

## The White-Walled Laboratory

By Karen Juhl

What happens in the moment we actually hear ourselves and our own presence? In the moment when the inaudible becomes audible? Christian Skjødt's exhibition *Sub-* makes the mind and body vibrate.

Laser beams are directed at the windows facing onto Christianshavn Canal, capturing vibrations from their panes. They shoot back, creating feedback. The first room of the exhibition houses the installation *Refractions* (2016). Here Skjødt works acoustically with the phenomenon of the window as the material division of two spaces. Because at the exact point when the laser beam is translated into sound, whether the sound comes from inside or outside is irrelevant. This generates new premises for the space. Not as a single space, but as x number of spaces with the emergence of a sensitive relationship between the feedback system and the people who occupy the space. As soon as one system shuts down, another begins. The work is the sum of the number of systems listening to themselves and each other – an uncontrollable sum of x number of memories, x number of perspectives as sound is not solely something we can measure in decibels and hertz.

The kinetic work *Inclinations* (2016) is installed in the corridor. The loudspeakers send out sound waves that are beyond the audible frequency range of human hearing. On each of them there is a ball that the vibrations of the loudspeaker set in motion, creating a rhythmic pattern. The prepared loudspeakers make sound present. The work is a witness to what we are unable to hear and the boundary between our sensory apparatus and the materiality of the world.

### The Installation of Flux and Vibrations

Skjødt works in the field of installation art, with a specific focus on the connections between sound and space and a constant eye and ear on human sensory perception.

This approach takes us back to New York in the late 1950s, when the composer and theorist John Cage extended the field of musicality to include the categories 'silence' and 'noise' and reinstated music as a category of sound. As an extension of this, a group of artists under the collective name Fluxus started to incorporate sound in more sculptural and visual forms that were spatially installed. Many of these artists attended Cage's courses on experimental composition at the New School of Social Research in New York.

In the publication *Background Noise* (2015), the art theorist Brandon Labelle describes how Fluxus' innovative use of mixed media (especially sound) changed perceptions of art. Fluxus artists drew attention to the radical use of art in situ, pointing to our presence in a material world. Consequently, the art world started to turn its attention to attentiveness itself – the aesthetic experience – rather than the art object. According to Labelle, sound art gained ground as art moved from objects to environments, because the essence of sound is relational, oscillating and communicative – in a constant, dynamic relationship to the spaces and bodies it emerges between.

### Physics and Aesthetics

Christian Skjødt compiles sound installations with a laboratory approach in which technical and physical experiments play a central role. He has described how in many ways sound bypasses the intellect and 'speaks' directly to the body, reminding us of the direct link between the body, thinking and reality. His visuals are minimalist, investigating individual audio-technical principles that investigate themselves and the space they are in. His work is based on the physicist's approach of allowing objects and materials to be what they are. But the listener physically changes this sterile scenario adding x number of unknown factors. By making the visitor part of the art situation standing in the midst of the artwork, Skjødt continues the legacy of the Fluxus movement. As a work, *Refractions* can thus not be pinned down, developing as it does due to the presence of the 'sound bodies' participating in the space. Many of Skjødt's works function interactively and

reactively, including *Vibrant Disturbance* (2012), which changes according to the degree and intensity of the flow of light. In this way, Skjødt creates spaces where it is impossible to stand at a distance as a viewer. We have to relate to place and time.

### **Between hearing and listening**

Skjødt combines two languages in his works. One is the language that articulates the conditions of hearing and conceives of people in terms of capacities – a language based on the scientific ideal of measuring the world and its materiality. The other articulates human perception and the potential of listening, where the individual is understood as a socially conditional entity. Skjødt intervenes between these two spheres, seeking to frame the moments where the inaudible becomes audible to let sensory perception unfold.

*Karen Juhl has a BA in Aesthetics and Culture and is a composer and musician.*

## **C.V.**

Christian Skjødt (b. 1980) is educated at the Royal Academy of Music, Denmark, 2009. He lives and works in Copenhagen and has exhibited at Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark (2015); A plus A Gallery, Venice (2015); Múcsarnok Kunsthalle Budapest (2014); Cruce Contemporáneo, Madrid (2014); 68 Square Metres (2013), and participated at sound art festivals like Spor (2016), Üle Heli, Tallinn (2015); Sound Reasons, New Delhi (2015); Skan II / Skanu Mežs, Riga (2014); Verona Risuona (2012); GAS, Göteborg (2012) and Ostrava Days in Czech Republic (2011).

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