

Melanie Uerlings

Jens Uwe Dyffort & Roswitha von den Driesch

Architecture in der Schwebe (floating in the air) or the Nibbling of the Leaf Miner

Their paths crossed in the realm of acoustic art. He is a composer, she is a visual artist. Jens-Uwe Dyffort and Roswitha von den Driesch have worked together since the 1990s; they were the recipients of the 2006 German Sound Art Prize, along with Werner Cee and Robert Jacobsen. Dyffort, who was born in Erfurt in 1967, studied composition under Franz Martin Olbrisch and Walter Zimmermann at the Hochschule der Künste¹ in Berlin. He was especially interested in electro-acoustic music, live electronics and spatial composition. *Musikalische Topologie*, a composition for 20 dispersed musicians, the composition *Diskrete Winkelzüge* (Discrete Ambages) for a spatially dispersed string quartet and the electronic composition *Kaskaden* (Cascades) all premiered in Berlin between 1996 and 98. Sound installation works together with Roswitha von den Driesch then offered a possibility of discovering new and more open musical and artistic areas completely independent of the traditional performance business. For Roswitha von den Driesch (1964*), who trained as a graphic artist, then studied architecture in Mainz and eventually free arts under Inge Mahn at the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee², turning to installative installations and acoustic art also meant an expansion of artistic means and experiences. Both artists focus their attention on sensitizing themselves for specific places, their histories, architecture, and acoustics, as well as their social and urban integration and function. The specific imprints these locations radiate also determine the coordinates in their search for an artistic and acoustic system. Dyffort and Driesch are detailed observers. They embark on a search for traces, researching local conditions and incidents. The concept behind their work results from and with the place itself. Their works, mainly sound installations, are inconspicuous at first. Eventually, though, they disclose themselves in that the location itself steps forward and idiosyncratically articulates itself in a new way. Attentions are caught, and threads spun, creating an artificial reference frame that focuses perceptions but does not channel them, allowing the possibilities presented by all associations and rooms for manoeuvre to remain open. Resulting is only a web that seems to interweave the hearer and viewer with the location in question. The locations that Jens-Uwe Dyffort and Roswitha von den Driesch work with are often outdoor spaces as well as abandoned building complexes.

One of the first common works, together with Klaus Lebkücher, was the *Kupferdraht mit Lautsprechern* (Copper Wire with Loudspeakers) installation at the Singuhr sound gallery in the Parochial Church in 1996 in Berlin. In retrospect, this piece holds a type of key function for both artists. It was here that the main characteristics of their artistic projects crystallized. In a way,

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Kupferdraht mit Lautsprechern pictographically mirrors their subtly reserved, yet systematically permeating working styles. Step by step, a dense network of fine copper wiring was spanned across the belfry of the Parochial Church. Anchors were placed where their paths crossed — 300 small piezo loudspeakers in total. “Coincidental” intersections and relationships result in the prevailing compositional “system” that does not operate hierarchically but, like the old bricks of the belfry’s vaults, is built according to a distribution of forces that is stable but versatile and outwardly autonomous. The listener and observer is met with a visually and acoustically homogenous image, as spatial and temporal structures follow an inner logic that corresponds to the architectonic fabric. Computer-controlled electrical impulses distributed via 300 relays create a loudspeaker-specific clicking sound based on variable rhythms and motion sequences. If two “clicks” meet at a junction or loudspeaker, the respective motion patterns become modified, and their speed sometimes changes. In this way, new musical movements and patterns can constantly be heard in the space over the entire installation period. With a bit of caution, the visitor can step inside the partially physically accessible net and, in doing so, *into* the acoustic events. The distance or closeness of the happenings in the space elucidate the rooms for manoeuvre opposite the surrounding, static architecture and therefore energetically transformed “tensions” of the vault’s imprint.

The *Punktierte Umgebung* (Punctured Surroundings) installation, also conceived for the Singuhr sound gallery, is mounted on the Parochial Church’s outer facade and taps exactly this area of an aesthetic field that is determined by perception and surroundings. Modeled on the former Glockenspiel’s automatic mechanism, sounds were played over loudspeakers in seven-and-a-half minute cycles that swirled around the tower of the church. Shunted to the rhythmic area all fragmented and transformed, these sounds then created variable metres that “traced” the entire church building. In order to create this effect, Dyffort und Driesch installed small piezo loudspeakers in correspondence with the architectonic structure of the façade of the church, which emitted repetitive impulses and quiet clicking sounds here and there. The church as an architectonic body as well as a functionally anchored building imperceptibly travels closer into the consciousness. The church’s immediate surroundings are particularly emphasized by the different reflected “sharp” sounds as a space expanded by the architecture. People passing by the large church courtyard or the narrow Parochialstrasse hardly perceive anything out of the ordinary, as the acoustic events of installation and the everyday surroundings become mixed and almost confused. The temporary artistic configuration assimilates with the “natural” local features and becomes a kind of component lecturing on the location. Dyffort and Driesch also had a reference to formal, architectonic, as well as social and political structures in mind when they developed the *In der Schwebe* project for the city hall towers in the town of Marl in 2006, for which they received the German Sound Art Prize. They used acoustic events to create or elucidate spatial and location-driven relations as well as balances of power. Built in the 1960s, the towers symbolised the attempt to create a political and social centre in Marl that would promise new positive perspectives within the context of the economic and social situation of the time.

A seemingly futuristic building with a novel hanging construction—a small foundation with a marginal contact surface for ground motion and load-bearing wedges—was created, on which the individual floors were “suspended”.

This makes the office floors seem like they are swaying above the earth—with an empty head space below them. Dyffort and Driesch use this space to allow the architectonic and urban planning arrangement to be tangible in a new way and to question its unique design. The clicking sounds created by the many piezo loudspeakers stimulated by electrical impulses also served as material here. The piezos were attached under the first floor along the supporting 28 hanging elements and created something like a “multisensoral” echo sounder below the tower, where there are either deep underpasses, green spaces or parks on different levels. This installation’s acoustic events, or the clicking sounds, are pre-programmed and represent a system that kick-starts and generates itself and a constant balancing of active forces. Chaotic, swaying and oscillating sound patterns can be heard. The towers, in a process that strives for equilibration following renewed disturbances, make these sound patterns seem as if they are swinging, over and over again. In this way, the *In der Schwebe* installation also highlights the relativity of externally stable conditions and allows a commonly prevailing principle or “natural” chaos to be heard that seems to counteract existing states, but is also a precondition for power, energy and motion. The processes within the open system that Jens-Uwe Dyffort realised compositionally operate autonomously as well as being subjected to certain rules. Perhaps some of the incredible fascination evoked by Dyffort and Driesch’s works lies precisely in this—in the symbiosis of seemingly “artificial” and “natural” processes and events. At the same time, the unconventional yet inherent interconnection of visual and acoustic perception steps within their installations. Roswitha von den Driesch describes this as a type of “acoustic drawing”. Point, line and surface audibly unfold themselves in the space, their “potential energy” almost emerging. The “traced” architectures do not seem static and isolated, but more as if they were in a constant state of motion. Our experience permits a notion of time, way and space, but how would it be if visual structures but acoustic events were not primarily and consciously meaningful?

Roswitha von den Driesch and Jens-Uwe Dyffort approach this question by creating close relationships between the everyday, the familiar, and the predefined on the one hand, and an unknown on the other hand, bringing about an acoustic and artificial subsidence. Outdoor installations are particularly prone to opening horizons and creating unexpected surprises. Even in a “natural” surrounding, therefore, the explicitly artificial events of the piezo clicks are not really perceived as being out of place. Along Kastanienallee in Jutta Park Höfgen, Driesch and Dyffort hung a total of 45 piezo loudspeakers on trees dotting the way for their work titled *Punktierter Umweg* (Dotted Detour) (2003). Different rhythms were played on every loudspeaker, at first in the same metre but in different tempi. Over the course of the day, this “fuzziness” transformed a clearly signed and ordered structure into a highly complex one. A counterpoint was created between the alley path and this system with its own dynamic, while shifting sight lines along the horizontal axis. The reverberations and the temporal

diversification of the sounds strengthened the perception for the surrounding space within a clear and landscaped architectonic design. Here, too, the architecture is “traced” and reshaped by motion and expanded. The visitors craned their necks to hear what was accompanying them down the tree-lined alley: was it birds, crickets or even a band of the feared leaf miners?

In this way, the image behind the artists’ idea became audible: a landscaped garden that is revitalised by rambling “nature”.

Those familiar with Jens-Uwe Dyffort’s und Roswitha von den Driesch’s works know that dependence on given formal structures and the fascination for control systems is always a direct debate that seeks freedom. This is very explicitly shown in the *OSO I* video installation (2005), where a tireless attempt is undertaken to overcome gravity. The works *Zimmer, Küche, Bad* (Room, Kitchen, Bathroom) (2001), *Zeitweiliger Wohnsitz Grünstraße* (Temporary Domicile Grünstrasse) (2000) und das *Hofgeschehen* (Courtyard Happenings) (2003/04) critically observe, analyze and “record” everyday human life and the listener and observer is confronted with his or her own behaviour and “whereabouts”. These works are connected to questions of relativity and possible freedom within the “artificial”, standardised or rather societal norms.

Roswitha von den Driesch and Jens-Uwe Dyffort use images and sound as moving signs and symbols that, mirrored as rhythm, provoke an alert, encompassing, and open worldview.

Jens-Uwe Dyffort / Roswitha von den Driesch

Exhibitions (selection):

Kupferdraht mit Lautsprechern singuhr sound gallery in parochial 1996

Seestück/Hörstück Massachussets Museum of Contemporary Art 1998

Auto langsam/ruhig+A4 Berlin Alexanderplatz 1999

Zeitweiliger Wohnsitz Grünstraße Berlin Köpenick 2000

Zimmer, Küche, Bad Galerie HO Berlin 2001

Punktierte Umgebung singuhr sound gallery in parochial 2001/2002

Punktierter Umweg Höfgen 2003

Hofgeschehen Museum Berlin-Neukölln 2003/4

Verdeckte Parallelen Märkisches Museum Berlin 2004

Stretta, VOXXX Galerie Chemnitz 2004

Missing Mars Zeiss Großplanetarium Berlin 2004

OSO-I Künstlerhaus Schloss Balmoral 2005

In der Schwebe Marl 2006

(Translation: Julia Schweizer)