

human ear has fully adapted to the new tonalities of the industrial era.³ Henceforth, all machines are mixed up.

Without lapsing into dystopian discourse, Kerstin Ergenzinger delivers poetical works that reflect our fear of losing control over our creations and our need for answers, while seeding doubt over the absolute dependence of electronic objects on human intervention. "Machine are not what we are, but they resemble us."⁴ These installations are two-way mirrors of our most intimate anxieties and desires, for while they have a clearly defined reason for existing, we are constantly searching for ours.

Claudine Hubert, 2014

Translation: Oana Avasilichioaei

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1. In 2013, the artist received the prestigious VIDA 15.0 digital arts award for this work, granted by Fundación Telefónica in Madrid, Spain.
 2. Grégory Chatonsky, "Tra(n)sduction (The perception of information)," translated by Louise Ashcroft in *Angles Digital Arts [Elektra 10 Essays]* (Montreal: Elektra, 2009), 145.
 3. Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, Futurist manifesto, 1913.
 4. Daniel Canty, "Black Box, White Noise, Smoke Screens," in *Angles Digital Arts, op.cit.*, 118.

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Touching Ambiguity

Kerstin Ergenzinger

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MACHINES THAT RESEMBLE US

Interested in the relationship between humankind and nature's inscrutability, Kerstin Ergenzinger creates installations that evoke a subtle, though invisible, presence, a kind of "non-absence" embodied through animated, organic objects. A young German artist, Ergenzinger studied in Berlin, London, and Cologne and currently lives in Berlin. Her artistic practice concerns sensory human conditions in relation to physical and conceptual surroundings. The exhibition *Touching Ambiguity* at OBORO

brings together *Whiskers in Space* and *Rotes Rauschen*,¹ two installations that make visitors confront their machinic alter egos by translating and giving form to their consciousness through the medium of wires, codes, and electrical signals.

Reacting to imperceptible air currents produced by visitors or by the installation itself, *Whiskers in Space* is composed of fine sensory structures that quiver in a seemingly random fashion. The work's title provides a clue: the "whiskers" are in fact the sensitive bristles or feathers of mammals and birds that transmit their vibrations to a sense organ located at their base (the most common being a cat's long whiskers, which allegedly help the cat find its way home). The installation disorients by placing us amongst a multitude of automatons, which seem to detect our presence and transmit signals between them, as though endowed with biological intelligence.

In addition to delineating the space, these strange compasses mark what is at once present and non-absent in the place. Have we not found ourselves sometimes feeling a strangeness in the air, an imponderable presence, as though something unidentifiable was amiss? Grégory Chatonsky proposes the following ideas: "Digital reductionism does not produce autistic machines but allows a whole range of connections, links, and relationships, as if after being translated the data does not cease to circulate in the hubbub of possible interpretations, its sense having been the default since the beginning. It is this property of digital machines and how they interact according to a general plan of equivalence that is so surprising."² Indeed, technological machines are never unaccompanied; they come equipped with cables and connections, their own wiring and ways of appropriating space and energy. At times, we have a very

detached relationship with our immediate surroundings: we put distance between our fundamental being and all common spaces. Yet without our realizing it, this fundamental being is nevertheless completely influenced by the immediate surroundings.

We might then ask ourselves: how do we live with our own proximity? How do we listen to that which is very near? *Rotes Rauschen*, or "red noise," draws directly from the earth to translate the low frequencies omnipresent in the ground into the tremors of a pendulum hanging over the visitor, whose presence impacts the readings of the seismometer supplying the sculpture. The more commonly known white noise is an amalgam of sounds of indistinct frequencies, while red noise refers to sounds whose power spectral density diminishes as the frequency increases. Here, low frequencies are slower and therefore unevenly distributed, and it is this slowness that the sensory organ created by Ergenzinger harnesses.

In cities, electrical machines are our close neighbours. However, our tendency to let them exist on the borders of our consciousness puts us in a paradoxical situation: although we keep them at a distance, the machines disturb us. Supplied by what cannot be perceived with the naked ear, *Rotes Rauschen* is an enchanted instrument that is self-generated as it articulates a relationship to our fear of discontinuity. The sculpture listens. It becomes an oracle, a reader of the present moment, an amplifier of mass shifting through space. It contracts and stretches, simultaneously translating essential activity issued from deep inside the earth and the most negligible superficial activity, our own motion. We always want to believe in signs, and the ones here come directly from ourselves. As Luigi Russolo predicted at the beginning of the 20th century, the