



Christian Marclay, *Extended Phone II*, 1994, telephone and plastic tubing, dimensions variable.  
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## Christian Marclay

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As anyone who has ever used a telephone knows, it doesn't always make communication easier. Here, Christian Marclay teases out the medium's shortcomings in four works from the 1990s while broaching broader questions of how we attempt to convey meaning to others. *Extended Phone II*, 1994, involves a black telephone receiver stretched to Seussical proportions. It loop-di-loops around one room, filling the space with coils like an out-of-control garden hose. The effect is funny, but the exaggerated distance between the speaking and listening ends of the receiver underscores the gulf between those on either end of a call.

Marclay delves further into the fractured nature of phone communication in *Telephones*, 1995. The seven-and-a-half-minute video offers a more concentrated dose of the droll wit and nimble editing that distinguish the artist's famed twenty-four-hour video piece *The Clock*, 2010. We watch actors from various films approach phones, dial numbers, answer, talk, listen, sign off, hang up. The characters speak to one another across decades and from radically different plotlines, forming a comically disjointed conversation. "Darling, it's me," says Ray Milland. "What?" responds a perplexed-looking Tom Hanks. "The girl's dead," says James Bond. "I'm so confused!" wails Katharine Hepburn. Later in the mash-up, one despairing brunette clutching a white receiver laments, "If I could just see you, talk to you." Talking on a telephone, it seems, isn't actually talking.

This sentiment is keenly felt in an age when many of us are rarely without our cell phones. Viewing these prescient works decades after Marclay created them makes one wonder where we'll be in another twenty years. Together, the works recall President Hayes's alleged reaction to the telephone in 1876. "That's an amazing invention," he reportedly told Alexander Graham Bell, "but who would ever want to use one of them?"

—Zoë Lescaze

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