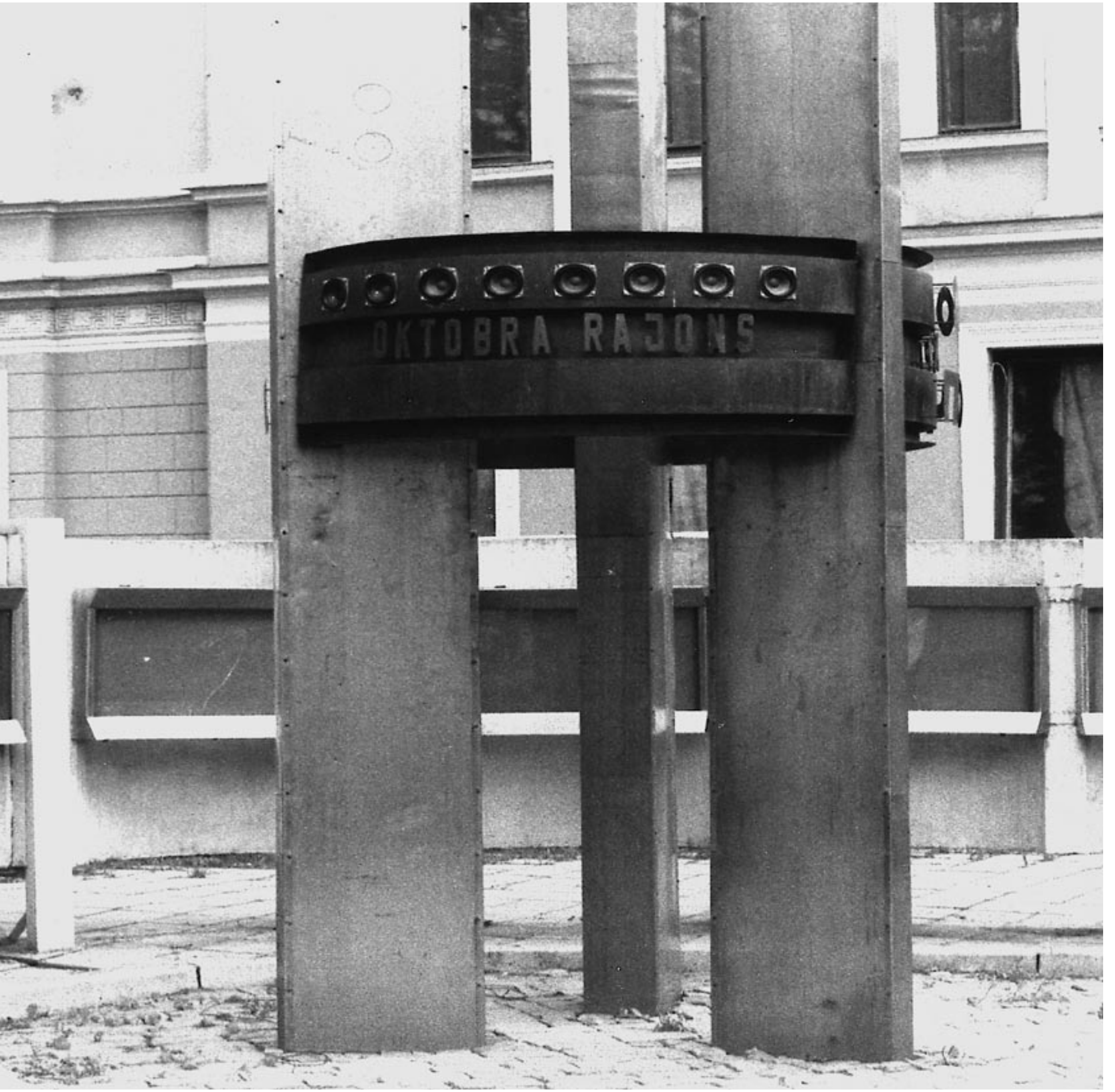
Le Mur Sonore (Speakers Wall). 2011
Le Forum du Quai, Angers.
The Berlin Wall as a participative sculpture for the Festival Accroche-Coeurs in Angers.
An electro-acoustic sculpture with an original segment of the Berlin Wall as centerpiece and 1000 connected loudspeakers, 6 radios, and 5 amplifiers. People could call up the sculpture and talk through it
directly for 3 minutes: more than 900 calls were registered. The sculpture also served as PA system for DJ concerts.

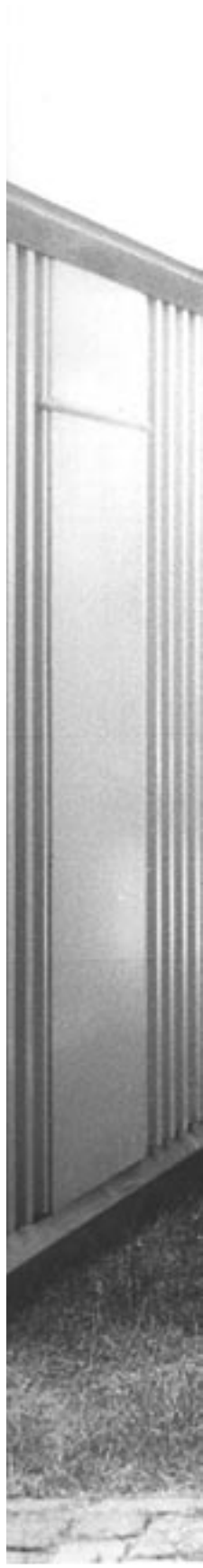
The Cube
Hard Rock Hotel, Palm Springs California, USA. 2013-2018
500 connected loudspeakers soldered together as an “active” public sound sculpture.
3 Bluetooth receivers, 5 recycled radio alarm clocks with white noise, and line-in for microphone and electric guitar.
Hotel guests can play tunes, messages or guitar through the sculpture.
Photo: Jeff Dow


ROCKSHOP

Jobfield 3000
Village Resort Exhibition / Kunstpflug e.V., Beelitz. 2008
Materials: imitation asparagus field, 60 connected telephones,
4 amplifiers, 4 MP3 players.
Sound: 4 channels of job offers recorded from the internet.

Speakers' Monument
Interferenzen Exhibition – Art from West Berlin, Riga, Lithnia.1991
Discarded Stalinist sculpture equipped with loudspeakers,
telephone answering machine and amplifier.
People can call up the sculpture and talk through it.


OKTOBRA RAJONS



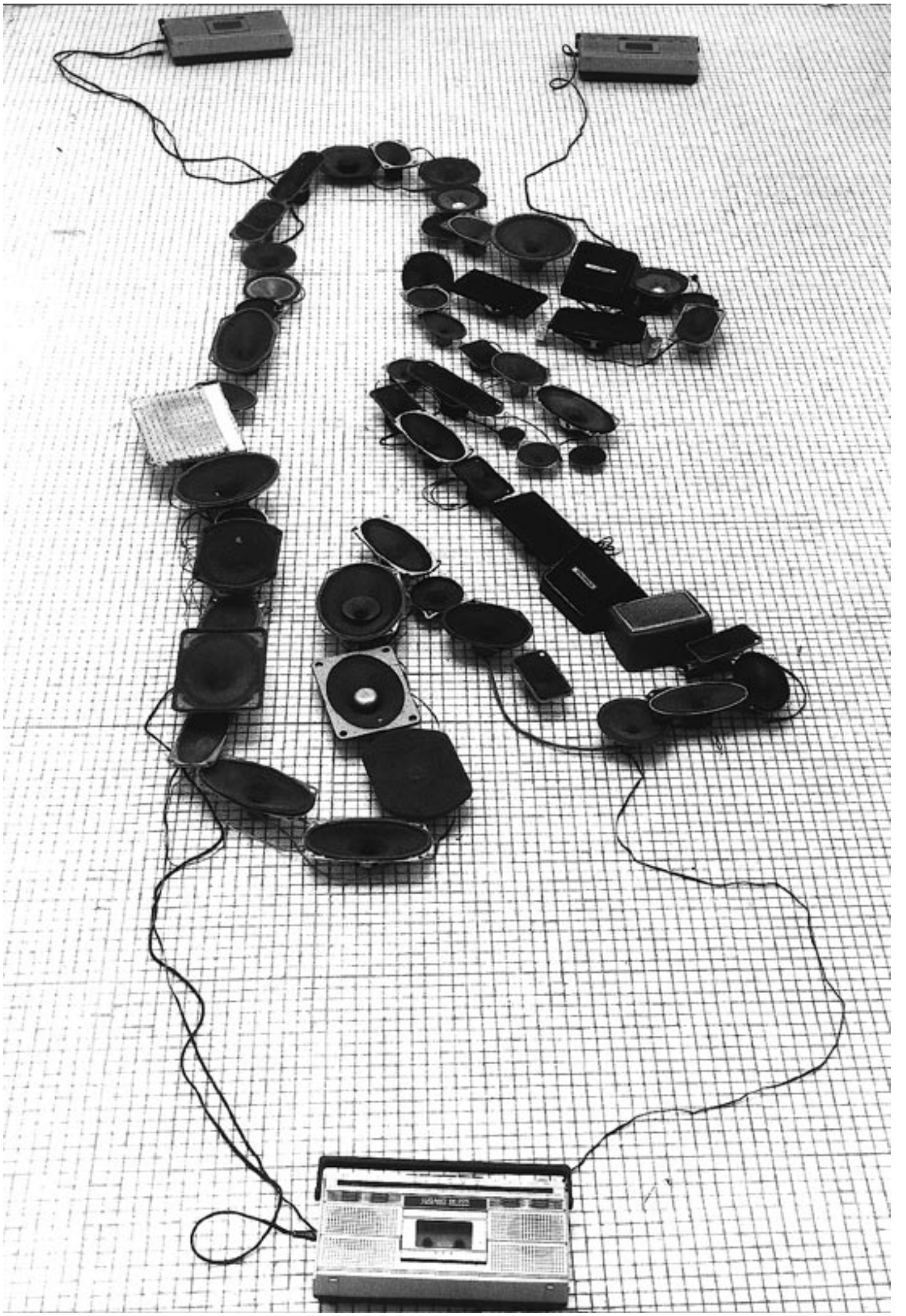
Speakers' Container
Kunst im Container, Freiburger Kunstverein. 1987
Container equipped with loudspeakers, amplifier, and telephone answering machine. People can call the container and speak inside it.

Speakers‘ Mailboxes.
“Material & Wirkung” e.V. Berlin.1985
Exhibition in a Berlin apartment house.
The tenants are asked to make cassette recordings for their respective mailboxes.

The MerkurHaus as Clocktower
IBA vor Ort. 1984
A foghorn installed inside the ruin of the Merkur department store. A reflection on the former Jerusalem church that had once stood facing it, the foghorn sounded every fifteen minutes from 10 AM to 6 PM. The installation upset the Axel Springer Publishers Group (a conservative newspaper) that had its main office in a new building that also stood on an opposite street corner. The powers-that-be at Springer decided that the sound was a nuisance and started an impressive news campaign against it. This in turn caused quite a ruckus between various newspapers which ended with the West Berlin Building senator intervening to have the installation closed down (see QR code for news articles).


QUEEN
ZAPPA
ZAPPA

Audio Profile. 1983
with Galerie no name, Berlin.
Human body profile outlined on the floor, 60 used loudspeakers, 3 cassette players that play recordings from different West Berlin locations.



Screamers Corner 1984
Schauplatz artists group show inside a former bank vault
(Moritzplatz, Berlin).
Visitors are allowed to scream.
Equipment: red carpet and note stand with text with the definition of the word “screaming”.

Audio Painting 1982
Galerie no name, Berlin
collabortion with Bernward Meyer
Stretched canvas, loudspeaker with sounds from various Berlin sites

The Audio Ballerinas

Audio Tutu 1990
Detail of a performance with live sampling of clarinette.
Le Festival les Arts au Soleil, Calais.
Solar-powered electro-acoustic tutu, car amplifier, car loudspeakers, radio, sampler, photo-resistor (light sensor).
photo: Eke Wyngaard

Audio Ballerina 1990
Festival les Arts au Soleil, l'Aéronef, Calais.
Solar-powered electro-acoustic tutu, solar cells, sampler,
photo-resistors, portable cassette player.

Audio Ballerina 1991
Interferenzen – Art from West Berlin, Riga, Latvia.
Electro-acoustic tutu and Radio Free Riga sound.
Audio Ballerina is accompanied by “Audio Streetsweepers” with amplifed rakes.

Audio Ballerinas 1991
Interferenzen Exhibition – Art from West Berlin.
Marble Palace, St Petersburg.
The Line choreography: dancers with electro-acoustic tutus,
rakes with contact microphones, cassette player with chorus sound.
Collaboration with dancers from the Bolshoi Ballet using amplified rakes.

Audio Ballerinas. 2025
Das Minsk, Intersonanzen Festival, Potsdam Germany.
Peeper choreography: dancers with light-to-frequency controllers,
digital samplers and Music sticks.

Audio Ballerinas Peeper performance 1997
Audio Tutus with light to frequency controllers.
Yokohama Museum of Modern Art, Japan.

Audio Ballerinas 2021
Device Festival, Zagreb Museum of Contemporary Art.
Digital Mamory: Electro-acoustic tutus with individual samplers recording and playing back sounds (pitch and loop devices) from saxophone player/composer Mak Murtic.

Audio Ballerinas.2025
Intersonanzen Festival, Das Minsk, Potsdam Germany.
Digital Mamory: Electro-acoustic tutus with individual samplers recording and playing back sounds (pitch and loop devices) from player/composer Sabin Vogel (flutes).
photo : Susken Rosenthal

Audio Ballerina (Risa Kojima) 2021
Audio Tutu with light-to-frequency controller
(situation photo) at Görlitzer Park, Berlin.
photo: Gerfried Zwicker

Audio Ballerinas.
Reuring Festival, Holland.
The Line. 2012
Performance with amplified rakes.
Dancer: Mimi Messner.


pabank

The Audio Ballerina‘s Story
Mimi Messner (2018)

“We dance to the sounds that we produce ourselves with our movements. We wear a tutu, a sort of skirt made of Plexiglas, in which loudspeakers are installed so that we always carry the sound source with us and are mobile. A mobile sound sculpture.”
This how I describe to friends what I do as an Audio Ballerina. When I first put on an audio tutu, I felt like a child who had been given a new toy - the best toy on earth: an instrument with which you don’t need to practice for years before you can play it. No keys, no strings - just a bit of analog electronics, a battery, some cables and four speakers. An instrument that can be played immediately and intuitively once you understand how it works.
I’ve been dancing for as long as I can remember and I picked up the technical instructions fast. After a short time I could produce wonderful sounds: beeping, humming, rattling, squeaking, meowing, barking and, via a small portable sampler on the Tutu, I could also pick up nearby sounds, amplify them, loop and pitch them, creating a wonderful cacophony, especially in the choreographical interplay with the other dancers, when the sounds and words overlap.
We also can change the sounds via our movements in space or the motions of our hands, for example for the Yamaha piece, where we have light-sensors on our fingertips that alter the sound according to our position to the light.
I was thrilled! As part of the Audio Group we toured festivals, vernissages, and galas around the world. It doesn’t matter what language you speak - everyone can appreciate sounds interacting with the environment. Which doesn‘t mean that the reactions of people to a performance are all alike: it can range from interest to irritation, excitement, skepticism or simply amusement. People who are looking for deep meanings might have a problem with this special public form of sound art. For some, a group of attractive young dancers dragging amplified rakes in slow-motion (The Line) through the low-income district of Berlin-Marzahn might seem like a provocation. On the other hand, the elitist public at the Vienna Museumsquartier - while sipping their Prosecco - will react to the same performance with endless discussions on Dadaism, Minimalism or performance art (“Klangkörper!”). While the retired vacationers on the boardwalk in Warnemünde simply ask: “And what galaxy are you from?”
During our public workshop sessions in Baitz (where Benoît has his studio), the village people would stand around laughing on the sidewalk showing, in my opinion, the most natural reaction, where shyness and curiosity quickly turn into wide grins. By the end, they are joining in, imitating the sounds and noises that we make. Welcome to the jam session!
I spent a few years as a dancer for the Audio Group before taking over from the former choreograph. The work frequently involved training with local dancers - from corpulent New York dancers to quick-witted Taiwanese. Essentially, there was not much to choreograph. In general the sequences of the different pieces stay the same – they just have to be adapted to the specific environment to create a special synergy.
The slow-motion version of The Line in Warnemünde can be likened to a needle of a record player scratching over the disc of the earth - not at 33 or 45 rpm‘s, but much, much slower. Such a performance can last a half hour, until it feels your arm is going to drop off. But at the same time you feel like you’re in a trance. On the other hand the Radio performance fitted perfectly into a small park in the financial district of Manhattan. In this performance, most of which is improvised, we use small radios powered by a solar cell on our foreheads. The resulting snatches of news, pop songs and white noise overlap each other while the dancers are moving like curious animals through the landscape.
But whe
mind, curiosity, and to reach a bit of the child in us. It‘s fun - for both sides - the performers and the spectators.

Audio Ballrinas 2001
Medi@terra Festival, Athens.
Peeper Choreograph with light-to-frequency controllers.
Foto: Eke Wyngaard

Performances:

Audio Uniforms
and
Sounding Wearables

Organizing Sound with Audio Clothes: an Interview with Jøran Rudi (1995)

Benoît Maubrey's work with audio art started in Berlin in 1982 with public sound sculptures, and he eventually turned to performative practices with portable audio embedded in clothes and costumes. Maubrey has developed a huge portfolio of audio ensemble performances on several continents, and an interesting thread of autonomy and critical reflection runs through his oeuvre. The costumes and their technical affordances have changed with new technological developments, and in this interview, Maubrey explains these developments, and how he has both maintained and extended his artistic focus.

JR: You have an interesting artistic background that reaches back to New York City and in particular to West Berlin in the early 1980s. You were originally a writer turned painter before you started working with sound – could you say something about how your ideas for using sound developed?

BM: In West Berlin there were these interesting residency programs that brought in artists like John Cage, and West Berlin and New York actually shared the beginnings of the sound art scene. I was lucky to show up in West Berlin; I could look at other artists who were already working with speakers, learn and exchange. I was looking for something, and thought that sound could be very viable for me as well. Once I started to work outdoors, meaning outside of gallery contexts, I started to feel a lot better about things, and I remember thinking that loudspeakers were like brushes on the outdoor canvas, you could spread your colors on the canvas, making the air vibrate.
Organizing sound is clearly interesting to many people, and the sound art scene is getting bigger and bigger, overlapping with noise musicians and the electronics and circuit board scene, as well as music and the fine arts scenes. I consider myself more as a painter than as a musician.

JR: You started your audio work with stationary sound sculptures, but eventually turned to live performances. Can you say something about why you became interested in the performance aspect of things?

BM: My main intention was to work outdoors, and not in the gallery spaces. I was working with PA systems that were already in place. The idea was that the character of the outdoor spaces would be changed by the sound. Social participation was a key element in my initial idea, and still is. I encouraged the public to participate in these sculptures by sending me cassettes. However, at a certain point it started to become difficult to get permission to access public PA systems, and also to install stationary sound sculptures. This is why I had the idea of building loudspeakers directly into my clothes, because I could then
invade public spaces without permission. I built mobile sound sculptures by sewing loudspeakers onto my jackets and inviting my friends to do the same. We called these "audio jackets" or "audio clothes". We could use public spaces in a logistically simple way without asking permission.....(see next pages)

Audio Buddies (photo)
West Berlin 1983
Artist (2nd from left) and friends wear second-hand jackets equipped with loudspeakers, 9-volt amplifiers, and mini-cassette players ("Walkmans").
Sounds: individual cassettes with dishware, breaking glasse, pots and pans.

JR: The technology in your audio costumes has been developing from simple analog to complex digital technology over the course of the last 25 years or so. Can you describe the goals for this development?

BM: The first Audio Clothes had portable cassette players, and only played back recorded sound. When the Walkman came along, it was a great help, and we went from ghetto blasters playing cassettes to Walkmen playing cassettes, and as technology was becoming smaller, it opened up things for new ideas. I wanted to orchestrate the clothes with specific sounds, and would make performance-specific recordings of different kinds and perform with them. There was a contest about sculptures in a public park in Berlin, and I came up with the idea of the Audio Herd. The herd was dressed in animal-skin prints and played animal sounds, and because this project had funding, I was able to develop special amplifiers and speaker units and get better quality than we'd had until then. This was the first "Audio Uniform": the clothes were all the same. There were seven performers and the sound tracks were of very high quality. One can think of it as a seven-channel composition. When the herd walked through the forest, we would play bird sounds, and in a jungle setting, we would play monkey sounds. I was orchestrating this multi-acoustic group differently depending on the individual spaces. The sounds were site-specific.

JR: You state somewhere in a recent book manuscript that you think of the sounds as relating to local customs, themes, situations and traditions. Can you explain something about how you are going about achieving this in concrete terms?

BM: Yes, for example when I was invited by Ars Electronica to create a performance, I decided on the idea of Audio Steelworkers, adapting the work clothes of the steel workers as a local uniform. We made recordings in the steel mills so that the group of electro-acoustic steelworkers reflected this in the city of Linz. The concept was that the site-specific electro-acoustic uniforms would reflect a certain theme from that area or region where the performances took place.

JR: The Audio Steelworkers from Linz, were they using only pre-recorded sounds?

BM: Yes, we (Ralf Buron and Hans Peter Kuhn) recorded in the steel mills and made cassettes, and later used them for ten performances around the city of Linz. That was always the concept.

JR: So when bringing the sound of the steel mills into the city by way of the performers, what was the significance of the performers moving? Does movement have any specific significance, or could you equally well have played the sounds back from stationary speakers?

BM: The audio group is like an amoeba - I always use the word multi-acoustic - they all play the same sound but it is not synchronized, it is always changing, for example if you're using a big hammer from the steel mills, it is not only the one hammer, but seven, and that makes a difference. When the performers are walking through areas, the spectators are inside the performance, and the performance is always changing because the performers move. Added to that is the topography, buildings and landscape. So you are working not only with yourself, but you are working the entire surroundings into your performance. And there is also the element of surprise for the spectators, most often they don't expect to be surrounded by these sounds – being inside a swarm of bees is different than observing the swarm of bees from a distance.... (see next pages)

Audio Herd
Bundesgartenschau, Berlin. 1985
10 imitation animal skin suits,
30-watt loudspeakers (non-visible audio corsets), 12 volt batteries, miniature cassette players, recordings of animal and human sounds (tapes: HP Kuhn).

In 1986 we were invited to the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria. For this occasion we created the Audio Steelworkers. During a preparatory visit I discovered that the city is home to the Voest Alpine, the biggest steel mill in Central Europe. We borrowed 10 fireproof coveralls, on which I mounted amplifiers and loudspekers. HP Kuhn created a tape based on live recordings from the steel mills. During the week-long festival we had 10 walk-on and mostly unexpected performances in various locations around the city.

The Steelworkers were also presented during Berlin Atonal Festival in the Zoologische Garten S- and U-Bahn station.

What really made a difference was when we made it possible for performers to use self-generated sounds. We were investigating how solar cells could make the performers non-dependent on batteries, and placed cells on plastic skirts large enough to provide enough energy to drive the amplifiers. A dancer friend happened by when we were developing this and said: “It’s a tutu” – and this was the start of the Audio Ballerinas. The tutus provided a lot of usable surface

BM: Dancers are trained very early in their careers to follow a set of rules, and they work with numbers when they dance. They also know more about choreography than I do, so my role now is to create the instruments. And each instrument actually dictates their choreography.

JR: How do the instruments dictate their choreography? – That’s an interesting view!

BM: Well, for example the light sensors (Peepers) that the dancers wear on their hands are used as light-to-frequency controllers, so that by moving the hands, opening, closing and tilting them, the dancers would change the sound. This makes for a strict choreography. Another instrument is The Line, developed over the course of many years. Basically, The Line is a contact microphone mounted on metal - for example on a garden rake. The rake would be dragged on the ground, and the sounds would come out of the tutus. Here, the rakes are setting terms for the choreography.....(see next pages)

QR code: solo double-Peeper choreography by Malin Hessen
The photovoltaic resistor “sound” occurs as their body (and hand) movements interfere with the direct light which can be either sunlight or artificial light. A Peeper choreography is very strict and usually occurrs in a limited “plateau” space or a stage.

Peepers. 2014 (photo right)
Summer of Fashion exhibition, MuseumQuartier, Vienna.
Dancers (left to right): Frida Yngvensson, Malin Hessen, Mimi Messner, Nele Paulmann.
photo: Sabine Groschup,
QR code: Ballerina teaser video 2017

Audio Ballerinas.1997 (photo right)
Intercommunications Center,
Tokyo City Opera House, Tokyo.
The Line choreography: dancers with electro-acoustic tutus, rakes with contact microphones, cassette player with chorus sound.

JR: OK, so what we in electro-acoustic music speak of as spatialization is a key element in the movement of your performers?

BM: Exactly, and that is one of the things that make audio uniforms so fascinating: they will always sound different depending on the spaces you put them in. Another example of this type of spatialization can be the Audio Cyclists that Icreated for Les Arts Electroniques Festival in Rennes in 1988. We did an interview with Tour de France-champion Bernard Hinault about cycling, and the tapes
we made from that interview were played by the cyclists when they were riding. We took the local culture of amateur cyclists and made races where the cyclists actually choreographed the sound of the composition, according to their "sports qualities" (for example stamina and desire to win). They were all wearing audio tricots, and when you hear recordings they often sound exactly like a swarm of bees.

JR: I want to go back to technical details a little – did the construction of any of these uniforms involve technical development?

BM: Yes, for the Audio Herd, we learned that we could build in pre-amps in addition to the normal amplifiers we had been using for a long time, and the pre-amps would make it possible to use microphones and talk through the clothes, not only play tapes. This was actually also the basis for the band **Guitar Monkeys (photo lower right**) from the mid-1980s. Basically, the guitars would be fitted with piezo microphones and played through the jackets. This method created a lot of feedback, and the 10-member band would 'invade' bars and so on. Contextually, this fit well with the punk scene of the 1980s in Berlin, and we became the house band in a couple of bars.

JR: Somewhere in your recent manuscript you write that you are making each performer 'responsible for their own sound'. The Guitar Monkeys is an example of that?

BM: Yes, and we gained a lot of freedom that way. Each player would pick up a guitar from a pile on a table, drink beer while playing, get up on a table, fall down, continue playing, and make an acoustic detour into the bathroom while still playing, all in the spirit of the time! It was pretty wild.

JR: But these were choreographed performances, from the sound of it?

BM: Of course – to me, music is essentially choreographed sound, so this was a composition.

JR: This makes me curious about whether you place any sort of restrictions on the performers when you construct the timelines in the performances – are there limits? I am thinking now about the **Audio Cyclists (photo upper right)** , if we could go back to them for a second, did you choreograph a dramaturgy – should they cycle close together, with distance apart, or with different speeds for example?

BM: We worked the cassettes into certain sections, like a ten-track tape, one for each of the cyclists. And no, I did not want to interfere with their performance. The only restrictions were in the material on the tapes, and in the route they were following. Their task was to follow the path through the city, and the magic was that the sportsmen created the details in the choreography.
What really made a difference was when we made it possible for performers to use self-generated sounds. We were investigating how solar cells could make the performers non-dependent on batteries, and placed cells on plastic skirts large enough to provide enough energy to drive for the speakers, solar panels and samplers. The dancers could record and play back their recordings as part of the performances. And we gradually added more features, like looping and pitching, all fully controllable by the dancers. We also added light sensors and radio receivers to further the interaction with the environments they were performing in.

JR: It seems that your technical development has consistently focused on making the performers autonomous. Has this autonomy changed your own role in the ensemble?...(see next pages)

JR: I remember a performance with audio uniforms and umbrellas in Oslo (1993).
The Audio Guards performance was strictly structured along a timeline, opening and closing umbrellas, dragging and tapping them on the pavement, and so on. How detailed were your instructions to the performers? Did your instructions have much to do with what we can call more conventional composition?

BM: This performance (Audio Guards) fits perfectly within my concept of audio uniforms. We (choreographic director: Sygun Schenk) copied the movements of the real palace guards, replaced the guns with umbrellas, and added sound.
I wanted the original choreography of the Guards transposed into sound, using microphones in the shoes and on the umbrellas. For me that performance was perfect because I didn't change anything, except add sound to an existing set of movements.

JR: From a musical perspective, how do you expect people to approach your works: is the quality of the sound essential, or the emphasis on certain aspects of the sound?

BM: What I am doing is using sound to make people think, it's all very simple. With the Audio Guards for example, the listeners are used to how the guards move normally, but being able to "hear" the guards changes everything for the listeners. I am changing the normal appearance of daily life, I want to bring a new perspective and a change in how the reality is perceived. I am not making concerts where you sit down and listen, I am taking existing elements from daily life and making them audible. I'll mention another example as well – the Audio Subway Controllers, where I recorded the commands given by Berlin subway attendants telling passengers to get on and off trains. We made several tapes with these commands (given by 20 different controllers, in order to get different voices and intonations), and equipped three performers with "All aboard" messages and four with "Stay back" messages. In the actual subway situation, playing back these tapes created absolute confusion among the travelers, and they were forced to think about the situation in a different way from what they were used to.

JR:
I sense an element of activism in your performances: they pop up, like street theater, perhaps even invisible theater, and surprise the audience in their environment and make them reflect.

BM:
Yes, and it's also about fantasy. (end)

Audio Guards
Ultima Music Festival,1993
Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway
Uniforms of the Royal Norwegian Guard equipped with audio jackets.
The choreography (Sygun Schenk) adapted from the real guards.
Sound: shoes and umbrellas amplified via contact microphones.

The Audio Subway Controllers (1987)
This Audio Uniform was created for the festival Die Anweisung in Berlin. In the Berlin subway, each station has an attendant who uses the PA system to advise passengers (with more or less emphasis, depending on his or her mood) when and when not to get on the trains (“Einsteigen, bitte!” and “Zurück bleiben!” are the phrases they use, translating roughly as “All aboard please!” and “Step back!”). I systematically recorded all the attendants‘ voices along one subway line and had Hans Peter Kuhn compile them onto two separate cassettes: one with 30 “All aboard, please!” voices and another with 30 “Step back!” voices. The Subway Authority loaned me seven authentic subway attendants’ suits, under which we could fit the audio corsets. As it turned out, the suits also had extra-large inside pockets for the amplifiers, batteries and cassette players, so that we had ourselves an instant Audio Uniform.
The performance consisted of playing the subway voice collages while “patrolling“ the subways. The combination of subway voices being played through authentic suits caused a certain amount of consternation among the subway passengers and employees.

QR code: performance at Sound and Movement Conference.
Freie Universität Berlin 2001

Audio Geishas,1997
ICC-NTT Tokyo City Opera House, Tokyo, Japan.
Kimonos, loudspeakers, circuitbended Casio *Voiceman,* photoresistors.
Dancers trigger sampled sounds via photoresisters and surrounding light.

Audio Cyclists (Cyclistes Sonores)
(with Ralf Buron)
Festival des Arts Electroniques, Rennes. 1988
10 sports shirts with 30-watt loudspeakers,
rechargeable 12-volt batteries, mini-cassette players.
Sound: the voice of Bernard Hinault.


SPECIALIZED
25
TRANS LITTORAL ATLANTIQUE

Microphones and self-expression: the Guitar Monkeys 1986

When I was having the amplifiers built for the Audio Herd, the engineer Wolf Köthe asked me if they should be equipped with a pre-amp which would allow them also to use a microphone and/or external instrument. I agreed to this and that is how the Guitar Monkeys came into existence.
This Audio Uniform was conceived at the same time as the Berlin Atonal Festival (1986) which was a music series of punk and avant-garde rock concerts. Ten performers with little or no experience with playing guitars wore black leather vests with loudspeakers mounted on the lower back section and an amplifier in the inside pocket into which one could plug a guitar or a microphone. In some cases, for extra volume, we did away with the leather vests and simply strapped large loudspeaker boxes onto our backs like backpacks.
Each member of this rock band could individually amplify his or her instrument without having to be on stage. Most of the time we played in the middle of the audience or in stairwells, hallways or other niches particular to the space (mens' and ladies' rooms have unique and intimate acoustic qualities).
The Guitar Monkeys were basically an intensive noise and feedback band with not just one loud-speaker giving off feedback, but ten at once (from below, above, and around you). We purchased our guitars at the local Berlin flea-market with a budget limit of 10 $ per instrument. Instead of usual contact microphones, we used cheap Piezo ceramic loudspeakers as pick-ups. After the Atonal Festival, the Guitar Monkeys stayed busy in local underground clubs (Fischbüro, KOB, Front Kino, Cafe Swing) and went on a European tour in 1988.

Guitar Monkeys. 1986 to present.
Berlin Atonal Festival, Space Night (HDK), KOB, Fischbüro and more....
10 electro-acoustic vests, acoustic guitars with contact microphones, amplifiers,
12 volt rechargeable batteries.

Feeback Fred. 1997 to present.
Spiral Hall, Tokyo
Backpack-style loudspeaker, microphone mask,
amplifier, volume control (hand-held potentiometer).

Feeback Fred
Spiral Hall, Tokyo 1997.
Sound and Movement Conference.
Freie Universität Berlin 2001
Backpack-style loudspeaker, microphone mask,
amplifier, volume control (hand-held potentiometer).

Audio Vacuum Cleaners.
Berlin Atonal Festival. 1986
The Matress Factory The Audio Jeans Uniform (with HP Kuhn), Pittsburg.
Streetsweeper uniforms with audio corsets and vacuum cleaner sound.

Audio Clothes (Audio Kleider / “Sprechende Kleider”) 1984
Kunst und Medien (Art and Media exhibition), Staatliche Kunsthalle Berlin.
Second-hand clothes equipped with loudspeakers, miniature 12 volt amplifiers, batteries and miniature cassette players.
Sound: individual recordings of glass, dishes, pot lids, and pans.

It was at this point I was starting to feel disappointed with my “clothes”. Even though we had made technical changes, namely that small miniature cassette players (Walkmans) had come on the market and had replaced the cumbersome Ghetto blasters and a technician friend had provided us with small amplifiers that fit comfortably in the vest pockets, I still felt that the acoustic quality lacked volume and the performances themselves lacked in direction and overall choreography. This is why I decided to build the first Audio Uniforms.

The concept of Audio Uniforms was to create series of electro-acoustic (speaker) clothes that reflected a local custom, theme, situation, or tradition: the material, electronics and sounds were to be chosen “in situ” that is, in regards to a particular situation or site.
I applied for a project grant in a competition for the Federal Garden Show (“Bundesgartenschau“) that was going to take place in West Berlin and founded Die Audio Gruppe (sound: Hans Peter Kuhn, electronics: Wulf Köthe, production: Claudia Träger) in order to obtain funding for creating Audio Herd.
In 1985 the Audio Herd was first presented at the Bundesgartenschau 85 . This multi-electro-acoustic uniform consisted of seven custom-built electro-acoustic (audio) suits for ambulatory performances through various landscapes of a large park. This uniform - classically cut jackets with pants for men and skirts for women - was made from a synthetic cloth that looked like animal fur. The idea was for the Herd to blend into the environment like multi-media chameleons.
The participants played audio recordings of animals (monkeys, birds, human beings) that corresponded to different areas of the garden and were choreographed as such (e.g. monkeys in the tropical sections, birds in the bushes, humans in the clearings). The performers were fitted with “audio corsets” - 40 cm diameter circular pieces of leather onto which a car loudspeaker was mounted. The audio corsets, worn under the jackets, were strapped to the performers’ backs. The only visible electronic element was a 30-watt amplifer that was mounted on the back of the jacket. The cassettes were played on Walkman cassette players and a 12-volt battery served as power source.

QR code: news report on Audio Herd performance at Breitscheidplatz Berlin 1985.
Photo right: performance at Schloss Charlottenburg
Photo: Claudia Traeger

Audio Peacock. 2001
gARTen Exhibition, BundesgartenSchau, Potsdam.
Polycarbonate costumes,16 loudspeakers, amplifier,
12 volt rechargeable batteries, microphone and sampler.
Performer: Gerrit de Vries
Photo:, Christian Funke

Audio Peacock. 2015
Belziger Landschaftswiese, Baitz.
Polycarbonate costume,16 loudspeakers, amplifier,
12 volt rechargeable battery, microphone and sampler.

Video Peacock. 2008
Mostra des Artes. Sao Paulo, Brazil.
Polycarbonate costume,16 loudspeakers, amplifier,
12 volt rechargeable battery, microphone, sampler, video projector.

Concepts and Themes

a chronology
1983-2025

N.B.:
Texts and pictures in the following chapters are provided with **QR codes** that can be scanned for documentary videos, sounds, and texts.

The Landscape Painter from Golo Föllmer

Benoît Maubrey suspected early that life meant trouble. Already at the age of eight he felt it in his bones. The causes are still unclear, it just happened. But as he grew up it got serious: he needed to experience something, wanted to feel life, and that meant doing things differently, breaking through expectations: making trouble simply by realizing his ideas unswervingly, consistently following his impulses and convictions. That's what came through to me most clearly, when I interviewed Maubrey one day in July 2018. It was clear how unconditionally this attitude had established itself in him: "When I left the US for Germany in 1979 it was like a Kamikaze thing. I thought, if it's do-or-die, better do it in a country like Germany where at least they appreciate art. You have a better chance of surviving." Without knowing why, this feeling, that there's no enjoyment if there's been no trouble, crept into his life. Benoît must provoke! Even today he is still questioning his motives. His art, however, was always focused, crystal clear, bang on the nose!

At a subsequent meeting he expanded on his ideas about interactive sound sculptures which disrupt or rearrange the public sphere, which make people audible and visible, which emphasize the personal amidst the impersonality of urban architecture, and bring people together. He began building the first of these sculptures at the beginning of the 1990s, and since 2010 his worldwide versions of 'Speaker's Corner' have become his main project. In Japan, Egypt, Canada, etc., he has set up monumental sculptures made of hundreds of scrap loudspeakers to be played by passers-by via microphone, telephone and Bluetooth.

The sculptures have their own beauty. The loudspeakers tell of fashions and styles of past decades, of the preferences of social groups and countries, of product fetishism and status, of intimate listening times and exuberant dance evenings. All this is deposited in the electronics Maubrey arranges into columns and walls. He integrates his loudspeaker sculptures into urban space by giving them architectural forms. The temple of Delphi made of recycled electronics is in itself a provocation, but also a thoughtful reference to cultural tradition. Giving it a voice recalls the temple's oracular function.

The public space is the only meaningful venue for Maubrey's works, which are based on interaction. The Guitar Monkeys, the Audio Ballerinas and dozens of other audio groups came before the loudspeaker sculptures. From the earliest days, the concept of stage was alien to him because of the separation between public and performer.

Maubrey speaks of his life as if it puzzles him. He asks himself, How on earth did I create that? Did I do that or did it just happen? He identifies the turning points, the changes of perspective, the flashes of enlightenment that fell as random thunderbolts from a dark cloud. "That's the greatest thing, all of them are part of the creative process! You have to be free to see and grasp the opportunity. Coincidence became my modus operandi. And sometimes you have to put up with a lot of trouble, or rather, you have to cause a lot of trouble — if you want to get to the edge, if you want to feel life."

When he was eight years old his mother surprised him in his room while he was writing out a hundred times "I must not disturb the class". Mother asked, trouble at school again? No, I'm just getting ready for next time, he answered. It was already clear to him that life meant trouble. "And you don't change," he says today "I still need to disturb".

When he arrives in Germany, he is a painter. First stop is Munich, where they look at him, irritated, and say: What do you think you're doing here? You belong in West Berlin! All right, then! He goes to Berlin as a painter, finds a soul mate in the owner of the Galerie No Name. Still a painter, he stiffens old clothes and uses them to stamp long canvases with 'group portraits', which he exhibits in public spaces. The process of convincing people to let him use their outdoor spaces for parts of the kilometer-long "Running Painting" has a surprising attraction for him: this is where an exchange of ideas and encounters arises. An important part of the process. Today it is the sometimes months-long search for hundreds of cheap scrap loudspeakers that fascinates him in a similar way: he goes to the back doors of junk shops, where the unsalable junk piles up. He has to learn how to find scrap in Japan, where they say: "We don't have garbage." Or in north Africa, where there's a lot of garbage, but it's valuable and expensive.

He arrives in Berlin after painting every day for ten years. But suddenly he is bored with painting. He falls victim to Painter's Block, and he treats himself by walking across West Berlin, until he hits the Wall somewhere, and turns around again. He lands in the Bilka market at Bahnhof Zoo, where the next epiphany hits him in the form of a jeans ad booming through loudspeakers: "That's it! Instead of advertising jeans, they should be letting artists use the loudspeaker systems to express themselves. You just have to push something through, through the air, and then the department store becomes a completely different place."

The painter depicts landscape on canvas, and the writer lies for 300 pages, says Maubrey. "It's all about interpretation." He knows what he's talking about, having won the creative writing award from Georgetown University in 1975. But that was back then. Now, it was 1982, and he decided to "paint" right onto the landscape itself, with sound waves. The air, his canvas; the sounds, his colors. He first tried it out in an experiment at the International Congress Center Berlin. Based on that experience he developed a way to get around permission for the use of official speaker systems by embedding his loudspeakers directly in clothing. Audio clothes were born. It was a simple solution, opening the door to surprising and anarchic actions.

The Audio Ballerinas are probably Benoît Maubrey's best-known project. "They look beautiful, people like to look at pretty girls. And the beautiful sight makes it easier to spoon-feed sound art to normal people". In Maubrey's studio in Baitz, the audio-tutus lie on shelves, with tour cases like those of a rock band, in which the special garments still travel today.

They are a long runner, even if they are not always completely understood. His experience with the Audio Ballerinas have made Benoît somewhat cynical. "You may be known as an international artist," he says, "but that doesn't mean people understand what you're doing. The Audio Ballerinas, for example, also get booked for corporate gala events. A VW manager once commented 'They look very nice, but what's all that noise?' I explained. 'Aha, good, but let's cut the performance short, shall we?' Another time a customer rents four Tutus to play the company jingle, and calls in panic that he can't get the four sound sources synchronized. He can't, of course, because that's part of the artistic concept, multi-acoustics. I suggest that the customer simply switch off three." The situation is saved — the art has won, the customer is satisfied.

Before the Audio Ballerinas there are other audio groups, each with their own special loudspeaker suits. The Guitar Monkeys storm rooms and fill them

up to the roof with noise, 10 guitarists, male and female, with wild, invented instruments like sawed-off shotguns, with amplifiers and loudspeakers in their jackets, sometimes standing on the tables, sometimes disappearing. While they keep on drinking their beers.

The Guitar Monkeys' and their irrepressible joy in breaking rules and rigidities are references to rock and punk. But it goes beyond that. Melody and riff are abandoned, only the gesture of liberation through the noise of the screaming guitars remains. The spontaneous actions are unmarketable and the whole freedom is shocking, no half-measures as with punk, which in the hands of the record industry become merchandising.

Maubrey's Larsen Ensemble consists of four musicians, each equipped with individual microphones and PA systems who create complex feedback phenomena. The Larsen Ensemble shares characteristics with the Guitar Monkeys, but focuses on space, on resonance modes. Maubrey is a sound researcher here, forming sound in space. The reference to rock and punk is still there with the feedback, but through the simple choreography of four people with loudspeakers on their backs he builds a bridge to contemporary music, as in Alvin Lucier's experiments with spatial resonances. These two ensembles, Larsen and Guitar Monkeys, are the closest Maubrey's oeuvre comes to music.

Maubrey (who admits he can't read a note) is neither technician, musician, choreographer nor composer – but as an artist working with mobile multi-acoustic loudspeaker systems, unencumbered by the rules of individual disciplines, he can move freely and relaxedly between the worlds of pop culture and art.

Then there's a long list of his other audio groups: Sounding Steel Workers at the Ars Electronica in Linz, Subway controllers in Berlin, the Audio Herd at the Federal Garden Show, etc. They all interact with their environment, with the people and objects around them, via sound. Benoît works with visual, acoustic and mobile elements in their respective location, integrates them into his concept, and "paints" the landscape with them: physically, visually, acoustically.

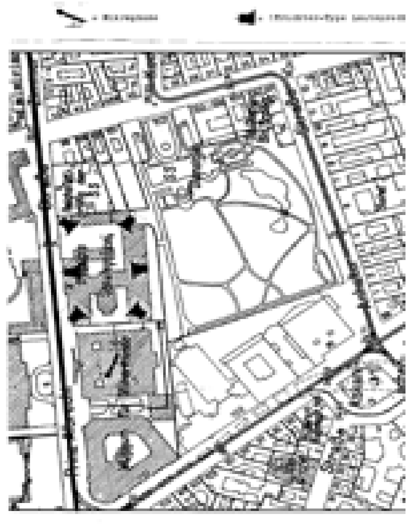
The equipment of the audio clothes continues to evolve with regard to the cultural space in which the performance takes place. In the beginning the performers used cassette players. Then they started using microphones and other pickups live. With the addition of cheap circuit-bent samplers from Asia, the Audio Ballerinas could use buttons and sensors to control the loop of the sampler and the pitch of the sound. Where other artists might turn to canvas, stone or color, Maubrey uses modern electronics as the contemporary artists' building material.

In every performance there are references to the daily life of that place, to the human lives lived there and to the everyday common uses of the technology available.

What may otherwise be expressed in public space almost exclusively through the visual display of fashion, style, posture and facial expressions, finds acoustic expression in Maubrey's sculptures. People put themselves audibly in relation to each other. Benoît's sculptures promote peoples' encounters on the basis of their circumstances. In this way, the atomization of people in public space is counteracted. Marc Augé has described how public urban space, for the sake of its functionality as a traffic and trading space, loses its role as a social place and has become a 'non-place'. Only when people do and show personal things there, do public squares become places of significance for individuals and groups, they become socially significant and effective.

In order to activate this function, routine behaviors in public space must be broken through: trouble is needed. Neither the artist nor the users of the sculpture have to state explicitly what their aim is as long as they use the opportunity to express themselves as individuals and/or parts of specific groups. Allowing you, urban dweller, to use Maubrey's sound architecture brings a moment of empowerment: the city belongs to you. Make it yours by playing your music and voicing your sound. We are all landscape painters. The sculpture is not confined to what the artist built, it becomes what the inhabitants of the place do with it: paint their city with sound.

Audio Painting 1982
International Congress Center in Berlin.
The public is invited to talk into an open microphone set in the middle of the main conference hall, their voices are amplified, manipulated via the sound technicians and interpreted with various lighting effects on the main stage.
Very few visitors accepted my offer so that I was left alone most of the day, repeating the sentence “Yellow and blue make green” through the speaker system and admiring the lighting effects.

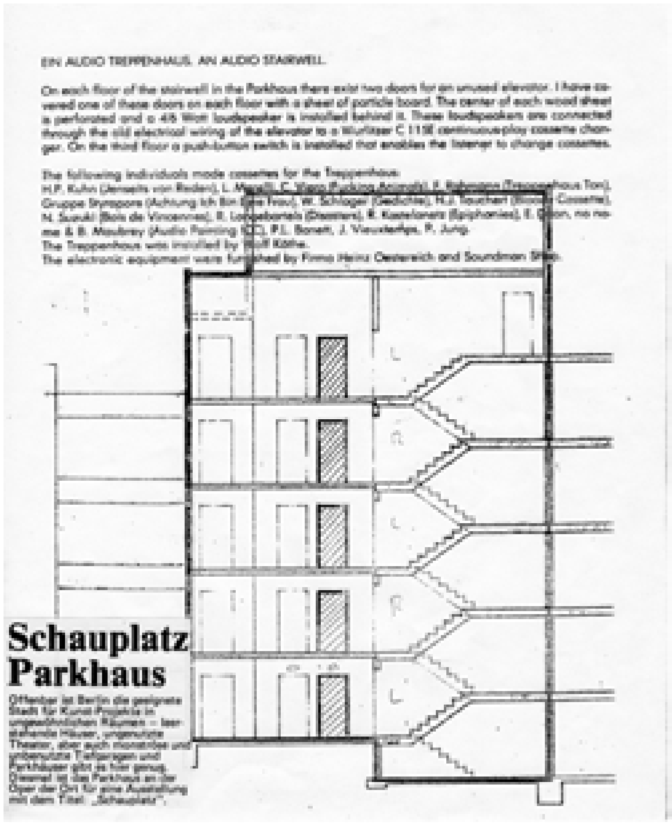


In 1983 I was invited to participate with the artist group Schauplatz founded by Wolfgang Wazlaw (one of several artist groups that were working in “on-site” situations in abandoned buildings in West Berlin). 1983 the group collaborated with IBA vor Ort (International Building Exhibition Berlin, an urban renewal project) during which the artists presented “archeological installations” in reference to Berlin’s past and mostly bombed-out sites and neighborhoods.

For the IBA projects I developed Speaker’s Corner in 1983 where a microphone was to be installed in the main inner courtyard of the Martin-Gropius Bau that would allow people to talk freely through 8 loudspeakers installed on the perimeter of the ruins of the former Nazi police building next door to it. This project was never realized.

For the Art and Media exhibition at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Berlin in 1984 I created Social Music.
I put out a call via the media and newspapers for people to send me audio cassettes. These were then played through a PA system in the stairwell of the building.

This is when I first collaborated with Hans Peter Kuhn, known as a “sound designer” who had made a name working with Robert Wilson at the local Schaubühne Theatre. I had approached him because of the Audio Herd project in order to make cassettes. Together we created Audio Café where the tables at the local cafeteria were equipped with individual loudspeakers and played “audio messages”.

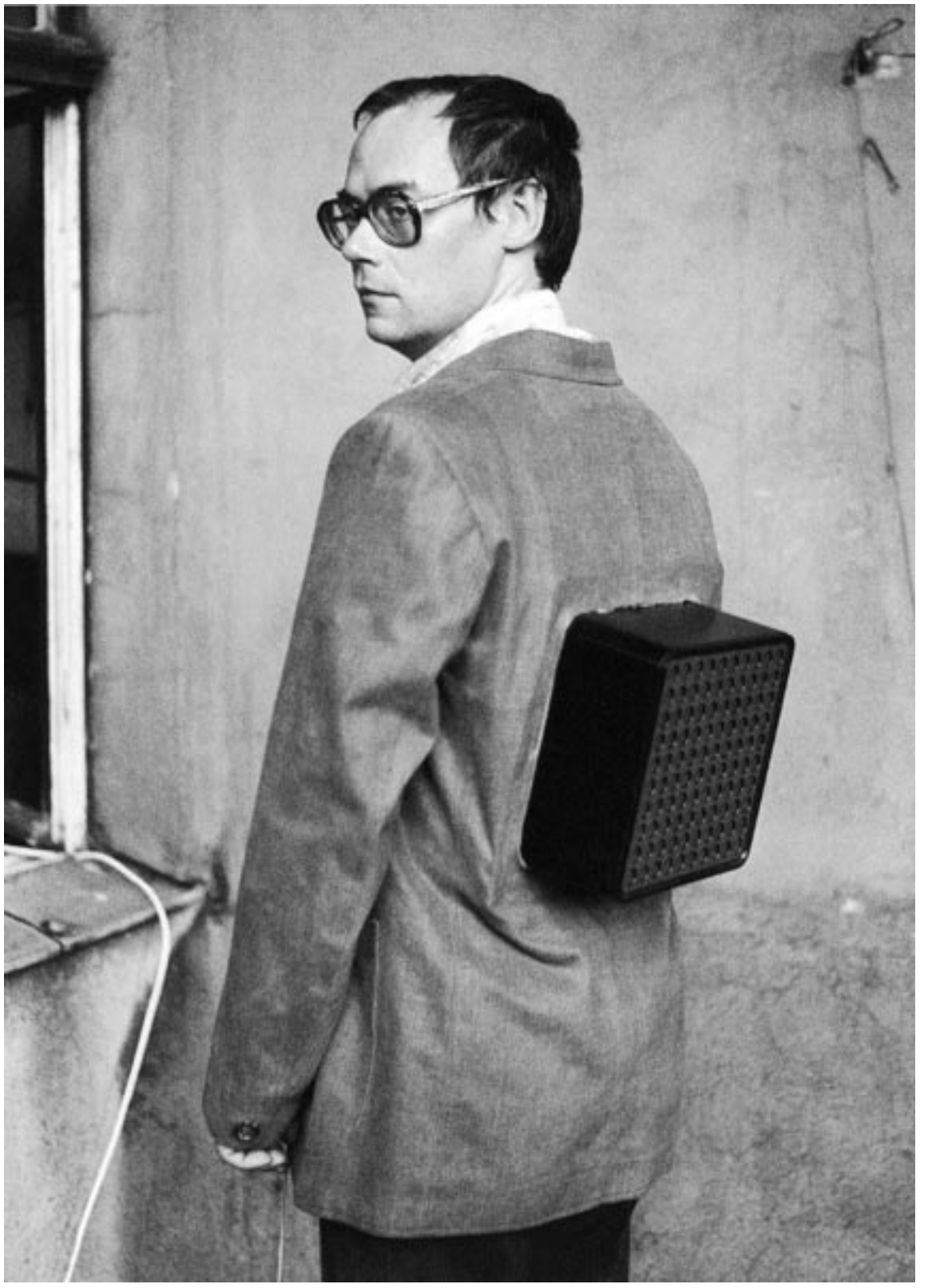

EIN AUDIO TREPPENHAUS. AN AUDIO STAIRWELL.

Schauplatz Parkhaus

Audio Stairwell (AudioTreppenhaus)
Schauplatz im Parkhaus Exhibition, 1983.
The West Berlin Schauplatz artist group created installations in an unused parking garage next to the West Berlin Opera house.
A series of loudspeakers were connected via the cables of the non-functional elevator shaft into a 4-floor vertical PA system.
Friends and colleagues contributed audio cassettes of sound recordings.

Audio Jackets and Clothes.1982

In 1982 it was probably out of frustration at not being able to obtain public speaker systems for my installations that I started attaching loudspeakers to second-hand jackets and clothes, transforming them into mobile loudspeaker systems for which I did not need permission to intervene in public spaces. At the Galerie no name in West Berlin we presented the first Audio Jackets in 1982.
I created an entire series of Audio Clothes, transforming my friends' and neighbors' wardrobes. I had each person make recordings and played the recordings via cassette recorders that were connected to the clothes they wore. Eventually I sat down by myself one afternoon and made a series of recordings with breaking glasses, lids, pots and pans in my kitchen -- creating, in effect, a "heavy metal" composition for Audio Jackets (see Audio Buddies page 94). In 1983 I was invited to present the audio clothes at the Quergalerie (Performance Promenade, Berlin, Wedding), at the Galerie Pegasus Audio Art with Peter Feinauer and Manuela Kunz (photo 2nd below), and at the Galerie Donguy for the Deuxieme Festival de la Performance Festival de Paris (photo and link direct below).



Audio Jacket 1982. West Berlin.
Figurant: Hans Jorg Tauchert . 12 volt, 30 watts, second-hand jacket,
mini-amplifier, portable cassette player.

In 1986 we were invited to the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria. For this occasion we created the Audio Steelworkers. During a preparatory visit I discovered that the city is home to the Voest Alpine, the biggest steel mill in Central Europe. We borrowed 10 fireproof coveralls, on which I mounted amplifiers and loudspekers. HP Kuhn created a tape based on live recordings from the steel mills. During the week-long festival we had 10 walk-on and mostly unexpected performances in various locations around the city.

The Steelworkers were also presented during Berlin Atonal Festival in the Zoologische Garten S- and U-Bahn station.

Festival Accroche-coeur in Angers 2014

Audio Cyclists (Cyclistes Sonores). 1988

Festival des Arts Electroniques in Rennes (with Ralf Buron). This city in the Brittany, France is very passionate about cycling, which provided the inspiration for the theme of this project. I had 10 “audio jerseys” (the typical nylon knit sports shirts that bicycle racers wear) built with loud-speakers sewn into the lower back area. Bernard Hinault, the five-time winner of the Tour de France, lived on the outskirts of Rennes. He agreed to let us interview him and the musician Ralf Buron used the taped interview to splice together a word collage that sounded in some parts like a techno-rap: “J‘ai gagné” was the basic chorus line of the Audio Cyclists‘ cassette.
The local sports center recruited 10 professional racers and organized a route through the streets of Rennes, complete with an official master of ceremonies and obligatory Audio Cyclist trophy for the winner at the end. There were even solo races against the clock, during which a metronome sound was played through the speaker-jerseys.
This performance has been repeated since then for a number of festivals. The Cyclists was also presented in1988 at ECLAT Festival du Theatre de Rue d‘Aurillac, in 1989 at le Musée de La Villette in Paris (“L‘Opéra Sonore” with Ralf Buron as “Audio Joggers”), and in 2014 (but using MP3 players instead of Walkmans) at the Festival Accroche-coeur in Angers and in the neighboring town of Chemille with amateur racers.

Guitar Monkeys: microphones and self-expression.

When I was having the amplifiers built for the Audio Herd, the engineer Wolf Köthe asked me if they should be equipped with a pre-amp which would allow them also to use a microphone and/or external instrument. I agreed to this and that is how the Guitar Monkeys came into existence.
This □ de rock concerts. Ten performers with little or no experience with playing guitars wore black leather vests with loudspeakers mounted on the lower back section and an amplifier in the inside pocket into which one could plug a guitar or a microphone. In s□ backpacks.
Each member of this rock band could individua□ stairwells, hallways or other niches particular to the space (mens' and ladies' rooms have unique and intimate acoustic qualities). The Guitar Monkeys were basically an intensive noise and feedback band with not just one loudspeaker giving off feedback, but ten at once (from below, above, and around you). We purchased our guitars at the local Berlin flea-market with a budget limit of 10 $ per instrument. Instead of usual contact microphones□ - ground clubs (Fischbüro, KOB, Front Kino, Cafe Swing) and went on a European tour in 1988.

photo: Guitar Monkeys at Urbane + Aboriginale Festival, Berlin 1991

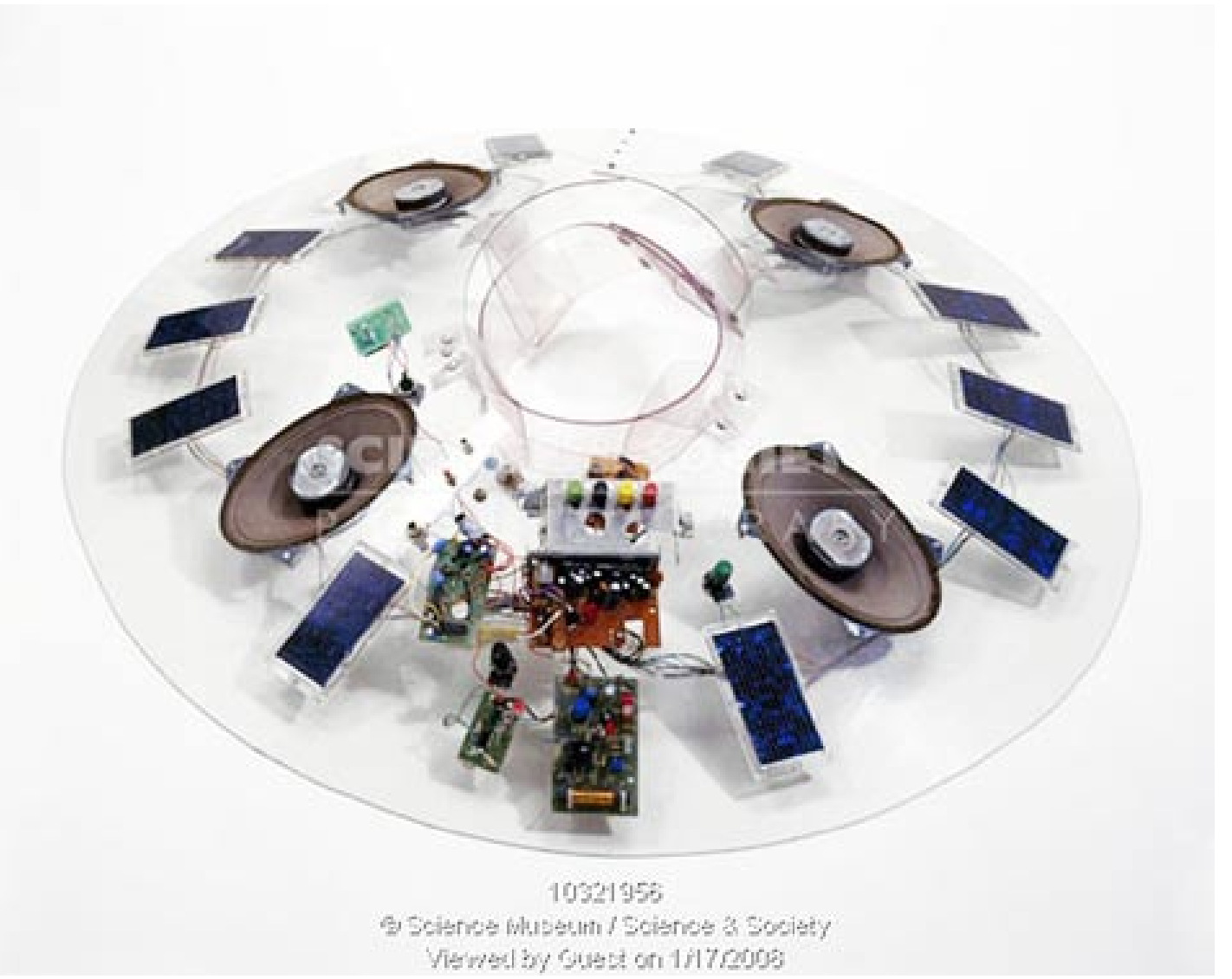
Typical Guitar Monkey choreography (changeable according to situation/room):
1. Guitars are piled up on a table in the middle of the room.
2. A GM walks over and knocks the pile over onto the floor.
3. One by one the GMs pick up their guitars and start playing.
4. GMs crisscrossing the room, wind up at the bar and drink beers while playing guitar.
5. GMs spread out and stand on chairs/tables/stage while playing guitars.
6. GM regroup and meet in the toilet while playing guitar. Feedback very intensive due to bodies, space, and guitar noise. Toilet door is open/ closed/ locked.
7. GM spill out into main room, gather in the center / stage where they group into a tight mass of bodies/sound/guitars.
8. The mass of GMs and guitars collapses onto the floor, at the shout of "shut up, shut up, shut up!". The GMs unplug their batteries.
9. Stillness... applause.

Main Performers:
Betty Sturmer, Fernando Bryce, Hans Jurg Tauchert, Greg Wulzcyn, Tobias Hoffmann, Codino, and more.....

Audio Ballerinas 1990 to present

I had been experimenting with solar cells as a power source for the Uniforms and come to the conclusion that they had to be mounted on a horizontal surface in order to catch as much of the sun's rays as possible. The artist Susken Rosenthal helped me build a transparent disc-like skirt out of plexi-glass that could hang loosely on a belt from the waist. On this surface we placed the solar cells and electronics. A visiting dancer friend who saw the prototype explained that we had created a "tutu" -- the skirt-like piece of clothing that dancers wear in such classical ballet pieces as Swan Lake. This is how Audio Tutus and the Audio Ballerinas came into existence.
While building the first generation of Audio Tutus we discovered that the hard but flexible surfaces (from polycarbonate material) were ideal not just for mounting speakers, solar cells, and amplifiers as in the previous Audio Uniforms but also for a whole array of new electronic instruments (not unlike a disc-jockey's mixing board). Under the masterful hand of our engineer, Manfred Thiem, we began experimenting with surplus electronic circuitboards ("DYI-ing" or "circuit-bending" as its termed today) -- each such "instrument" became the basis for various choreographical pieces which were developed and improved over the years (as the Tutus themselves).

exhibition picture: courtesy London Science Museum 2006.



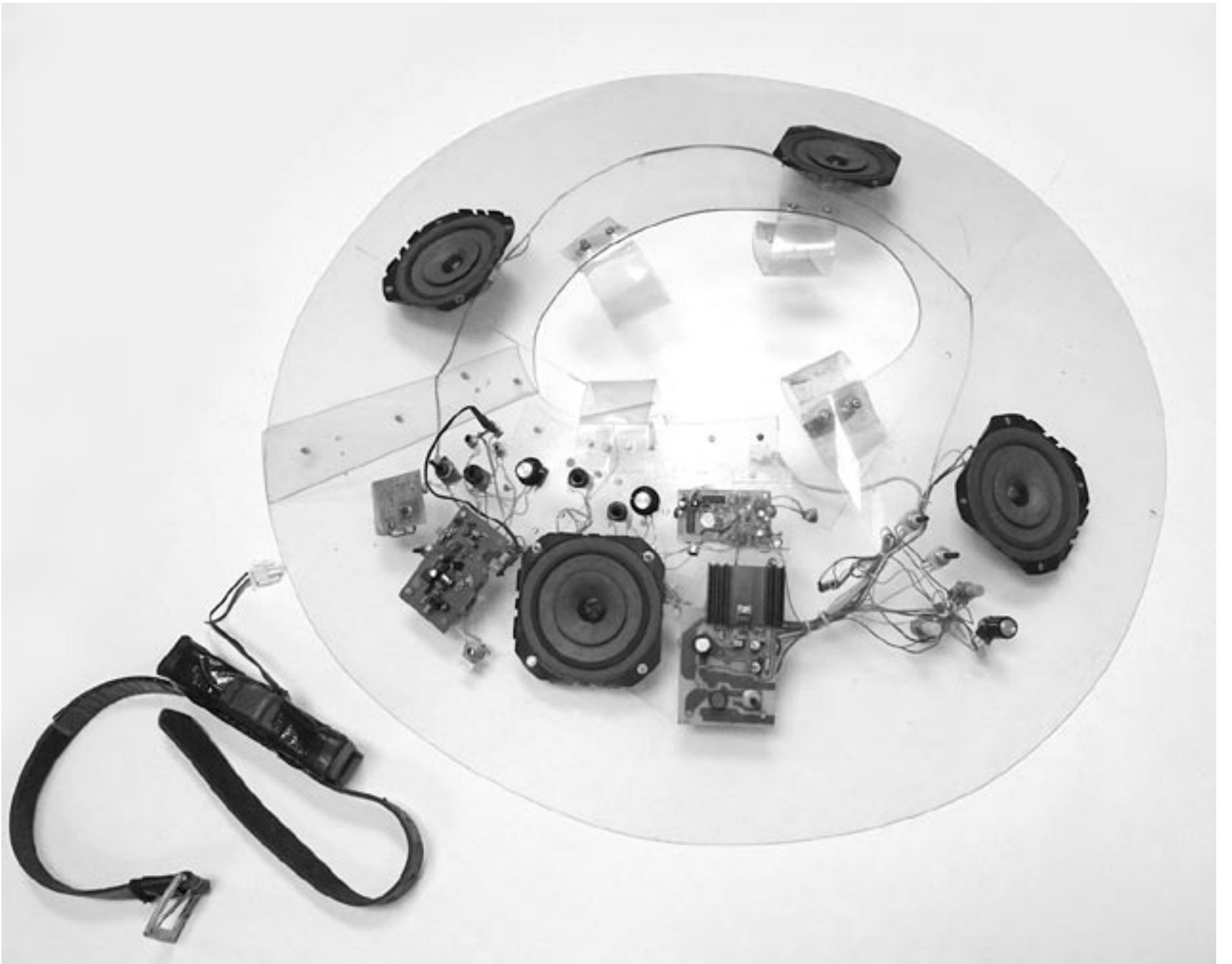
Audio Ballerinas / Solar Ballerinas. 1990
Solar-powered Audio Tutu (first generation: detail 1 of 7 units)
Le Festival les Arts au Soleil, Calais.
Electro-acoustic tutu, solar cells, car amplifier, car loudspeakers, radio, sampler,
piezo contact microphone, photo-resistor (light sensor).
Engineer: Manfred Thiem.

2nd generation of Audio tutus. 1992-2000

The Audio Gruppe received a grant from Berlin city government for an Audio Ballerina East-meets-West project (the Berlin Wall had fallen in 1989) in which we would train classical dancers from the East to work with audio tutus from the West in the re-united Berlin. We had a formal rehearsal space in the former Haus der Junge Talente (House of Young Talent) near Alexanderplatz and posted an official call for dancers.

The Audio Ballerinas became an established group including a core of dancers, a choreograph, technicians, manager (Katja von der Bey) and myself as director. I realized that the solar cells were not dependable enough as power sources for our instruments. A second generation of tutus were built using rechargeable 12-volt batteries and state-of-the-art amplifier, along with light sensors, samplers, pre-amps and radio receivers. The Audio Ballerinas begin an unprecedented series of performances at festivals and events around the world.

Main engineer: Manfred Thiem.



2000 to present

3rd generation of Audio Tutus. 2000
Under the supervision of Jago Whitehead (who had previously helped construct the first Audio Igloo in Hull, U.K) the tutus were denuded of all equipment except for loudspeakers and amplifier. The individual instruments were now modular and could be attached or replaced via Velcro fasteners.
Each Ballerina had her own kit including “plug-in” sampler, radio, solar cell (for radio modulation and power), pre-amplifier, light-to-frequency controller (Peeper) and MP3 players - or “music sticks” (for pre-recorded sounds). The Yamahas (DYI circuitboards with sounds and tunes) were separately worn on their vests as before.
Rechargeable lead-gel 12 volt batteries were integrated on the belt. This way repairs and adjustments could be done instanteously and without soldering.

The Audio Ballerinas: the Instruments 1990 to present

Examples of choreographic pieces developed and improved over the years:

Digital Memory: using a digital chip (256 K) for sampling sounds the performers could spontaneously record local sounds, play them back, amplify them, repeat them (via an electronic looping device), and alter them via a down- and up-pitch mechanism. For example, the tutus could record five seconds of the sound of a bell tower ringing nearby and instantaneously play back the sound like a staggered echo, with an electronic timer they could change the speed - in effect "looping" the sound - with another regulator they could "pitch" the sound to that of a heavy brass gong or, in the other direction, to that of jingling bells.

Digital Memory is at the core of an Audio Ballerina performance. In each place where they perform the first task of the group is to find a particular local sound - a sound that is indigenous to that site or country - that can be used for the performance. A few notable examples that occurred in the following years are :
- Lenin's piano in the Marble Palace during the Interferenzen Exhibition in St. Petersburg 1992).
- local Aboriginals playing their didgeridoos at the Third International Symposium for Electronic Arts, Sydney 1993 (photo right).
- Beck Forum, Munich, 1993, sampling the yodeler Franzi Kinateder.
- Sampling the Swedish saxophonist Mats Gustafsson at the Kulturbro festival, Ystad, Sweden 2000 (photo right).

During a typical choreography a group of Ballerinas record the sound, loop it and play it back individually while spreading out over an extended area (of a room or garden or park), thus creating - from an original sound - a multi-acoustic and mobile concert. This new instrument allowed us to do away with the pre-recorded cassettes we had been using previously and work spontaneously and site-specifically with our environment.

The *CHAOS Choreography*: The sample of a sample of a sample of a sample....
In the late 90s we developed "multi-sampling" or "re-resampling" concerts (SO36 Club, Berlin1995) The Audio Ballerinas's main instrument is a digital sampler. A group of 6 Audio Ballerinas successively record one sound, for example a drunk guy leaning at the bar who mumbles the word „Shit" at each individual Ballerina as they pass him by.The Ballerinas spread out in the room, each one is repeating the word „Shit" through their electroacoustic tutus and automatically „looping" it (repeating it with their electronics):
„Shit" is coming at you from everywhere. For a while they change the pitch (high tones and low tones of „Shit"), manipulating the sound via their sensors and changing the word itself.Then the Ballerinas seperate into two groups of three dancers. Group A then samples the sampled „Shit" of Group B.Then they seperate again and loop and pitch the word as a composition in the room.Then Group B samples the re-sampled sound from Group A: a second-generation sample occurrs.Then they split up. The spectactors can barely understand the word „shit" now.Then Group A re-re-samples the sound of Group B. The word „shit" has turned into a sound that is not definable any more: a new composition occurrs..Then Group B re-re-resamples Group A, they spread out and come back together so that Group A samples Group B, and so on, and so on....until the sound has metamorphasized into a kind of loud pulsating noise and the Ballerinas are dancing like dervishes in a crazy dance. At this point the sound from the tutus is transmitted simultaneously and gradually via wireless microphones to a very loud PA system in the room, so that the volume rises slowly and it sounds like the room is about to explode – people cup their ears and some even scream. Then, all at once, the Ballerinas unplug their battery and „kill" the sound: the incredible noise from the Audio Tutus and from the PA disintegrate like a falling Tower of Babbel.The concert room reverberates for a second or two of stillness.Then silence. And there is nothing left of „Shit" except the guy at the bar.

Intersonanzen Festival, Potsdam 2018

video: C. Santana 1993

Audio Geishas,1997
ICC-NTT Tokyo City Opera House, Tokyo, Japan.
Kimonos, loudspeakers, circuitbended Casio *Voiceman,* photoresistors.
Dancers trigger sampled sounds via photoresisters and surrounding light.

Solo Performances: Feedback Fred

Feedback Fred originates from the days of the Guitar Monkeys in 1987 and was developed over the years during various theater pieces (Audio Ballerinas and Electronic Guys 1994, Audio Drama 1994).
This “phonic character” is equipped with a large loudspeaker on his back and a 30-watt amp and microphone that is clamped to his mouth via a black face mask. Essentially he “plays” feedback in the true sense of the word: by moving through a room and monologuing through the microphone he produces different levels of feedback. He is fitted with knee and elbow protectors as his actions also involve semi-acrobatic stunts in the room. Dramatically speaking he is a cross between the Hunchback of Notre Dame and Hamlet: he expresses himself oratorically, but his speeches are limited due to his actions and constant struggle with his self-produced feedback. He is a melodramatic character but he is also a clown.

Digital Arts Week, Zurich (2006), VERSCH Festival, Amsterdam (2010), Spiral Hall, Tokyo (1997),TanzZeit 1999, HAU Theater Berlin, Sound and Movement Conference Free University Berlin (2001), Ping Festival, Mallorca (2007), NAISA (New Adventures in Sound Art) Toronto (2009), Brno International Music Festival, Czech Republic (2015), Sound City Days, Kosice (2014).

Kosice Sound Art Days 2014

Fred in Japan, Spiral Hall, Tokyo.1997

2001 Feedback Fred
Sound and Movement Conference,
Free University Berlin.
Photo: H. Krul

Beyond 2000 TV report on Feedback Fred and Audio Ballerinas 1998

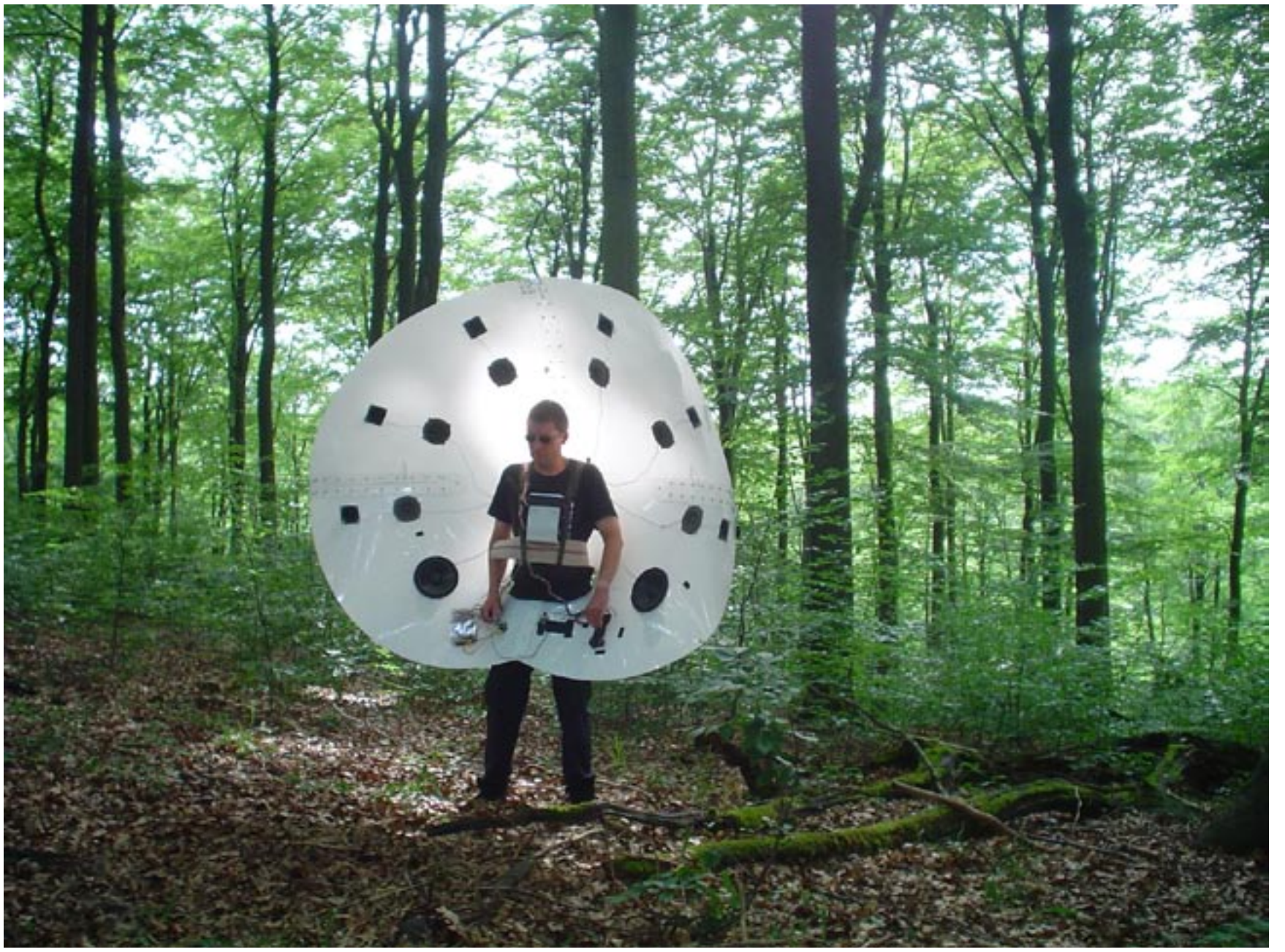
Fred visiting a classroom at Danish Academy of Music 2011

Solo Performances : The Electronic Guy 1985 to present
Audio Tuxedo (with tails and top hat) for the mayor of West Berlin.
Sound: fifty different voice recordings of “Berlin tut gut” (“Berlin does you good”) for the opening of the Berlin International Electronics Fair 1985. The mayor declined, fearful that if he used the jacket it would put his press attaché out of work.

Collection of the Berlinische Galerie, Berlin.
In the years since 2000 the tuxedos have been upgraded with digital amplifiers, samplers and sound-to-light technology.

In the following years the Electronic Guy was equipped with a second-generation Audio Tuxedo which he uses to “jam” with different instruments intergrated into the tuxedo: sampler, guitar amplifier, radio receiver (white noise) and light-to-freqeuncy controller. see QR codes for performances at Kosice Sound Art Days 2014, Offinas do Convento/ Portugal 2015 and the 15.Internationales Klangkunstfestival Berlin 2018.

Audio Peacocks. 2002 to present.
Polycarbonate costume in the shape of a peacock, showing off his elaborate display of feathers, rustling his “plumage”, but instead of “eyespots” the dish-like surface has 16 loudspeakers installed.
The first prototype was built in my studios in the village of Baitz, the
ensuing construction of four models occurred during an artist-in residence program at Lieux Publics in Marseille.
Together with Gerrit de Vries and Jago Whitehead four Audio Peacocks were built: two with see-through polycarbonate and two with white polycarbonate. They were equipped with amplifiers, samplers, microphones and 12 volt rechargeable batteries.
We soon realized that the white costumes were more effective visually: they could also be used in combination with light effects and video projections.



Video Peacocks. 2003 to present
En Route Project, Kunstpflug e.V. Brandenburg/Baitz
White polycarbonate (plexiglass) costume with 16 loudspeakers and sampler. Used for audio-visual performances. Visualizations are projected live and directly onto the peacock costume.

Video Peacocks
Cyberbirds performance, Hohenrausch Festival, Rostock. 2009
An audio-visual performance with white polycarbonate costumes equipped with 16 loudspeakers and samplers.
As Audio Peacock the performer amplifies and alters his voice
using a built-in microphone, sampler and digital filter mechanism. The Video Peacock is a nocturnal version of the Audio Peacock. Here the polycarbonate dish becomes a mobile projection screen. Sound and light are emitted from the same surface and can interact. The Video Peacock is an urban multi-media phenomenon. It roves over a much smaller area than the Audio Peacock so that it can catch the light. Live visualizations (movies, pictures, texts, computer-enhanced images and closed circuit camera views) are beamed onto the performers as they play their sounds.
Similarly the peacock perform d.
During the CyberBird performance the sound of an Audio Ballerina (Rachel Brooker) - without her audio tutu but equipped with a light-to-frequency-sensor and transmitter was amplified and visualized “live” (as oscilloscope patterns and transmitted sounds) via two CyberBirds at her side.

Larsen Ensemble Project. A “Feedback Ensemble”. 2011 SPOR Festival Aarhus, Denmark.
Performers equipped with backpack-style loudspeakers, guitar-effect systems, slide potentiometers and microphones.
Project for DIVA (Danish Arts Council Grant) residency: a “Feedback Ensemble” named after the Danish scientist who discovered the phenomenon of feedback. Students from the Royal Academy of Music are equipped with loudspeakers strapped to the backs like backpacks (photo), guitar-effect systems (reverb/
delay effects) in order to modulate the feedback sound, and microphones. Due to the inherent nature of the phenomenon of feedback the performers alter the sound via their movement within the space around them. A special choreography was developed in order to investigate the effect of four feedback units “inter-feedbacking” with one another.

Portable feedback unit

Performers: Henriette Jensen, Juri Vagner, Mads Engell, Kaj David. (see QR code)

Speakers Gate. 2010
ObArt Festival, Kirschau, Germany.
350 connected loudspeakers amplifiers, radio receivers from the LetMeRepair company, Bautzen. Electronic elements are soldered together and amplify ‘white noise’ (electromagnetic waves from the environment).
Replica of the gateway of a local 6th century fortress (the Körse : see picture below).
Sponsor: Karl Dominick, director of LetMeRepair.

Folklore and Traditional Costumes

Sorben 3000
Rudolstadt Festival, Germany. 2024.
ObArt Festival, Kirschau. 2010
Traditional costumes equipped with loudspeakers, samplers, wireless receivers, and sound-to-light LED systems.
Electro-acoustic folklore costumes, hats (“Hauben”) that play local Sorbian* music. The costumes are also equipped with LED sound-to-light light technology that allows them to “light up” as they play their original Sorbisch instruments and songs.

Photo right: “Haube“ (Sorbisch hat) with traditional ornaments, LED light strips and sound-to-light circuit board.

*During the 6th century A.D., the Sorbs arrived in the Western part of what is now Germany. In the North, the area of their settlement reached Berlin. In 631 A.D., for the first time.

Plantagenets 3000
In 2014 we recycled the electronics onto a new folkloric costume - the “Plantagenets” - during the festival Accroche-Coeur in Angers. This time we attached the sound-sensitive LED strips to their costumes and umbrellas and had their accordion player “light them up” with the tunes from his instrument.

Awa Odori 3000
Tokushima LED Festival, Tokushima, Japan 2016.
Traditional Awa Odori dancers (Tokushima, Japan), kimonos equipped with sound-to-light LED systems, wireless receivers and accompanied by local traditional musicians.

Audio Suicide. 2009
Vox Populi exhibition, Bad Belzig, Burg Eisenhardt. Kunstpflug e.V.
Artist throws screaming loudspeakers from a tower into a dungeon.
They break on impact with the ground.
Materials: 30 recycled loudspeakers, amplifier, 12 volt rechargeable battery, MP3 player.
Sound: screams.

Audio Igloo
Materials: 300 connected loudspeakers, tuners, record players and receivers.
Sound: electro-magnetic air waves (white noise).
1997 Hull Time Based Arts, UK.
2004 Parochial Church, Singuhr Gallery, Berlin
2011 Ostrale, Dresden
2013 Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl

Rap Fields
Jenseits von Eden Exhibition.
2005 LandKunstLeben, Steinhöfel, Germany.
2011 Ostrale, Dresden.
A sound installation with 3 rows of 20 emphatically shouting telephone receivers. Each row has its own particular voice and is labelled according : “Fukiou”, “Esshohl”, and “Sukmai-dik”. 60 connected former East German telephones and 3 samplers.

Field
2017 Interim Festival, Grabenstätten, Germany.
A field is “planted” with 48 connected loudspeakers as socio-archeological artifacts. The loudspeakers “talk” and “sound”. The loudspeakers are half-buried in the earth and connected to four amplifiers equipped with SD cards with voice samples. There are four rows corresponding to four channels. The 12 volt system is powered via photo-voltaic panels.
The sound: local recordings in the dialect of Schwabische Alb (Hülben in Baden-Württemberg) from 1940s and 50s (birth-day, war-time letter, folkongs, New Year’s celebration...)

Guillotine Sonore. 1989
(from L'Opéra Sonore with Ralf Buron)
Festival Perspectives, Inventer 89, Saarbrücken.
Loudspeakers with live sampled voices from politicians are demolished.
Materials: guillotine (wood), pulley, mechanical switch, four loudspeakers, microphone and sampler.
Audio Ballerina: Lotte Grohe

Media Masher 2009
Vox Populi Exhbition, Burg Eisenhardt, Bad Belzig.
Wooden Guillotine, sampler with amplifier, radio sounds, live news and music that gets "mashed".

Audio Guillotine. 2011
Tonspur/ der Lautsprecher MuseumsQuartier, Vienna.
Visitors are invited to talk into the speakers, their voices are then pulversized.
Materials: wood, loudspeakers, sampler, amplifier, 12 volt battery, microphone.

Audio Guillotine. 2013
Brno International Music Festival. (photo right)
Spectators are allowed to talk into the loudspeaker, their voices are sampled, played back and smashed.
Materials: guillotine (wood), pulley, mechanical switch, recycled loudspeakers, microphone and sampler.
Construction: Michal Estrada
Situation: the Guillotine "served" by Feedback Fred.

Temple 2012-2013
ZKM | Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany.
3000 connected loudspeakers, 4 amplifiers,
6 radio receivers (white noise),1 mixing board,
1 telephone answering machine.
Photo: S. Harms

SPEAKERS ARENA
Berlin, Pallasstrasse 3, 2019.
Kitchener Canada 2018
Quebec, Passages Insolites Festival, EXMURO, 2017 + 2022.

320 connected loudspeakers, 2 amplifiers, 2 smartphones,
3 Bluetooth receivers, audio Twitter, 4 input jacks, 1 microphone, mixingboard. The public (passersby) and local musicians can participate “live” through the sculpture. Grafitti Sprayers are also welcome.
Production: Zwitschermachine, Berlin.

Shrine. 2015 Kobe Biennale.
A Torii Gate is a place “where the spirits are more likely to hear your prayers”. Shrine is a public sound sculpture that allows the spectators to express themselves. It functions as a Speakers Corner or a social “hub” where people can meet. People can use their smartphones to play their music by using Bluetooth technology and/or plug in a microphone or electric instrument and play directly through the sculpture. A local break dancer, You Kaneko, played her music and performed for the Shrine as an up-dated version of a traditional Miko dancer (maiden in service of a Sinto Shrine).

Leuchturm (Lighthouse)
FUSION Festival, Larz, Germany. 2022
In cooperation with Subardo Group / Leipzig.
400 loudspeakers and radios (all connected) 2 amplifiers,
Sound: LoopBARDO: an interactive 8 track, loop based interactive music and performance station from Andreas Frieser. 2 amplifiers, line in. With circling light at the top.
Construction team/ technical engineers: DaLi, Vilte Gustyte, Albert Amerioun, Philipp Steinkellner, Emmanuel Ott.

Ship
Fusion Festival, Lärz, Germany. 2023
Visitors can express themselves through:
350 connected loudspeakers, line in, Bluetooth receivers, microphone and sampler machine/ Loopbardo (Subardo/ Andreas Frieser).
Back view.

Liberator
Open Art Biennial, Örebro, Sweden. 2024
Detail: situation with listeners.
Visitors can express themselves through: 800 connected loudspeakers, 2 automatic telephone answering machines, 3 Bluetooth receivers, microphone and input jacks.
Sculpture is wrapped around an older „Befriaren“ sculpture at Henry Allards Park.

photo: F.B.Esbjörnsson

Audio Ballerinas. 2025
Das Minsk, Intersonanzen Festival, Potsdam Germany.
Peeper choreography: dancers with light-to-frequency controllers.
choreography: Marie Rechsteiner

Photo + video: Frank Paul

The Audio Gruppe: collaborators
Main Technical team, engineers and production:
Gerrit de Vries, Jago Whitehead, Thomas Berndt, Wulf Köthe, Susken Rosenthal, Nori Minori Yamashita, Johnny Camara (ElectroJohnny), Rex Lingwood (production and carpentry for ARENA, Kitchener), Mido (Obelisk), Keiko Kudo (Awa Odori 3000), Marko Gutman, Robert Lüdke, Philipp Steinkellner, Emmanuel Ott, Georg Weckwerth (Streamers production).

Choreographers + solos: Elizabeth Brodin, Lotta Melin, Mimi Messner, Katja Rotzoll, Sygun Schenk, Marie Rechsteiner.

Sound Sculptures:

2024 LIBERATOR, Open Art Biennale, Orebro, Sweden.
2023 SHIP, Fusion Festival, Germany.
2022 STREAMERS, Media Art is Here, ZKM, Karlsruhe.
STREAMERS: a COVID Sculpture, Vienna (curator: Tonspur e.V)
ARENA at Passages Insolites Festival , EXMURO, Quebec
LIGHTHOUSE / Leuchtürm, FUSION Festival, Lärz / Germany,
in cooperation with Subardo Group/Leipzig
2021 SPEAKERS ARENA. 24 Hours Neukölln, Berlin.
AUDIO IGLOO „Lost and Found“, Nurnberg, German. .
2019 SPEAKERS ARENA, Kulturhaupstadt Fonds, Berlin City Grant. Producer:
Galerie Zwitschermachine, Berlin.
2018 OBELISK, Cairotronica, Cairo.
ARENA, Cafka Biennial, Kitchener, Canada.
2017 FIELD, Interim Festival, Grabenstetten (Schwäbische Alb) Germany.
2016 KARAOKE TORI, Kamiyama, Japan.
2015 SHRINE, Kobe Biennale, Japan.
AUDIO GUILLOTINE, Brno International Music Festival, Czech Republic.
ERRATIKER, Kunstpflug eV, Baitz.
2014 Gateway, MaerzMusik, Berliner Festspiele.
2013 Audio Igloo, Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl.
The Cube, Hard Rock Hotel, Palm Springs, CA.
2012 Temple, Sound Art Exhibition, Center for Art and Technology, ZKM, Karlsruhe.
Cake, A Tribute to John Cage, MuseumsQuartier, Vienna, Tonspur e.V.
2011 Le Mur Sonore, Festival Accroche-Coeurs, Angers, France.
2010 Audio Guillotine, Loudspeaker Exhibition, Museumsquartier, Vienna.
Speakers Gate, ObArt Festival, Kirschau, Bautzen.
2009 Audio Suicide, Vox Populi exhibition, Bad Belzig, Burg Eisenhardt. Kunstpflug e.V.
2008 Jobfield, Village Resort Exhibition/Kunstpflug e.V./ Brandenburg, Beelitz.
2007 Audio Suitcases, Im Auge des Klangs , Schloss Moyland.
2004 Audio Igloo, Singuhr-Hörgalerie, Parochial Church/Berlin.
Audio Koffer, Sonoric Atmospheres/ Ostsseebiennale der Klangkunst.
1999 Audio Igloo, Hull Time Based Arts, UK.
1991 Speakers Monument, Interferenzen – Art from West Berlin, Riga, Latvia.
1989 Speakers Container, Kunst im Container, Freiburger Kunstverein (catalog).
Le Polyphone (Project), Inventer 89, La Grande Halle de la Villette.
1987 Audio Frühschoppen, Galerie Giannozzo. Berlin.
1986 Speakers Corner, Artcom Cologne.
1985 The Box (with H.P. Kuhn), Gasteig Culture Center, Munich.
Audio Mailboxes, Material & Wirkung e.V., Berlin.
1983 Audio Treppenhaus, Kunstraum Projekt Schauplatz, Berlin (catalog).
1983 Audio Cafe Installation (with HP Kuhn), and Social Music Project, Kunst und Medien Exhibition, Kunsthalle Berlin.
1983 Social Music Installation, Kunst und Medien, Kunsthalle Berlin (catalog).
Audio Bathtub (with HP Kuhn), Schauplatz im Kutscherhaus Berlin (catalog).
Merkurhaus als Glockenturm, Schauplatz/ IBA Vort Ort, Berlin (catalog).
1982 Audio Painting, International Congress Center, Berlin.
Audio Painting, collaboration with Bernward Meyer, Gallery no name, Berlin.

Audio Ballerina Performances

2025 Intersonanzen Festival, DAS MINSK Potsdam.
2022 Lehniner Institut for Art and Culture, Kloster Lehnin, Germany.
2021 The AUDIO BALLERINAS at Görlitzer Park,Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg/ Berlin.
Device Art Festival, Contemporary Art Museum, Zagreb.
2017 Intersonanzen Festival, Potsdam.
2016 “Wired” exhibition, Deutsche Technik Museum, Berlin.
2014 MärzMusik Festival, Berliner Festspiele.
2013 Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl.
“Nuit Blanche” Kosice European Culture Capital, Slovakien.
2012 Statt Farbe: Licht , Bauhaus Museum, Dessau.
2010 Zero1 Festival, San Jose Biennale, San Jose Ca.
2009 Berlinische Galerie, Berlin.
2008 Mostra des Artes, SESC, Sao Paolo, Brazil.
Musica Ex Machina, MEM Festival.
Ingenuity, Cleveland Festival for Arts and Technology.
Solar Ballerinas, Canary Projects: Works at the Intersection of Art & Ecology, NYC.
2006 Taipei Digital Arts Festival, Taiwan.
Sitelines Festival, NYC.
SIGGRAPH, Boston.
2004 Sonoric Atmospheres /Ostsee Biennale of Sound Art.
Thailand New Media Art Festival/Bangkok.
“Soundscape & Shadow” Musikfestival, Denkmalschmiede Höfgen.
Lowlands Festival, Holland.
Schweriner Kultursommer.
LEM Festival (Gracia Territoria Sonor), Barcelona.
2002 Location One, NYC.
Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Berlin.
Potsdamer Festspiele.
2001 KunstMuseum / Wolfsburg.
Berliner Festspiele.
Sound and Movement Conference. Freie Universität Berlin.
New Haven Festival for Arts and Ideas.
Seoul Performing Arts Festival.
Medi@terra Festival, Athens.
Musee des Arts et Industrie, Saint-Etienne.
FETA Festival, Gdansk.
2000 Monaco Dance Danses Forum, Montecarlo.
Tollwood Festival, Munich.
1999 IDAT Conference, Phoenix, AZ.
Danzdag, Kulturhus Aarhus, Denmark.
Les Nuits Savoureuses de Belfort, France.
1998 Malta Festival, Poznan, Poland.
Stockton Riverside Festival, UK.
International Symposium for Electronic Arts, Chicago.
Sound Art Festival, Krakow.
1997 ISEA, Chicago.
Ostranenie Festival, Stiftung Bauhaus / Dessau.
1997 ICC-NTT Tokyo City Opera House, Tokyo, Japan.
1996 XIX International Triennale Exhibition of Milan.
International Street Theatre Festival, Holzminden.
Kryptonal Festival, Berlin.
38eme Rugissants, Grenoble.
1995 Krakow (The Krakovia Meetings).
Sound Art Festival, Hannover.
1994 International Symposium on Electronic Art, Helsinki.
1993 Mediale, Hamburg.
Art and Computers, University of Moscow.
“Augenlied”, Schloß Pluschow, Mecklenburgische Künstlerhaus.
Beck Forum, Munich.
Ultima Festival, Oslo.
1992 Cleveland Performance Festival, Ohio.
TISEA, Sydney.
1991 European Land Art Biennale, Cottbus, Germany.
1990 Festival les Arts au Soleil, Aeronef Lille, France.

Audio Uniforms and Wearables / Performances
2024 Sorben 3000, Rudolstadt Festival, Germany.
2016 Awa Odori 3000, LED Festival, Tokushima, Japan.
2014 Electronic Guy, Sound City Days, Kosice, Slovakien.
2012 Elektroprussians, Intersonanz Festival, Potsdam, BVNM.
2010 Sorben 3000, ObArt Festival, Kirschau, Bautzen.
2011 Audio Ballerinas, Audio Cyclists, Audio Geishas, Plantagenets 3000,
Festival Accroche-Coeurs, Angers, France.
Larsen Ensemble, Ballet a Larsen, Spor Festival, Aarhus.
2010 Sorben 3000, ObArt Festival, Kirschau, Bautzen.
2009 Feedback Fred, NAISA (New Adventures in Sound Art), Toronto.
2008 Video Peacocks / CyberBirds, Hohenrausch Festival, Rostock.
2006 Feedback Fred and Video Peacock Digital Arts Week, Zurich.
2005 Electronic Guy Tour, Vancouver (Video In), NYC (Location 1).
2004 Audio Peacocks, gARTen event, BUGA Park Potsdam.
2003 High Fidelity, Musiktheatre im Revier, Gelsenkirchen (co-production mit Berndt Schindowski).
2000 Geisha 3.0, Dock 11, Berlin.
1999 Audio Ballerinas and Electronic Guys, Theatre am Hallesches Ufer, Berlin.
Bong Boys. LICHT exhibition Völklinger Hütte, Saarbrucken.
1998 Audio Ballerinas and Electronic Guys USA tour, The KITCHEN (NYC),
Scena Theatre (Washington, D.C.), Buskers Fare (NYC).
1997 Audio Geishas, ICC-NTT Tokyo City Opera House, Tokyo, Japan.
1997 Cellular Buddies, Sonambiente Sound Art Festival, Arts Academy, Berlin.
1994 Audio Drama, Theatre zum Westlichen Staathirschen, Berlin.
1993 Audio Guards, Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival, Oslo, Norway.
1990 Guitar Monkeys, Sound Symposium, St. John's, Newfoundland.
1989 L'Opera Sonore (with Ralf Buron), Festival PERSPECTIVES, Saarbrücken.
1989 Guitar Monkeys Audio Ambush Tour/ Berlin, Front Kino, Cafe Swing, Fischbüro, Ballhaus Naunyn-
strasse, KOB. Guitar Monkeys European Tour, Nürnburg, Regensburg, Amsterdam, Paris.
1988 Audio Cyclists, (with Ralf Buron), Festival des Arts Electroniques, Rennes.
1989 L'Opera Sonore, "Parcours Sonores", Musée de La Villette, Paris.
1989 Audio Uniforms, Festival du Theatre de Rue, Aurillac.
1987 Festival du Fantastique, AnnecyAudio Herd, Animal Art, STEIRISCHE HERBST, Graz, Austria
1987 Audio Subway Controllers (Audio BVG), Die Anweisung Festival, Berlin.
1986 The Audio Steelworkers, ARS ELECTRONICA, Linz, Austria (catalog).
The Audio Jeans Uniform (with HP Kuhn), The Mattress Factory, Pittsburg.
Audio Uniforms and Guitar Monkeys, Berlin Atonal Festival.
1985 Audio Herd, BUGA, Bundesgartenschau Berlin.
Menschen als Medien, Gallery no Name, Berlin (catalog).
Audio Herd, Berlin AvantGarde in Gasteig, Gasteig Culture Center, Munich.
1984 Guitar Monkeys, Fischbüro, Berlin.
1983 Audio Clothes, Premier Festival de Performance, Gallery Donguy, Paris.
Audio Kleider, Kunst und Medien, Kunsthalle Berlin (catalog).
Audio Art, Gallery Pegasus, Berlin.

Awards:
2018 ARENA Sculpture nominated for the Participatory and Urban Interaction Award Media Architecture Bien-
nale Beijing.
2017 1st Prize in Hacking Urban Furniture Competition, ZKU / Cente for Art and Urbanistics, Berlin.
2008 Marler Video Installation Prize, Skulpturenmuseum Marl.
2006 Franklin Furnace Fund for Performance, NYC.
2004 Palmarès du 35e Concours Internationaux de Musique et d'Art Sonore Electroacoustiques de Bourges.
2002 Grand Prix International Video Danse (honorable mention).
1995 European Award for Street Theatre, Holzminden.
1992 Marketplace for Projects Competition The Wall in Your Head) for Speakers Memorial .
1991 Prix Ars Electronica, Acknowledgment for Interactive Art:
1983 Speakers Wall, Overcoming the Wall Competition, Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, Berlin (catalog).

Grants / Residencies:
2018 Berlin Kulturhaupstadt Fonds Grant for ARENA.
2016 Grant from the City of Berlin for New Music and Sound Art.
2011 DIVA artist residency in Aarhus, Denmark.
2010 Artist-in-Residence at MuseumsQuartier Vienna.
2006 Composer-in-Residence, Schloss Wiepersdorf, Brandenburg.
2002 Audio Peacocks, Artist in Residence, Lieux Publics, Marseille.
1999 Hull Time Based Arts, UK.

Audio Marriage (with Susken Rosenthal).
Rathaus Charlottenburg, Berin.1988
Audio Tuxedo and Audio Top Hat,
amplifier, 9 Volt battery, miniature cassette player.
Sound: the word “yes” in 50 intonations.

photos
front cover :
Audio Suicide, 2009, Vox Populi exhibition, Burg Eisenhardt,
Bad Belzig, Kunstpflug e.V.

back cover:
Speakers Wall (detail), 2017
Darb Culture Center, Cairo.

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Downloads (links to videos and texts

This book is dedicated to my mother Luce de Vitry d'Avaucourt
and to my ancestor Philippe de Vitry (1291 – 1361) French bishop, composer,
music theorist and author of the Ars Nova treatise.