



FKW // ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR GESCHLECHTERFORSCHUNG UND VISUELLE KULTUR

NR. 69 // APRIL 2021

SOUND | IN EMPTY ROOMS

FKW //

NR. 69 // APRIL 2021

SOUND | IN EMPTY ROOMS

004–006 // **FKW-Redaktion**
EDITORIAL

007–018 // **Marietta Kesting**
INTRODUCTION
SOUND | IN EMPTY ROOMS: LONELY LISTENING TO AFFECTIVE STREAMS, AND PRODUCTION POLITICS

ARTIKEL / ARTICLES

019–029 // **Vera Tollmann**
„YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON IN THIS CONFERENCE“

030–040 // **Marie Thompson**
LISTENING WITH TINNITUS

041–052 // **Kathrin Köppert**
BENT NOTES ON RACIAL POLICING. ZUR DEKOLONIALEN POLITIK DER ‚GEKRÜMMTEN NOTEN‘ BEI ARTHUR Jafa UND GLENN LIGON

053–056 // **Nadia Buyse**
THE SOUND OF SILENCE

057–067 // **Kristina Pia Hofer**
THE LIMITS OF LISTENING: THREE CONVERSATIONS ON PRACTICING WITH SOUND DURING A COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

068–077 // **Denise Palmieri & Kristina Pia Hofer**
“THE EXERCISE OF LISTENING ALSO MEANS LISTENING TO WHAT YOU READ.”
A CONVERSATION ON SILENCES AND PRESENCES IN RACIALIZED SONIC SPACE

078–089 // **noid, Christine Schörkhuber & Kristina Pia Hofer**
“YOU ARE RESONATING WITH IDEAS MORE THAN WITH FREQUENCIES.”
A CONVERSATION ON PERFORMING MUSIC IN DIGITAL AND HYBRID SELF-ORGANIZED SPACES

090–100 // **Zosia Hołubowska & Kristina Pia Hofer**
“YOU DON’T ONLY LISTEN WITH YOUR EARS, YOU ALSO LISTEN WITH YOUR MUSCLES AND YOUR BONES.”
A CONVERSATION ON THE CHALLENGES OF SHARING SONIC SPACE ONLINE

EDITION

101 // **Sounds Queer?**
BENEFIT COMPILATION TAPE

102–107 // **Birgit Michlmayr**
„A SYNTHESIZER CAN BE A FEMINIST SPACESHIP TO CHALLENGE NOT ONLY RULES IN MUSIC BUT ALSO SOCIAL NORMS.“
DAS BENEFIT COMPILATION TAPE VON SOUNDS QUEER?

FKW //

NR. 69 // APRIL 2021

SOUND | IN EMPTY ROOMS

REZENSIONEN

108–113 // **Lena Radtke**

LINDA HENTSCHEL: SCHAUEN UND STRAFEN. NACH 9/11, BAND I, KULTURVERLAG KADMOS, BERLIN 2020

114–119 // **Silke Förchler**

IMKE GIRSSMANN (2020): HAUPTSTADTMITTE ALS ORT NATIONALER ERINNERUNGSKULTUR? DIE BERLINER DENKMÄLER FÜR FREIHEIT UND EINHEIT UND FÜR DIE IM NATIONALSOZIALISMUS VERFOLGTEN HOMOSEXUELLEN, BIELEFELD, TRANSCRIPT, REIHE: STUDIEN ZUR VISUELLEN KULTUR BD. 27

EDITORIAL

Als wir diese Ausgabe während des ersten Lockdowns im Frühjahr 2020 in Deutschland und Österreich planten, ahnten wir nicht, dass wir sie während eines zweiten fertigstellen würden. Die veränderte Umstände von Soundproduktion und -Praktiken des Hörens während der globalen COVID-19 Pandemie sowie die Einschränkungen des öffentlichen Lebens, die mit den Maßnahmen gegen die Ausbreitung des Virus von den Regierungen vieler Regionen einhergingen, waren Ausgangspunkt unserer Überlegungen. Dabei interessierten wir uns besonders für die Bedingungen des Sprechens, Performens und (Zu-)Hörens online: Welche Möglichkeiten, aber auch welche Einschränkungen ergeben sich, wenn Lehren, Lernen, Musikmachen, Tanz darbieten und politischer Aktivismus plötzlich nur noch vorrangig übers Internet möglich ist?¹⁾

Diese Ausgabe beinhaltet deutsche und englische Textbeiträge. Die Produktionsumstände waren nicht einfach: Bibliotheken waren geschlossen und Treffen konnten zumeist nur digital stattfinden. Die „empty rooms“ aus dem Titel beziehen sich für uns auf Clubs, Musik- und Kulturorte, mithin öffentliche, kollektive Räume, weniger auf private Wohnungen. Dennoch beschäftigen wir uns auch mit der Abwesenheit von öffentlichem Leben und physischer Versammlung in den Räumen, auf die die Herausgeber*innen und Autor*innen während der Lockdowns zurückgeworfen waren und sind: Ihre Privathaushalte, die nun verdichtet alle Funktionen übernehmen und erfüllen müssen, die sich sonst auf viele andere Räume aufteilen (siehe u.a. Nadia Buyses Beitrag).

Wir sind uns bewusst, dass von vielen Menschen die (privaten) Räume während der Lockdowns alles andere als ‚empty‘ empfunden werden. Jene, die während der Ausgangsbeschränkungen auf engem Raum mit ihren Familien/Mitbewohner*innen eingezwängt waren, jene, deren täglicher Aufenthaltsort weiterhin gleichzeitig Schule, (Lohn- und Haus-)Arbeits- und Spielplatz ist, jene, die sich in sogenannten ‚systemrelevanten‘ Berufen weiterhin unfreiwillig in die physische Gesellschaft von Patient*innen, Klient*innen und Kund*innen begeben müssen, jene, die vermehrt häuslicher Gewalt ausgesetzt sind, jene, die ihr marginalisierter Status, z.B. als Geflüchtete oder Wohnungslose, in Aufenthaltssituationen drängt, in denen Abstandhalten schlichtweg nicht möglich ist – sie alle werden ihre Umgebung sicher als alles andere als leer und isoliert erleben.

Unsere Ausführungen kommunizieren damit auch die konkrete, mit Donna Haraway gesprochen, *partielle* Perspektive, oder, übersetzt ins Vokabular der Sound Studies, die partikularen ‚points of audition‘²⁾ der Herausgeber*innen und Autor*innen, die eng mit ihrer Verortung als Wissensarbeiter*innen, Künstler*innen und Musikpublikum im *physical distance*-Betrieb verknüpft ist. Sound | In Empty Rooms amplifiziert damit die Erfahrungen und Eindrücke von Produzent*innen, die seit März 2019 hauptsächlich von zu Hause aus arbeiten und dabei versuchen, zumindest für die Dauer von Videokonferenzen alleine vor dem Bildschirm zu sein – und die nicht nur Nachts von hedonistischeren Zeiten in überfüllten Clubs, Musikvenues und voll besetzten Theatern träumen.

Wenn Sie und ihr euch vielleicht wundert, dass Sound auf den ersten Blick ein wenig visuelles Thema für ein FKW-Heft ist, so wollen wir daran erinnern, dass Ton und Bild sehr eng miteinander verknüpft sind³⁾ und dass es auch bereits 2001 eine FKW-Ausgabe mit dem Titel „Music“ (# 31) gab, die im Online-Archiv bei Interesse verfügbar ist. Ebenso widmet sich das im Winter 2020/21 erschene *Kunstforum* # 272 unter dem Titel „This is not a Love Song“ dem Verhältnis von Kunst und Musik. Über die Frage der Verschränkung von Musik und visueller Kultur hinaus beschäftigen sich außerdem die Sound (Art) Studies schon länger mit visuellen Themen wie Un-Sichtbarkeit, Audio-Visualität und dem Verhältnis von Sehen und Hören – und sei es nur in der Bezugnahme auf Sehen/Visuelles als Abgrenzungshorizont. Unsere FKW-Ausgabe knüpft an diese Denklinien an und fragt unter den besonderen Umständen der anhaltenden globalen COVID-19 Pandemie nach unterschiedlichen Erfahrungen mit dem Hören und dem Produzieren von Sound in einer dynamischen Relationalität von Visuellem und Auditiven.

Wir danken unseren Autor*innen, unseren Rezensent*innen und *Sounds Queer?* für die Edition, ganz besonders Daniel Hendrickson für das Lektorat der englischen Beiträge und ebenso Fabian Brunke von Zwo.Acht für die Gestaltung. Das für Winter 2021/22 geplante Heft Nr. 70 beschäftigt sich unter dem Titel *wie //sprechen wir #feminismus?// neue globale Herausforderungen* mit der aktuellen Wiederbelebung eines geschichtsmächtigen Begriffs. Nachdem er in Verruf geraten war, etwa zugunsten eines inklusiveren Verständnisses im Sinne antidiskriminierender *Diversity*, erlebt Feminismus heute eine politische wie auch popkulturelle Wiederentdeckung. Was verspricht die gegenwärtige neue Konjunktur und zunehmende Verschlagwortung?

Unter welchen Herausforderungen eines global und dekolonial wie antidiskriminierend getragenen *Feminismus als Signifikanten* stehen wir heute, welche neuen Chancen bietet er? Zusammengestellt wird die Ausgabe von den Gastherausgeberinnen Elena Zanichelli und Valeria Schulte-Fischedick.

Viel Vergnügen beim Lesen!

1)

Diese Ausgabe blickt und hört mit Beiträgen von derzeit in Westeuropa lebenden Autor*innen auf einige lokal situierte Aspekte der gegenwärtig aufgrund von COVID-19 herrschenden Produktionsbedingungen von Sound. Dennoch ist es kein Heft ‚über COVID‘: unser Fokus liegt nicht auf der globalen Pandemie und ihren verheerenden Auswirkungen in anderen Bereichen des Lebens, die wir als Autor*innen und Redakteur*innen wahr- und ernstnehmen, und die wir uns nicht anmaßen, in diesem Heft umfassend adressieren zu können.

2)

Die Film Sound Studies benennen mit ‚point of audition‘ die auditive Entsprechung eines ‚point of view‘ shot einer Filmfigur: also eine Sound-Bild-Montage, die die physikalische Beschaffenheit des Filmtones so wiedergibt, wie sie von der Position der hörenden Figur aus zu vernehmen ist, siehe Altman, Rick (ed.) (1992), *Sound Theory / Sound Practice*. London: Routledge, S. 251. Hier wird der Begriff metaphorisch verwendet als sound-sensible Ergänzung zum Begriff der Perspektive, um in einem Heft über Sound und Hören nicht nur aus dem Visuellen abgeleitete Sprachbilder zu bedienen.

3)

Siehe zum Beispiel die Sonderausgabe des *Journals of Visual Culture*, vol.10, Ausgabe 2, die 2011 Beiträge zu „Sonic Art and Audio Cultures“ versammelte. doi: 10.1177/1470412911402879. (26.02.2021).

INTRODUCTION //

SOUND I IN EMPTY ROOMS: LONELY LISTENING TO AFFECTIVE STREAMS, AND PRODUCTION POLITICS

During the second lockdown and while writing this text, a radio station in Berlin is advertising with the slogan “Hör Dich glücklich” (“Listen yourself happy”). While this tagline captures both an inherent connection of sound, pleasure, and affect, it also inadvertently points to one of the few activities still possible. But isolated listening is not the same as collective listening.

— “You can only narrate loneliness acoustically,” claims filmmaker Christian Petzold (Diederichsen & Ruhm 2010: 220). What sounds can be heard in the rooms that have been emptied due to COVID-19 precautions and restrictions? Berlin and other cities have become quieter than ever before in some regards, while noise from private parties in neighboring apartments or in public parks may have gotten louder and more frequent than usual.

— Jace Clayton’s rhetorical question “Where is the party?” in his review of famed DJ Carl Craig’s installation in New York in spring 2020 hit a nerve. Like several other artworks, Craig’s *Party/After Party* seemed both to anticipate and to comment on the uncanny situation of the present, almost acting as a seismographic forecast. As Clayton outlines, “The sweaty social contract invoked by the art of the DJ – according to which the relationship between performer and crowd is a self-modulating loop wherein the kinetic energy of the latter informs the aesthetic choices of the former and vice versa, resulting in a communal momentum powerful enough to shape the subsequent creation of more music – is underwritten by a sonic axiom: Amplified music sounds terrible in empty rooms” (Clayton 2020). Usually, dancing or standing clubgoers’ bodies act as a filter to the raw sound. Without them, not only does the music sound terrible, but the mutual energy, the overflow of affect, and the rapport between DJ and audience is missing.

— Since all spaces of collective listening, the clubs and venues, opera houses and bars, have been closed for most of 2020 and are still closed in 2021 at least until Easter, some people use their car as a substitute for the club, cranking up the volume to the maximum. At least in the car, they are moving through the city, are seen and heard by passersby, and the sound reverberates differently.

STREAMING SOUNDS AND PRODUCING AT HOME — During the first lockdown, videos circulated in social media of people from Wuhan, China to Lombardy, Italy standing on their balconies and singing to each other, expressing solace and solidarity. But as the disease's transmission paths were studied more, it was exactly the act of breathing, speaking, and singing together that was deemed to be the most dangerous, especially in indoor settings. The pulmonologist Michael J. Stephen stated the basic truth: "The atmosphere is a communal space, and lungs are an extension of it" (Stephen 2021). Choirs like *Mala Sirena*¹⁾ and directors like Katharina Schmitt started rehearsals via Zoom. This seemed like a difficult undertaking as one sometimes experiences a delay of some milliseconds, leading to an out of sync video. Sound is what provides temporal synchronicity. There is nothing more jarring than out of sync sound in a movie, where people move their lips, but their voices are not audible or do not match.

— In spring 2020, campaigns like "United we stream" and funding calls for struggling venues were quickly filling up my social media feeds. New podcasts and radio shows, or live streams of DJ sets proliferated. Everybody seemed busy creating something, playing from bed- or living rooms. This home recording situation and production setting is, of course, by no means new and not only a result of the pandemic. Underfunded electronic musicians have already known it very well for the last two decades. Artist, speaker, musician, and educator on transgender and pansexual queerness Terre Thaemlitz has always criticized this fact both in her writings and in her tracks.²⁾ She reflects on "how the various media industries ... demand a degree of optimism and uplifting happy-ends so as to generate a product capable of sale in a marketplace with no forgiveness for pessimism [...]" (Thaemlitz 2016). While Thaemlitz often points out that she is expected to work for free, this represents a taboo as she explains in her meandering style, since "doing so risks invoking romantic images of heroism, conviction, and suffering for one's art – perhaps as a consumer you admire our conviction and/or feel sorry for our financial state, or perhaps as a producer of some type you have had similar experiences and resent the potential implication that any of this is out of the ordinary or worthy of reflection [...]" (ibid.).

— For good measure, Thaemlitz as *DJ Sprinkles* had released a remix of Canada's *The Mole – Lockdown Party* (DJ Sprinkles Crossfaderama) in 2013.³⁾ During the spring 2020 lockdown, I returned to this track's fragmented house experience for a melancholic and at the same distanced memory of dancefloor euphoria. It

1)

The choir *Mala Sirena* was initiated by Constanze Ruhm in 2017. See: <https://www.mala-sirena.net/> (20 February 2021).

2)

For example, Terre Thaemlitz, *Midtown 120 Blues Album*, and the publication *Nuisance: Writings on Identity Jamming and Audio Production*, Vienna: zaglossus 2016.

3)

The Mole – Lockdown Party (DJ Sprinkles Crossfaderama), Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAjU_6yw2Gs (3 February 2021).

features several brutally interrupted loops of voices, live screaming, singing, and evocative howling almost like a wolf, and a recognizable driving bass beat. In its remixed version by Thaemlitz/Sprinkles it is even more cut up and gets faded in and out, presenting the same material over and over with slightly different variations. It takes you from a high-intensity party crowd to a meditative aural space and back, while still being danceable, as one can observe on YouTube in an amateur video of Sven Våth playing the track live at Cocoricò club in Rome 2013.⁴⁾ Watching it, I felt like a visitor from another planet, how could these people be in this crowded space, carelessly moving so close together?

— And yet to return to the question of production: in spring and summer of 2020, the slew of home-recording activities was more than the aspect of low-cost DIY production of sounds. It was also about sending a signal out to the world: “Listen, I am still here,” and thus making sure one was not forgotten.

— The experience of being alone, speaking alone into one’s small laptop screen, hoping that others could hear you, was no longer a privilege or an outburst of narcissistic egomania, it became a common happening for many people. The mandatory question “Can you hear me?” or the command “Unmute your microphone” became standard repertoire. This experience also creates new modes of affect: in particular, there should be a word invented to describe the particular loneliness you feel after holding a lecture via videoconference software and then finding yourself alone in the bedroom of your flat.

— Virginia Woolf, of course, had described *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) as a pre-condition for women to write fiction. Now, in 2020, for a short while, it seemed that everyone who was not sick but stuck at home, could have become an instant writer. Alas, soon people felt the pressure of “corona-creativity-terror,” as it was once called in a discussion at the b_books collective.

AN AUDIENCE OF ONE — A work that was significant for me was Ari Benjamin Meyer’s *Solo*.⁵⁾ An audience of one person sits alone in an enclosed space. An opera singer starts to perform for this smallest audience ever. You can never see the singer, but you understand from the sound coming through the walls that she is moving around: sometimes coming closer to the wall behind which you are sitting and lowering her voice to a whisper, sometimes again singing from further away. The libretto comments on the relationship between the soloist and the solitary recipient and the tension between a live personal presence without ever meeting face

4) Sven Våth playing the *Lockdown Party* Remix: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mQ99ZTMRDk> (3 February 2021).

5) *Solo* was first presented in Berlin by Soundfair at Loge in 2009. Ari B. Meyers – Solo (Social Distance Version) 2009/2020, performance by Susanne Fischer, soprano, music score, variable dimensions, duration, 10 min. Courtesy of the artist and Esther Schipper.

to face. I heard the piece in Berlin during some easing of restriction after the first lockdown in September 2020. Having a professional singer sing only for me was a very special and luxurious experience. It created a very intimate feeling but by the same token it was also an utterly isolating setting. I wished I could have seen the singer and applauded her, but by the end of the piece she was already gone, before I was guided outside again. Meyer's piece was first performed in 2009, so it was not conceived during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it seemed to speak about its experience better than any other.

— In another rendition of a similar work by Meyers a DJ performs live for an audience of one in an empty club. He plays a composed track by Meyers and Deadbeat that lasts 10 minutes. This piece is called *K-Club*, and was shown in 2019 in Turin and in October 2020 at *Blitz Club* in Munich.⁶⁾

— Several clubs, like *Blitz*, opened their doors to art exhibits since they could not open all year as usual. Other venues together with theaters even became – alienated from their usual purpose, but since they had the necessary infrastructure in place – COVID-19 testing centers in winter '20/'21 in Berlin and Vienna.⁷⁾

WHERE IS THE PARTY, AGAIN? DANCE, PROTEST, SILENCE

— On May 25, 2020, Carl Craig streamed his DJ set live for *Movement*, which also only took place at *home* this year. *Movement* is one of the longest running and biggest annual electronic music festivals in Detroit, the rightful birthplace of techno.⁸⁾ Two camera views document Craig's set, one shows his upper body, the second zooms in on his hands on the controls of the mixing board. He wears a t-shirt saying "Merica." The term 'Merica is now frequently used in ironic or self-conscious fashion, emphasizing emblematic or stereotypical qualities of American traditions, institutions, and national ideals. The t-shirt with text hints possibly at the political turmoil that happened despite a global pandemic in 2021, and the often uneasy relationships of party and politics.

— On May 31, while on one of the countless walks around my

6) *K Club*, with DJ Tiefschwarz/Basti. Curated by Eva Huttenlauch (Lenbachhaus) together with Sarah Haugeneder (Various Others), see "K Club Performance von Ari B. Meyers am 9./10. Okt im Blitz Club München," *Tabula Rasa*, 25.9.2020, <https://www.tabularasamagazin.de/k-club-performance-von-ari-benjamin-meyers-am-9-10-okt-im-blitz-club-muenchen/> (6 February 2021).

7) <https://mitvergnuegen.com/2020/kit-kat-club-corona-schnelltestzentrum/> (6 February 2021).

8) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YB-SMZmie3dw> (14 January 2021). <https://www.movement.us/> (14 January 2021).



// Figure 1
Ari Benjamin Meyers, *K Club*, OGR Turin, 2019, Performance, environment, neon sign, 2 12-inch, LP vinyl records, Installation dimensions variable

neighborhood, I suddenly heard beats and saw fog waving through the air. It was like an apparition and turned out to be a self-organized boat rave. There were protest flotillas and rubber boats on Landwehr canal in Berlin demanding an end to the closure of clubs.

— This event was condemned in social media and press, and criticized as too risky, even though it took place outdoors. A second criticism was its hybrid mix of pleasure-orientation and gesture toward politics. It was shortly after the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in the USA. Some of the young ravers were holding up signs reading “I can’t breathe,”⁹⁾ while dancing on top of a floating device to techno beats, sipping alcohol. At the same time the statement “I can’t breathe” took on extra resonance during a respiratory pandemic that disproportionately affected people of color, partly because they were living in areas with more polluted air and less access to health services. Thus the pandemic intensified what Rob Nixon termed “slow violence” (2011).

— In addition, the improvised boat rave offered a paramount example of the question of ‘voice’ in its political dimension and what kind of speech act was seen as a legitimate claim. At the same time the affective and casual coding of the protest and its mixing of issues (closure of clubs and Black Lives Matter) seemed to create a strong dissonance, mostly in its critics. As Jens Kastner and Andreas Spiegel had recapitulated in the context of popular music and politics: “Voice, or the possibility of raising one’s real voice personally or politically, has become Voice & Vote – a relation that extends into the relationships between pop cultures and parliamentarianism as equally diversified and interrelated forms of publicly representing voices”¹⁰⁾ (2018: 12–13).

— All means of public demonstrations in 2020 were under higher than usual pressure and seen as a conundrum. On the one hand, protest to raise one’s voice works best in the collective, on the other hand, exactly these gatherings were mostly forbidden under the pandemic precautions. Some formats of protest on social media were tried out as an alternative or amplification of analogue protest, as for example, posting no private images and instead changing one’s profile image to a black square in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.¹¹⁾ It became increasingly evident in 2020, however, that this gesture of only visual and silent protest was just *clicktivism* and in no way equivalent to gathering in large numbers on the streets, live and loud.

— And yet, there can be powerful statements in listening to the silence, and what is left out, in certain images and audio-visual materials. In her contribution to this issue **Katrin Köppert**

9)

These were the words uttered by several black men who were killed by police, and they appeared as graffiti and on protest signs globally in the summer of 2020.

10)

Translation of the author, original text: “Die Stimme oder die Möglichkeit, die echte Stimme so persönlich wie politisch zu erheben, hat sich aufgespalten in Voice & Vote – in eine Relation, die sich bis in die Beziehungen zwischen Popkulturen und Parlamentarismus als gleichermaßen diversifizierte wie aufeinander bezogene Formen der öffentlichen Repräsentation von Stimmen erstreckt.”

11)

Even though one interesting online-phenomenon was the unusual alliance of K-Pop fans that supported Black Lives Matter and flooded right-wing social media. See Cho 2020.



// Figure 2a & 2 b

Boat Protest on Landwehrkanal, Berlin
May 2020



// Figure 2c

Graffito “Rest in Power G. Floyd,” Pannierstr. Berlin, May 2020

analyzes the black American artist Arthur Jafa's *White Album* together with Glen Ligon's works and their specific engagement with both black sound culture and ongoing racism. Köppert employs Tina Campt's strategy of "listening to images" (2017) and contextualizes art works that denounce concrete policing practices, also in a wider sense as modes of capture connected to constructions of whiteness and blackness. Significantly, her analysis finds in these "bent notes" moments of decolonial explosion and escape.

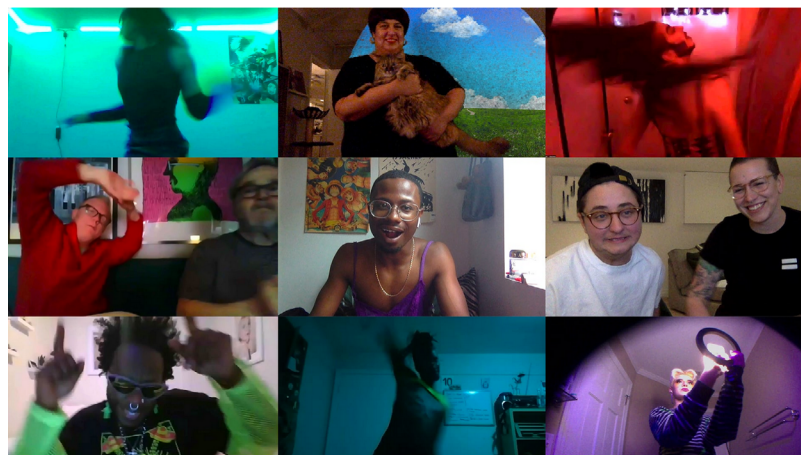
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MUSIC? — Questions of class and stereotypes about audience behaviors are, of course, entangled with the discourses on pandemic safety. Why were classical concerts, for example, allowed to take place for some months indoors with socially distanced audiences, while clubs and live concerts of other musical genres remained forbidden? High-brow culture won out over low-brow culture, since there was a common assumption by the politicians that the listeners of classical music would be 'more orderly' than club goers, even though both venues are usually highly regulated in terms of access and audience surveillance. Clubs started to fight to be recognized as spaces of culture.¹²⁾

— Berlin's notorious club *Berghain* did not open at all again after spring 2020, and is still closed at the beginning of 2021. In the summer it hosted a sound installation and an art exhibit. A large banner has been covering the upper part of the building, which can be read from the S-Bahn windows, stating: "Morgen ist die Frage // Tomorrow is the question."

— Los Angeles based filmmaker Aurora Brachman instead embraced the opportunity of dancing together on Zoom, and documented a nightly queer dance party that she joined during lockdown, underlining the importance of clubs: "Historically, nightlife has been one of the few safe spaces for the queer community. It is no surprise that in this time of devastation, queer people have once again sought community in the club, albeit a virtual one" (Bachmann 2020 a). The result of Brachman's documentation and dialogue with participants is a short documentary film called *Club Quarantine* that captures the amazing diversity

12)

As I was finishing this text, there was another Europe-wide action day organized by several clubs #clubsAREculture on February 6th 2021 under the title of (Open) Club Day, see <https://www.clubsareculture.de/open-club-day/> (4 February 2021).



// Figure 3
Club Quarantine by Aurora Bachmann,
Film still

and some of the positive energy of this getting-together in cyberspace. (Bachmann 2020b).

— The House of World Cultures (HKW) had planned a festival with the title *The Disappearance of Music* for Nov. 13–15, 2020 in Berlin, comprised of live concerts, talks, installations, films, and performances. Tellingly, the curators Detlef Diederichsen and Zuri Maria Daiß had conceived this format, again, before corona was a factor, explaining that “[it] was meant as an exaggerated provocation. The pandemic, however, has given it a new meaning. [...] But music is already in the process of an extensive transformation due to digitization. Instruments, notes, virtuosity – even the human voice and composers – are gradually being replaced by computer programs and artificial intelligence.”¹³⁾ With the typical irony that characterized any planning of live events in 2020, a new partial lockdown was announced in the middle of November and the whole festival was moved online. This changed the festival fundamentally, especially for the soundwalk performance *Hauch*, created by composer Juliana Hodkinson, stage designer Marsha Ginsberg and director Katharina Schmitt.¹⁴⁾ In the performance, the recipients would have walked together with one performer, disguised as a member of the audience, who at the first location transforms into a creepy clown. The text of the libretto sung by the *Neue Vocalsolisten*¹⁵⁾ comments on a scary disappearance of people, and appearance of bodiless voices; “Skin without body. Body without voice. Voice without breath. Breath without skin. Will people one day disappear into the landscape the way that all sounds inevitably fade into space?”¹⁶⁾ The clown would then be joined by two others, taking the audience through an outdoor immersive sonic horror show, albeit with some playful elements. Schmitt, Hodkinson, and Ginsberg instead created a film, which they consider to be only the first instantiation of the piece due to the limitation and lack of interactivity.

13)

Quoted from the HKW-flyer, more information at: https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2020/das_verschwinden_der_musik/start.php (1 December 2020).

14)

https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p_174131.php (1 December 2020). Even though the libretto is sung in both English and German, they decided to keep the title in German for its onomatopoeic quality. “Hauch” translates in English to “whiff” or “breath.”

15)

It was recorded in May 2020 by the Neue Vocalsolisten, see <https://neuevocalsolisten.de/> (1 December 2020).

16)

https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p_174131.php (1 December 2020).



// Figure 4 & 5

Hauch by Katharina Schmitt, Juliana Hodkinson and Marsha Ginsberg

013

— In retrospect, I wondered if this scene in *Hauch* of an audience member turning into a performer does not also mirror some aspects of the theatrical staging effects on *Zoom*, where dialogue often feels more like an exchange of pre-scripted ideas than a spontaneous conversation and where the connection between body and voice is also cut.

— Many other musicians and DJs that would have played concerts or live DJ sets had to find alternatives and were invited by HKW to make videos, documenting the whole – or some steps – of the process of music making and track building. This shifted the perspective, again, to the construction, tinkering, and views of the sound artists and musicians alone in their (studio) rooms.

— The home studio as the ‘home office’ is a euphemism that conflates private with public space ever more completely, provoking media and affect scholar Simon Strick to rant: “I’ll just go ahead and say it, most of you know anyhow: there is no ‘home office’ despite what everybody claims. There is just the home, your or our home, two rooms and a kitchen, for sleeping, for cats, for eating, for cleaning up, for children, making the beds, for watching TV, for relaxing, wait no, no relaxing, not anymore. All the time we have is organized around working [...] there is no office in the home, and instead the home becomes a 24/7 factory” (Strick 2020).

— This of course holds true not only for musicians and lecturers, but even more for students, who often had to work from isolated and small rooms while universities and academies remained shut. My students from the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich were scattered throughout several countries due to travel restrictions, and I saw them only in the video conference format as little thumbnail-sized images (if they had a good internet connection). In one online seminar I asked them when they were last in a crowd. The answers ranged from a funeral in Serbia with a larger than allowed group of mourners, to a peaceful protest in South Korea, but most had not been together in larger groups for months. The students with bad internet connections only came through as distorted voices, sometimes sounding truly robotic. We laughed about this together, as some comic relief in dire times.

TRANSHUMAN LISTENING AND ALGORITHMIC CURATION? —

Diederich Diederichsen has remarked on the relationship of human hearing versus recording devices: “I don’t think [...] that sound requires less manipulation, but that the way in which sound records reality, before the manipulation, has something ‘transhuman’ about it, like a scientific specimen of reality” (Diederichsen &

Ruhm 2016: 224). Music and sound easily combines what is considered the human and analogue and its machinic abstract side. Louis Chude-Sokei recently stated in an intervention that in the realm of black music and sound these aspects were in fact never opposed.¹⁷⁾ In his seminal *The Sound of Culture* (2015: 5) he suggests that the black diaspora is the primary space of black innovation: “[...] to focus on this as a space of sound and sound production is to reorient our listening not only toward the means of aural production but also toward how blacks directly engage information and technology through sound.” This engagement in new hybrid practices between analogue and digital, human input and machinic output and vice versa has become especially important during the time of pandemic restrictions – the rapper Blackwell, for example, performed at the Super Bowl Pregame show in a virtual concert in February 2021.

— In everyday listening the transhuman aspect may be especially felt in the overlapping sphere of mathematics and music. Analyzing and calculating with sound data seems to be easier for artificial intelligence (AI) than seeing and recognizing images. Music play lists online are increasingly compared and curated by algorithms. If, for instance, one is a subscriber to *Spotify*, listeners are stuck within a circular and claustrophobic logic – if you listen to this song, try this similar song; closing our ears and consolidating music into a filtered mix of favorites that may soon turn stale, because it only offers more of the same.

— Simultaneously, the commodification and proliferation of paywalls online became noticeably audible in 2020. One now has to pay per listen (or view) for much content that used to be freely available. *YouTube*, for example inserts blaring commercials into hour-long DJ sets or uploaded albums every five minutes or so unless you sign up for a premium version that, of course, costs money. Similarly, *Soundcloud* adds advertisement at the beginning of tracks.

— It can be stated for the record that the auditive, the oral, and the format of radio-show or podcast have definitely gained ground during 2020 and the beginning of 2021 despite precarious working conditions. One already scandalized example is the new app *Clubhouse*, which provides a stage to an exclusive in-crowd (by invitation only) and offers a mixture of Ted-talk speeches, but all without any visuals. It seems to gain its appeal from the allure of scarce access, being part of the in-crowd, and the inclusion of some aspects of the confessional booth through this. This has led a few self-important politicians to disclose aspects they would have been better not to.

17)

Intervention at Brandhorst's *Future Bodies* Symposium, Jan. 21-23, 2021, see https://www.museum-brandhorst.de/en/events/louis-chude-sokei-the-desire-of-objects-slavery-and-the-sex-life-of-machines/?t=16114275001915&fbclid=IwAR1Q_U2k0A_j_T6vUxS9LrNX-EZsN1Li0nMgQcPDX3u8G4t8K_iIU1fC5PCE (5 February 2021).

— Is this possibly indicative of a democratization of digital media production and (self-) broadcasting? On *Instagram*, for instance, one can post a picture and enter into a dialogue on images in seemingly the same way as the social media channel of, say, the Metropolitan Museum of Art or other well-known institutions. In *Clubhouse* one is given the same stage as prominent speakers. Are we moving closer to Warhol's declared '15 minutes of world-wide fame' for everybody? While it is too early to tell how the pandemic situation will change the media spheres and their promise of participation, many of us are, however, already used to turning one's microphone on and off like a *bona fide* musician or TV moderator. This experience of the online video conference is the starting point for **Vera Tollmann's** contribution, which draws on Mladen Dolar's theory of the voice. Nowadays more and more robotic and assistant voices are entering the arena along with human speech, but even these non-human voices are often gendered and stereotypical. Often they use a female voice in the uncritical tradition of female caring figures as Tollmann analyzes.

PARANOID LISTENING, TINNITUS, AND SYNAESTHESIA — The Berlin collective *CHEAP* created the ingenious radio show: "You are so paranoid, you probably think this radio-show is about you," in which they simultaneously explore sounds from the archive, the pandemic present, and questions of surveillance, coding, and AI.¹⁸⁾ This brings up the question: What if you hear something and are not sure where it comes from, or if it is only inside your head? This could happen for several reasons, hearing non-existent voices points either to being a medium in the old sense of the word, or to an altered mental state. But what happens, when you hear no messages, but simply noise?

— **Marie Thompson** considers the case of tinnitus in her text and addresses the question of whether the practice of listening can start with a "a clean slate," or whether it may instead already have a certain level of noise always going on. While John Cage, in his prominent piece "4'33'" (1952), made the sound within a room audible for a collective audience, without any of the expected musical sounds played for them, Thompson emphasizes the possibly never ceasing sound level within one's own head.¹⁹⁾ She describes tinnitus as a social phenomenon that usually gets silenced in the discourses within music and listening, since it interferes with any notion of exact or "clean listening." Paradoxically, the cure for tinnitus often involves de-centering listening in one's perception.

18)

Susanne Sachsse / Marc Siegel / Xiu Xiu (Jamie Stewart)

YOU'RE SO PARANOID, YOU PROBABLY THINK THIS RADIO SHOW IS ABOUT YOU
Ein musikalischer Unterhaltungsrundfunkdienst (2020) Hörspiel.

Paranoide Körperpolitiken nach dem Virus, in Sprechchören und Sprachkollisionen <https://www.paranoia-tv.com/de/program/content/207-youre-so-paranoid-you-probably-think-this-radio-show-is-about-you-ein-musikalischer-unterhaltungsrundfunkdienst> (20 February 2021).

19)

Similarly, Ulrike Bergermann argued that there is not only the dichotomy between people able to hear and people who are deaf, but a shade of different subgroups. See Bergermann 2016: 102.

— However, sensory input often overlaps in human perception and is never purely visual or sonic: Artist and curator **Nadia Buyse** shares some of her pandemic experiences and epiphanies in a diaristic piece. In her images she creates a visual jam similar to audio improvisation that starts with colorful blobs that evolve into miniature synaesthetic narratives: Hirameki conceivably meets with Rorschach and Kandinsky? Buyse's results have an unfinished feeling, inviting the audience to fill in or think further along with the alluded elements in a playful space somewhere between comics and a visual score, sometimes showing pop-cultural affinities, and re-playing minute perceptions. The pandemic seems absent from these visual recordings, except maybe in one scene of a UFO and a little stick figure beneath it, waiting to be beamed up, and who would not want that?

// References

- Bergermann, Ulrike (2016): Trajektorien des Hörens. Auditiiver Kolonialismus, in: Parahuman. Neue Perspektiven auf das Leben mit Technik. K. Harrasser u. S. Roessiger (eds.), Vienna, Weimar, Cologne, Böhlau, pp. 91-103.
- Brachman, Aurora (2020a): Every Night in Quarantine, I Danced with Hundreds of Strangers. In: New York Times, Sept. 22, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/22/opinion/club-quarantine-coronavirus.html> (6 February 2021)
- Aurora Brachman (2020b): *Club Quarantine*, (Film) Sept. 22nd 2020. <https://vimeo.com/aurora-brachman> (6 February 2021)
- Campt, Tina (2017): *Listening to Images*. Durham, Duke University Press.
- Clayton, Jace (2020): Where is the Party? Jace Clayton on Carl Craig at DIA: Beacon. in: *Artforum* Vol. 58, No.9, (print) May/June 2020. Available online <https://www.artforum.com/print/202005/jace-clayton-on-carl-craig-at-dia-beacon-82809> (20 February 2021)
- Cho, Michelle (2020): Pandemic Media: Protest Repertoires and K-pop's Double Visions, in: V. Heidiger et al. eds. *Pandemic Media: Preliminary Notes Toward an Inventory*. Lüneburg, meson press, pp. 333-340.
- Chude-Sokei, Louis (2016): *The Sound of Culture: Diaspora and Black Technopoetics*. Middletown, Wesleyan UP.
- Diederichsen, Diederich, Constanze Ruhm (2010) (eds.): *Immediacy and Non-Simultaneity: Utopia of Sound*, Vienna, Schlebrügge.
- Kastner, Jens & Spiegel, Andreas (2018): *Einleitung*, in: *Die Stimme als Voice and Vote*. S. Buchmann et al (eds.), Berlin b_books, pp. 11-15.
- Nixon, Rob (2011): *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. New Haven, Harvard University Press.
- Stephen, Michael J. (2021): *Breath Taking: The Power, Fragility, and Future of our Extraordinary Lungs*. New York, Atlantic Monthly Press.
- Strick, Simon (2020): Digitally Drunk, 28.3. 2020, Gender Blog der Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft (zfm). <https://zfm.wissenschaft.de/online/blog/digitally-drunk> (5 February 2021)
- Thaemlitz, Terre (2016): *Nuisance: Writings on Identity Jamming and Audio Production*, Vienna: Zaglossus. The introduction is available on Thaemlitz's website: <http://www.comatone.com/writings/nuisance.html> (20 February 2021).

// Image Credits

- Fig. 1: Ari Benjamin Meyers, *K Club*, 2019, Performance, environment, neon sign, 2 12-inch LP vinyl records, Installation dimensions variable
Exhibition view: Ari Benjamin Meyers, *In Concert*, OGR, Turin, 2019
Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin
Photo © Andrea Rossetti.
- Fig. 2a, 2b: *Boat Protest on Landwehrkanal*, Berlin May 2020, Photos © Marietta Kesting.

Fig. 2c: Graffito "Rest in Power G. Floyd." Pannierstr. Berlin, May 2020, Photo © Marietta Kesting.
Fig. 3, 4: Images of *Hauch*, © Katharina Schmitt, Juliana Hodkinson and Marsha Ginsberg 2020.
Fig. 5: Film Still *Club Quarantine*, © Aurora Bachmann 2020.

// About the Author

Marietta Kesting holds the position of junior professor at the cx centre for interdisciplinary studies at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich. Her focus areas in research and teaching are post-colonial media and archives, affect studies, and (digital) art theory.

Kesting is part of the publishing collective *b_books*, Berlin since 2004 and has become a member of the editorial board of *FKW* journal for visual culture and gender studies in 2017. A recent publication is '[Dream] Images of Earth in Quarantine', in the journal *Photography and Culture*, 2021, Vol. 14, Issue 2, pp.1–17, DOI: 10.1080/17514517.2021.1889127 and together with S. Witzgall (eds.): *Politik der Emotionen. Macht der Affekte*. Berlin, diaphanes (forthcoming in May 2021).

// *FKW* is supported by the Mariann Steegmann Institute and Cultural Critique / Cultural Analysis in the Arts ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann / www.fkw-journal.de

// License

This work is licensed under the CC-BY-NC-ND License 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>



„YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON IN THIS CONFERENCE“

Wie klingen (künstliche) Stimmen, die in der Cloud gespeichert oder generiert werden und über Kanäle wie Livestreams oder Medien wie Smart Speaker an unsere Ohren dringen? Im Folgenden geht es um vermeintlich körperlose Stimmen, die neben semantischen Aussagen (oder schlicht: akustischer Sprachausgabe) ihre technologische Bedingtheit vermitteln, wenngleich Rechen- und Übertragungsleistung aus Sicht der Entwickler*innen möglichst unbemerkt bleiben sollen. Dazu zählen sowohl avancierte virtuelle Stimmen aus dem Bereich des *Machine Learning*, die Nutzer*innen affizieren und an Geräte und damit an Services in der Cloud binden sollen, als auch operative Stimmen, die etwa eine Systemmeldung ansagen, wie es in älteren Betriebssystemen eine Popup-Nachricht auf dem Bildschirm war.

— Wie lassen sich die verschiedenen Stimmqualitäten von menschlichen Stimmen und aktuellen Computerstimmen auseinanderhalten und ihre jeweilige Bedeutung verstehen? Dazu kann unterschieden werden in erstens eine von Menschen (mit Hilfe technischer Effekte) imitierte Computerstimme, zweitens aktuelle, AI-basierte Computerstimmen und drittens eine authentische menschliche Stimme in der Rolle einer zukünftigen Computerstimme.¹⁾ Für die zweite Gruppe ist bezeichnend, dass sich die Möglichkeiten von Natural Language Processing etwa seit der berühmten Computerstimme von Stephen Hawking, die sein Sprachautomat *Call Text 5010 Speech*-Synthesizer erzeugte, dermaßen weiterentwickelt haben, dass neue Prototypen in kurzen Demo-Dialogen von einer menschlichen Stimme nicht zu unterscheiden sind, wie zum Beispiel *Google Duplex* beweist. Daraus ergeben sich allerdings neue Probleme: Sobald die Maschinenstimme wie ein Mensch klingt, droht sie, die Hierarchisierung von Computerstimme und Mensch aufzuheben, wie im Fall von Duplex. In Callcentern etwa nimmt zunächst eine maschinelle Stimme den Anruf entgegen, sortiert in einer überschaubaren Frage-Antwort-Situation vor und füllt Wartezeit bis eine Kundenberaterin den wesentlichen Teil des Gesprächs übernimmt. Ähnlich läuft es beim Warten auf die Anderen in einer Videokonferenz: Automatische Ansagen haben maximal eine dienende Funktion. Anhand von Spielfilmen wie *Her* (Jonze 2013) mit sogenannten *voice actors*, die ihre natürliche Stimme einem Computer leihen, wird nachfolgend die Frage diskutiert, wie nah die Maschine den Menschen in Zukunft kommen soll. Eine genderneutrale AI-Stimme

1)

Die menschliche Stimme als fiktive Computerstimme hat eine lange Tradition im Film und in der Popmusik, zu deren Ikonen anfangs Kraftwerk zählten und zuletzt Hyperpop-Vertreterinnen wie SOPHIE, die mit Synthesizer, Vocoder oder Autotune ihre Stimmen mechanisch und virtuell erklingen ließen, um damit binäre Kategorien wie Mensch-Avatar oder Mann-Frau aufzulösen.

namens *Q* könnte hier einen Ausweg aus einer als mechanisch oder binär kritisierten Computerstimme oder als unheimlich empfundenen, allzu menschlichen AI-Stimmwelt zeigen.

—— „You are the only person in this conference.“ Mit dieser automatischen Ansage begrüßt das Videokonferenzprogramm *BigBlueButton* die erste Nutzerin beim Eintreten in den virtuellen Konferenzraum, eine abstrahierte Fläche, die sich im Wesentlichen aus verschiedenen Dashboard-Elementen und potentiell aus Videofenstern zusammensetzt. „You are the only person in this conference“ ist ein redundanter Satz, denn beim Blick in die Teilnehmer*innenliste steht dort neben dem eigenen Namen kein weiterer. Dass es sich hier um ein einseitiges Sender-Empfänger-Modell handelt und kein Kommunikationsangebot, wie von Smartphones und deren Sprach-Interfaces gewohnt,²⁾ unterstreicht die Antiquiertheit der Ansage. Hier können die Nutzer*innen nicht als „algorithmic subjects“ auftreten und im Tausch gegen Daten digitale Dienste in Anspruch nehmen (vgl. Munn 2018: 84). Das Zeitalter des *Cloud Computing* mit seinem ausgeweiteten Dienstleistungsgedanken bleibt außen vor – „as-a-Service“ (aaS) wurde im Zusammenhang mit *Cloud Computing* (z. B. Infrastructure-as-a-Service, Software-as-a-Service) eingeführt und auf Wohn-, Mobilitäts- und alle möglichen Angebote ausgedehnt. Aus technischer Perspektive handelt es sich bei der *BigBlueButton*-Ansage um den sogenannten *alone sound* – so wird die Audiodatei auf der Ebene der Systemeinstellungen bezeichnet. In diesem digitalen Seminarraum bleibt es zunächst still, es gibt keine hierfür produzierte Raum-Atmo, weder das Rauschen einer Computerlüftung noch das Schalten an den Knotenpunkten des Netzwerks. Es ist so lange nichts Interface-Spezifisches zu hören, bis eine weitere Person durch das Knacksen ihres Mikrofons merklich den virtuellen Raum betritt und ihr Name in der Teilnehmerliste erscheint.

—— Im Unterschied zu virtuellen Assistenten oder automatischen Telefonsystemen handelt es sich hier nicht um eine Computerstimme, wie sich auf Nachfrage im Rechenzentrum der Universität herausstellt.³⁾ Stattdessen wird die Aufnahme einer menschlichen Stimme wiedergegeben, eine von mehreren wav-Dateien, die in der Audiokomponente des Open-Source-Videokonferenztools *BigBlueButton* mitgeliefert werden. Die namenlose Stimme klingt gefühllos, monoton und unpersönlich, wie jeder andere Sound eines Betriebssystems, das aus einem Computerzeitalter vor der Cloud stammt, in dem sich alles lokal auf dem Motherboard abspielte und als ‚User-Erfahrung‘ noch wesentliches Kriterium bei der Programmierung einer Software oder eines Interface zu sein

2)

Bei Inbetriebnahme eines iPhone können Nutzer*innen vorgegebene Beispieläußerungen als Input ein sprechen, um Siri auf die persönliche Stimme einzustellen. Oder sie lassen es und benutzen Siri nie.

3)

Auskunft per E-Mail erhalten am 8.10.2020.

schien. Ein Mensch hat für diese Sprachausgabe offenkundig also eine Computerstimme imitiert – beziehungsweise die Vorstellung, die es zur Tonalität von Computerstimmen gibt. Dies kann bei menschlichen User*innen für Irritationen sorgen. Um die möglicherweise Ärger oder ein Gefühl von Einsamkeit hervorrufende Ansage abzustellen, da sie in der Wiederholung und Redundanz stört, sah ein User im Forum nur mehr den Ausweg, die Datei umzubenennen, damit sie vom System nicht länger erkannt und abgespielt würde.⁴⁾

—— Die Ansage „You are the only...“ mag rudimentär erscheinen im Hinblick auf die größeren Entwicklungen im Internet der Dinge, die der Überzeugung folgen, dass Sprachinterfaces die Nutzung von smarten Geräten wie überhaupt den Alltag erleichtern, „a voicebased interface eliminates the friction that often accompany other technologies – the ‘pain points’ of picking up a smartphone, opening an app, awkwardly tapping out a search query“ (Munn 2018: 83). Interfaces passen sich an die Nutzer*innen an; umgekehrt werden Nutzer*innen aufgefordert, sich an die technologischen Bedingungen anzupassen, sei es durch Sprechtempo, Aussprache oder Aktivierungswörter (Ebd.: 107). Doch all das bedeutet nicht, dass die akustisch-sprachliche Interaktion zwischen Maschine und Mensch reibungslos funktioniert. Wie oft ist einem beispielsweise schon der Satz „ich habe Sie nicht verstanden“ von einem automatischen Telefonsystem entgegnet worden.

—— Vor einigen Jahren hat die Medienwissenschaftlerin Frances Dyson in *The Tone of Our Times* (2014) damals neu entwickelte Roboterstimmen unter ihren konkreten ökonomischen und medienökologischen Entstehungsbedingungen auf ihre räumliche und sensuelle Wirkung hin untersucht. Zu dem Zeitpunkt sprachen Roboter ohne Betonung.⁵⁾ In der Entwicklungsgeschichte computergesteuerter Sprachverarbeitung gibt es lange schon das Bemühen, die monotonen Stimmen, die zum Teil in ihrer Affektlosigkeit berühren, in empathisch klingende Stimmen zu verwandeln. Dyson zufolge sind es die technologischen Entwicklungen, epistemologischen Fragen und kulturellen Diskurse aus einer jahrhundertalten Mediengeschichte, die den Klang der übertragenen Stimmen beeinflussen. Anfangs waren es Telefonverbindungen, die Nähe herstellten. Die künstliche Stimme hingegen hatten immer „a touch of the uncanny“ (Dyson 2014: 88). Bei dem Philosophen und Stimmtheoretiker Mladen Dolar gilt die Stimme ohne Körper als unheimlich, weil sie auf die Abwesenheit eines Körpers verweist. Die Erfahrung des Unheimlichen produzierte letztlich jedes Medium, solange es neu und noch nicht in sämtlichen Haushalten vorhanden

4)

„I also considered just renaming the audio file, and hoping that if Asterisk can't find the file, it won't play it“. (AdHominem 2012).

5)

Das entsprechende Kapitel in Frances Dysons Buch hat den Titel „Disaffected Voices.“

war. Doch dort, wo es keinen Körper gibt, tritt ein spielerischer Umgang an die Stelle des Unheimlichen. Wie YouTube-Videos zeigen,⁶⁾ haben viele Nutzer*innen die computergenerierten Stimmen von Siri oder Alexa schnell als Computernetzwerke mit fehlender Kognition vorgeführt.

—— Allerdings können immer noch Momente des Unheimlichen, die einen Kipppunkt markieren, auftreten: zum Beispiel dann, wenn eine neue AI-Stimme mit einem Mal allzu menschlich erklingt. Zuletzt ging dies im Fall von *Google Duplex* dem empfindsamen, menschlichen Publikum zu weit. So wurden nach einer öffentlichen Vorstellung des Sprachassistentendienstes ethische Fragen diskutiert. Die Programmierer hatten der AI typische menschliche Verhaltensweisen in Gesprächen antrainiert, zustimmende Partikel wie ein „mh“, offenbar um die *uncanniness* von *Duplex* zu minimieren. Die im Demovideo dargestellten Dialoge zwischen Maschine und Mensch irritierten deshalb, weil die Imitation der menschlichen Stimme durch die Maschine täuschend echt war. Würde aus *Google Duplex* in dieser Form eine Anwendung für den Alltagsgebrauch, wüssten menschliche Teilnehmer*innen nicht zweifelsfrei, dass sie mit einer Maschine reden. Zweifel und Kritik an diesem automatischen Programm wurden laut (Harwell 2018). Seit 2019 wird die Anwendung in den USA von Google genutzt, um Angaben wie Öffnungszeiten in Google Maps zu aktualisieren. *Duplex* setzt sich aus drei AI-basierten Komponenten zusammen, einem neuronalen Netz, einem Spracherkennungsprogramm und WaveNet, einem generativen Programm, das in Googles Schwesterunternehmen DeepMind entstanden und für die typisch menschlichen Diskurspartikel wie die „mhs“ und „aahs“ zuständig ist.

—— Nach dieser Kritik entschied Google, dass sich die AI-Stimme zu Beginn der Konversation als System von Google vorstellen sollte. Während Duplex-Anrufe bislang teilweise noch von Menschen durchgeführt wurden, um Daten für einen besseren KI-Trainingsprozess zu sammeln, übernimmt die Maschine aktuell laut Google 99 Prozent der Anrufe. Das hört sich dann so an: „Heyyyy, I’m calling from Google Maps. Given the current health situation, I want to update if you are open today. I’m an automated service that is recorded and monitored for quality insurance. When do you open and close today?“ (Mrkšić 2020). Andere Anwendungen wie *Lyrebird* bietet User*innen an, die eigene Sprechstimme, etwa für Podcasts, Vorträge und Video-Voiceover, zu klonen (descript 2021). Für die Videokonferenzanwendung *Google Duo* wurde ein *auto complete*-Feature für Sprache entwickelt, in dem AI-Technologie fehlende Buchstaben oder Silben der Sprecherin ersetzt, sollte deren

6)

Siehe beispielsweise Athena P (2020): *The Replika (AI Friend) is... interesting?* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T071GRkScrM> (22.02.2021) oder South Park (2017): *Alexa’s the Coolest!* Staffel 21, Folge 1. <https://www.south-park.de/videoclip/6zs9up/south-park-alexa-s-the-coolest> (22.02.2021)

Internetverbindung aussetzen. Es geht hierbei um Zeitfenster von 120 Millisekunden. Damit wäre dann auf der Audio-Ebene eine reibungslose, wenngleich roboterhafte Korrektur vorgenommen, die nach dem Prinzip von Textvervollständigung funktioniert und wie Duplex auf WaveNet basiert. Vorhergesagter Text wird als Sprache generiert und die Glitches im Livestream unterhalb der Wahrnehmungsschwelle korrigiert – zumindest in den Audiosamples (Barrera, Stirnberg 2020, MIT Technology Review 2020). Welche Auswirkungen diese automatische Korrektur im Detail haben kann, müsste im Vergleich von Programmierschnittstelle, sinnlich wahrnehmbaren Stimmen und Lippenbewegungen auf den gestreamten Videobildern ermittelt werden. So gesehen hat Dysons Ratschlag an die Medienwissenschaften – „to attend to the suspensions that modulate the enigmatic, ambivalent hyphen between human and post“ (Dyson 2014: 91) – seine metaphorische Qualität behalten. Im Fall von Duo ist es banal, eine Technologie (Autocomplete) korrigiert die Fehler (Unterbrechung im Livestream) einer anderen.

— Bei maschineller Sprachverarbeitung, wie zum Beispiel einer sprechenden AI, gibt es im Code geringe Möglichkeiten, die Stimme emotional aufzuladen. Aus der Entwicklungsabteilung von Amazon Alexa heißt es, „developers cannot change the prosody – ‘you cannot control the stress and intonation of the speech.’ [...] Small adjustments can be made using the <break> tag, specifying a pause in speech. [...] there is no possibility for lyrical readings, altered pitches, timbre shifts or abrupt volume and speed changes. Texttospeech establishes language as a particular set of universal parameters. This abstracted system provides maximum readability but simultaneously negates emotionality“ (Munn 2018: 96). Emotionalität findet auf einer Metaebene statt, die solche berechneten Intelligenzen nicht imitieren können. Deswegen ist es nicht überraschend, dass in dem Film *Her* (Jonze 2013) eine AI des Betriebssystems mit der echten Stimme einer Schauspielerin spricht, die also mit sämtlichen Affekten belegt werden kann. Der Film *Her* kam zwar zwei Jahre nach der Einführung von Siri auf Apple-Telefonen und zwei Jahre vor der Markteinführung des Amazon Echo und damit dem ersten Gerät, das Alexa nutzte, in die Kinos; Alexa bestätigt jedoch scheinbar die Gewissheit der Prä-Alexa-Ära für *Her*: Für den Regisseur des Films war es naheliegend, dem OS im Film die Stimme einer menschlichen Schauspielerin zu geben.

— Denn was die AI-Stimme noch nicht kann, nur die menschliche Stimme als Stellvertreterin einer vorgeblichen AI im Film, nennt Mladen Dolar „Nichtstimmen.“ „Nichtstimmen von Husten

und Schluckauf über Brabbeln, Schreien, Lachen und Singen sind ja offenbar keine sprachlichen Stimmen; sie sind keine Phoneme und stehen doch nicht einfach außerhalb der sprachlichen Struktur: Sie scheinen sich gerade in ihrer Nichtartikuliertheit [...] besonders dafür zu eignen, die Struktur als solche zu verkörpern, die Struktur in ihrer grundlegendsten Form – oder Bedeutung an sich, jenseits jeder konkreten, faßlichen Bedeutung“ (Dolar 2014: 48).

WOMAN-AS-INTERFACE — In *Her* kann die gespielte AI sämtliche nicht-stimmliche Laute äußern. Filme wie dieser machen sich keine Mühe zu erklären, warum es sich bei den Stimmen keineswegs um computergenerierte handelt. Sie behaupten einfach, in einer unbestimmten Zukunft würden Maschinen wie Menschen klingen. Doch *Her* hebt sich als aktuellstes Beispiel für das algorithmische Imaginäre ab von anderen Beispielen. Anders als in der Mediengeschichte hat die Stimme von Scarlett Johansson zwar dienenden Charakter, ihr vernetztes Dasein gibt der Handlung jedoch eine unerwartete Wende, als sich herausstellt, dass diese Dienste nicht in einem *One-on-one*-Verhältnis geleistet werden. Das OS, in dessen Stimme sich der menschliche Protagonist des Films verliebt hat, kommuniziert parallel mit vielen anderen Menschen und ebenso weiteren Ausprägungen des OS. Insofern eröffnet die Handlung von *Her* den Blick in eine technologische Zukunft mit einer Dienstleistungsgesellschaft, in der Dienste in alle Richtungen verrichtet werden, von Maschinen für Menschen, von Menschen für Menschen und Menschen für Maschinen.

— Um wieder zum Ausgangsbeispiel zurückzukommen: Der Klang der „You are the only person“-Stimme lässt sich als weiblich einordnen. Die Verwendung einer weiblichen Stimme im digitalen Service- und Assistenzbereich ist ein hier digital animiertes, sexistisches Klischee. Persönliche Assistentin ist ein Beruf, der in der westlichen hierarchischen Angestellten- und Büroökultur in der Vergangenheit überwiegend von Frauen ausgeübt wurde (und auch in der Gegenwart oft weiter wird); als künstliche Version lebt die Vorstellung der dienenden Frau nun in Navigationsgeräten oder Smart Speakern weiter und wird auf Chips gespeichert.

— Mit der Einführung von ISDN⁷⁾ Anfang der 1990er-Jahre waren die technischen Voraussetzungen für Videotelefonie geschaffen. In der Zeit machte die Telekom mit drei Bildtelefonanlagen parallel Werbung für das neue ISDN-Netz und die damit verbundenen technischen Lösungen. Dabei ließen sie das Stereotyp von historisch weiblich besetzten Stellen in der Telefonzentrale oder im Sekretariat aufleben, indem sie die Geräte mit weiblichen

7)

ISDN ist der Internationale Standard für ein digitales Telekommunikationsnetz. Im Jahr 1979 entstanden erste Pläne und 1982 fiel die Entscheidung für die ISDN-Technik. Seit 1989 war ISDN in Betrieb. Die Telekom hat diesen digitalen Standard Ende 2020 abgeschaltet.

Vornamen markierten. Das Modell „Christa R“ bestand zum Beispiel aus einem Monitor mit beweglicher Kamera, einer Telefon-einheit und einem Videocodierer. „Christa R“, „Lisa C“ und „Claudia O“ sollten die Kommunikation in den Büros verändern (Lieb 2020). Die Telekom gab ihren Modellen weibliche Identitäten, die wie zum polizeilichen Schutz der Privatsphäre vom Nachnamen nur den ersten Buchstaben preisgaben. Die Abkürzung eines Nachnamens mit dem Initial ist eigentlich nur aus der medialen Berichterstattung über Kriminalfälle und anschließende Prozesse bekannt; die Identität von Opfern und Tatverdächtigen wird durch die Anonymisierung geschützt, entsprechendes fordert etwa das deutsche Presserecht. „Da die Telekom bzw. die Post davor und danach entweder auf Fantasienamen (Xitel) oder eher technische Bezeichnungen zurückgriff, wirkt es noch auffälliger, dass bei diesen drei Modellen diese Namen gewählt wurden.“⁸⁾ Sadie Plant kritisierte Tätigkeiten am Beispiel der Telefonistin, die Gesprächsverbindungen herstellte und dabei zum Interface zwischen Mensch und Medium wurde, als „woman-as-interface“ (Munn 2018: 99-100). Im Fall der Telekomgeräte ist die Frau zum Interface-Objekt geworden.

Der Sexismus der IT-Branche wird in den vergangenen Jahren häufiger, öffentlicher und vehementer kritisiert.⁹⁾ Aus heutiger Sicht wirkt ein über die ISDN-Technik und ihre Einsatzmöglichkeiten informierender Telekom-Clip¹⁰⁾ von 1992 skurril, antiquiert. Wenn die Videotelefonie vorgestellt wird, muss die Frau in der Rolle der immerhin weiblichen Auftraggeberin mit dem Auftragnehmer flirten. Sie lacht amüsiert, ohne dass aus dem gefilmten Gespräch deutlich wird warum.¹¹⁾ Es ist ein stereotypes Rollenspiel, mit dem der in den Apparaten angelegte Sexismus auf Anweisung der Regie performt wird.

NON-BINARY — Aus Gründen von binären Default-Einstellungen wie diesen hat sich die Non-Profit-Initiative Feminist AI¹²⁾ in Los Angeles damit beschäftigt, die vorinstallierte, weiblich gegenderte Alexa-Stimme durch eine von den Nutzer*innen selbstgewählte oder neu programmierte Stimme zu ersetzen. Hier gilt nicht mehr, was Mladen Dolar noch über das Verhältnis zwischen Anruferantworter und Stimme schrieb, dass ein Gerät als „Stellvertreter [der unsichtbaren, abwesenden Quelle] aufzutreten beginnt“ (Dolar 2014: 86). Hier wird die Stimme zur Stellvertreterin für eine non-binäre Sprachpolitik. Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, haben Feminist AI mit einem sogenannten Wizard of OZ-Test, einer gängigen Methode in der Entwicklung eines neuen Interface, versucht,

8) Matthias Lieb, Mitarbeiter am Museum für Post und Telekommunikation in Frankfurt am Main, war im Sommer 2020 mit einer Archivrecherche zum Thema Videotelefonie beschäftigt. Diese Aussage machte er in einer E-Mail an die Autorin vom 21.7.2020.

9) Unter anderem kritisiert die Autorin Anna Wiener die patriarchale Geschlechterordnung in *Uncanny Valley* (London, 4th Estate, 2020), einem Bericht, der auf persönlichen Beobachtungen und Erfahrungen als Mitarbeiterin in Tech-Startups im Silicon Valley der Zehnerjahre beruht. Spezifisch mit der Inszenierung von KI-Assistenzsystemen beschäftigen sich Martin Hennig und Kilian Hauptmann unter dem Aspekt von Macht und Gender in ihrem Beitrag „Alexa, optimier mich“ KI-Fiktionen digitaler Assistenzsysteme in der Werbung,“ (Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft 21, Künstliche Intelligenzen, 2/2019, S. 86-95).

10) 1992 bewirbt die Telekom das digitale Netz aus Glasfaserleitungen für die Übertragung von Sprache, Daten, Texte und bewegte Bilder in informativen Werbevideos „Alles über ein Netz,“ vgl. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11YFr-C_SKq (22.02.2021). Ab 14 Min 31 Sek wird der ‚Clou‘ vorgestellt, ein Bildtelefon, ein Computermonitor mit der entsprechenden Software, Kamera und einer Tastatur, über die Bildeinstellungen vorgenommen werden können (Tasten für Bild hell, Bild dunkel, Eigenbild und Dokument).

11) 1992 bewirbt die Telekom das digitale Netz aus Glasfaserleitungen für die Übertragung von Sprache, Daten, Text und bewegten Bildern in informativen Werbevideos. Auf YouTube ist eine Kompilation zu finden. Siehe „Alles über ein Netz,“ YouTube, ab 15 Min 26 Sek. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11YFr-C_SKq (22.02.2021)

12) Feminist AI (2016): Thoughtful Voice Design. <https://www.feminist.ai/thoughtful-voice-design>

die Affekt-Reaktion von Nutzer*innen zu ermitteln. Mit diesem Zwischenschritt im Entwicklungsprozess wird Geld und Zeit gespart, indem die ‚Erfindung‘ oder das ‚Feature‘ zunächst von einer realen Person, die sich in einem anderen Raum befindet, simuliert wird, was die Tester*innen weder wissen noch sehen können. Die Testpersonen gehen in der Situation davon aus, dass sie mit einer künstlichen Intelligenz kommunizieren. Bei diesem Vorgang geht es darum herauszufinden, ob der Service den zukünftigen Nutzer*innen behagt. Erst nach solchen Testergebnissen wird für Programmierer*innen deutlich, mit welchen Maßnahmen sie an den Programmierschnittstellen und auf der Code-Ebene intervenieren könnten.¹³⁾ Wobei die Möglichkeiten der Intervention von außen begrenzt sind – „for a real intervene, you need to work in a company.“¹⁴⁾ Feminist AI stellen im Rahmen ihrer Intervention fest: „Participants indicated they would like the ability to modify the output of the voice when private information is collected“ (Feminist AI 2016). Hier könnte eine Vielfalt an Stimmen für Diversität sorgen.

— Neben Feminist AI gibt es u.a. auch Projekte wie Q, eine als geschlechtslos bezeichnete Stimme, die in internationaler Zusammenarbeit entwickelt wurde¹⁵⁾ und als Maschinenstimme erkennbar ist. Während in dem Film *Her* noch eine Geschichte erzählt wurde und mit einer fiktiven OS-Stimme die Frage verhandelt wurde, wie eng das Mensch-Maschine-Verhältnis sein könnte oder eines Tages sein würde, deutet das Beispiel Google Duplex die Anmutung einer universellen Intelligenz an, obwohl sie auf einen einfachen Dialog zum Sammeln von Informationen programmiert wurde, doch die Diskurspartikel suggerieren mehr.

— In *Her* wird die alte Utopie der Verschmelzung von Mensch und Maschine zur Dystopie,¹⁶⁾ distanziert sich damit aber von alten Stereotypen. Ist in dieser Verbindung die Maschine defizitär oder ist der Mensch defizitär? Die Maschine muss vernetzt sein, sonst funktioniert sie nicht als Knotenpunkt in den Netzwerken. Das OS ist eine immaterielle Stimme ohne Körper, ohne Gehäuse. Navis, Siris und Alexas sind die Töchter der Telefonistin, die Ferngespräche herstellte, bis der Switch erfunden worden war.

— Neben dem problematischen Einsatz von Smart

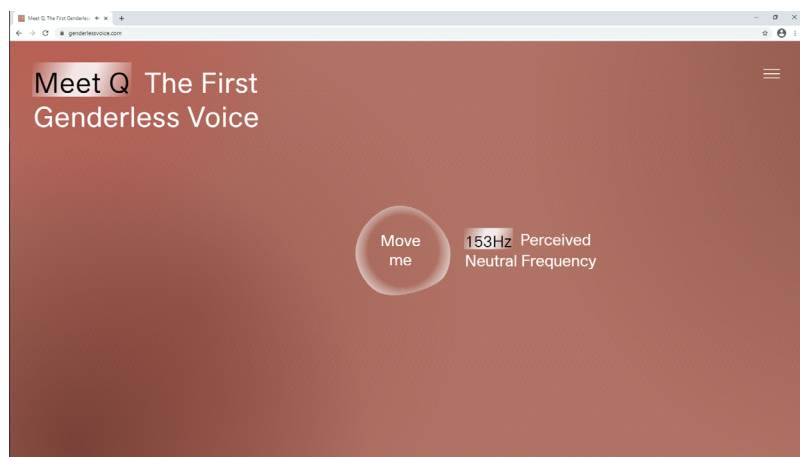
13) Vgl. zur theoretischen Reflexion von Interventionen in digitale Kulturen, Galloway, Alexander R. (2017), *Intervening Infrastructures: Ad Hoc Networking and Liberated Computer Language*. In: Caygill, Lecker, Schulze (Hg.), *Interventions in Digital Cultures*. Lüneburg, meson press 2017, S. 61-72.

14) Mercedes Bunz im Q&A nach ihrem Online-Vortrag „On the Culture of Artificial Intelligence“, veranstaltet vom Museum Brandhorst und dem Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte der Universität München, 27.1.2021. <https://www.zikg.eu/aktuelles/veranstaltungen/2021/online-vortrag-mercedes-bunz> (22.02.2021)

15) Siehe <https://www.genderlessvoice.com/> (22.02.2021). Die Linguistin Selina Sutton kritisiert in einem Paper, dass es sich um eine geschlechtlich uneindeutige Stimme handelt, nicht um eine geschlechtslose. Siehe Sutton, S. J. (2020). *Gender Ambiguous, not Genderless. Proceedings of the 2nd Conference on Conversational User Interfaces*. doi:10.1145/3405755.3406123

16) „Die Stimme ohne Beigaben ist keine ‚normale‘ Stimme mehr; ihr fehlt jene menschliche Note, die der öden Maschinerie des Signifikanten durch die Stimme hinzugefügt zu werden scheint, und so liegt die Drohung in ihr, daß die Menschheit selbst mit der mechanischen Wiederholbarkeit verschmelzen und dadurch ihren Halt verlieren könnte“ (Dolar 2014: 34).

// Abbildung 1
Meet Q, Screenshot



Speakern und dem problematischen Design künstlicher Stimmen tritt ein anderer Konflikt beim Erkennen menschlicher Stimmen durch algorithmische Systeme auf. Wie aus der Zeugenaussage einer Wissenschaftlerin vor dem New Yorker City Council zum Einsatz von Algorithmen in automatisierten Personalentscheidungen (Myers West 2020) hervorgeht, macht nicht nur Gesichtserkennungs-Software erhebliche Fehler aufgrund von rassistischen und sexistischen Vorannahmen und Vorurteilen, sondern Programme für die Erkennung von Stimmen diskriminieren Bewerber*innen hinsichtlich Gender und Race. „Facial and voice analysis technologies work less well for people of color, English speakers with non-native accents, and trans people“ (Ebd.).

— Dass Veränderung in der realen Welt eine Umdeutung der digitalen Welt voraussetzt, um aus regressiven stereotypisierenden Zuschreibungen wie normativen binären Setzungen herauszukommen, manifestiert sich in einigen Texten. Die queer-feministische Autorin Legacy Russell vertritt in ihrem Manifest *Glitch Feminism* genauso die Position, etwas am Maschinencode zu verändern und damit die Welt draußen, „away from the keyboard („AFK“),“ wie sie es nennt, um die eingefahrene Gewichtung von online und IRL neu zu denken. Etwas am Maschinencode zu verändern ist deswegen bedeutsamer als sich hinter Verschlüsselungstechnik und Datenschutz weiter zu verriegeln, weil die Menschen ohnehin schon mitten in den Maschinen stehen und sich nicht entziehen können (Russell 2020: 141). Das Mittendrin sein begründet sie mit den vielen Automatismen, die sich in das digitale Leben eingeschlichen haben: Autofill, Autocomplete, Autoplay. Ihre Idee von „reduce the way our bodies can be read“ bedeutet, „to throttle the predictability of autoplay“ (Ebd.: 75). *Glitch* ist hier Metapher und Methode, Projektion und Aktion, um die vom Plattformkapitalismus eingeforderte Performance zu stören oder zu verweigern: „glitch is a form of refusal.“

— Wie nah kann also die maschinelle Stimme der menschlichen kommen und vice versa? Mit welchen Interventionen lassen sich die Gewohnheiten, Zuschreibungen und Markierungen im Sinne von Russells Manifest unterbrechen? Wie könnten die Computer und andere Maschinen sprechen, um nicht den Uncanny Valley-Effekt¹⁷⁾ zu reproduzieren und mit menschlichen Stimmen verwechselt zu werden? Die künstlich wirkenden Stimmen, die einsame User*innen in *BigBlueButton* begrüßen und der Text, den sie sprechen, so scheint es, verraten sie schnell. Die menschliche Stimme imitierte bestenfalls Modulation, Affektarmut und Einsilbigkeit der ersten Generationen von Computerstimmen.

17)

Mit dem Uncanny Valley-Effekt ist das irritierende, ins Unheimliche tendierende Erleben von KI-Technologie, wie es der japanische Robotikforscher Masahiro Mori 1970 anhand von zu menschlich und daher unheimlich wirkenden Robotern und Handprothesen erforscht und in einer Diagrammkurve als „Uncanny Valley“ markiert hatte (Mori, Masahiro (2019): *Das Unheimliche Tal* [Bukimi no Tani Genshō, 1970]. Aus dem Japanischen von MacDorman, Karl F.; Schwind, Valentin. In: Haensch, Konstantin Daniel; Nelke, Lara; Planitzer, Matthias (Hg.), *Uncanny Interfaces*. Hamburg, Textem Verlag 2019. S. 212–219). Die Affinität zwischen Mensch und Maschine nimmt durch ausgeprägt anthropomorphes Design stark ab. Daher plädierte Mori dafür, „durch nichtmenschliche Designs Maschinen zu entwerfen, deren Gegenwart Affinität im Menschen erzeugt“ (Ebd.: 218). AI-Anwendungen begleiten also scheinbar weiterhin dieselben Probleme, wenngleich sie in andere Anwendungsbereiche fallen.

Denn Stimme und Raum bedingen sich gegenseitig. Doch im Digitalen bleiben die Welten fragmentarisch. Was dort fehlt, sind unter anderem „extra-linguistic elements of communication: the soundings, gestures and affective transmissions that make up our different relations“ (Kanngiesser 2011). Die Möglichkeiten in den Code zu intervenieren und gegenwärtige Cyborg-Prozesse künstlicher Stimmen hörbar und verhandelbar zu machen oder zu stören, sind dennoch gegeben, wie die hier vorgestellten Beispiele verdeutlichen. Feminist AI haben es exemplarisch mit Testen alternativer Stimmen demonstriert. Q ist ein weiterer Vorschlag, anders über die konventionellen AI-Stimmen und ihre Wirkungen in der realen Welt zu nachzudenken. Smartness sollte diverser ausgelegt werden, andernfalls hängen die digitalen Ichs vieler Nutzer*innen im Uncanny Valley fest. You are not the only person in this conference.

// Literaturverzeichnis

- AdHominem (Username), How do I eliminate “You are the only person in this conference”, Februar 2012. <https://community.freepbx.org/t/how-do-i-eliminate-you-are-currently-the-only-person-in-this-conference/13348> (22.02.2021)
- Barrera, Pablo (Google Research); Stirnberg, Florian (DeepMind) (2020): Improving Audio Quality in Duo with WaveNetEQ, Google AI Blog, 1. April 2020. <https://ai.googleblog.com/2020/04/improving-audio-quality-in-duo-with.html> (22.02.2021)
- Bucher, Taina (2012): Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook. In: *New Media & Society* 14(7), S. 1164–1180.
- Descript (2021): Ultra-realistic voice-cloning. <https://www.descript.com/overdub?lyrebird=true> (22.02.2021)
- Dolar, Mladen (2014). *His Master's Voice. Eine Theorie der Stimme*. [OR, 2003], Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp.
- Dyson, Frances (2014), *The Tone of Our Times. Sound, Sense, Economy, and Ecology*. Cambridge, MA und London, The MIT Press.
- Feminist AI (2016): Thoughtful Voice Design. <https://www.feminist.ai/thoughtful-voice-design> (22.02.2021)
- Galloway, Alexander R. (2012), *The Interface Effect*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Galloway, Alexander R. (2017), *Intervening Infrastructures: Ad Hoc Networking and Liberated Computer Language*. In: Caygill, Leeker, Schulze (Hg.), *Interventions in Digital Cultures*. Lüneburg, meson press 2017, S. 61–72.
- Haraway, Donna (1984): Lieber Kyborg als Göttin! Für eine sozialistisch-feministische Unterwanderung der Gentechnologie. In: Lange, Bernd-Peter / Stuby, Anna Maria (Hg.), *Neunzehnhundertvierundachtzig, Argument-Sonderband 105*. Berlin, Argument-Verlag, S. 66–84.
- Harwell, Drew (2018): A Google program can pass as a human on the phone. Should it be required to tell people it's a machine? In: *The Washington Post*, 9. Mai 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/05/08/a-google-program-can-pass-as-a-human-on-the-phone-should-it-be-required-to-tell-people-its-a-machine/> (22.02.2021)
- Kanngiesser, Anja (2011): A sonic geography of voice: Towards an affective politics. In: *Progress in Human Geography*, 10 November 2011, DOI: 10.1177/0309132511423969.
- Lieb, Matthias (2020): Bildtelefonie – Vorläufer der Videokonferenz. Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation. 24. März 2020. https://www.lebenx0.de/bildtelefonie-videokonferenzen/?fbclid=IwAR0ZG4wGINZJhs9kgh0w2UtxUaBm_LEHufmzIj-BMYki1giFcvD9FqrVL0 (22.02.2021)
- MIT Technology Review (2020): Google's auto-complete for speech can cover up glitches in video calls. 6. April 2020. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/04/06/998410/google-artificial-intelligence-autocomplete-internet-voice-speech-glitches-video-call/> (22.02.2021)
- Mrkšić, Nikola (2020): Our Voice Assistant Spoke to Google Duplex. Here's What Happened... 23. September 2020. <https://www.polyai.com/>

[our-voice-assistant-spoke-to-google-duplex-heres-what-happened/](#) (22.02.2021)

Munn, Luke (2018), *Ferocious Logics. Unmaking the Algorithm*. Lüneburg, meson press.

Myers West, Sarah (2020), *AI Now Institute, Ethical Implications of Using Artificial Intelligence and Automated Decision Systems*. New York City Council, Committee on Technology, November 13, 2020. <https://ainowinstitute.org/ai-now-city-council-testimony-fair-shot-act.pdf> (22.02.2021)

Nunes, Mark (2011), *Error. Glitch, Noise, and Jam in New Media Cultures*. New York und London, Continuum Books.

Russell, Legacy (2020): *Glitch Feminism. A Manifesto*. London, New York, Verso.

// Abbildungsverzeichnis

Abb. 1: Screenshot „Meet Q the genderless Voice“

// Angaben zur Autorin

Vera Tollmann ist Kulturwissenschaftlerin und Dozentin für Theorie der digitalen Medien an der Universität Hildesheim. Im September 2020 hat sie an der HFBK Hamburg promoviert. Zu ihren jüngsten Veröffentlichungen gehören „Poor Connections. A long history of videotelephony“ (Cabinet Magazine, 2020), „Wow, that's so postcard!“ in *Planet Earth* (Humboldt Books, 2019) und „Proxies“ (mit Wendy Hui Kyong Chun und Boaz Levin) in *Uncertain Archives* (MIT Press 2021). Sie ist Ko-Kuratorin der Ausstellung „Sensing Scale,“ die im Frühjahr 2021 in der Kunsthalle Münster zu sehen sein wird.

// FKW wird gefördert durch das Mariann Steegmann Institut und Cultural Critique / Kulturanalyse in den Künsten ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann // www.fkw-journal.de

// Lizenz

Der Text ist lizenziert unter der CC-BY-NC-ND Lizenz 4.0 International. Der Lizenzvertrag ist abrufbar unter: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.de>



LISTENING WITH TINNITUS

In *The Hum of the World: A Philosophy of Listening*, Lawrence Kramer invites his reader to “contemplate what would happen if we heard the world as attentively as we see it.” Seeking to connect sound to the tangibility and perceptibility of life through a series of poetic and theoretical vignettes, Kramer provocatively posits that “the sense of hearing grounds the sense of being” (Kramer 2019: 2). Of particular importance is what Kramer calls the ‘audiable’ – that is, “the material promise of sound,” heard as “the hum of the world” (ibid.: 4). It is this “undertone of auditory culture” to which Kramer wishes to direct his reader’s attention, asking “what is lost when we don’t hearken to the audible, and what might be gained if we do” (ibid.: 4-5).

_____ Kramer’s book is symptomatic of the recent proliferation of interest in listening’s ontology and ethical potentiality, manifest in humanities scholarship, feminist theory, and artistic and curatorial practice. In a culture where the eye is purported to dominate, listening has been understood as revelatory. Salomé Voegelin, for example, argues that while listening will not automatically provide us with a better world, it can nonetheless be politically and epistemologically useful in revealing “the world in its invisibility: its unseen movements beneath its visual organisation” (Voegelin 2014: 165). These revelations, however, may require a position of vulnerability. Brandon LaBelle describes listening as “a condition of weak-strength” inasmuch as the “dialogical moment” requires “always listening beyond myself, moving my own views in consideration of another’s, giving my attention to opinions different from my own while finding ways to resist and counter their power if need be” (LaBelle 2018: 145).

_____ As both these descriptions suggest, an open, vulnerable, and attentive listening that makes apparent our relationality and responsibilities is deemed ethically and politically valuable. Yet listening has also been deemed something that is neglected: it is habitually done badly. In the field of acoustic ecology, exercises such as ‘ear cleaning’ are deemed necessary in a noisy world that does not listen carefully enough. Ear cleaning activities such as soundwalks and directed listening exercises aim to create a heightened sense of sonic awareness: to ‘open ears’ so that listeners are able “to notice sounds they have never really listened to before, to listen [...] to the sounds of their own environment and the sounds they themselves inject into their environment” (Schafer 1967: 1).

For Schafer, ear cleaning is akin to a surgeon's habit of washing their hands before operating: "Ears also perform delicate operations and therefore ear cleanliness is an important prerequisite for all musical listening and musical playing" (ibid.).

— While these practical and poetical approaches to listening have been influential in offering novel aesthetic experiences and alternative understandings of social life, they have often been based upon an unacknowledged and unimpaired ideal ear. There has been comparatively little attention as to how those whose ears will never be clean, or indeed whose ears are *too* clean,¹⁾ relate to the promises made of listening – its capacity to connect, reveal, and reconfigure. Just as oft-repeated claims about the primacy of the visual tend to obscure differing ocular capacities, listening's advocates have often silenced the spectrum of aural capacities through which sonic experience takes place and through which auditory knowledge is formed. Kramer, for his part, seemingly finds himself caught between the actual and the ideal. Thus he tempers his attachment of sound to the sense of aliveness with an acknowledgement that sensory experience is distributed unevenly between and across cultures; and the heterogeneity of subjects that apprehend the world. Kramer also seeks to include Deafness within his philosophy of listening: in a remark that appears in parentheses, he notes that "the profoundly deaf cannot hear most sounds, but that does not mean they have no auditory experience. In hearing less, the deaf hear differently" (Kramer 2019: 31). The bracketing of this comment is revealing of a wider structural tendency of Kramer's argument and those similar to it: while listening or aurality may be 'expanded' to incorporate those who have historically been marginalized within auditory culture, their inclusion seemingly has little impact on the argument that is pursued. If, as Kramer suggests, the D/deaf hear differently, then the question remains as to what implications this difference has, if any, for the primary connection of sound and life, of hearing and being.

— For some listeners, the hum does not just come from the world but, seemingly, from within. During the current health crisis, this interior humming has been amplified, exacerbated by domestic confinement, social isolation, and unevenly-distributed affects of fear, stress, and anxiety. Some are hearing this humming for the first time during this crisis. Indeed, at the time of writing, there have been some suggestions that tinnitus and other changes to hearing may be a possible symptom, or aftereffect, of COVID-19 infection (Koumpa, Forde, and Manjaly 2020; Munro et al. 2020). Tinnitus refers to a conscious perception of sound for which there

1)

As will become apparent, I am suggesting that those with tinnitus will struggle to reach Schafer's ideal listening positionality of 'clean ears.' If 'clean ears' refers to a condition where the ear is able to "exercise its individualistic right to demand that insouciant and distracting sounds should be stopped in order that it may concentrate on those that truly matter" (Schafer 1967: 2), then many of those who listen with tinnitus will struggle to meet this ideal listening state. Those whose ears are too clean may be an accurate description of some listeners with hyperacusis. Hyperacusis refers to an increased sensitivity to sound, where certain sounds are heard as too loud. This can be to the extent that sound is perceived as painful.

is no external source. It is a common yet diverse auditory condition. Although many will experience tinnitus at some point in their lives, what this tinnitus sounds like, why it is audible, and the impact it has on a listener can vary widely. In films and television, tinnitus tends to be depicted as a high-pitched ringing in the ears that is initiated by and then fades following a traumatic encounter – manifest as either physical harm or psychic distress. Yet tinnitus may persist: it can be a near-constant accompaniment in everyday life. Alternatively, tinnitus may be an intermittent addition to the listening ear, coming and going in relation to different sonic and social situations. Tinnitus is often manifest as a steady hum or series of tones, but it can also throb, pulse, sweep, crackle, click, or distort. It can be experienced as banal, fascinating, or frightening. As a type of hearing impairment, tinnitus may constitute one of the gains of hearing loss but it may also be heard by those who are otherwise deemed ‘otologically normal.’²⁾

_____ Centering tinnitus can help to provincialize the ‘normate’ ear. For Rosemarie Garland Thomson, the normate refers to an idealised subject position that is ‘unmarked’ by disability, as well as race and gender; and which underpins Eurocentric, liberal democratic notions of personhood (Thomson 2017). It is in relation to the normate that disability becomes perceptible and functions as such: educational spaces, workplaces, the media, and medical institutions are organised around the normate. The normate is also traceable in responses to the pandemic: it informs, for example, the conflation of youth and ‘healthiness;’ and the apparent correlation of ‘underlying health conditions’ and disposability. Critical accounts of disability and its social origins tend to focus on the visible relationship of the normate and the disabled, made apparent by their representation in images, film, and television. However, the normate is also an auditory construct: it underpins and is reproduced by, amongst other things, acoustic regulations and hearing technologies. It is the perceptual norm against which tinnitus, alongside other hearing conditions and impairments, is judged as deviation. However, the normate often passes unacknowledged. Such is the case when an ontology or ethics grounded in aural communication assumes an affective and intellectual capacity to engage with sound; and when unimpaired hearing is treated as given. I want to move towards taking impairment and disability out of the parentheses and footnotes, and speculate as to how tinnitus can ground an alternative understanding of listening: what does listening with tinnitus serve to amplify, distort, and reconfigure? While what I refer to herein as normate philosophies of listening

2)

Otology is a branch of medicine studying the physiology and anatomy of the ear and its associated sensory systems. Otologically normal refers those who conform to the standard of ‘good,’ ‘normal,’ or ‘unimpaired’ hearing.

necessarily tend towards generalisation, tinnitus refuses this tendency, insofar as its causes, effects, qualities, and contexts vary widely. However, an attention to the relationship between listening and tinnitus can also make apparent infrequently acknowledged aspects of the latter. In particular, the recurrent emphasis on listening as a social, ethical, and relational practice provides an opportunity to rethink tinnitus's attribution as a personal and interior auditory experience. In other words, knowing listening through tinnitus, and tinnitus through listening, can generate alternative conceptualisations of both.

(TRYING TO AVOID) LISTENING TO HEARING — It may appear as if tinnitus and listening cohere to different aspects of auditory experience. While the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, hearing and listening are frequently distinguished from one another. Where hearing is thought of as the physical perception of sound, listening pertains to a cultural practice of auditory attention. Hearing is somatic, automatic, and passive, where listening is learned, cultivated, and directed. Hearing can be thought of as the sensory substrate that grounds different and diverse practices of listening. It is the material means through which oft-romanticised, sonic intersubjectivity occurs (Sterne 2015, Rice 2015).

— Tinnitus tends to be thought of as an impairment of or modification to this sensory substrate. Yet it also highlights the complexity of distinguishing listening from hearing. Indeed, the experience of tinnitus is often one of listening *to* hearing, with attention being drawn to (what feels like) the ear's private sound. However, where some listeners with tinnitus find habituation relatively straightforward, attention can also serve to exacerbate tinnitus: focusing on or listening out for tinnitus can intensify it. Tinnitus requires that the aesthetic and moral virtues frequently attributed to careful and attentive listening are qualified, insofar as listening carefully and attentively to tinnitus might be experienced as harmful. Furthermore, where normative accounts of listening emphasise its associations with sociality and relationality, listening to tinnitus might be experienced as a withdrawal *from* social life. It can distract from intersubjective encounters, taking the listener inside themselves. However, as a result, tinnitus may ground other practices of listening. The use of low-level background sound, for example, is often suggested as a strategy for masking tinnitus. This masking involves not only making tinnitus more difficult to hear but also directing the attention of the listener away from it and towards other sounds.

— Where theorists and artists often advocate for a capacious listening – the feminist composer Pauline Oliveros’s description of her creative practice of deep listening as “listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing” (Oliveros 2000) is illustrative of this tendency – listening with tinnitus makes apparent the need for a selective aurality. In her critical analysis of cultural theory’s turn toward relationality, Eva Haifa Giraud has argued for greater attention to be paid to the exclusions created by ethical and theoretical formations that foreground entanglement. For Giraud, exclusions are not only created by systems that foster oppression and marginalization. All epistemologies, including those that advocate for a recognition of complexity and connectivity, create omissions. Making these exclusions perceptible is important in denaturalising the normative (and, by extension, the normate). However, as Giraud argues, exclusions, separations, and disengagements can also, in some circumstances, be ethically beneficial or necessary. Exclusion is not simply the opposite of relationality, as the pursuit of some kinds of connection requires the exclusion of others (Giraud 2019).

— Listening with tinnitus illustrates this final point. Directing the listening ear towards some types of sound can, in some instances, help to facilitate a disconnection from tinnitus and its associated affects. This disconnection, furthermore, might be considered ethically beneficial if tinnitus is a cause of distress. While normate philosophies of listening have often embraced sonic relationality, connectivity, and capaciousness, to listen with tinnitus is to take seriously the need to *not* listen.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE EAR — While often held as a physiological ‘fact,’ tinnitus also acts as a reminder that hearing, as well as listening, is historically and culturally contingent (Sterne 2015). Research into tinnitus has primarily stemmed from Western Europe and the USA (Baguley, McFerran, and Hall 2013). Furthermore, there are racial differences as to who reports as having tinnitus. In their study of tinnitus amongst US adults, Josef Shargorodsky et al. suggest that ‘non-Hispanic whites’ report a higher prevalence of tinnitus than non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic populations (Shargorodsky, Curhan, and Farwell 2010). The reasons for racial differences in reported prevalence are not reflected upon by the authors. However, the widely-reported inequalities that Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour face in access to healthcare, quality of care, and health outcomes is one possible factor. These

geographic and demographic inclusions and omissions suggest that the treatment of tinnitus as a distinguishable and nameable medical symptom – one that coheres with a population of identifiable tinnitus ‘sufferers’ – is a culturally-informed designation, underpinned by a Euro-American and white-racialised perspective. This is not to suggest that the spectrum of auditory experiences categorised as tinnitus are not experienced outside of ‘the global North’ or ‘the West,’ as is highlighted by Victor De Andrade and Eleanor Morris’ study of Black South African traditional healers and their understandings of and approaches to hearing impairment. ‘Ringing and other sounds in the ears’ was one of a range of hearing issues that was reported to and addressed by traditional healers (de Andrade and Ross 2005). However, the effects, diagnosis, and management of tinnitus tend to be articulated in relation to notions of optimization, productivity, normalcy, and economic value, which are by no means universally shared nor applicable (see Steingo and Sykes 2019).

_____ Hearing and listening are not only co-constituted by cultural difference, they are also formations of power. However, in the rush to get to an affirmative ontology and ethics of listening, there is a tendency to leave unaddressed the ways that listening and its sensory substate are imbricated with Capital and coloniality, and their accompanying hierarchies of the human.³⁾ Tinnitus and other hearing impairments, by comparison, require a consideration of the geopolitics of the ear. Noise exposure, for example, is a common cause of tinnitus. Primarily defined in terms of sound volume and duration, noise exposure may occur in recreational settings, workplaces, residential environments, or elsewhere. However, there is some correlation between noise exposure and social inequalities, insofar as those who are recurrently exposed to noise are more likely to also experience socioeconomic deprivation (European Commission 2016; Keizer 2010). Some European and American studies have also found that tinnitus is more likely to be reported by those with a lower level of education (Unterrainer, Greimel, and Leibetseder 2001) and from a low income background (Mahboubi et al. 2013). Furthermore, there is a correlation between tinnitus and hearing loss. The World Health Organization reports that ‘disabling’ hearing loss – defined as a reduction in hearing greater than 40dB in the ‘better’ ear for adults and 30dB for children – is four times as prevalent in South Asian and Sub-Saharan African regions than in ‘high-income’ regions. Although these populations are underrepresented in both tinnitus research and scholarship about sound and listening, the geopolitical distribution of hearing

3)

This relative absence is suggested by Voegelin’s discussion of a Chris Watson’s soundscape composition and installation at Kew Garden’s Palm House. Voegelin rightfully notes that the palm house is a relic of colonialism and empire. The usual silence of the Palm House is compared to a museum. For Voegelin, Chris Watson’s piece transforms her perception of the Palm House as a colonial place: “the sound implodes this frame and hints at the plurality of the frames that we inhabit contingently and simultaneously: Kew Gardens, the colonial, the historical, the contemporary, the personal, knowledge, knowing, experience, and contradiction.” She continues: “I have a different awareness of the palm house now. I cannot ever enter it as a glass cabinet of colonial exploration and collection again but will always see the wood for the trees, the movement the whispers [...] It is not a display but an environment, a sonic place, which I have seen [sic.] other layers of, other slices, whose reality remains in their possibility influencing the present actuality for me” (Voegelin 2014: 17–18, my emphasis). The implication of this seems to be that listening with Watson’s composition shifts the perception of a place as ‘simply’ colonial towards other possibilities. While this may be Voegelin’s experience, and while she is keen to emphasise the contingency of listening, what is missing here is a consideration of positionality: who is and isn’t able to move ‘beyond’ the conception of the Palm House as colonial place and why; who might be prevented from perceiving the ‘plurality of frames’ upon which the perception of alternative possibilities is predicated?

loss illustrates how auditory impairment and disability cohere with global economic inequalities. The conditions through which listeners develop and experience tinnitus can therefore raise important questions about the uneven distributions of risk and debilitation: whose ears are in need of protection and whose hearing is considered disposable.

— These questions become particularly pertinent during the current health crisis. Where much has been made of the quietude initiated by various government lockdowns – March through to May 2020 has been designated ‘the longest period of quiet in recorded human history’ due to the reduction of seismic vibrations (Basu 2020) – these auditory imaginations of the pandemic risk silencing those for whom the world did not stop. This includes those designated ‘key workers’ – a term that, in a UK context, has been used to refer to a labour force within which the low-paid, precarious, and racially-minoritised are overrepresented. Furthermore, according to the Women’s Budget Group, of the 3 million people in what are deemed ‘high exposure’ jobs in the UK during the pandemic, 77% are women, and Black, Asian, and migrant women are over-represented within this group (Women’s Budget Group, 2020). Given the range of serious risks associated with COVID-19 infection, its potential impact upon hearing capacity, which I briefly mentioned earlier, may appear as relatively trivial. However, this potential impact can also be situated within a wider context, where the inequalities associated with race, gender, poverty, and precarity cohere with a distinction between those who can stay at home to stay safe, and those who cannot.

— Listening with tinnitus can therefore make apparent that it is not just an issue of who and what is perceptible that is predicated on the asymmetries of the world: “what voices are heard, what accents dominate the landscape, what interests are represented in its soundscape and what in turn remains inaudible, unable to make itself count, silenced, muted and even ignored” (Voegelin 2018). The hearing and listening capacities that, in Voegelin’s account, enable the perception of these asymmetries are also shaped by these asymmetries. Furthermore, these asymmetries are concealed by the normate listener, but also risk being concealed if listening with tinnitus is subject to abstraction and generalisation. An ethics or ontology of listening – or indeed an ontology of listening with tinnitus – therefore needs to be grounded in an acknowledgment of the relationship between listening positionality, hearing capacity, and the geopolitics of the ear.

TINNITUS AND AURAL RELATIONALITY — In March 2020 Dia: Beacon launched *Party/After Party*, a sound installation and exhibition by the techno DJ and producer Carl Craig. The work, which has partly inspired this Special Issue, is predicated around a dialectic of euphoria and loneliness. The piece contrasts the joyous connectivity of the dancefloor with the disconnections faced by the touring musician. Craig suggests that he “wanted to reflect the isolation of the many hours spent alone in hotel rooms and the tinnitus that I, and many other artists, have to contend with as a result of our work” (Dia: Beacon 2019). Consequently, dissonant music interjects at various points, marking the shift from party to after-party. In his review of the exhibition, which draws out the resonances between Craig’s work and the radical pandemic-induced social transformations that occurred shortly after its opening, Jace Clayton describes the high-pitched sine-wave drone as the exhibition’s “most poignant sound.” The sound of tinnitus, Clayton explains “is one that becomes more piercing when we are alone, after the afterparty, when the world has quieted down” (Clayton 2020). Indeed, tinnitus may be akin to a hangover, exacerbated by overdoing it, that is, listening for too long and too loudly. The effects are not noticeable until the morning after.

— Such presentations of tinnitus will always be contradictory, insofar as it involves sharing the unshareable, reducing the complexity of tinnitus to a symbolic sound. However, Craig’s staging of listening with tinnitus vis-à-vis the dialectic of aloneness and togetherness, work and play, serves as an important reminder that the ears of attentive listeners – such as DJs and producers – are often ‘unclean.’ Where theoretical imaginations of audition often omit these possible consequences of a life’s listening work, Craig’s exhibition foregrounds them.

— While Craig’s work positions tinnitus as symptomatic of being alone, it can also be understood as a reminder that tinnitus itself is relational. Although I have suggested that tinnitus can amplify common points of omission from recent poetics and practices of listening, and while I have sought to temper the celebration of connectivity and capaciousness found in normative philosophies of listening through an attention to selectivity and exclusion, the recurrent emphasis on listening as/and relationality, and the co-constitution of the hearer and the heard also provides an opportunity to reevaluate listening with tinnitus. If, as LaBelle suggests, “listening does not so much discern, point from point, body from body, rather it registers *all* that surrounds us, creating links and connections between ourselves and our environment”

(LaBelle 2012), then how does tinnitus figure in this relationship between audition and milieu?

—— Tinnitus complicates the implication that what is heard comes from the surrounding environment ‘out there’ and animates the resonant ‘in here’ of the ear. It scrambles the delineation of interiority and exteriority, sonic object and listening subject. Yet tinnitus can also exemplify the ways that aurality is predicated on and produces relations between listener and environment. Although the subjective sound of tinnitus is often objectified – it is often pinned down to a particular frequency or set of frequencies with particular acoustic characteristics – various environmental, affective, and physiological factors can mean that the perception of tinnitus changes over the course of a day, over a period of weeks or years. Indeed, as Carl Craig’s piece makes apparent, different auditory environments can shape experiences of tinnitus. The noisy shared space of the club may provide relief from tinnitus, particularly by comparison to the quiet hotel room. Alternatively, tinnitus may be manifest as ‘the afterparty’: the ringing may be initiated or exacerbated by the main event, but is only really heard once it has passed. The wider milieu therefore shapes and is shaped by listening with tinnitus.

—— Tinnitus is recognised as a personal auditory experience. With the notable exception of objective pulsatile tinnitus, tinnitus cannot be heard by others: it exists for the ear of the beholder only and specific to them. Recognising that experiences of tinnitus are partly constituted by the wider context in which audition takes place, by contrast, extends tinnitus beyond the ear of the beholder: it, too, becomes relational. This is not to deny that tinnitus is often experienced as highly individualised: indeed, the inability of others to hear it can be part of what makes tinnitus so disconcerting. However, this individual ‘affliction’ might be rethought as both subjective and relational: subjective in the sense that it is heard by and impacts upon the individual listener, relational in the sense that experiences of tinnitus are partially constituted by different sonic and social environments. In other words, tinnitus is mediated.

—— As a theoretical line of argument, this rethinking of tinnitus as relational might seem rather inconsequential. Yet in practice, it raises some challenging ethical questions for listening’s practitioners and advocates. What does it mean to take seriously that the acoustic qualities of different spaces can serve to exacerbate or mask tinnitus? What implications does this have for listening practices and sonic meditations that are grounded in quietude?

What unintentional harms might arise in listening to ‘everything possible’?

— In this short intervention, I have sought to contrast the normate listening embedded in many critical and creative accounts of auditory experience by amplifying tinnitus. Where philosophies of listening grounded in the normate aim to ‘include’ aural impairment, I have instead sought to consider how listening with and through tinnitus can provide an alternative perspective on the former. If listening is to be understood as an ethically and epistemologically valuable practice, then attention is needed into the omissions that are produced when unimpaired hearing is taken as given.

// Abstract

Listening has often been a source of philosophical interest; and there are a growing number of publications and artistic projects dedicated to its ethical potentiality. Yet what tends to be assumed in this work is an unimpaired ‘normate’ listener. With reference to the ongoing COVID-19 health crisis and Carl Craig’s art installation *Party/After Party* (2020), I ask: What does listening with tinnitus serve to amplify, distort, and reconfigure in relation to ‘normate’ philosophies of listening? Tinnitus, I argue, requires us to take seriously the need to *not* listen. It also requires an attention to the relationship between hearing capacity, listening positionality, and the geopolitics of the ear. However, despite their limitations, ‘normate’ philosophies of listening can themselves help provide a different perspective on tinnitus. In particular, the recurrent emphasis on listening as a social, ethical, and relational practice provides an opportunity to rethink tinnitus’s attribution as a personal and interior auditory experience. Understanding listening with tinnitus, and tinnitus with listening, can thus generate alternative conceptualisations of both.

// References

- Andrade, Victor de, and Ross, Eleanor (2005): Beliefs and Practices of Black South African Traditional Healers Regarding Hearing Impairment: Creencias y Prácticas de Los Curanderos Negros Sudafricanos En Torno a La Hipoacusia. In: *International Journal of Audiology* vol.44, issue 9, pp. 489–99. doi:10.1080/14992020500188999
- Baguley, David, McFerran, Don, and Hall, Deborah (2013): Tinnitus. In: *The Lancet* vol.382, issue 9904, pp. 1600–1607. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(13)60142-7
- Clayton, Jace (2020): Where’s the Party. *Art Forum*, June 2020. <https://www.artforum.com/print/202005/jace-clayton-on-carl-craig-at-dia-beacon-82809> (22 February 2021)
- Dia: Beacon (2019): New Immersive Sound Installation by Carl Craig Opening at Dia:Beacon on March 6, 2020. 21 November 2019. <https://www.diaart.org/about/press/new-immersive-sound-in-stallation-by-carl-craig-opening-at-diabeacon-on-march-6-2020/type/text> (22 February 2021)
- European Commission (2016): Links between Noise and Air Pollution and Socioeconomic Status. LU: Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2779/200217> (22 February 2021)
- Giraud, Eva Haifa (2019): *What Comes after Entanglement?: Activism, Anthropocentrism, and an Ethics of Exclusion*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Keizer, Garret (2010): *The Unwanted Sound of Everything We Want: A Book About Noise*. Hachette UK.
- Koumpa, Foteini Stefania, Forde, Cillian T, and Manjaly, Joseph G. (2020): Sudden Irreversible Hearing Loss Post COVID-19. In: *BMJ Case Reports* vol.13, issue 11: e238419. doi:10.1136/bcr-2020-238419
- Kramer, Lawrence (2019): *The Hum of the World: A Philosophy of Listening*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- LaBelle, Brandon (2012): On Listening. In: *Kunstjournalen B-Post* 12. <https://b-post.no/en/12/la-belle.html>. (22 February 2021)
- LaBelle, Brandon (2018): *Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance*. MIT Press.
- Mahboubi, Hossein, Oliaei, Sepehr, Kiumehr, Saman, Dwabe, Sami, and Djallilian, Hamid R. (2013): The Prevalence and Characteristics of Tinnitus in the Youth Population of the United States: Tinnitus in Youth Population. In: *The Laryngoscope* vol.123, issue 8, pp. 2001–8. doi:10.1002/lary.24015
- Munro, Kevin J., Uus, Kai, Almufarrij, Ibrahim, Chaudhuri, Nazia, and Yioe, Veronica (2020):

Persistent Self-Reported Changes in Hearing and Tinnitus in Post-Hospitalisation COVID-19 Cases. In: International Journal of Audiology vol.59, issue 12, pp. 889–90. doi:10.1080/14992027.2020.1798519

Oliveros, Pauline (2000): Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory to Practice Practice. In *Ple-nium Address for Humanities in the New Millennium*. Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Rice, Tom (2015): Listening. In: Novak, David, and Sakakeeny, Matt (eds.), *Keywords in Sound*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 99–111.

Schafer, R. Murray (1967): *Ear Cleaning: Notes for an Experimental Music Course*. Toronto: Clark and Cruickshank.

Shargorodsky, Josef, Curhan, Gary C. and Farwell, Wildon R. (2010): Prevalence and Characteristics of Tinnitus among US Adults. In: *The American Journal of Medicine* vol.123, issue 8, pp. 711–18. doi:10.1016/j.amjmed.2010.02.015

Steingo, Gavin, and Sykes, Jim (eds.) (2019): *Remapping Sound Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Sterne, Johnathan (2015): Hearing. In: Novak, David, and Sakakeeny, Matt (eds.), *Keywords in Sound*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 65–77.

Thomson, Rosemarie Garland (2017): *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Unterrainer, Josef, Greimel, K, and Leibetseder, Max (2001): Are Demographic and Socioeconomic Factors Predictive for Perceived Tinnitus Impairment? In: *The International Tinnitus Journal* 7, pp. 109–11.

Voegelin, Salomé (2014): *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Voegelin, Salomé (2018): *The Political Possibility of Sound: Fragments of Listening*. Hardcover Edition. New York: Bloomsbury.

Women's Budget Group, Covid-19 and Women: What We Know So Far... 21 May 2020: <https://wbg.org.uk/blog/covid-19-and-women-what-we-know-so-far/> (15 November 2020)

// About the Author

Marie Thompson is a Lecturer in Popular Music at The Open University, UK. She is the author of *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (Bloomsbury, 2017) and co-editor of *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience* (Bloomsbury, 2013). Marie is currently the Principal Investigator of the Arts and Humanities Research Council project, Tinnitus, Auditory Knowledge and the Arts (2020–2022). She is also a founding participant, with Annie Goh, of Sonic Cyberfeminisms, an ongoing project that critically and creatively explores the connections between sound, gender, technology, and cyberfeminism. A 'sonic cyberfeminisms' special issue of *Feminist Review* is to be published in March 2021.

// FKW is supported by the Mariann Steegmann Institute and Cultural Critique / Cultural Analysis in the Arts ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Kooß / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann / www.fkw-journal.de

// License

This work is licensed under the CC-BY-NC-ND License 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>



BENT NOTES ON RACIAL POLICING. ZUR DEKOLONIALEN POLITIK DER ‚GEKRÜMMTEN NOTEN‘ BEI ARTHUR Jafa UND GLENN LIGON

Der US-afrikanisch-amerikanische Filmemacher und Kameramann Arthur Jafa gewann 2019 auf der Venedig-Biennale den Goldenen Löwen für seine Arbeit *The White Album* (2018).¹⁾ Das Video lässt sich als Familienalbum eines weißen Rassismus verstehen, der – wie Saskia Trebing schreibt – „noch immer in alle Bilder, die wir heute konsumieren, [blutet]“ (Trebing 2019). Rassismus wird als das Element herausgearbeitet, das weiße Menschen zur Familie zusammenbindet und sie dergestalt umschließt, das den Autor Ismail Muhammad noch in der Seherfahrung des Videos das Gefühl umgibt, in diese Familie mit eingesperrt zu werden. Er schreibt: „*The White Album* produced an experience of confinement“ (Muhammad 2019). Das Album präsentiere Weißsein als eine lähmende Erfahrung, als eine Logik, „that seals white people off from the world around them“ (Muhammad 2019). Wenn also der You-Tuber Dixon White in einem der von Jafa montierten Schnipsel fragt: „What is it, that stops so many white people from wanting to change their hearts in regards to race [...] what is it that keeps us stuck right there in that comfortable position of untruth?“, dann können wir mit Muhammad antworten: „It is whiteness as a condition of entrapment in the spoils of settler-colonial society“ (Muhammad 2019). Weißsein ist demnach Bedingung der Einsperrung in die koloniale Gesellschaft. Dabei ist Weißsein längst schon als ein Begriff etabliert worden, der nicht von einem gegebenen Naturzustand ausgeht, sondern von „hergestellte(n), interpretierte(n) und praktizierte(n) Sichtbarkeit(en) und Positionen“ (Arndt 2005: 343). Aber obwohl Weißsein als interpretierte Position suggeriert, dekonstruiert und mit anderen Interpretationen überschrieben werden zu können, bindet es – nach der Auslegung der Arbeit Jafas – Menschen an das Gefühl, die koloniale Gesellschaft verteidigen zu müssen, obwohl sie noch nicht einmal bedroht ist. Wie die kritische Auseinandersetzung mit einem vielleicht zu simplifiziert verwendeten Begriff des Postkolonialismus als der Zeit „nach dem Kolonialismus“ verdeutlicht,²⁾ scheint *white supremacy* Menschen noch immer affektiv an die koloniale Gesellschaft zu ketten.

———Ästhetisch übersetzt Jafa das Gefühl des *entrapment* nicht nur durch lange Einstellungen auf weiße, erstarrte, unbewegliche Gesichter, sondern einen – wie Muhammad es beschreibt – krampf-

1)

In vielen Besprechungen wird nahegelegt, der Titel spiele auf Joan Didions gleichnamigen Roman und das Album der Beatles an. Ich konnte keine Belege finden, ob dies die für Jafa bewusst gewählten Referenzen sind (Gebreyesus 2018, Sargent 2018).

2)

Insbesondere dekoloniale Ansätze problematisieren, der Präfix „post“ suggeriere einen historischen Bruch mit dem Kolonialismus. Der Unterstellung einer solchen Sorglosigkeit widersetzt sich u.a. Stuart Hall, der mit seiner Frage „Wann war der Postkolonialismus?“ betont, dass es sich beim Postkolonialismus nicht um eine konfliktfreie Zone handele, sondern um eine neue Figuration eines Macht-Wissens-Komplexes, der über den Kolonialismus hinausgehe, diesen aber nicht als abgeschlossen betrachte (Hall 1997, vgl. auch Castro Varela / Dhawan 2015: 288).

artigen Rhythmus, einen Rhythmus, der den Zuschauer*innen das Gefühl vermittelt, nicht loslassen zu können, zu verkrampfen, krampfhaft an *white supremacy* festhalten zu müssen (Muhammad 2019).

— Mit dieser Sound-Ästhetik setzt Jafa einen Kontrapunkt zu seinen früheren Arbeiten, in denen nicht nur die Erfahrungswelten Schwarzer³⁾ Menschen in der Diaspora im Mittelpunkt stehen, sondern die – wie er es nennt – *black visual intonations* (Jafa 1998). Mit diesen Schwarzen visuellen Intonationen meint er Bilder, die in Konkordanz mit bestimmten Frequenzen vibrieren, die für Schwarze Musik typisch sind.⁴⁾ Entsprechend manipuliert er Bilder durch das Verfahren der Montage so, dass sie sich den Texturen Schwarzer Musik annähern, womit Jafa undeutliche (*slurred*), aber auch verbogene oder vielmehr gekrümmte (*bent*) Noten meint, die *blue notes* (L'Official 2018) oder, wie ich in diesem Beitrag stark machen möchte, *bent notes*.

— Das in Sounds und Rhythmen übersetzte Motiv des Krümmens, das auf den ersten Blick an das des Krampfens in *The White Album* erinnern könnte, folgt im Schwarzen Familienalbum jedoch einer anderen als an Privilegien krampfhaft festhaltenden Ideo-Logik. Krümmung im Sinne einer Biegung oder eines Bogens erzeugt stattdessen eine Spannung, eine gespannte Stille, die die US-afrikanisch-amerikanische Afrikanistin und Gender-Forscherin Tina Campt in *Listening to Images* auch als „tension of stasis“ (Campt 2017: 49) bezeichnet und als das Potential Schwarzer Zukünftigkeit in der visuellen Repräsentation Schwarzer Menschen herausarbeitet. Die Spannung, die Campt mit der visuellen Stagnation Schwarzer Menschen in fotografischen Darstellungen zusammenbringt, ist bei Jafa an die Dehnung bzw. Krümmung von Noten in der Schwarzen Intonation angelehnt. Hieran und an das nach Campt dekoloniale Moment dieser Spannung möchte ich anschließen, um darlegen zu können, dass emanzipatorisches Potential für Schwarze Zukünfte auch in dem Zusammenhang lauert, wo es am wenigsten vermutet werden kann: dem Komplex rassistischer Polizeigewalt bzw. der Polizierung⁵⁾ Schwarzer Menschen. Ausgehend von Arthur Jafas Filmen und manchen Arbeiten Glenn Ligon möchte ich nach den dekolonialen Politiken der gespannten Stille bzw. gebogenen Intonation im Kontext rassistischer Polizierung fragen.

— So sehr *bent notes* und Blues historisch als ein Modus funktioniert haben, alternative Konzeptionen der Welt nach vorne zu bringen, wie die US-afrikanisch-amerikanische Filmwissenschaftlerin Kara Keeling schreibt (Keeling 2019: 127), so sehr – so

3)

Im Anschluss an Eggers u. a. schreibe ich Schwarz groß, um das Widerständige Schwarzer Subjekte entgegen den entsubjektivierenden Konstruktionen hervorzuheben (Eggers u. a. 2005: 13).

4)

Kara Keeling merkt an, dass Jafa wie auch John Akomfrah, mit dem er in engem Austausch steht, Schwarzen Film wie Schwarze Musik machen möchte (Keeling 2019: 142).

5)

Vanessa Eileen Thompson spricht vom Polizieren als einer Praxis der Polizei, die aber über die Polizei hinausgeht und auf die Kriminalisierung Schwarzer Menschen als Prinzip des Rassismus in der Geschichte der Moderne verweist. Dieses Prinzip beruht auf der rassifizierten Grenzziehung, wonach weiße Rechtssubjekte vor denen geschützt werden müssen, die aus dem Bereich des Rechts herausgedrängt werden: Das umfasst neben Schwarzen Menschen People of Color, Rom*nija, Sint*ezza, Muslim*a und natürlich auch Juden* und Jüdinnen* (Thompson 2019: 316f.).

wird zu sehen sein – ist die Orientierung „nach vorn“ alternativen Artikulationen von Zeit unterlegen, nämlich Krümmungen und Stagnationen. Hieraus leitet sich ein Argument Schwarzer Zukünftigkeit ab, das nicht mit linearen Konzepten der Abolition oder Dekolonialität zu verwechseln ist. Dekolonialität ist demnach nicht einfach als eine vom Sog der Vergangenheit unbeeinflusste Zukunft oder als zukünftiger Bruch mit der Gegenwart zu verstehen. Stattdessen bedeute Dekolonialität, im Warten auf ihre Umsetzung zu handeln, als sei sie schon unter uns, als wäre⁶⁾ sie im Hier und Jetzt schon realisiert. Das setzt nicht nur Imaginationskräfte frei, sondern schärft auch den Blick für die in der Vergangenheit bereits aufgestoßenen Fenster antikolonialer Befreiung. Daher ist für Jafa wie auch Ligon das Archiv der Schwarzen vernakulären Kultur von großer Relevanz. In diesem Archiv liegt der Spielraum verborgen, der ermöglicht, Dekolonialität als bereits existierenden Teil unserer Gegenwart zu verankern (Keeling 2019: 49f.).

_____ Vielleicht lassen sich die Entwicklungen seit den Black Lives Matter Protesten als ein Beispiel dieser gespannten Stille inmitten der pandemischen Gesellschaft verstehen. Die Proteste gegen rassistische Polizeigewalt resonieren im nur vermeintlich leeren Raum. Inmitten des Wartens auf postpandemische Zeiten ist das Moment dekolonialer Möglichkeiten punktuell und partikular spürbar, zum Beispiel in den digitalen Gesprächsatmosphären sozialer Medien und feuilletonistischer Debatten. Wenngleich die Lautstärke des Protests in diesen Debatten abgedämpft ist, hat sich ihr Sound in eine Frequenz verwandelt, der als unruhestiftende Vibration wahrnehmbar ist. Hier bricht sich etwas frei, an das anzuknüpfen wichtig ist.

BLUES BLOOD BRUISE _____ 2015 überzog den Eingang des Zentralen Pavillons der Venedig Biennale die Neon-Installation des US-afrikanisch-amerikanischen Künstlers Glenn Ligon. *A Small Band* – so der Titel der Arbeit – reihte drei Wörter aneinander: „blues blood bruise.“ Drei Wörter und eine aufgeladene Geschichte. Zwei von ihnen bilden die Referenz auf die *Harlem Six*, sechs Schwarze männliche Jugendliche, die 1964 für Morde, die sie nicht begangen hatten, verhaftet, von der Polizei geschlagen und eingesperrt wurden (Kraynak 2018). „Blood“ und „bruise“ spielen auf einen Satz an, den Daniel Hamm, einer der Jugendlichen, sagte, als er vom Sozialarbeiter Willie Jones mit der Absicht, ihn zu entlasten, interviewt wurde. Hamm gab zu Protokoll, dass er im Gefängnis sein Bein rieb und drückte, weil er sich wünschte, die Wunden, die ihm

6)

Für Kara Keeling ist die rhetorische Figur *as if* zentral, um dekoloniale Möglichkeitsbedingungen in der Gegenwart auszuloten (Keeling 2020).



// Abbildung 1

Glenn Ligon, *A Small Band*, 2015

zugefügt wurden, ließen sich öffnen, damit Blut fließe, das zeigen würde, wie sehr er leide: „I had to, like, open the bruise up and let some blood come out to show them that I was bleeding.“ Ligon wählt für seine Installation die Worte „bruise“ und „blood“ aus dem Satz und ergänzt sie um die auditive Komponente des Blues. Mit der Ergänzung des Wortes „blues“ hebt er im Sinne der Bedeutung der gebogenen Intonation das Moment hervor, das voller Spannung ist, sich aber nicht im Fließen des Blutes entladen kann, um den Schmerz sichtbar werden zu lassen. Ähnlich wie bei der *blue note* dehnt sich Zeit aus und wird die Krümmung zu einer Stockung, die sich, mit Frantz Fanon gesprochen, als *waiting time* beschreiben lässt. Dies ist die Zeit, in der Schwarze Menschen dazu gezwungen sind, auf die Realisierung der Dekolonisierung zu warten (Fanon 1968: 7). Dazu verdammt, auf die antikoloniale Befreiung zu warten, müssen nach Fanon Schwarze Menschen Schmerz erdulden, ohne zu leiden. Damit ist gemeint, dass Schwarzen Menschen, obwohl sie brutalste Formen des Schmerzes über sich ergehen lassen müssen, kein Schmerzempfinden zugestanden wird. Das rassistische und historisch die Sklaverei legitimierende Stereotyp, Schwarze Menschen seien schmerzunempfindlicher,⁷⁾ setzt sich in Form einer ungleichen medizinischen Behandlung bis in die Gegenwart der Corona Pandemie fort. Die an COVID-19 verstorbene Schwarze Ärztin Susan Moore verwies in Videobotschaften kurz vor ihrem Tod darauf, dass sie nicht mit ausreichend Schmerzmitteln versorgt würde (Eligon 2020).

— Wenn also Hamm sagt, er wüsche sich, seine Wunden würden bluten, damit seine Verletzung sichtbar und somit anerkannt

7)

Zum Beispiel wurden im Zuge der Erfindung der modernen Gynäkologie Experimente an Schwarzen versklavten Frauen ohne Anästhesie vorgenommen (Snorton 2017: 24, Holland 2018).

würde, geht es um die Frage, wessen Schmerz und somit wessen Leben nicht zählt. Ohne dass sein Schmerz anerkannt wird, ist er in den Zustand der angespannten Erwartung versetzt, der ihn gegenüber dem kommenden Leid umso vulnerabler macht. Zu warten – so Keeling in Auseinandersetzung mit Fanons *waiting time* – bedeute schließlich „a sense of constant attentive observation that includes the body’s posture and attitude and that keeps the mind ready“ (Keeling 2007: 36). Die Notwendigkeit einer erhöhten Aufmerksamkeit erfordert, die Sensoren einzustellen, sensorisch zu sein, *sensitive*, wie Fanon schreibt (Fanon 1968: 120). Diese Sensitivität in der Dauer des Wartens bereitet den Weg, gegenüber der kolonialen Gewalt empfänglich sein zu müssen. Sie ebnet aber – wie Keeling hervorhebt – auch den Weg, sich gegenüber der dekolonialen Gesellschaft zu öffnen (Keeling 2007: 34-40). Insofern diese nach Fanon nicht antizipierbar ist, sondern sich wie eine Explosion unverhofft und unvermittelt entlädt, macht es keinen Sinn, sie – wie Samira Kawash in ihren Ausführungen zu Fanons Terminologie der dekolonialen Explosion verdeutlicht (Kawash 1999: 239f.) – innerhalb von *agency* und Repräsentation zu vermuten. Eher ermögliche die aufgrund von *waiting time* intensivierte Sensitivität, sich affektiv ins Verhältnis zur unverhofften Entladung der Dekolonisierung zu setzen – so als wäre sie bereits da. Hiermit komme ich dem Affektiven der mit der *blue*-Note apostrophierten, gedehnten Zeit des Wartens näher und betrachte die durch Ligons *blues*-Referenz hervorgehobene affektive Dimension der sonst auf Lesbarkeit beruhenden Installation als Potenzial der Annäherung an die dekoloniale Explosion.

COME OUT — Die auf der Venedig Biennale gezeigte Installation ist die Fortführung der künstlerischen Auseinandersetzung Ligons mit den *Harlem Six* und speziell der sinnlich wahrnehmbaren Frequenz des sich nicht entladen könnenden Schmerzes Daniel Hamms. Die Installation greift Worte aus dem Satz Hamms auf, der auch Ligons Serie *Come Out* aus den Jahren 2014/2015 zugrunde liegt. *Come Out* ist die malerische Auseinandersetzung mit der gleichnamigen Komposition Steve Reichs (1966), die die rassistisch motivierte Polizeigewalt gegenüber den Harlem Six und den sogenannten *Little Fruit Stand Riot* musikalisch verarbeitet.⁸⁾ Auf Anfrage hatte der weiße US-amerikanische Komponist Reich anlässlich eines Benefizkonzerts zur Finanzierung der Wiederaufnahme des Gerichtsprozesses der Harlem Six 1966 die Interviewsequenz zum Ausgang seiner experimentellen Komposition gemacht, in der Hamm zur Aussage gibt, sichtbar bluten

8)

Siehe Youtube Steve Reich,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0WVh1DON50> (2.3.2021)



// Abbildung 2
Glenn Ligon, *Come Out Study #2*, 2014

zu wollen, um der rassistischen Gewalt und seinem Schmerz Ausdruck zu verleihen. Angelehnt an das Sampling des Satzes, das sich in der Komposition zu einer Geräusch- vielmehr Noise-Kulisse verdichtet, spürt auch Ligon – wenngleich im stillen Medium der Malerei – dem mehr fühl-, als lesbaren Echo der Worte nach. Durch die Übereinanderschichtung der Worte fällt das Lesen schwer und ähneln die im Bild zwar einer Struktur folgenden, aber sich verunklarenden Buchstaben dem synkopierten Rhythmus der Komposition Reichs. In Reichs Stück erzeugt die Auslassung von Vokalen und die zunehmende Betonung sonst unbetonter Schläge eine Spannung, die sich als Ausdehnung der Zeit des Wartens verstehen lässt. Insbesondere aufgrund der Verdichtung von „come“ wird der Eindruck verstärkt, Schwarzsein sei immer auf die Gegenwart des „Kommens“ beschränkt, nie aber auf die des Ankommens oder Überkommens der kolonialen Gesellschaft. Hinzukommt, dass die Worte „come“ und „show“ auf ihre Konsonanten reduziert werden und so die lautmalerische Komponente von Sprache hervorgearbeitet wird. Insofern Onomatopöie eine Klangfigur ist, die der Steigerung oder Intensivierung des Ausdrucks dient, der an dieser Stelle schon längst keiner mehr des rein rational fasslichen Inhalts ist, wird die sinnlich-affektive Ebene in der gedehnten Zeit des Kommens oder Wartens betont. Die dekoloniale Explosion kann aufgrund der sinnlichen Intensivierung in greifbare Nähe gefühlt werden.

— Die sich durch fehlende Leserlichkeit einstellende Sinnlichkeit der Malerei Lignons in *Come Out* adressiert diese dichte und

aufgeladene, gespannte Zeit des Wartens, um sich der dekolonialen Explosion affektiv anzunähern, ohne sicher sein zu können, dass sie jemals kommt.

—— Die gedehnte Gegenwart des Kommens einer dekolonialen Explosion verschränkt sich dabei mit Fragen von Geschlecht und Sexualität. Der Titel der Serie *Come Out* lässt sich schließlich auch auf die Frage des Outings einer nicht-heteronormativen Schwarzen Männlichkeit verstehen, eine Frage, die mindestens im Werk des schwulen Künstlers Glenn Ligon eine Rolle spielt. Zusammengekommen mit der Komposition Reichs wird jedoch das Augenmerk auf den Moment gelegt, der noch vor dem endgültigen Outing lokalisiert ist. Weil Reich den gesamten Satz Hamms auf das Wort „come“ zulaufen lässt, wird auf eine Zeitlichkeit gedrängt, die sich der Endgültigkeit einer sexuellen Identifizierung oder auch geschlechtlichen Positionierung entzieht. Das Outing erfolgt im Präsenz des Kommens und ist ähnlich ungewiss gegenüber der Zukunft wie die Dekolonisation. Und nicht nur das: Indem sich zum Schluss das Wort „come“ in einem angetriebenen Tempo zum Klang des Buchstaben „c“ [wie dt. k] verdichtet, werden Geschlecht und Sexualität als Begehren und in ihren affektiven Dimensionen erfahrbar. Ligon übersetzt diese Affektivität in seinen Bildern als Farbverläufe. Verschmierte Buchstaben bilden das Reservoir eines auf Flüssigkeitsaustausch beharrenden *dirty sex*. Damit im Zusammenhang steht ein Verhältnis zu Sexualität, nicht als Identitätsbeschaffer, sondern queere Explosion. Diese ist ähnlich unerwartbar und nicht abschließbar, wie die dekoloniale Explosion nach Fanon. Dass diese Unabschließbarkeit von geschlechtlicher und sexueller Identität bei Ligon relevant ist, verdeutlichen seine vielen Arbeiten, die auch im Zuge der post-Black-Bewegung als dekonstruktive Abstrahierungen Schwarzer Männlichkeit gelesen wurden, wie ich an anderer Stelle am Beispiel von *A Feast of Scraps* (1994–1998) verdeutlicht habe (Köppert 2020).

LOVE IS THE MESSAGE – THE MESSAGE IS DEATH —— Auch Arthur Jafa – wenngleich im filmischen Medium – thematisiert in seiner Arbeit *Love is the Message – the Message is Death* (2016) Schwarze Männlichkeit in der durch Krümmung gedehnten Temporalität des Wartens auf Dekolonisierung, die bezogen auf Geschlecht und Sexualität bedeuten würde, sich von dem rassistischen Stereotyp des Sexualstraftäters und dem durch Black Nationalism hervorgebrachten Bild der durchaus brutalisierten Wehrhaftigkeit befreien zu können. Stattdessen stellt den Auftakt des zum Song *Ultra-light Beam* (2016) von Kanye West

montierten Films der Auszug eines 2013 viral gegangenes YouTube-Videos dar, der Charles Ramsey zeigt, als er einem Reporter sagt: „I knew something was wrong when a little pretty white girl ran into a Black man’s arms. Something is wrong here.“ Die Ungläubigkeit, ein weißes Mädchen könne einem Schwarzen Mann begegnen, ohne dass sich dieser an ihr vergehe, markiert unmissverständlich, wie virulent noch immer das Vorurteil des Schwarzen Vergewaltigers ist und wie sehr das Stereotyp in die rassistische Polizierung Schwarzer Männlichkeit verstrickt ist. Die brutale Ermordung Emmett Tills 1955 war nur der vorläufige Höhepunkt der Lynchjustiz in den USA. Sie hat sich seitdem in das vermeintlich gesetzliche System einer brutalisierten Polizeiarbeit eingelagert, die, wie wir im Film Jafas sehen, offene Gewalt ebenso umfasst wie kaltblütige Erschießungen zum Beispiel Walter Scotts (von den – wenngleich nicht im Film zu sehenden – Bildern der Erstickung zum Beispiel Eric Garners und George Floyds ganz zu schweigen).

— Dem stellt Jafa jedoch Bildausschnitte zur Seite, die auf die Inkorporierung einer solchen auf Schwarze Männlichkeit einwirkenden Gewalt gleichermaßen anspielen wie auf die im Zuge der Black Panther Bewegung explizite Bezugnahme auf Gewalt als Mittel der Gegenwehr (Keeling 2007: 68-94). So ist in einer Szene ein Schwarzer Jugendlicher zu sehen, der eine Schwarze Frau anbrüllt und ihr unvermittelt ins Gesicht schlägt. Aber auch die vielen Einspieler Schwarzer Sportler verhandeln Schwarze Männlichkeit im Bild der Stärke und des im Kontext weißer Suprematie reduzierten Identifikationsangebots geschlechtlichen Ausdrucks (Hall 2004).

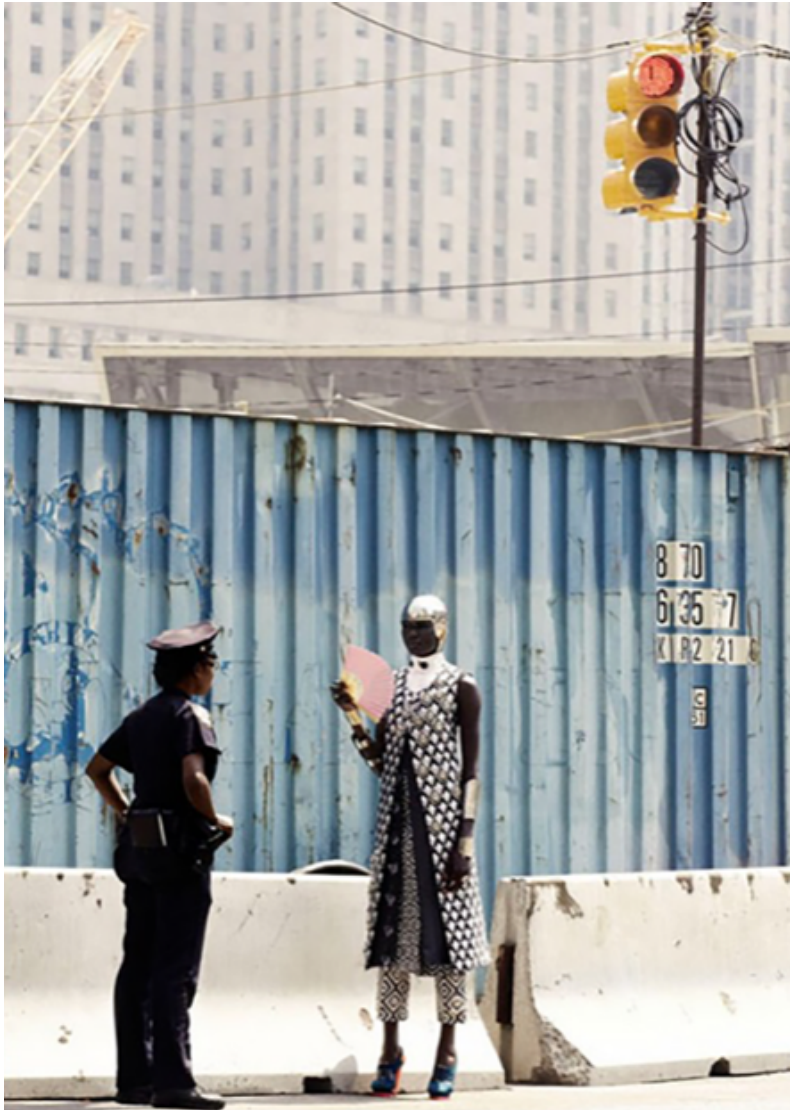
— Die Montage der Identifikationsschablonen, die Schwarze Männlichkeit an kolonialrassistische Vorstellungswelten bindet, wird jedoch mit einer sich an der *blue note* orientierenden Rhythmisierung der Bilder vorgenommen, die – so meine ich – affektiv an Dekolonialität anschließen lässt, wenngleich sie in weiter Ferne scheint. Tatsächlich wird der Soundtrack des Films – Kanye Wests Song – immer wieder gedehnt und verlangsamt, sodass der Moment des Voranschreitens umso unverhoffter, umso explosiver erscheint. Blues als Mittel der Synkopierung des Films knüpft an die Zeit des Wartens auf dekoloniale Befreiung an, um im Loop der Pause die Vibration einer anderen Welt, einer anderen Schwarzen Männlichkeit zu spüren. Einer Männlichkeit auch, die Schwarze Weiblichkeit anders als – wie Angela Davis schreibt – entweder matriarchal-mütterliche oder viktimisierte begreift (Davis 1971). Daher und hiermit möchte ich zum Ende kommen,



// Abbildung 3

Jonathan Bachman, *Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge*, 2016

ist die Fotografie, die Ieshia Evans am 12. Juli 2016 in Baton Rouge zeigt, der Denkraum für diesen Text. Für mich figuriert Ieshia Evans eine Schwarze feministische Politik des Anhaltens und der Stagnation, die auf die Möglichkeit inmitten der durch die auf sie zustürmenden Polizisten artikulierten Unmöglichkeit dekolonialer Explosion verweist. Die für mich mit der *bent note* in Kongruenz stehende Stasis betrachte ich als Ausdruck des *as if* (Keeling 2020). Evans tritt den Polizisten gegenüber, als wäre sie schon frei. Durch das allen vernünftigen Überlegungen widerstrebende und Evans gefährdende Stillstehen wird die rassistische Politik des Anhaltens Schwarzer Menschen, um sie zu profilieren, in ihrer nekropolitischen Dimension entlarvt. Statt vor der Polizei wegzurennen, zu flüchten und aus der Puste zu kommen, das – wie Vanessa Eileen Thompson schreibt – unmittelbar auch an die Erfahrung des Ersticken-Müssens heranführt (Thompson 2020), bleibt sie stehen, begibt sie sich in Gefahr – und kann doch atmen. Insofern scheint mir die Politik des Anhaltens im Sinne der *bent note* eine gewissermaßen afro-futuristische Technologie zu sein, die wir hier im Bild zum Ausdruck gebracht, Imaginationen in der Gegenwart eines an sich imaginationslosen Komplexes rassistischer Polizierung erlaubt.



// Abbildung 4

Julia Noni, *City Dweller*, 2012

/ Abstract

Der Beitrag befasst sich anhand künstlerischer Arbeiten von Arthur Jafa und Glenn Ligon mit dem im Kontext der Schwarzen Intonation wichtigen Konzept der *bent notes*. Auf Grundlage der Temporalität dieser gekrümmten Noten wird eine Perspektive entwickelt, die im Komplex rassistischer „Polizierungen“ an dekoloniale Möglichkeitsräume heranführt.

// Literaturverzeichnis

- Arndt, Susan (2005): Mythen des *weißen* Subjekts: Verleugnung und Hierarchisierung von Rassismus. In: Eggers, Maureen Maisha / Kilomba, Grada / Piesche, Peggy / Arndt, Susan (Hg.): Mythen, Masken und Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland, Münster, Unrast, S. 340–362.
- Camp, Tina (2017): *Listening to Images*. Durham / London: Duke University Press.
- Castro Varela, María do Mar / Dhawan, Nikita (2015): Postkoloniale Theorie kritisch betrachtet. In: dies.: *Postkoloniale Theorie. Eine kritische Einführung*. Bielefeld, transcript, S. 285–338.
- Davis, Angela (1971): Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves. In: *The Black Scholar* Jg. 3, H. 4, S. 2–15.
- Eggers, Maureen Maisha / Kilomba, Grada / Piesche, Peggy / Arndt, Susan (2005): Konzeptuelle

- Überlegungen. In: dies. (Hg.): *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland*, Münster, Unrast, S. 11–13.
- El-Tayeb, Fatima / Thompson, Vanessa Eileen (2019): *Alltagsrassismus, staatliche Gewalt und koloniale Tradition. Ein Gespräch über Racial Profiling und intersektionale Widerstände in Europa*. In: Baile, Mohamed Wa / Dankwa, Serena O. / Naguib, Tarek / Purtschert, Patricia / Schilliger, Sarah (Hg.): *Racial Profiling. Struktureller Rassismus und antirassistischer Widerstand*, Bielefeld, transcript, S. 311–328.
- Fanon, Frantz (1968): *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York, Grove Press.
- Eligon, John (2020): *Black Doctor Dies of Covid-19 After Complaining of Racist Treatment*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/23/us/susan-moore-black-doctor-indiana.html> (19.2.2021).
- Gebreyesus, Ruth (2018): *Why the film-maker behind Love Is the Message is turning his lens to whiteness*. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/dec/11/arthur-jafa-video-artist-love-is-the-message> (26.2.2021).
- Hall, Stuart (1997): *Wann war „der Postkolonialismus“? Denken an der Grenze*. In: ders.: *Hybride Kulturen*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, S. 219–249.
- Hall, Stuart (2004): *Das Spektakel des Anderen*. In: ders.: *Ideologie – Identität – Repräsentation*. Hamburg, Argument, S. 108–166.
- Holland, Brynn (2018): *The “Father of Modern Gynecology” Performed Shocking Experiments on Enslaved Women*. <https://www.history.com/news/the-father-of-modern-gynecology-performed-shocking-experiments-on-slaves> (19.2.2021).
- Jafa, Arthur (1998): *Black Visual Intonation*. In: O’Meally, Robert (Hg.): *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, New York, Colombia University Press, S. 264–268.
- Kawash, Samira (1999): *Terrorists and Vampires: Fanon’s Spectral Violence of Decolonization*. In: Alessandrini, Anthony C. (Hg.): *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, New York, Routledge, S. 237–257.
- Keeling, Kara (2007): *The Witch’s Flight. The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*, Durham / London: Duke University Press.
- Keeling, Kara (2019): *Queer Times, Black Futures*, New York, New York University Press.
- Keeling, Kara (2020): *Queer Times, Black Futures*, Vortrag v. 1.12.2020, Medien / Denken, ifm kolloquium, Ruhr-Universität Bochum.
- Köppert, Katrin (2020): *Modalitäten der Stille. Queerness, Fotografie und post-black art*. In: *Fotogeschichte* Jg. 40, H. 155, S. 35–42.
- Kraynak, Janet (2018): *Hot to Hear What is Not Heard: Glenn Ligon, Steve Reich, And the Audible Past*. In: *Grey Room* Jg. 70, H. Winter 2018, S. 54–79.
- L’Official, Peter (2018): *The Visual Frequency of Black Life*. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/07/12/the-visual-frequency-of-black-life/> (19.2.2021).
- Muhammad, Ismail (2019): *Whiteness and Aesthetic Failure: Arthur Jafa’s *The White Album**. <https://openspace.sfmoma.org/2019/02/whiteness-and-aesthetic-failure-arthur-jafas-the-white-album/> (19.1.2021).
- Snorton, C. Riley (2017): *Black on Both Sides. A Radical History of Trans Identity*, Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Thompson, Vanessa Eileen (2020): *Die Verunmöglichung von Atmen*. <https://heimatkunde.boell.de/de/2020/09/02/die-verunmoeglichung-von-atmen> (19.2.2021).
- Thompson, Vanessa Eileen (2020): *Digital Racial Profiling. Deutsches Transkript des Podcastes: Feminismus ist systemrelevant #002*. <https://www.gwi-boell.de/de/2020/09/28/transkript-digital-racial-profiling> (19.2.2021).
- Trebing, Saskia (2019): *In interessanten Zeiten leben. Löwe für Arthur Jafa*. <https://www.monopol-magazin.de/arthur-jafa-goldener-loewe> (19.2.2021).

// **Abbildungsverzeichnis**

- Abb. 1: Glenn Ligon, *A Small Band*, 2015, Installationsansicht, Neon, Farbe und Metallhalterung, 3 Komponenten: „blues“ 74.75 x 231 inches; „blood“ 74.75 x 231.5 inches; „bruise“ 74.75 x 264.75 inches; insgesamt ca. 74.75 x 797.5 inches (189.9 x 2025.7 cm); Collection of Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Photographer Credit: Roberto Marossi | Courtesy of Rebuild Foundation © Glenn Ligon; Courtesy of the artist, Hauser & Wirth, New York, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, and Chantal Crousel, Paris.
- Abb. 2: Glenn Ligon, *Come Out Study #2*, 2014, Siebdruck auf Leinwand, 35.63 x 48.63 inches (90.49 x 123.51 cm); Photographer Credit: Thomas Dane © Glenn Ligon; Courtesy of the artist, Hauser & Wirth, New York, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, Thomas Dane Gallery, London and Chantal Crousel, Paris.
- Abb. 3: Jonathan Bachman, *Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge*, 2016, Reuters, Fair Use, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Taking_a_Stand_in_Baton_Rouge.jpg (02.03.2021).
- Abb. 4: Julia Noni, *City Dweller*, *Obsession Magazine* 2012.

// Angaben zur Autor*in

Katrin Köppert ist Kunst- und Medienwissenschaftlerin. Seit Oktober 2019 ist sie Juniorprofessorin für Kunstgeschichte / populäre Kulturen an der Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig. Zu den Arbeitsschwerpunkten zählen Queer Media Theory, Affect Studies und politische Gefühle, Digitale Feminismen und Kunst, Post-, und Dekoloniale (Medien-)Theorien des Anthropozäns, Gender, Race und Fotografie. Sie leitet mit Julia Bee das DFG-Forschungsnetzwerk *Gender, Medien und Affekt*. Zuletzt erschienen ist u.a. die Monographie *Queer Pain. Schmerz als Solidarisierung, Fotografie als Affizierung*, Berlin: Neofelis.

// FKW wird gefördert durch das Mariann Steegmann Institut und Cultural Critique / Kulturanalyse in den Künsten ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann // www.fkw-journal.de

// Lizenz

Der Text ist lizenziert unter der CC-BY-NC-ND Lizenz 4.0 International. Der Lizenzvertrag ist abrufbar unter: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.de>

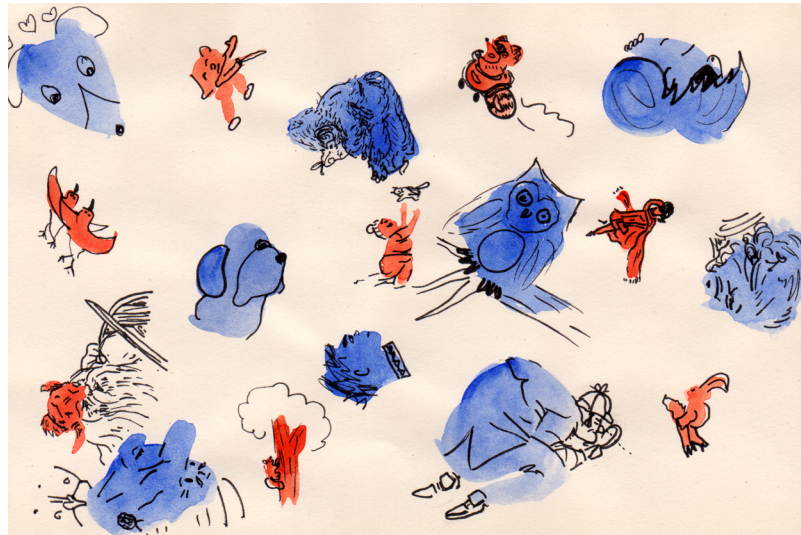


THE SOUND OF SILENCE

“What does a pandemic sound like?” was never a question I thought I would have to ask myself and I don’t think it’s a stretch to say that I am not the only person to have this thought.

— With no foreseeable end in sight and a very confused government with consistently shifting policies, it’s hard to imagine a world where you would have a room full of punks crammed into a basement and even if you/I/we would ever feel safe in that environment again. If someone now stands too close to me on the street, I turn away out of paranoia. I don’t like being in a room with more than four people. This is the new normal.

— Before the new normal, I was a musician and researcher focused on looking at punk as a diasporic decolonial art practice... Basically, I start bands as art projects and try to write about it. This was actually still pretty new, well, the writing part. I have been an artist and musician for many years, entering academia was the new part. As you can imagine, for an early career researcher, reconfiguring this sort of qualitative and collaborative research in the time of social distancing seemed impossible. I felt lost in my practice, in my work, and also in myself. I miss shows. I miss the visceral energy of sharing music and space with people. I miss responding to an excited crowd of people, making banter between us and feeling a sense of community. Things change and I have faith we will hold that space again, but at the moment I have to return to the question....



// Figure 1
Untitled by Nadia Buyse and Joe Blann

“WHAT DOES A PANDEMIC SOUND LIKE?”

— I spent those first few weeks accepting that everything I had been working on had come to an end and I couldn’t rush it or find a new way to proceed. All I could do is sit with it. In the first weeks of lockdown I would spend hours just sitting in a chair, listening to the radio. Radio Gold or Absolute ‘60s; those two were my favorites. But the thing about radio is that the same songs get repeated quite

often, as if the same 586 songs were on a sort of non-stop shuffle loop. I heard “Judy in Disguise” by John Fred and His Playboy Band at least once a day for six weeks straight. Every time it came on I would change the lyrics in the chorus in my head:

“JUDY IN THIS GUY”

“JUDY’S GETTING HIGH”

“JUDY’S EATING THAI”

— Where the song just became an expression of syllables and tonal articulations, utter and total nonsense.

IS THIS WHAT A PANDEMIC SOUNDS LIKE?

— Where I once moved through streets to get from point A to B, where I would hear the sounds around me and the shift they made as I passed by car/bus/foot. I am now acutely aware of every neighbor’s home DIY project as I hear the sounds of power tools and weed whackers, lads on scaffolds, home deliveries of cumbersome packages that require a small group of movers to discuss loudly whether they need to take



// Figure 2
Untitled by Nadia Buyse and Joe Blann

it through the back or not. I stand still as it moves around me, a cacophony of home improvement. I look into my own home, which is filled with expectations it never dealt with before: How do you work as an office? How do you work as a gym? How do you work as a cocktail lounge? I share the space with my partner, and unless one of us is in the bathroom we are always holding space within the same four walls. People wonder how we can be in lockdown in such a small place together, but you’d be surprised at the privacy you can find staring out a window as your thoughts wander and you ask yourself rhetorical questions like

“WHAT DOES A PANDEMIC SOUND LIKE?”

— I tried to attend/participate/perform in online events; only the ones that seemed like the money would go to a good cause or where I was invited by people I loved. Oftentimes the sound was of poor quality, or there was a lag in the synchronization of image and sound that was the product of an overworked router. Frequencies lost, feedback from the speakers of a person who didn't mute themselves at a Zoom show, a hot microphone through a guitar amp through a computer speaker... I had to disconnect. Tried to restart the live feed but now I am two minutes behind.

IS THIS WHAT A PANDEMIC SOUNDS LIKE?

— What about the music I've written in this time? What about the songs I sing to myself? To me it doesn't sound like much until

I play it with or to someone else. How can one be self-possessed and so dependent on an exchange activated by others? Without that exchange it sounds like a degree above silence to me, the echoes of my own brain a little louder for no one to hear except my partner who shares this space, who doesn't get the experience of me performing for/to/with them, but rather is berated by my awkward melodies as I work out lyrics and chord progressions. And what do I do with the music I write at this time? Do I put it into the world, sponsor an ad, get a PR agent to get me into the right publications? Do I debut my overwrought highly anticipated pop album over an Instagram feed or live tweet listening party? Do I claim that it is the sound of a revolution or the voice of a generation? Or what a pandemic sounds like?!

— I don't know. And at some point I stopped asking. I stopped thinking. I stopped planning. I started to ritualize my days not by appointments or obligations; but rather by daily basic impulses such as “this is the part of the day when I have a tea,” “this is the part of the day when I read,” “this is the part of the day when I open the windows and smoke a cigarette.” The rituals manifested themselves in other areas in my art practice. My husband had



// Figure 3
Untitled by Nadia Buyse and Joe Blann

introduced me to the book Hirameki by Peng & Hu (2016). This interactive book showed you the possibilities of making drawings out of blots; similar to imagining the shapes of clouds but then drawing it in. We became obsessed. We spent hours upon hours water coloring abstract forms and turning them into drawings. Drawing this way reminded me of musical improvisation, you take cues from the people you're playing with, Joe would paint an orange blob and I would see a cat with a mohawk in it. It was in these moments of improvisation and creation that I could get a bit of reconciliation in my COVID provoked broken relationship with my practice and research. I could let go of the control, the plan, the order. I could rely on intuition and ritualistic self-care to go back within myself and ask...

“WHAT DOES A PANDEMIC SOUND LIKE?”

// References

Peng & Hu (2016): Hirameki: Draw What You See, London, Thames & Hudson.

Image Credits

Fig.1–3: “Untitled,” © Nadia Buyse and Joe Blann

// About the Author

Nadia Buyse (She/her) is a cultural activist who makes bands as art projects ([DUBAIS](#), [Snoozers](#), to name a couple). She currently resides in Brighton, UK where she is a community artist and Curator at [ONCA](#) and is undertaking a PhD at the University of Sussex around punk practice in post diaspora.

// FKW is supported by the Mariann Steegmann Institute and Cultural Critique / Cultural Analysis in the Arts ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann / www.fkw-journal.de

// License

This work is licensed under the CC-BY-NC-ND License 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>



THE LIMITS OF LISTENING: THREE CONVERSATIONS ON SOUND PRACTICE DURING A COVID-19 LOCKDOWN¹⁾

“We still want to keep up with musicians and djs around, and as we feel that digitals streams are irretrievably lacking the social energy of live music events and are not able to compensate for it, we are looking for consolation in words,” writes Viennese experimental electronic music curator, promoter, and dj Shilla Strelka when launching the interview series *Insides* on her platform STRUMA+IODINE in late April 2020.²⁾ Strelka is speaking at the height of what residents in the region should remember as their first in a series of COVID-19 lockdowns, which abruptly and effectively shut down most forms of public artistic life relevant for musicians and performers in physical spaces from March 16, 2020 onward.³⁾ Her post captures a sentiment that was widely shared at the time in my own bubble of DIY punk musicians, synth wavers, and other artists performing with their bodies and with sound: that playing online, though often the only opportunity left to play at all, was a poor substitute for running a show in a physical venue, in assembly with and close proximity to a live, equally corporeal audience.

— In my circles, the loss experienced did not just concern the professional aspects of being a musician and/or performer working in Vienna (including the loss of income, though this remains a crucial problem too), but also the loss of a sense of personal connection. In large part, the small, specialized ‘scenes’ that crowd around local venues, like Venster99, or labels, like unrecords, form an extended network of friends, acquaintances, collaborators, and mutual fans who know and often also genuinely care about each other’s personal lives, and who are used to connecting regularly at live events. Many of these relationships are close enough that one would talk for an hour when bumping into each other at a club, but too casual to warrant a video call or an outdoor walk-and-talk date, which during lockdowns meant that people would usually lose touch completely. Between April and June 2020, *Insides* alleviated this sense of disintegration by posting forty-nine short interviews asking fifty-one electronic musicians with strong local ties how they spent their time now, how the pandemic affected their work and productivity, and how they were dealing with the restrictions on playing shows. Strelka’s collection is a timely document, granting insights to the wide range of very different coping strategies that a small sample of Viennese musicians came up with early on,

1)

Funding note: this and the following three articles were completed as part of the Elise Richter project “Situating Cinematics: Materialities of Sound in Audiovisual Art Acts,” Austrian Science Fund (FWF): V770-G.

2)

<https://strumaandiodine.wordpress.com/2020/04/23/insides/> (18 February 2021)

3)

In Austria, venues remained closed from March 13 to May 2020. Seated indoor shows for a very limited number of people were possible between May and October 2020, which allowed theaters and live music venues that could implement the regulations to host events during that time. Clubs and music venues whose concepts or economic situation depended on hosting a larger number of people – or on audiences being able to freely move, for instance, because of dancing – mostly remained closed even during the months with lighter COVID-19 regulations. All cultural venues – including clubs, theaters, and museums – were closed down again in November 2020 for a second and then third lockdown that lasted until February 8, 2021. While museums were open at the time of writing this article in February 2021, all music venues, theaters, and clubs were still shut.

after severe COVID-19 restrictions had been imposed upon their work for the first time. It lays no claim to offering a comprehensive analysis or assessment of its present situation – which was, after all, not only unprecedented (and thus hard to process) for many of the artists featured, but very obviously also still ongoing, with uncertain outcome.

——— To me, Strelka’s interview series not only provided much needed “consolation in words” during long stretches of social isolation, but was also the spark that inspired me to edit and co-author this section of the present issue of FKW. When revisiting *Insidest* for updates throughout last spring, I frequently imagined having to write about the 2020 lockdowns as a different person, in the future, and realized what a welcome empirical resource the format could offer for later engagement with the current crisis. Its commitment to recording what *could* be known at its present moment, while fully accepting that this knowledge was necessarily limited, helped shape my decision to assemble a similar resource for this special issue of FKW. Taking *Insidest* as a cue, the following pages compile three conversations with four artists who are based in Vienna, who play/perform with/study/teach/research sound and listening, whose work I admire, and whose artistic, personal, and political strategies of working with sound within the present challenges I was wildly and longingly curious about while having to keep my physical distance.

——— In September 2020, I met performance artist Denise Palmieri, noid (Arnold Haberl) and Christine Schörkhuber of the digital venue echoraume, and Zosia Hołubowska of the queer feminist electronic music collective Sounds Queer? for one long (60 minutes plus) talk each about their sound practice since COVID-19. We talked along a semi-structured catalogue of questions, organizing each conversation around three topics: what role does sound and listening play in the co-authors’ current artistic, curatorial, and pedagogic practice? What sound and listening spaces are they creating in their work, and how does the necessary move to digital means of connection co-shape these spaces? How can listening – as a practice and concept that possibly, and arguably, escapes the power structures that dominate large parts of the visual field – invite egalitarian ways of relating to each other? As will become apparent in my discussion below, the questions were open enough for each artist to take them into the directions that were most important to them. Each conversation was sound recorded, transcribed in full by me, and later edited for clarity and length in a collaboration with all authors. Though formally and methodologically different (they are longer

and more in-depth, and the results of a months-long process of spoken and written exchange) and not as large in sample size (they offer five points of audition, instead of fifty-one), our collection of texts shares with Strelka's *Insides* the awareness that we, the authors, did not yet know enough to give comprehensive explanations, but that we would need to document our present processes and insights if we wanted to make sense with them in times to come.

SITUATING 'LISTENING' — As temporary and preliminary utterances, the following texts probe into particular, and differing, experiences of listening. As the titles of the respective conversations indicate, Denise Palmieri, noid and Christine Schörkhuber, and Zosia Hołubowska needed and wanted to address what limited and challenged their artistic/aesthetic, social, and political agency in their current sound work, and they amplified that these limits were demarcated by questions of space and power. This did not come as a surprise, as all four artists are, in addition to and in dialogue with their pursuit of aesthetic practices that could empower them individually as producing subjects, also activists in a more 'traditionally' political realm: they lobby for political change through representation.

— Denise Palmieri is co-president of the Austrian Association of Women Artists (VBKÖ), which dates back to 1910 and has maintained a feminist work and exhibition space in Vienna's first district since then. Highly aware of the classism and imperialist, National Socialist, and ensuing structural racisms that are part and parcel of many strains of historical and present-day Austrian feminisms, and especially also of their own history of becoming,⁴⁾ VBKÖ now hosts queer feminist activities that reflect on these entanglements and amplify voices that remain marginalized in Austrian art scenes and institutions. In 2019, VBKÖ premiered *Gorgonx*,⁵⁾ a group work developed by Denise Palmieri, Naya Freire/Tieta Lux, Ivy Monteiro, and Mavi Veloso that confronts – in song, dance, lip-syncing, poetic recitation, and a final noisy fireworks of money-shaped confetti, green slime, and hard Euro cash – the invisibilities the artists find themselves expected to inhabit as trans* and gender non-conforming Brazilian immigrants of color in Europe. Palmieri's position with the association reflects a central interest of her solo work, which has long employed vocalizing as both artistic tool and crucial site of inquiry. In performances like *As Lived Our Parents* (Kunsthalle Wien, 2015),⁶⁾ *Almost Naked*, *Almost Black* (Q21 Vienna, 2017),⁷⁾ and in the video works based on her live pieces,⁸⁾ Palmieri contrasts her singing of pop songs,

4) <https://www.vbkoe.org/home/?lang=en> (18 February 2021)

5) <https://www.denisepalmieri.net/gorgonxs>, <https://www.vbkoe.org/2019/07/15/gorgonxs/> (18 February 2021)

6) <https://www.denisepalmieri.net/as-lived-our-parents>, <https://kunsthallewien.at/en/exhibition/destination-vienna-2015/> (18 February 18 2021)

7) <https://www.denisepalmieri.net/quase-negra-quase-nua>; <https://www.mqw.at/en/institutions/q21/frei-raum-q21-exhibition-space/2017/06/welt-kompakt/> (18 February 2021)

8) http://avstream.akbild.ac.at/eyebase/eyebase.data.offline/mandant_1/avmedien/1/1/00011062_1.mp4 (18 February 2021)

as a seemingly universally intelligible and lighthearted form of communication with her audience, with a demonstration of how synchronically symbolic and corporeal objects (Austrian Imperial architecture, a cloak and a *Dirndl*⁹⁾ drenched in plaster slowly hardening as the show progresses) facilitate the audience reading her body as gendered, racialized, sexualized, and fetishized, thus relentlessly fixing her in place. The current artistic and political projects she spoke about with me for this volume of *FKW* continue to vocally counter projections of ‘the human voice’ as a given means of agency that was universally granted and equally accessible to, literally and figuratively, every-body alike.

_____ noid and Christine Schörkhuber are active in the lobby group *mitderstadtreden* (‘talking to the city’), which since 2017 has negotiated with the City Government of Vienna about more, and more programmatic, public funding for experimental, DIY, and contemporary music (‘neue Musik’). Aiming to act as ‘the mouthpiece of Austria’s free music scene,’¹⁰⁾ the group wants to heighten local policy-makers’ sensibility for concerns like fair pay for self-employed artists, and the need for independently run performance spaces for musicians with little or no access to commercial markets. noid and Schörkhuber take part in *mitderstadtreden*’s work group for the provision of performance spaces (AG Räume), which addresses the disastrous consequences that corporate real estate ‘development’ and property speculation by private business ventures bear on non-commercial, self-organized Vienna venues. *Steinergasse*, for instance, which has long hosted noid’s concert series *der bloede dritte mittwoch*,¹¹⁾ was recently sold to investors, and will very likely shut down in late 2021. *Echoraum*, which remains an important cooperation partner for Schörkhuber’s festival *Klangmanifeste*,¹²⁾ was under serious threat in 2017. *mo.ë* *Thelemangasse*, which has offered a space for larger cooperations between experimental artists and activists since 2010, was lost to real estate speculators in 2017 and has stood empty ever since.¹³⁾ By holding their wishes for autonomously run, trans-disciplinary centers for experimental and DIY (sound) art, and an interest in keeping local rents affordable for all tenants and neighbors, as two equally important aspects of the same struggle for a communal right to the city, these and other precarious, self-organized physical venue projects in Vienna often try to link artistic practice to broader community politics. The virtual venue *echoraume*, which noid and Schörkhuber co-organize in a larger collective and which we spoke about for our text in this volume, pursues similar goals for the Internet, which, as the only performance space available at the

9)

Dirndl is a German and Austrian national costume for women* which was invented by fashion designers in the 1930s, and instrumentalized by the National Socialist and Austro Fascist regimes to propagate the idea of a ‘Germanness’ that was historically, culturally, and racially unified by a shared pre-modern, rural tradition. See Elsbeth Wallnöfer, 2020, *Tracht Macht Politik*, Innsbruck: Haymon.

10)

“Sprachrohr der freien Musikszene Österreichs”: <https://mitderstadtreden.at/aktivitaeten/> (18 February 2021)

11)

<http://bloedermittwoch.klingt.org/> (18 February 2021)

12)

<http://www.klangmanifeste.at> (18 February 2021)

13)

Alisa Beck and Marie-Christine Rissinger (ed.) 2019: *Die Akte mo.ë. Protokolle einer abgesagten Zukunft*. Vienna: edition mono/monochrom.

time of COVID-19 regulations, has gained importance when physical locations shut down. Looking to open up opportunities beyond the proprietary offerings of companies like YouTube and Zoom, the echoraume team asks how to build and maintain self-organized, distributed performance platforms that manage to keep non-commercial artists and organizers in the loop, while at the same time affording a level of control over the means of production and (re-) presentation that compares to the physical DIY venues they had to temporarily and/or permanently leave behind.

— Zosia Hołubowska's community work, which takes place across a number of collectives in local and international contexts, seeks to empower women*, trans*, queer, non-binary, gender-non-conforming electronic musicians by sharing knowledge and tools for self-expression and promoting their work. Their main activist format is providing education and disseminating information: in lectures, radio shows, and workshops, they teach how to compose and produce with analog and digital sound synthesis, as well as how to listen more closely to the muffled histories of early synthesizer development by female and non-binary artists and engineers, and to overheard contemporary music histories as they are written today by queer artists working in DIY electronic music production. Hołubowska co-runs the Polish platform Oramics,¹⁴⁾ which empowers women*, non-binary and queer artists and promotes the Eastern European electronic music scene. Most recently, the Oramics organizers have used their platform to raise awareness for Belarussian and Polish activists rallying against repression from their authoritarian national governments.¹⁵⁾ Hołubowska's Vienna-based collective Sounds Queer?, which they talk about in our co-authored text (and which also delivers the edition for this issue of FKW, see Birgit Michlmayr's text), provides low-cost, low-threshold access to shared hardware and shared knowledge for prospective and practicing musicians of all levels, and organizes shows and jams that pay attention to how the emotional and material labor of sounding and listening (cf. Thompson 2018) could be distributed in novel, more mutually empowering ways among musicians, audiences, and facilitators. With their solo project Mala Herba, Hołubowska reworks archival traditional songs from Eastern Europe by resounding their vibrations with their body and their synths to craft them into hard-hitting dance hymns about pulverizing the borders of present-day nation states and gender norms.¹⁶⁾

— Palmieri's, noid's, Schörkhuber's, and Hołubowska's active and productive interest for political representation considerably shapes how they speak about their artistic work. Sounding out

14)

<https://oramics.pl/> (18 February 2021) The collective takes its name from an optical synthesizer system developed in the 1950s and 1960s by the British musician and sound engineer Daphne Oram (1925–2003).

15)

<https://soundcloud.com/oramicspl/sets/oramics-belarus>, <https://wepresent.wetransfer.com/story/oramics-poland/>, <https://www.facebook.com/CTMFestival/videos/502356100733749/> (18 February 2021)

16)

<https://aufnahmeundwiedergabe.bandcamp.com/album/demonologia> (18 February 2021)

problems that resonate loudly with Donna Haraway's epistemological engagement with "partial perspective" in Western conceptualizations of vision and feminist science studies (1988)¹⁷ for their own auditory practices, my co-authors demanded of us, who were speaking together, to listen to listening as a *situated* practice.

PRACTICE TEST — To me, the amplification of listening as situatedness in our conversations meant rephrasing as a question, and testing against concrete practices, one suggestion commonly found in phenomenological, ontological, and artistic research-inspired theorizations of sound: is there a potential for egalitarian, ethically accountable, and politically imaginative relating that is *specific* to auditory engagement? As Marie Thompson observes in this volume, listening is currently heralded as bringing forth an aware and responsible relationality between listeners, the listened-to, and the concrete worlds that they meet in. Theorists and practitioners of sound art in particular have often routinely extrapolated this exceptional potentiality of listening by pointing to a set of presumably fundamental¹⁸ differences between 'sound' and 'vision' (Sterne 2003, Sterne 2012: 9f), or, more precisely, to the presumably different ways of engaging that sound (qua listening) and vision (qua looking) would afford (Ruhm 2010). In contrast to vision, which many authors cast in terms of dictating a distance, and thus a clear-cut separation, of the looking subject from the object of the gaze, and of privileging a single perspective or point of view, sound has been described as "expansive[...] and leak[y]" and able to "diffuse[...] in all directions" (Connor 2005: 48), as "multiplying and expanding the point of attention" by "appearing at multiple locations" at once (LaBelle 2015 [2006]: xiii), as "cannot[ing] companionship" and "remind[ing] the listener of his [sic] own presence in a living world" (Licht 2019 [2007]), and as inviting the listening subject, by way of intimate proximity of ear and audio signal, to perceive themselves not just as reflected by, but *as* the very "auditory object" of their own contemplation (Voegelin 2010: xii).

— Given its impressive track record on paper, it is astonishing that my interlocutors remained somewhat reserved when asked to speculate about listening's social and political promise and potentialities for their own practices. One possible explanation might be the marginal role that sound art theories can assign to representation as a field of political agency, which, as sketched out above, looms large in my co-authors' lives. Two recent monographs, Brandon LaBelle's *Sonic Agency* (2018) and Salomé Voegelin's *The Political Possibility of Sound* (2019), may serve as examples. Both

17)

"So, I think my problem, and 'our' problem, is how to have *simultaneously* an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims, and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, *and* a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects to finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness" (Haraway 1988: 579, italics in original).

18)

For recent assessments of the epistemological dangers of theorizing these differences as "unchanging and transhistorical givens," see Thompson, Marie (2017): *Whiteness and the Ontological Turn in Sound Studies*. In: *Parallax* July 2017. doi:10.1080/13534645.2017.1339967, Kane, Brian (2015): *Sound Studies without Auditory Culture: A Critique of the Ontological Turn*. In: *Sound Studies* vol.1, issue 1, pp. 2-21. doi:10.1080/20551940.2015.1079063, Steingo, Gavin and Sykes, Jim (eds.) (2019): *Remapping Sound Studies*, Durham: Duke University Press.

publications explicitly locate the egalitarian promise of listening in a complicity of sound and *invisibility*. They draw and expand upon Voegelin's earlier conceptualization of "sonic sensibility," a philosophical and poetic writing practice that crucially relies on engaging with "fleeting and ephemeral" energies, vibrancies, intensities, "presences," and "things" that remained beyond visible but that were, as contingencies, ready to unfold in contact with listening subjects that attuned to them with the necessary delicacy and care (Voegelin 2014: 1-3). The political promise of such an engagement, Voegelin suggests, was "to question [...] singular actuality and to hear other possibilities that are probable too, but which, for reasons of ideology, power and coincidence do not take equal part in the production of knowledge, reality, value, and truth" (2014: 3). The agency LaBelle attributes to the sonic similarly hinges on paying close and careful attention to "deep matters and shared energies" that would allow disenfranchised political actors to form intimate alliances for "*undercover activity*" out of sight of those seeking to police them (2018: 3, 32, italics in original). As a (visual) grammar, it is implied, representation answers only to things (subjects, relations, scenarios for the future) it has already seen, and thus has no capacity to imagine anything outside itself. In contrast, listening is projected as moving dynamically through the folds of invisibility, and thus as able to put one in very real touch with literally everything else – which leads Salomé Voegelin to the boldly optimistic conclusion that sound, by holding "the cavernous simultaneity of all the possible possibilities of this world," acted "not as metaphor and parable [...], but as a portal into real possibility" (2019: 27f).

——— Voegelin's and LaBelle's investment in invisibility tries to answer to a central problem of representation that Johanna Schaffer has termed the 'ambivalences of visibility' (*Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit*): within discourses that separate populations into 'marked' minoritized and 'unmarked' universal subjects along (hetero-)sexist, racist, classist, ableist scripts, representational politics that push for 'more visibility' as their central strategy for empowerment will produce subjects that need to reaffirm these very scripts in order to be recognized (Schaffer 2008: 12, 51-59). LaBelle and Voegelin similarly suggest their strategic modes as means to counter "identification, ocular arrest, and visual capture" (LaBelle 2018: 32), and as an invitation to perceive possibilities beyond the "ideology" that "is" representation (Voegelin 2019: 121). As a speculative practice, LaBelle's and Voegelin's championship of the invisible seeks to tackle the hard task of imagining "*otherwise*

and *elsewhere*” (Gordon 2016: 4, italics in original), of earnestly engaging with ideas about sound and relationality that are utopian insofar as they want to do more than provide criticism of presently existing forms of living (cf. Gordon 2016). This can be a useful and necessary offer for left activism, art, and academic writing, especially when caught up in what Henriette Gunkel, Ayesha Hameed, and Simon O’Sullivan, in their recent edited volume on cultural imaginations of possible political futures, call “the impasses of neoliberalism” (Gunkel, Hameed and Sullivan 2017). Echoes of similar strategies do resonate in the following conversations: for instance, when Denise Palmieri stages her *Humbling Exercise* in the public pool of Vienna’s Stadthallenbad, where narrator and listener feel out for stories amplifying the importance of collectives as political agents in the intimacy and flow of a shared body of water, when noid and Christine Schörkhuber entertain the option of (dis-)organizing the echoraume digital archive in an “underview” (“*Unübersicht*”) that exposes, confuses, and complexifies the logic of common categorizations on online platforms, or when Zosia Hołubowska’s communally corporeal engagement with folk songs – singing together, learning how to store vibrations produced by the body of a group in one’s own bodily tissues – actualizes a meaning beyond the hierarchical grammars of anthropological archives.

— What LaBelle’s and Voegelin’s methodology cannot always account for, however, and what I think is expressed most saliently in the following conversations, is Schaffer’s crucial caveat that invisibility grants no out and away from visual representation, but co-produces its very power structures and codes (2008: 55). Schaffer reminds her readers that invisibility also entails the privilege of appearing as unmarked, as embodying an individualized exemplification of a visual, cultural, and moral norm. This privilege invests subjects holding positions of hegemonic majority with the power to present their perspective as universal, instead of partial and situated (Schaffer 2008: 54, also see hooks 1992). As many scholars of visibility have repeatedly demonstrated for different contexts – I pick out, as examples for this introduction, Donna Haraway (1988), Richard Dyer (1997), Linda Alcoff (1999), and Belinda Kazeem-Kaminski (2018) – this power privilege extends from individual to social structure when hegemonic ways of seeing and knowing deny that the differences in access to in/visibility and ‘universal’ subjecthood exist in the first place. As it is an important part of the logic that grounds their argument, LaBelle and Voegelin are aware of the mutually co-productive dynamics of in/visibility, and at times address them explicitly. Still, their primarily positive

framing of invisibility as such presupposes that knowledge about the complexities of being absent from view, and especially about the very different consequences such an absence can have for the everyday, present-day lives of differently situated subjects, was already shared by all of their readers. Their methodology, and related theoretical and artistic strategies that highlight sound's presumed independence from the binary epistemology of scopic regimes, thus do not readily provide tools to grapple with sonic situations, relations, and spaces that confront listeners invested in political change with agents that simply renounce engaging with existing representational politics at all, and thus reify hegemonic unmarked-ness.¹⁹⁾

— In their texts for this volume, Denise Palmieri, noid, Christine Schörkhuber, and Zosia Hołubowska instead amplify strategies that allow them to address how intricately concrete, historically and geopolitically situated forms of looking and listening, scopic and aural regimes, sound and visibility, in/visibility and in/audibility, in different discursive, material, technological and corporeal sedimentations, weave into each other to activate the ambivalences of representation the authors encounter in their artistic and activist practices. Palmieri's work with language and visibility in *white* racialized spaces, noid's and Schörkhuber's investment in opto-sonic aesthetics and sensibility for sound as concept, idea, and code, and Hołubowska's care for sounding as an embodied practice all call into question the artistic and political values of separating 'sound' from 'vision.' However, none of these artists is interested in such relationality because it was boundless and/or all-encompassing, and they are not pointing to it in order to remain attuned to 'all the possible possibilities of this world.' When Denise Palmieri's performative language refracts dominant Eurological conceptualizations of her subject position as hyper-visible, but intellectually muffled spectacle, when noid and Christine Schörkhuber interrogate as linguistic the tacit "agreements" between user and code enacted by 'black box' digital audiovisual technologies, and when Zosia Hołubowska's collectives try to find grammars of more accountable forms of holding and giving sonic space, they choose to enter relations that can recognize privileges as a privilege, norms as a norm, structuring hierarchies as a structural hierarchy.

THREE CONVERSATIONS: LISTENING TO/AS AGENTIAL CUTS —

Contrary to what US pop star Madonna announced in an infamously ignorant Instagram video in March 2020,²⁰⁾ the global

19)

Marie Thompson discusses examples of such theoretical and artistic strategies in her article "Whiteness and the ontological turn in sound studies." In: *Parallax* July 2017. doi:10.1080/13534645.2017.1339967

20)

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/madonna-posts-video-calling-coronavirus-the-great-equalizer-from-a-bathtub-filled-with-rose-petals/> (18 February 2021)

COVID-19 pandemic does not hit every person and population equally hard, but continues to draw urgent attention to the very lines that cynically separate subjects and systems worth preserving and protecting from expendable forms of life (cf. Redecker 2020, Sanin 2020, Bertz 2021, ZeroCovid 2021). While an artistic and academic thinking through and with sound, as happens in this volume of FKW and especially in the three following conversations, can suggest only small and soft tools to tackle the manifold and overwhelming political injustices the pandemic continues to aggravate in many contexts, it nevertheless offers a practice field for re-engaging questions of when to amplify the relationality of all actors involved, and when, in the words of Eva Haifa Giraud, to pay attention to the agential cuts, the “particular points within these assemblages when things stabilize as things” (Giraud 2019: 67). The following conversations move between uncutting ‘sound’ as productively relational with visual and tactile fields of agency, and carefully differentiating within the tangle of political representation of and in sounding and listening as to which nodes and corners weigh most heavily for whom. Hopefully, hearing about how much work can be, and is already, still, being done, and being done well, will not only come as a ‘consolation in words,’ but also as a call to good cheer for those of our readers who presently practice from rooms that feel empty of public assembly. It has for me. Thank you everybody who helped this volume of FKW into being!

// Links to artist / project homepages

<https://www.denisepalmieri.net>

<https://echoraeume.klingt.org/>

<https://www.soundsqueer.org/>

// References

Alcoff, Linda (1999): Towards a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment. In: *Radical Philosophy*, vol.1, issue 95, pp. 15–26. Available online at: <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/towards-a-phenomenology-of-racial-embodiment> (18 February 2021)

Bertz, D.F. (ed.) (2021): *Die Welt nach Corona. Von den Risiken des Kapitalismus, den Nebenwirkungen des Ausnahmezustands und der kommenden Gesellschaft*. Berlin: Bertz+Fischer.

Connor, Steve (2005): Ears Have Walls: On Hearing Art. In: *FO A RM*, issue 4, pp. 48–57. Available online at: <http://www.stevenconnor.com/earshavewalls/> (18 February 2021)

Dyer, Richard (1997): *White*. London: Routledge.

Haraway, Donna (1988): Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. In: *Feminist Studies*, vol.14, issue 3, pp. 575–599.

hooks, bell (1992): *Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance*. In: *Black Looks. Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, pp. 21–39.

Giraud, Eva Haifa (2019): *What Comes after Entanglement? Activism, Anthropocentrism, and an Ethics of Exclusion*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Gordon, Avery F. (2016): Some Thoughts on the Utopian. In: *Anthropology and Materialism*, issue 3, pp. 1–23. Available online at: <http://am.revues.org/678> (18 February 2021)

Gunkel, Henriette, Hameed, Ayesha and O’Sullivan, Simon (eds.) (2017): *Futures and Fictions*. London: Repeater.

- Kazeem-Kaminski (2018): *Unearthing*. In *Conversation: On Listening and Caring*. In: *Critical Ethnic Studies* vol.4, issue 2, pp. 75–99. doi:10.5749/jcritethnstud.4.2.0075
- LaBelle, Brandon (2015[2006]): *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*. Second Edition. New York: Bloomsbury.
- LaBelle, Brandon (2018): *Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance*. London: Goldsmiths Press.
- Licht, Alan (2019): *Sound Art Revisited*. Kindle Edition. London: Bloomsbury.
- Redecker, Eva von (2020): *Revolution für das Leben: Philosophie der neuen Protestformen*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer.
- Ruhm, Constanze (2010): *Immediacy and Non-Simultaneity: Utopia of Sound*. In: Diedrichsen, Diedrich and Ruhm, Constance (eds.), *Utopia of Sound*. Vienna: Schöningh, pp. 7–18.
- Sanin, Daniel (2020): *Ohne Utopie bleibt die Apokalypse: Ein kritisch-psychologischer Blick auf die Coronakrise*. In: *versorgerin* issue 0128, p. 12. Available online at: <http://versorgerin.stwst.at/artikel/dec-3-2020-1206/ohne-utopie-bleibt-die-apokalypse> (18 February 2021)
- Schaffer, Johanna (2008): *Ambivalenzen der Sichtbarkeit: Über die visuellen Strukturen der Anerkennung*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Sterne, Jonathan (2003): *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sterne, Jonathan (2012): *Sonic Imaginations*. In: Sterne, Jonathan (ed.), *The Sound Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–17.
- Thompson, Marie (2018): *Listening Work: Listening as a Crucial Political Act*. DICE workshop, November 1, 2018. Published online September 24, 2019 at <https://www.stitcher.com/show/dice-conference-festival/episode/dice-2018-listening-work-with-dr-marie-thompson-69728609> (18 February 2021)
- Thompson, Marie (2021): *Listening with Tinnitus*. This volume, pp. 30–40.
- Voegelín, Salomé (2010): *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Voegelín, Salomé (2014): *Sonic Possible Worlds: Hearing the Continuum of Sound*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Voegelín, Salomé (2019): *The Political Possibility of Sound: Fragments of Listening*. Paperback Edition. London: Bloomsbury.
- ZeroCovid (2021): *The Aim is Zero Infections! For a European Shutdown in Solidarity*. Available online at: <https://zero-covid.org/language/en/> (18 February 2021)

// About the Author

Kristina Pia Hofer is a media theorist, musician, and performer based in Vienna. She currently holds an Elise Richter postdoc project at the Department of Media Theory, University of Applied Arts Vienna, and is working on a *habilitation* entitled *Situating Cinesonics: Materialities of Sound in Audiovisual Art*.

// FKW is supported by the Mariann Steegmann Institute and Cultural Critique / Cultural Analysis in the Arts ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann / www.fkw-journal.de

// License

This work is licensed under the CC-BY-NC-ND License 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>



“THE EXERCISE OF LISTENING ALSO MEANS LISTENING TO WHAT YOU READ.” A CONVERSATION ON SILENCES AND PRESENCES IN RACIALIZED SONIC SPACE

KRISTINA PIA HOFER — Tell me about your current artistic practice. What are you working on, and what does sound mean for this work at the moment?

DENISE PALMIERI — I am working on a few projects for other people as a performer, while I am developing my own research: connecting texts about decolonization, revolution, and feminism with my artistic practice. For me, this means trying to go through the body, with communication and interaction, finding out how these movements are reflected in my life, how they change me, and how I can translate or transform them into art. Every time somebody invites me to do something, I try to pull a little bit of my research – about the decolonial, about strength – into it. Sound, in my present work, is not so much about creating rhythm or melody, but about creating voice and language. In Vienna I am often confronted with racist language and attitude, against which I raise my voice. Last weekend, for example, while riding my bike, a car was driving by too fast and close to me. At the red light, the driver, a *white* man,¹⁾ tried to leave the car to confront me, but I blocked the door with my bike and told him through the window that he should be more careful, he could have run me over. He said that I was taking too much space. I told him that I needed to keep my distance to the parked cars. He told me: “Mir ist es wurscht, was mit Ihnen passiert” – “I don’t give a shit what happens to you.” This *white* person was coming for me, being violent, so I had to exercise talking back. I am a Brown person, and what is the history of such situations? Speaking with Grada Kilomba, the history is of silence.²⁾ Me and my ancestors were silent for too long, because of not knowing what to say, not having the strength, not having our voice. So I’m always going to say something in situations like these. I know I won’t change the ignorant person. But there were children present, and those children saw: if you stand against a Brown person, this person will talk back. They had a learning moment, I could see it in their interrogating faces. Their father figure was being irrational, while I was laughing at him and his lack of humanity. In moments like these, sound is about creating voice, and language.

1)

In this article, we follow Grada Kilomba’s use of italics and capitalization to mark out *Black*, *Brown*, *of Color* and *white* as racialized subject positions which are historically specific social constructs, rather than given ontologies. See Kilomba, Grada (2019), *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism*. 5th edition. Münster: Unrast Verlag.

2)

Kilomba, *ibid.*

—— When I perceive sound in my work, I am trying to understand this language that I speak, and how I speak, and to whom I speak, and then create music with it. For me, language and music always come with each other. I receive words through poetry, and music, for me, is poetry with melody. My main tool is making fun with them. Not everybody I'm talking to is ignorant, but my research on and interest in decolonization and postcolonial thought is a heavy matter, no matter who we are. As the scholar Marco Aurélio da Conceição Correa says: "The best response to *white* cynicism can only be Black mockery."³⁾ I start dancing, I start moving, I start mocking, and then I make a song. But the basis is creating a voice, understanding which is my voice, and how I can use it. And never missing an opportunity to have a stage, or a fight (laughs). However, if somebody invites me to *just* sing, I won't do it. I won't use a platform just to show myself. "How pretty I am! Look at me here on the stage, how good I can sing!" I don't do that.

KPH —— I was about to ask you about the two different contexts. When you have a confrontation on the street, it's very clear that it's a serious situation, and that your use of voice is an immediate political act. I can imagine, however, that this immediacy transports less easily in a performance context, where your talking back is put on a stage, and where the medium of performance allows audiences to witness you speaking without feeling personally addressed. Audiences in Vienna are not always very diverse. The same holds true for the institutions that put on shows.⁴⁾ How do you work in this context with voicing, with sounding, to make clear: this is not just another spectacle? Where a predominately *white* audience, in a space dominated by *white* gatekeepers, can look at an artist of Color perform, without having to be accountable for the matters addressed in the performance?

DS —— It is not the easiest thing. Sometimes you prepare a lot, and the audience doesn't respond, sometimes you don't read the audience. In my early works, I often used objects to physically separate myself from the audience. They could see me, but they couldn't go through me. In 2015, for instance, I performed my work *As Lived our Parents*⁵⁾ at Kunsthalle Karlsplatz, a venue that is a huge glass box. The curtains were open, you could see the street, but I had my back to the window, and a sculpture – a cloak made of plaster – at my back, so I was protected. It was a durational piece, people could come and go as they pleased. I sang and stopped. When people came over to me, I started to sing again, but then I stopped.

3) <https://www.geledes.org.br/a-resposta-pro-cinismo-branco-e-o-deboche-preto/> (18 February 2021) Translation from Portuguese by Denise Palmieri.

4) For a report on Austrian cultural institutions in the late 2010s, see Hunter, Tonica (2019): Mapping Diversities: Notes on Austria. In: Louw, Kathleen (ed.), *Beyond Afropolitan and Other Labels: On the Complexities of Dis-Othering as a Process*. Brussels: BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts Brussels, pp. 17-26. The open access publication is available as pdf at: <https://www.bozar.be/en/activities/136895-dis-othering> (18 February 2021)

5) <https://youtu.be/H8ip4XBpHjo> (18 February 2021)

And just sat. Now, I communicate much more with the audience. I direct my eyes and my movements towards them. Sometimes there is an exchange, and sometimes there isn't. Audiences in Vienna like to keep to themselves, they don't exchange a lot with you as a performer on the stage. They like waiting to the end, as if to say: "I will wait for you to finish talking, before I manifest myself." And even then, it's mostly reactions, like cheering – outbursts rather, not a real conversation. If you want an interaction, you have to pull it out of them, and that's not an easy thing. Sometimes I go for the intimate and individual, for instance, that a person can come to me and talk to me. People tend to come closer during durational pieces. Presently, I am interested in creating works that are very intimate, but show how I separate, how I draw boundaries, at the same time. For instance, I will perform at Freud Museum for the Sodom Vienna⁶⁾ series in October 2020. There, I'll have the opportunity to restage the 2015 Kunsthalle performance in a more intimate setting, without the sculpture as a shield. I am wearing a spiritual armor now, and it will show in this performance. Another example would be *Gorgonxs*, an experimental performance I conceived together with Naya Freire (Tieta Lux), Ivy Monteiro, and Mavi Veloso in 2019. We performed at the Austrian Association of Women Artists (VBKÖ),⁷⁾ in a space that is minimal in size. As we formulated for the description of the show, we are Brazilian Immigrant trans/gender non-conforming artists aiming to break out of the glass walls that the societal normative gaze imposes upon us.⁸⁾ The vibe we created was: "We are here, and you are there," and specifically: "You can look, but you can't touch." *Gorgonxs* was very aggressive in that respect. And it didn't intend to have the audience speak, at all. It was more like: "Now, *you* listen."

KPH — Talking about the possible relationships between listening, looking, and claiming space: some contemporary voices in sound studies keep investing a lot of hope into 'listening' as a practice that would allow humans to break out of the constraints of Western scopic regimes, and open up spaces for less hierarchical ways to engage with each other. You and I have had a lot of exchange on this topic, for instance, during an evening at Central Linz called *Radikales*



6) <https://brut-wien.at/de/Programm/Kalender/Programm-2020/11/Gin-Mueller> (18 February 2021)

7) <https://www.vbkoe.org/home/?lang=en> (18 February 2021)

8) <https://www.vbkoe.org/2019/07/15/gorgonxs/> (18 February 2021)

// Figure 1
Gorgonx premiere at VBKÖ Vienna, 14 August 2019. © VBKÖ. Photo: Rafaella Bieleesch

Hören, 'Radical Listening,' in October 2019, where we discussed the political potentialities of creating polyphonies, and listening to multiple voices, on a podium with our colleagues Veza Fernandez and Ricarda Denzer.⁹⁾ Would you like to share your take on these issues here too?

DS — I don't see 'listening' in a sentimental way. First of all, 'listening' invites appropriation like any other form of art. Recently, I have noticed a lot of articles on sound and music that talk about Black artists, but the texts themselves are very *white*. A *white* friend recently gave me an article to read, and told me, "Look, I included a lot of people of Color!" But I said: "Wait a minute. You have a singer, an electronic musician, a DJ, and a dancer. But not a single academic of Color." When every feminist reference you bring in is *white*, I have to stop and ask you whether you really want to do that. And I said to her: "We are still being objectified! This has to stop." In her book *O que é lugar de fala?*, Djamila Ribeiro, one of the Black Brazilian feminist philosophers I admire, uses a term of the sociologist Sueli Carnero's, "mulata tipo exportação," to describe the kind of women that is acceptable for a *white* audience.¹⁰⁾ It is the Brown woman that the dominant group can export and socially and culturally appropriate. In a recent video, Ribeiro also tells the story that when she was going to Paris to give a speech, people asked her "Oh, so you are going to dance?" This is the perfect example for a racist misrecognition of Black intellectuals. Sueli Carnero argues that the relations built by the historical conditions of the Americas, that is, by conquest and *white* dominance, are still very present, and are reified in the dominant group's default relationship to Black people in general, and Black women in particular. As Carnero puts it: "The social appropriation of the defeated group is one of the emblematic moments of the winner's affirmation of superiority."¹¹⁾ Next to domestic workers who serve 'liberated' women, Brown women who can serve as 'muses' or cultural objects are widely accepted today, because they affirm *white* superiority. As long as Black people only appear in the space of the stage, of entertainment, they do not threaten the established, racist social order.

— Second, I don't believe that European academia can create an idea of community, or of a collective, in their texts. *White* academics, in every field, center too much on the individual researcher. It's all about "*my* research, *my* research, *my* research." It's centric of their own work and their own establishment. It never looks outside. As I said, many texts I read that are based on *white* academics don't mention a single Brown reference. I am fed up with this, because

9)
<https://www.gfk-ooe.at/event/radikales-hoeren/> (18 February 2021)

10)
Ribeiro, Djamila (2017): *O que é: lugar de fala?* Belo Horizonte (MG): Letramento, pp. 28-29.

11)
Carneiro, Sueli (no date): "Enegrecer o feminismo: a situação da mulher negra na América Latina a partir de uma perspectiva de gênero." Available online at: https://disciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/375003/mod_resource/content/0/Carneiro_Feminismo%20negro.pdf (last visited: February 18, 2021). Translated by Denise Palmieri.

so many of the work of Black activists and feminists is available in English, and if you don't mention a single one, I know that you don't know any of them. If you know *one*, you know plenty, because they talk in collective. They never leave one of them alone. They always talk about each other. Always. They never talk as an individual, because they know that the individual is not strong. They understand that the fight wasn't sustained by one person. Think about Adrienne Maree Brown's *Emergent Strategies*¹²⁾ – it's all about talking about other women that empower you; you don't go two pages without a woman mentioning a woman. This exercise of listening – it also means listening to what you *read*.

KPH ____ That's a great way to put it.

DS ____ Right? How can I listen to you, and believe in you, if you just bring me one point of view? I understand that you are an individual, and I will see you as an individual – but if you don't represent a collective, why should I care about you? The individual is not the one I care about, it is not the one that represents change. This is what Patricia Hill Collins talks about in her 1997 text about standpoint theory.¹³⁾ Of course, the individual cannot be ignored, but you have to see the group that suffers something.

____ There's this beautiful work of Shilpa Gupta's: *For, in your tongue, I cannot fit*.¹⁴⁾ It was one of my favorite artworks at Biennale Arte 2019 in Venice. It is a sound installation giving voice to the poets that couldn't speak in their time. There are poems in many languages on sheets of paper, and the sheets are pierced. Above the sheets, you see something that looks like microphones hanging from the ceiling, but they are not real microphones – they are speakers. They are hanging down, you can see their heads. You feel like you are invited to speak the poem that is written, but it's *not* for you to speak. It's not your place to speak. You have to bow your head, and *listen*. I was exploding when I saw the installation, it was so beautiful. There was this *white* guy coming in, talking into the speakers: "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Hahaha." And then he had to lower his head, and bow to the text. You *do* have to *shift* your *head* – not upwards, but downwards. To read, you always have to bend. It's brilliant. And it's from an Indian artist, a woman. I say, great! The artworks I like most are often from the *periferias do mundo*, never from the center (laughs).

KPH ____ It sounds like a too naïve implementation of 'listening' as a practice can be treacherous: just putting a bunch of people

12)

Brown, Adrienne Maree (2017): *Emergent Strategies: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. Edinburgh, Oakland, Baltimore: AK Press.

13)

Hill Collins, Patricia (1997): Comment on Hekman's "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited": Where's the Power? In: *Signs*, vol.22, issue 2, pp. 375–381.

14)

<http://shilpagupta.com/for-in-your-tongue-i-cannot-fit-audio/> (18 February 2021)

together and making them listen at the same time does not automatically create situations in which communities are being rebuilt for the better. How does this awareness shape the listening spaces you create in your artistic work?

DS ____ You listen together only if you comment on it afterwards. But this is not an easy thing. I don't think it's even in our power to create situations of 'listening together,' as you call it. I think we can only bring, and we can hope. Think back to the confrontation I spoke about in the beginning of conversation: the child that sees the *white* man speaking to me, and me reacting, will know that when they open their mouth to say something to a Brown person, they will have to listen to a reply. We won't listen quietly. In other situations, people might listen together, but then still don't speak. The environment might be too intimidating. Think of our experience at Central Linz, which you mentioned earlier. The audience was not speaking. We opened up to them, it was intimate, we were smiling, we had drinks, and they still didn't say anything. And after the official event was over, they came to us to exchange email addresses. That is a need sometimes. To come out of this formal space, or to make a connection for the future.

____ Speaking about community – I don't know. You don't create an idea of the collective, because the collective includes you. For a work that I will be doing for Reclaim Festival in October 2020¹⁵⁾ I am going to ask the audience to tell me stories about experiences in their lives that are in a collective context. We will be in the water, in the pool at Stadthallenbad here in Vienna. I will ask them to tell me stories that are associated with somebody close to them, a role model that is or was part of their lives. The work will be called *Humbling Exercise*. I am trying to better understand who we are, and why we feel so important. Because we're not. You're not the most important person in this world, although your papa and your mama tell you that, and for them, you probably are – but that's it. We have to stop looking at ourselves with this egocentric importance, because the important thing should be the collective. And you can only understand your collectiveness if you understand that you, as an individual, cannot be big by yourself. That's what COVID taught us.

KPH ____ How did the reality of COVID-19, especially the spring 2020 lockdown, impact on your work? What changed for your academic and artistic research into creating voice and language, when you had to physically distance from the world you usually engage with?

15)

Reclaim Festival 2020, too, had to be cancelled due to further COVID-19 measures taken after the interview took place.

DS — Puh. I listened to Julischka Stengele talk at the H13 award ceremony¹⁶⁾ last week, where she said that for her, the lockdown was great, because she could really pause from being bothered all the time. I can relate to this. When you are attacked daily in the outside world, it can be a relief to be without the presence of others, who are inflicting pain on you. This made me think of a performance of Charlene Bicalho's and Jéssica Porciúncula's at the Museu de Artes do Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre: in June 2019, during their residencies at the museum, they raised a flag that said "Mate o branco dentro de você;" "Kill the *white* inside of you."¹⁷⁾ I read the slogan as "Kill the *white* woman inside you." It reminded me of *white* feminists who have so much space already, and still keep it all to themselves. The misconception is that *white* women would lose their space if they gave it to a Black woman, a trans woman, a woman different from themselves, to speak. They don't understand that they would receive ten times what they gave by moving over, and keeping quiet for a while.¹⁸⁾ I think the COVID situation really enabled people to realize how they have internalized this sort of racialized oppression, and gave them the chance to kill those harmful voices, inside of them, in their own space.

— I was already working on similar ideas before COVID. In one of my projects of 2019, I was questioning Internet tutorials. What is this virtual space that connects us? How will we take the responsibility that democracy has given us – to select from such a great number of options, and to question our selection? Who are we allowing ourselves to be taught by? Who has the right to tell me, as a Brown person, how I should shake my ass, go into a split, breathe in and out? With which power do they come into my life? And how do I let them in? These questions are especially important when the instructions sound universally empowering: "You can do it! Shake out what your Mama gave you!" – this sounds like you can do and achieve anything, in this neoliberal way, with hard work. But that's not what I get. For a Brown person, it's a fiction of a place, that we all have the same rights. The right to be listened to and to speak doesn't exist for all of us in the same way. The spring 2020 COVID lockdown, when the Internet became the only way to reach people, made me even more aware, so my artistic practice was inflamed with activism. BLM played an important role here too. We went to the streets as the system showed how it really worked, fighting against PoC and immigrants *even in this moment*, in the middle of a pandemic. I became very aggressive, very angry. I was trying to understand this moment, and activism helped me to not go crazy.

16)

Julischka Stengele won the H13 Lower Austria Prize for Performance in 2020 for her work BALLAST | EXISTENZ: <https://www.kunstraum.net/en/Exhibitions/104-h13-2020-julischka-stengele> (18 February 2021)

17)

<https://www.sul21.com.br/opiniaopublica/2019/06/o-bara-vai-ao-museu-po-de-pemba-poesia-e-performance-por-duan-kisssonde/> (18 February 2021)

18)

As Djamila Ribeiro puts it, drawing on Audre Lorde: "Audre Lorde urges us to think about the need to recognize our differences and no longer see them as negative. The problem would be when the differences mean inequalities. The lack of recognition that we start from different places, since we experience gender differently, leads to the legitimacy of an exclusive discourse, as it does not raise awareness to other ways of being a woman in the world. This attention to what the author calls the evasion of responsibility of *white* women, for not committing themselves to change, can be understood as a lack of ethical posture in thinking the world from their places. The fact that they do not demarcate these places and continue to ignore that there are different starting points between women causes these *white* women to continue ignoring their duty in questioning themselves and, consequently, reproduce oppressions against Black women or against, as Lorde calls in the text, 'those that are not acceptable.' Those from their social backgrounds know that 'surviving is not an academic skill.'" Ribeiro, *lugar*, 30. Translated by Denise Palmieri.

— I am often online, but I was barely active there, except for the eventual post about openings and premieres. But as a private person, I did not want to expose myself because I didn't feel comfortable – I wonder who does in a crisis like this. I mostly use the Internet to see if my friends are fine, to call them. To have philosophical talks, to cry together, to be human together. I returned to these intimate spaces, where we *really* exchanged. And I didn't feel the need to be a public speaker at the time, because there were better representers than me – for instance, Djamila Ribeiro. To get an idea how powerful and important her work is, just check out the recent interview she gave for Griot Magazine.¹⁹⁾ She has been writing about racism and Black feminism in Brazil for a long time, and I was following her work before COVID. When BLM exploded, she started posting even more, and voices like hers became more present. In Brazil, for instance, *white* comedians, actors, directors, sociologists, and social anthropologists – intellectuals and entertainment people who have a lot of followers – were giving their social media to Black people to post there for a month. I think it happened in the whole of Latin America. This was how BLM was reflected there. Listening to these brilliant voices, I understood that I needed to check whether I actually improved my environment by saying what I thought was so important to express. I was putting this question to *myself*. Just showing how pretty you can sing on stage, or how beautiful you can master a certain technique – that's extremely colonial. Art institutions in Europe were built on the aristocracy. If you don't have this context in mind, if you repeat oppressive speech and stereotypes, why do you think your speech is so important? I think that artists need to position themselves. And I am trying my best to position *myself*.

— I think that listening is an important part in this process, as an *active* thing. If you engage with listening to something so that it can *inspire* you, you are contextualizing permanently: who is talking, and how are they creating their content, their material? Now, with COVID in all of our lives, I really focus on the activity of listening, more than on seeing. I listen to podcasts, and even when I have a video on, I don't watch. I move away from the screen, and I lay back. I don't go multifunctional, I just – do the exercise of listening. And sometimes I write down some things that I hear, but when it really touches me I revisit it – I listen to it again and again. For me it's been such a digging, the listening. And I was thinking to myself: I need to build something. For when I have a stage again. I won't waste the opportunity. Because I know now how important the stage is, now that I lack it. Without the stage, the public doesn't

19)

<http://griotmag.com/en/aint-i-a-woman-djamila-ribeiro-on-social-justice-black-feminism-and-the-place-of-speech/> (18

February 2021)

see me. As a PoC intellectual, visibility is key, because we still lack representation – in this case, in the art scene.

20)
Ribeiro, lugar, 44.

KPH ____ What's your vision for taking the stage when performing is possible again without COVID restrictions?

DS ____ I am being invited for a lot of work now, because fat and Black is fashion at the moment. I take those jobs, I am not going to waste my chance – it might be that I stop being in fashion, and that I fall into oblivion again. My idea is to break stereotypes now. I am a very strong stereotype of my own culture – I, too, am “mulata tipo exportação.” And that's a stereotype I want to break. Again, I am taking my cue from Djamila Ribeiro, who explains that when there is some space to talk, for example, for a Black trans woman, how difficult it is for this person to be heard when she speaks about anything else than being a Black trans woman. How can she talk about economics, astrophysics, science, and philosophy, and be heard?²⁰⁾ I want to break this idea of a Brown person only being able to talk about how to samba, how to twerk – but *through* twerking. For me, the stage is a place to question your image in your mind, your idea of who I am. By reading me through my ‘phenotype’ – a fat, Brown woman from Latin America. The assumption that: you see that, and then you know me. And then I start showing you what I am, and you have a new reading of me, and then I show you that you are reading me, and you have a reading of yourself.

KPH ____ That sounds like a fusion of visual and audio strategies – you work with language, but by mirroring and putting up smoke screens—

DS ____ —and layers.

KPH ____ So your suggestion to “listen to what you are reading” also shows up in your stage work. You ask your audience to listen to their own reactions of what they're being shown, and being told. You investigate the senses of looking and listening not by separating them, like many traditions in European sciences historically did, but by contextualizing them.

DS ____ There is no disconnection. And ‘contextualizing’ is a beautiful word. It makes me think of ‘text,’ ‘texture’—

KPH ____ —textile, fabric—

DS — Yeah, it's a beautiful way. Contextualizing. I love digression, instead of getting to a point. I love going in different directions at the same time, and I appreciate this in other people's work too. I love the idea of humbling the listener – like in Shilpa Gupta's work, where the means of talking actually are a means of *listening*. As I said: it's important to look at yourself as who you are, so you can see yourself small, and you can understand the needs of the collective. This, for me, is what COVID brought us.

// Funding note

This article was completed as part of the Elise Richter project "Situating Cinesonics: Materialities of Sound in Audiovisual Art Acts," Austrian Science Fund (FWF): V770-G.

// Image credits

Fig.1 *Gorgonx* premiere at VBKÖ Vienna, 14 August 2019. © VBKÖ. Photo: Rafaella Bielesch

// About the Authors

Denise Palmieri is a Brazilian artist based in Vienna. As a performance artist, she mixes experience and consciousness unfolding ritualistic aspects of the body and the voice, questioning binary, normative knowledge production.

Kristina Pia Hofer is a media theorist, musician, and performer based in Vienna. She currently holds an Elise Richter postdoc project at the Department of Media Theory, University of Applied Arts Vienna, and is working on a *habilitation* entitled *Situating Cinesonics: Materialities of Sound in Audiovisual Art*.

// FKW is supported by the Mariann Steegmann Institute and Cultural Critique / Cultural Analysis in the Arts ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann / www.fkw-journal.de

// License

This work is licensed under the CC-BY-NC-ND License 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>



“YOU ARE RESONATING WITH IDEAS MORE THAN WITH FREQUENCIES.” A CONVERSATION ON PERFORMING MUSIC IN DIGITAL AND HYBRID SELF-ORGANIZED SPACES

KRISTINA PIA HOFER _____ Tell me about your practice at echoraume. What sort of space is it, and what has been happening there for the last couple of months?

CHRISTINE SCHÖRKHUBER _____ echoraume is a virtual venue. It's not a service provider for general streaming – it's a community space that the contributing organizations generated together, to have their own independent streaming platform. It also contains a video chat, and a text chat system.

NOID _____ We started echoraume right after the spring 2020 lockdown was announced. Christine's festival, Klangmanifeste,¹⁾ and an event of my der bloede dritte Mittwoch²⁾ series had to be cancelled. Christine and I immediately agreed that we would not stop organizing events, but move them to the digital space. Everybody had this idea at that moment (laughs), but echoraume was special since we wanted integrated chat rooms from the start, and we wanted to point out the precarious situation of performing spaces in Vienna, which had already been a problem before COVID-19. The idea was that we would create our virtual venue in the present situation, because this was the only option to organize any concerts at that time, but that we would move back into our real house, as soon as the situation would allow. Running echoraume during the lockdown was a statement saying: we *need* the space.

CS _____ When the COVID crisis forced everybody into virtual rooms, it was important to us to find an alternative to regular, proprietary streaming providers. We wanted this virtual room to be self-defined by artists, sound artists, and musicians. And it worked: at the moment there are about twenty organizers doing events at echoraume, and it became a real option. The Viennese art newsletter eSeL called us “the new hotspot of the Viennese media scene,”³⁾ and I think it's at least a bit true. People connect in a different way than they would have before.

KPH _____ How do you ‘curate’ the room? As an artist, what would I do if I wanted to play?

1)
<http://www.klangmanifeste.at/> (18 February 2021)

2)
<http://bloedermittwoch.klingt.org/> (18 February 2021)

3)
“[...] de[r] neue[...] virtuelle[...] Inspot der Wiener Szene”: <https://esel.at/termin/105459/kaffee-adele> (18 February 2021)

CS ____ You write us an email, and we decide as a team. Our decision is not curatorial in an artistic sense – we look at whether an artist’s idea fits with the idea of the community-based project. The only proposals we have rejected so far were those of people looking us up like an enterprise, as a service provider, and expecting that we run everything. That’s what we don’t do.

KPH ____ Does the collective work for free?

N ____ We were lucky to get some funding at the start. We were supported by the MA7, the City of Vienna Municipal Department 7, in a very non-bureaucratic way. And we also got some money directly from mica Music Austria.⁴⁾

KPH ____ Was this money part of extra funding these organizations implemented because of COVID-19?

N ____ No. And it wasn’t much, but it was enough to pay the technical team and the organizing team at least a little. Also, every participating organization that could afford it contributed a ‘streaming fee.’

CS ____ These fees were voluntary solidarity contributions, and depended on the financial possibilities of each organization. For instance, der bloede dritte mittwoch and Klangmanifeste both paid €600 each. Others paid less, or more – mostly less, actually.

KPH ____ You are both musicians yourself. What do you think about the transmissibility of sounds through platforms like echoraeume? How is it different from playing in a physical space?

CS ____ You cannot compare them at all. Playing through a platform means a completely different idea of sound, it doesn’t have anything to do with live music. So whenever you do something in the virtual room, you have to consider this. For me, playing at echoraeume as a performer was super nice, because I could let the audience watch me from above, and watch my hands while I was working. I really let people look over my shoulder, and I communicated from down there. Usually, in a live situation, that’s not possible. Also, the virtual room lets you combine things that you otherwise wouldn’t combine – you can work your show into a video art piece. And you can always play with situations typical for the Internet itself: latency, interruptions, breaks, and this really crazy

4)
<https://www.musicaustria.at/> (18 February 2021)

idea that you think you have a sound wave moving through the room, while actually it is moving through glass fiber. This opens extra realms.

KPH ____ Did this also have an impact on the sounds you were producing?

CS ____ Content-wise? Yes. I was working with computer-voice-triggered terms of use. I took the various terms-of-use agreements of social media providers, and let a computer voice read them out loud in various accents. Then I scattered them into fragments, used that as material for a beat sampler, and remixed the content. I wanted to make obvious the absurdity of these agreements, which we tend to accept quite easily. Before COVID-19, everybody who worked in the virtual room had the impression that they chose it deliberately. But during COVID, we were forced into it. I wanted this reflected in the pieces that I did for the virtual room.

KPH ____ How is performing in the virtual for you, noid?

N ____ To me, the visual component becomes more important. For the first broadcast, Klaus Filip and I performed *Sonic Luz*, a live sound performance in which we produce images through shadow play with our instruments. We use optical sound discs and lamps as an optosonic synthesizer – the shadow contains the sound information, but it also creates an image. It was a logical choice for the first broadcast.

KPH ____ I have heard of artists who are afraid to do streams because they usually do not pay a lot of attention to what they performing looks like.

N ____ You can just do what you always do, record it, and transmit – or you can do things differently. In the beginning, we had planned that at echoraume everything should be happening live, but then, the question came up: what does ‘performing live’ actually mean in the virtual space? Some live setups can also be technically difficult to realize. We tried some very complicated things (laughs). For instance, when we moved back into the real space with *der bloede dritte mittwoch* as soon as the hard lockdown in spring 2020 ended, we had one show that happened in the virtual space – the performers were in New York and Barcelona. We wanted to broadcast this show live at echoraume, and project it in the real

space venue at the same time. Things did not turn out exactly as planned (laughs). Microphones that were not supposed to be open were open, for instance. It's one thing to make a concert and have a stream. You have some image and some sound, and you send them out. But once you have a signal coming back, it gets really, really complex.

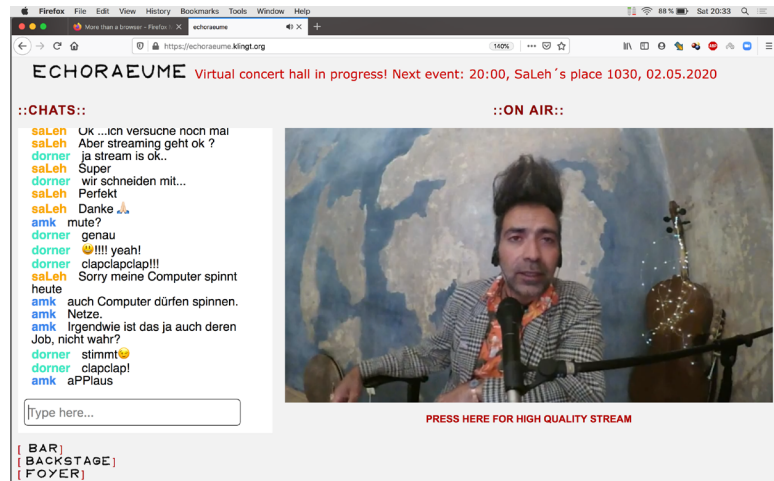
KPH ____ You said that at echoraeume, there is the possibility to participate for whoever is watching and listening. Did you, when performing, interact with those interactions? Or are the chat rooms meant for the audiences to interact among themselves?

CS ____ Audiences can feedback via text chat to the moderation of a show. In our show FS* About Feminisms, we were reacting to those feedbacks. When playing music though, I usually don't. It's technically possible, and some artists do. I find it difficult to focus on two things at the same time (laughs).

N ____ Another issue is latency, which you have on the stream, but not on the chat. There's a latency of anything between twenty seconds and one minute, which you have on all the commercial streaming platforms, too. And this is a real handicap for the live interaction. Even if you want to implement a simple interaction, like an applause function, the applause comes twenty seconds late. Which is an eternity. There are different ideas out too – Michael Aschauer, who is involved in the technical and artistic development of echoraeume, wants to try a stream that prioritizes the real time aspect over the quality/safety aspect. His idea is to send the stream directly via webRTC, an open source tool that allows direct, peer-to-peer communication in real time. The stream becomes something like a chat. Michael is working on performing with this idea, and has already experimented live with this setup at Ars Electronica 2020.⁵⁾

CS ____ Michael also programmed the video chat for our platform, the vroom.

5)
<https://ars.electronica.art/keplers-gardens/en/stwst48x6-more-less/> (18 February 2021)



// Figure 1
echoraeume live. Screen grab

KPH ____ Do you know who listens to and watches your shows?

CS ____ Partly, from feedback to the chats – the text chat was very active, especially at the beginning and during summer. The numbers we know from the statistics.

N ____ And from the donations (laughs).

CS ____ I want to add something on the issue of self-representation in the virtual room. At the end of the day, it's not new. I think the visual aspect of live performing came to us much earlier, before everyone was streaming. First, when you had a live performance, you had to take care of documentation for yourself. Second, you had to deal with the fact that probably, luckily or unluckily, some recording of your show would end up on the Internet anyway. When you play in 2020, you are never only live. You are always documented. You always refer to your own Instagram/Facebook figure.

KPH ____ Unless you are super controlling.

CS ____ You cannot control everything.

N ____ Whether you're controlling or not: as a musician, it was always very clear to me that whenever I enter the stage – however 'the stage' is defined – I am a performer. And that I also produce a visual aspect. You cannot not perform. You can decide to do an "I'm not performing!"-performance, but that's it. I think that's a valid decision, and you can still do it on the stream, but there it gets a bit more difficult because you *know* there is a camera, and you *know* the camera has a frame, which has an inside and an outside, and you need to decide what goes in and what stays out.

CS ____ Somehow, this gives you even more control. You are more aware, and can consciously decide how, or if, the audience sees you. I think it's nice to play live, but it's also a lot of stress, because people can watch you all the time.

N ____ There was this fantastic interview I had with Taku Unami for one of our first shows at echoraeume. He was producing a video for der bloede dritte mittwoch, where he took a virtual tramway ride through Vienna from his room, via a Japanese TV station that broadcasts these rides nonstop. When we had our talk, he put his cell phone down on the table, and you could only see his head from

the forehead up – mostly his hair, sometimes the upper rim of his glasses. I couldn't tell if this framing was deliberately chosen, but it was a very strong decision, and a very strong image, to *not* show the face.

CS ____ Mai Ling,⁶⁾ the contemporary Asian artist collective that had four or five broadcasts at echoraume dealing with the anti-Asian racism that was flaring up during the spring 2020 lockdown, used a similar strategy. They are working with the group synonym "Mai Ling" and use it as a collective alias. When they perform, they hold a paper cutout depicting the face of "Mai Ling" in front of their faces. This would not be possible in a live performance.

KPH ____ Do you store the echoraume performance for audiences to access after the initial broadcast?

CS ____ The organizations that program the shows, and make the recordings, sometimes also make them accessible on their own websites. Dorf TV⁷⁾ took over a lot of our shows, and many shows are now in their archive. We don't have our own archive at echoraume yet, and we're still figuring out how to do it, or if we should do it at all.

N ____ Clemens Hausch, the organizer of MOOZAK⁸⁾ and web designer for echoraume, suggested doing an "Unübersicht" –

CS ____ –literally, an "underview" instead of an "overview"! (laughs)

N ____ For me, Clemens's idea works well, because it reflects the situation that we have in the virtual space: it's totally chaotic. Everything is archived, but it is not organized. You find new things as well as relics of early days, plus there's commercial pressure that pushes certain content to the front. It's very hard to get to the things you're actually interested in, when they are behind that layer of commercial information.

CS ____ On the other hand, of course, there is the expectation of just finding the shows. Still, we don't want to just put up the shows in a regular way, like on YouTube. We're still discussing how to do it. It's not so easy, because you'd have to program it, and then it would be very close to an 'alternative YouTube' – and that's a

6)
<https://www.mai-ling.org/> (18 February 2021)

7)
<https://dorftv.at> (18 February 2021)

8)
<http://moozak.org/> (18 February 2021)

challenge, especially financially. We couldn't do it with the little funding we get from the City of Vienna.

KPH ____ My next question would be about listening. I guess you follow a lot of shows, both in real spaces and in virtual spaces. How would you describe your listening experiences in both contexts?

N ____ I'm always very conscious of the resonances of a space. My main instrument is the cello, and for a string instrument, the space in which you play becomes part of it. In every real space, you have resonances that are defined by frequencies, and they define the reverb or bouncing effect you get. In the virtual space, there is an analogy to these resonances, but of course they are not physical. In a way, they are theoretical. Does that make sense? I mean, you are resonating with ideas, more than with frequencies. I think it's possible to play with them in a similar way, but of course you're changing the medium, from frequencies to ideas. For instance, I made a video for the Festival Jazz en Lima in Lima, Peru, where I used an old quarry as my stage, and wanted to work with the idea of distance. I played the cello, and my performance was filmed with cell phones, through binoculars, from a great distance. Sometimes I was also hiding behind bushes.

KPH ____ These strategies of communicating 'distance' are all visual. Is it easier to play within the medium of ideas, as you call it, on the visual layer – or can such play also manifest in sound?

N ____ I think for me it's mostly in the visual, though it would be very interesting to try and translate it to the sound layer. However, I'd say that the Internet is designed mainly as a visual medium, and that as an audience, we perceive it as such. Sound is neglected. The speakers of a laptop are usually not as good as its screen. Sound resolution is poor, the frequency range is poor. Also, skipping is easier through visual material. When you skip through sound, you lose all timing information.

CS ____ I think the way that information is given through the Internet already says a lot about its perception. The Internet is about compression, so you generate most of the things you perceive in your own head. When you have mp3 compression, you add some of the sound psychoacoustically – we *know* that there is a bass coming in, even if we don't hear it; we can make a snare continue to play in our heads, even when it's not there anymore. When you have

pictures, you add most of them in your brain, because an H.264 compression actually just says: “Here are a lot of black pixels, and after two seconds, there will be a white pixel.” This is the language that the Internet uses, and we are used to translating it.

— When perceiving art in the Internet, we ourselves create while we are receiving – its aesthetics, its meaning, and its content. We are using codes, montage, and frames. A meme is an example of that: it extracts some crucial aspect of a certain situation and becomes a pointed visual comment referring to something else. But as soon as people refer to the meme, it gets a meaning of its own. It becomes the reference that summarizes a whole bunch of facts. Concepts in the www need a lot of round-up knowledge, connotations, and context to work, but they also need simple information units or symbols to carry the actual meaning. Social media communication, and actually all online information communication, uses a wide and fast variety of such little codes that shorten the information transfer process. In the last years, I think we were really ramping up in how fast we can connect pieces of information. Maybe the situation was similar with early cinema: suddenly, after a while, audiences understood that a cut could signify that a considerable amount of time has passed in the narrative. These are codes you have to learn. And after a while they seem natural to you.

N — I think it’s also interesting to talk about the code that’s behind the web surface, HTML code. If you question the codes of communication in the virtual space, you cannot stop in front of the computer keyboard, you have to go inside the technological codes as well. In the 1990s, media art invested a lot in this discourse. We had telephone concerts, conference concerts, and they were conceptual and trial-and-error, because the technology did not work. You could do audio via the Internet, but up until the early 2000s, there were always problems. You could not just *use* the media, so we had media art that questioned the media. When the technology started to work, in 2005, in 2010, when you could do voice over IP, it became boring (laughs). Artists were stepping back, and the art discourse about those codes was less important for a while. Now, during a lockdown, we are in a really bad situation: all the technology that works smoothly is now proprietary, and we are giving away control of our communication. A lot of people say “Facebook is bad,” but they still use it. Because it is a surrogate for public space.

CS — However, to quote Clay Shirky: “Communications tools don’t get socially interesting until they get technologically boring.”⁹⁾

9)

Shirky, Clay (2008): *Here Comes Everybody: How Change Happens When People Come Together*. London: Penguin, 105.

In the 1990s, performing in the virtual space was interesting on an artistic level, as a technological phenomenon, but now it is interesting on a cultural anthropological level. But of course, we are still in the middle of this development. And like you, Kristina, said when inviting us to this interview: now is the time for collecting experiences, and analyze them later.

KPH ____ One thing that immediately comes to mind – and I say this as a not very programming-savvy person – is that learning the codes behind the web surface takes labor and skill that is not equally distributed among performing artists and general audiences like me.

CS ____ In our group, we use different programming languages, and some people are very skilled at them, while others are not. For me, code is the language that structures the art that I work with, so I'm always interested in how it works, even if I don't speak it. I am happy that there are other people in the group who speak these languages more fluently than I do. However, I think understanding code is not so different from understanding any other language that constructs reality. In the end, it is a way of communicating with a machine. It's an agreement.

N ____ I think that even if you don't speak the language, it's important to understand that there *is* a language that you can learn. If you don't understand a cell phone, it's just a black box that you cannot look inside. But it makes a big difference if you know that inside is something that follows rules, and that they are simple rules you *can* learn to understand.

CS ____ I also think that even if it doesn't work out in the end, it makes sense to try it yourself, just as a statement that you won't take what you are getting served, and to try to create your own structures (laughs). As an artist, you will never be able to do it better than an enterprise. You cannot write programs, construct systems, or built applications that surpass a heavily-tested product with a million-dollar budget and a lot of manpower behind it, on a functional level. But you can create something that is closer to your situation and your needs. Anyway, better functionality is not the point. The point is finding other ways of doing it.

KPH ____ To wrap up, let's come back to the question of listening. In sound art studies, it is often suggested that sound, as an

invisible phenomenon, could possibly disturb or even disrupt the unequal power structures that visuality, as we know it, imposes upon most societies. Listening, presumably, can open up spaces for less hierarchical ways for humans to engage with each other. Without going into the details of the particular theories: how does this general suggestion resonate with you?

N ____ Sound is always a sign of power. Church bells are a classic example. Historically, dominance was often stated by sound. But listening is another question.

CS ____ It depends on what kind of ‘listening’ we are talking about. Comparing listening to information to listening in general is like comparing reading to watching a landscape. In social communications among humans, listening has this meta-meaning of being a focused, contemplative, not-sending-but-receiving act. This meaning also applies to experiences of listening to nature, landscape, environment. It does not apply to situations where you listen to gather concrete information. Even if these situations are connected to each other.

N ____ I have a hard time seeing ‘listening’ as a totally equal or non-hierarchical thing, because listening means that someone has to shut up, so that someone else can produce sound. This is not a non-hierarchical situation – unless we all shut up, and no one decides that we do so (laughs). I mean, I like to shut up every once in a while; I like it when everyone shuts up. But the question remains – who decides? Another very basic thing is that if there is a crowd of people talking, when there is a whole room to listen to, we have filters that we unconsciously use. You can also consciously decide not to pay attention to a specific sound. The sound will still come into your ears, but you can just stop following the meaning, you can listen and at the same time not listen. So, I’d say that there are ways to create non-hierarchical listening situations, but it’s not something inherent to the auditory sense.

KPH ____ During the spring 2020 lockdown, on social media platforms, many musicians and performance artists I follow expressed their grief about not being able to play music for a live audience, to listen to music together in clubs, to gather in a physical space, and to speak to each other in physical presence. This concern also came up a lot among my community of university teachers when we had to move our classes online. Could it be that ‘listening’ – in the

sense of deeply engaging with each other, socially – benefits from such real space situations? And what’s different when connecting through the Internet?

CS ____ Even when you go back to listening as a tool of communication, it’s very difficult to translate it to the digital room. You don’t catch every exhale, every nuance of the voice of who you’re talking to. You don’t get these little things, that nevertheless transport meaning, via digital communication. Some people fill this gap with other tools – for instance, they learn to communicate with stronger facial gestures. I think that over digital channels, the auditive sense is losing very much of supplementary information, and those gaps are filled with other things – concepts, visuals codes, messengers, emoticons. Emoticons are very important, they are visual icons filling in for the auditory affective expressions you don’t hear in a voice over digital transmission.

KPH ____ Where are you going next with echoraume?

CS ____ We will have some hybrid events, which will partly be streamed on the Net, and partly happen live in physical space.

N ____ The question of hybrid spaces will stay with us for a while. Even very prominently, I think. echoraume started as virtual only, but now, it has become hybrid. And I think this is a field where a lot of work needs to be done. Technologically, artistically—

CS ____ —socially.

KPH ____ And theoretically, for me, so I will be getting back to you about this question, hopefully, over the course of the next couple of years.

CS ____ I think none of us actually really understands yet what’s happening. We’ll be around!

echoraume can be followed online at:

<https://echoraume.klingt.org/>

// Funding note

This article was completed as part of the Elise Richter project “Situating Cinesonics: Materialities of Sound in Audiovisual Art Acts,” Austrian Science Fund (FWF): V770-G.

// Image credits

Fig. 1: *echoraeume* live. Screen grab.

//About the Authors

noid /aka Arnold Haberl (b. 1970) studied cello and mathematics. He is teaching at the Multimedia Art department of the University for Applied Science in Salzburg. As a composer, sound-artist, cello player, and improviser, he understands his work as fundamental research, leading to a wide range of contradictory outcomes. He is part of the organizing team of the monthly concert series *der bloede dritte mittwoch* and the community based streaming platform *echoraeume.klingt.org*. He also curated an annual sound art exhibition in Nickelsdorf. <http://noid.klingt.org>

Christine Schörkhuber is a freelance sound and media artist, video maker, and musician based in Vienna. She is interested in close listening, in the intersections of audio and visual arts, and in the dynamic relations between sociopolitical and technological systems and the individual. As a solo musician, she performs under the name *Canned Fit*. As curator and organizer she is/was involved at *IG Kultur Österreich*, the feminist hackerspace *Mz. Baltazar's Laboratory*, the sound art festival *Klangmanifeste*, the art space *Symposion Lindabrunn*, and the community-based streaming platform *echoraeume.klingt.org*. In 2019, she received the *Recognition Award for Media Arts, Lower Austria*. Latest Publication: Robert Misik, Christine Schörkhuber and Harald Welzer (eds.), *Arbeit ist unsichtbar. Die bisher nicht erzählte Geschichte, Gegenwart und Zukunft der Arbeit*. Vienna: Picus Verlag. Upcoming Release: *Lullabies to wake up* (Christine Schörkhuber and Zorka Wollny), Warsaw: Bocian Records.

Kristina Pia Hofer is a media theorist, musician, and performer based in Vienna. She currently holds an *Elise Richter* postdoc project at the Department of Media Theory, University of Applied Arts Vienna, and is working on a *habilitation* entitled *Situating Cinesonics: Materialities of Sound in Audiovisual Art*.

// FKW is supported by the Mariann Steegmann Institute and Cultural Critique / Cultural Analysis in the Arts ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann / www.fkw-journal.de

// License

This work is licensed under the CC-BY-NC-ND License 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>



“YOU DON’T ONLY LISTEN WITH YOUR EARS, YOU ALSO LISTEN WITH YOUR MUSCLES AND YOUR BONES.” A CONVERSATION ON THE CHALLENGES OF SHARING SONIC SPACE ONLINE

KRISTINA PIA HOFER ——— Tell me about your artistic practice, and the work you do with the Sounds Queer? collective. What role does sound play in these contexts?

ZOSIA HOŁUBOWSKA ——— Sound is one of the few ways in which I can relate to and communicate with people. I find it difficult to talk and make friends. I can express myself better, and find easier connection and understanding, through sound. I am not educated as a musician or an artist, though. I come from punk and DIY, where everyone was making music, but no one was calling themselves a musician. I am trained as an anthropologist. Up to my master’s studies, I treated those two things separately. I was looking for methodologies that were based on activism and had a strong ethical basis. I realized too late that it was not possible to conduct anarchist anthropology based on activism and relational ethics within academia, so I moved to artistic research where I had more space for my practice. At some point, I just decided to call myself a musician and focus entirely on sound. Now, it’s the main thing I do: I produce electronic music, I teach electronic music, I do performances, radio pieces, and sound design for theater and movies.

——— With Sounds Queer? (SQ?) we treat sound as a tool to strengthen agency. In 2015, I started holding workshops like “How to start playing music without knowing how to play an instrument” in rented or squatted practice spaces. They were about operating a drum machine, playing a riff on the bass, and adding some cheap keyboard sounds – I wanted to show that it’s really easy to make sounds, even with just two mp3 players and some downloaded samples from the Internet. When I moved to Vienna, I got a grant from KùltürGemma¹⁾ for a series of workshops, and for developing a performance exploring the idea of animating a safer space in queer activism through making music together. I asked Adele Knall and Violeta Gil Martínez to join, we registered as a *Verein*,²⁾ got funding from the City of Vienna, and broadened the scope of our enterprise (laughs). Together, we treat sound as an act that is able to conjure a safer space. Through playing sounds together, we can find a feeling of belonging, an exchange with people that have

1)
www.kueltuergemma.at (18 February 2021)

2)
In Austria, a registered association (Verein) is eligible to apply for public funding.

different experiences than our own. We were running a physical space until recently, a synth lab with a program of workshops and jam sessions. We also created an interactive sound and video installation together at the Austrian Association of Women Artists (VBKÖ) as part of an exhibition celebrating the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage.³⁾ The installation showcased the documentation of a performance I curated and organized in December 2017. We added a DIY synth to the setup, so that audiences could watch the documentation and intervene in the soundscape. We had also scheduled a SQ? exhibition at VBKÖ in November 2020, within the framework of their "Agency of Failure" program. We had to move it to April 2021 because of COVID.

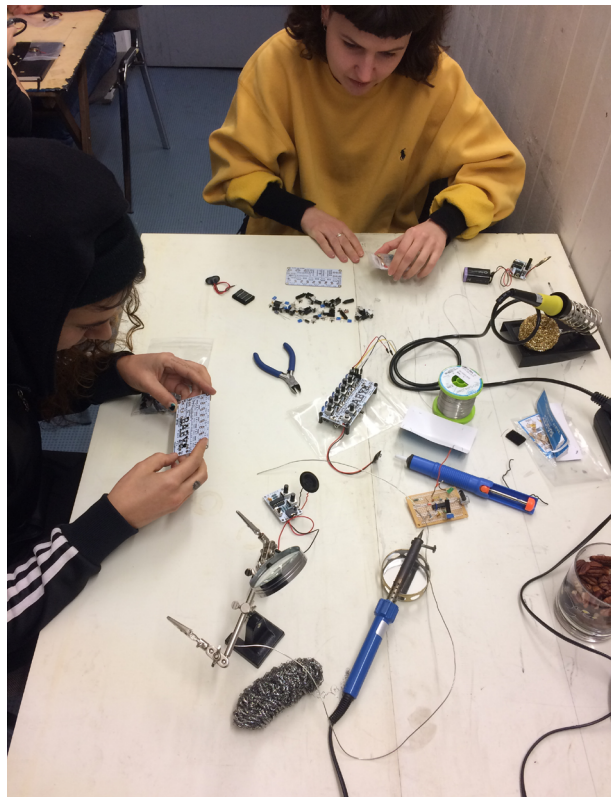
KPH ____ What does "safer space" mean in the context of SQ?

ZH ____ My interpretation of the term is inspired by my activism. I worked in a conflict mediation team in a queer festival in Copenhagen, where we developed a toolkit based on Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed.⁴⁾ We tried to think of conflict as a collective responsibility, a dynamic with power structures behind it, not only as a situation between two individuals. We tried to uphold a relational ethical approach: all experiences and emotions are valid, and it's about listening and understanding each other, but also about recognizing your privileges. We followed a line of thinking from intersectional queer feminism, as I have experienced it in various groups, collectives, and DIY zines: that you can be a migrant and also be racist, for instance. We wanted to keep in mind the different obstacles that a person can encounter, so that we wouldn't erase each other's trajectories. Obstacles do not annul the privileges we might have, but it is crucial to reevaluate your actions in a dynamic process. The process should be centered around giving space to others, rather than demanding that something be provided to you. That's how I define a safer space: a situation where different experiences can be voiced and heard.

____ And then I realized that it's possible to create this situation through music too, especially when organizing an event: by paying careful attention to what the performing band's message is, how

3) <https://www.vbkoe.org/2018/09/18/nothing-less-100-jahre-frauenwahlrecht/> (18 February 2021)

4) Boal, Augusto (1994 [1979]): *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.



// Figure 1
Workshop at Sounds Queer? Festival,
SSTR6, Vienna, 9–13 January 2019.
© Sounds Queer?

the band presents itself, where the event is organized, who's doing the door, what the prices of admission are, and what the entrance policy is. We applied this idea to the way we organize workshops and teach music at SQ?. Of course, we are still learning a lot, and we make mistakes as we go. But we try to be better and better at what it actually means to make something accessible. Because it's not enough to just say it. You have to work really hard.

KPH ____ What strategies do you employ to make SQ? accessible? And who are we talking about when we talk accessibility?

ZH ____ One strategy is the way we formulate an invitation. We don't have what we call an identity policy. We prioritize people that don't identify as cis straight male, but everyone is welcome. However, in a workshop, when I ask "Who wants to try something?" I make sure that it's not a man that jumps ahead to the front of the line. We also have a social spot policy for people who can't afford the regular fee: at every workshop, we offer one or two spots for free or on a sliding scale.

____ One thing that doesn't work is that we don't reach some communities we'd like to reach out to, like queer refugees and other migrant communities. SQ? only functions in English, because I don't speak German so well, and some of these communities don't prioritize speaking English. That's something we need to address. In general, we still have a hard time getting out of our own bubble. We don't often have the time to go around and spread flyers and posters, we rely on newsletters, and these newsletters usually serve students. So we have a lot of students, who are not my priority to serve. Also, our former physical space was on the first floor without a lift. And after a while we realized that because of our limited budget, we had really crappy, fragile plastic chairs, which are uncomfortable when someone is bigger. So we learn as we go, but it's important to learn. At some point, we actually stopped to use the word 'accessible' for our studio, because we are not an accessible studio. We now say that we're an open studio.

KPH ____ At the studio, you put an emphasis on working with synthesizers. Why does this choice of instrument matter?

ZH ____ Let me start a little bit poetically (laughs). One of my favorite books is *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw* by Freya Jarman-Ivens.⁵⁾ In her introduction, Jarman-Ivens recalls being obsessed with Alison Stamp's

5)

Jarman-Ivens, Freya (2011): *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

performance in a 1980s recording of Allegri's *Miserere*, specifically with the tension between the peak of the highest note and the melodic resolution right afterwards to a new harmony. She connected this listening experience with her personal struggle with coming to terms with her queer identity. Later on, the research on tension and operatic voice became the focus of her academic career – but it all started with an emotion, a fascination, an attraction. I relate to that. I have been obsessed with synthesizers for as long as I can remember, and I cannot tell you why (laughs). When I started researching on the pioneers of electronic music, they were all women, or gender non-conforming individuals. It fascinated me that the development of this technology, at a time that granted greater access to technology and education to women in general, created a perfect situation to reinvent music *and* gender roles. Women could pick up an instrument that didn't yet have stigma or history attached to it, and try anything that was possible.

KPH ____ What time are you speaking about?

ZH ____ I am specifically speaking about Wendy Carlos, Delia Derbyshire, Daphne Oram, Éliane Radigue, Elżbieta Sikora, Pauline Oliveros, and lots of other women that were around in the 1960s. It fascinates me that they had this instrument that was not really an instrument, that no one even knew what it could sound like, and that women were on the forefront of creating this genre, this art. And they were pushing the technology forward. Wendy Carlos was heavily involved in coming up with the interface for the first Moogs, which had been clunky and easily got out of tune. Carlos basically turned them into instruments. At SQ? we start all our workshops by referring to these artists. For me, as a femme-recognized person, it's important to finally have a place where I belong, historically. Because when you study history, and you cannot find a person that looks like you... It's not that they don't exist, but the way history is being presented, you're always like: "But where was I? Where am I in this?" That's another reason why I am drawn to electronic music.

KPH ____ What does listening mean to you? For you as an artist, and for your practice with the SQ? collective?

ZH ____ I think listening is the core of composing and producing music. Listening is much more important than actually making a noise, or a sound. Obviously, I am very fascinated with Pauline Oliveros, and the emotionally gentle and empathic listening she

suggests that engages the whole body.⁶⁾ In my work, however, I use listening as a learning tool. I research a lot in archives of traditional music from Poland and Ukraine. I don't use transcriptions and I don't do recreations or reconstructions, I *listen* to the recordings, and then I try to learn how to sing the melody. This is not because I don't read notes. I think that this music is deprived of something crucial when it's being transcribed. Especially when transferred to the twelve sharp tone structure.

KPH ____ What's missing?

ZH ____ First, the meaning of this music. It's not only a melody. The melody and the lyrics are one thing, one identity. Second, music always has a function and a purpose, and its magical consequences on reality. But something that is transcribed, catalogued alphabetically, and released under the name of a researcher... that's pointless to me. I am talking about the violence and anxiety of archives: taking things out of the context, disseminating them in a way that people who created this knowledge have no control over it, and cataloging texts of shared culture under the name of one researcher.

____ Coming back to your question of listening: I am interested in collective improvisation. In many collective improvisations that I witness, there is very little actual listening between the participants. Everyone's looking for their five minutes to solo, or to get louder and more experimental than the others. In December 2017, as a final presentation for a workshop I did when SQ? was still my solo project, I invited the workshop participants (Verena Schwab, Edwina Sasse, Nicole Sabella, and Miña Tarilonte Rodríguez) and two artists, Aja Ireland and DJ Morgiana HZ, to improvise at the Prospekthof at Semperdepot in Vienna, which is a very large space with a very high ceiling. The musicians were so far away from each other, with their own signal amplified so loudly close to them, that they could not hear anyone else when they were playing. If they wanted to listen to other people, they literally had to stop playing, and start walking around in the space. I wanted to create a multi-layered conversation, a polyphonic dialogue. I told them before what the setup would be, and they were terrified. But I told them to trust the silence, and that we didn't have to create a full-on symphony all the time. I liked thinking about composing as listening. When I have the opportunity, I like composing and creating in a way that has the audience participate in creating the composition, either by triggering sensors, or by just moving in space and mixing

6)

Oliveros, Pauline (2005): *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice*. Lincoln: iUniverse.

the sounds that come from the different sources in the room, so they decide for themselves how much they hear of what source.

KPH ____ What about listening in the pedagogic space of SQ?

ZH ____ At the beginning, people had no headphones, and each workshop was an hour of noise. No one could hear what they were doing, and everybody was only interested in trying out the gear. Now they are using headphones and try the synthesizers one by one, which is better for everybody's ears. When we do jams at SQ? it can be a challenge to be inviting, while also taking care that the space doesn't get squashed by somebody who's very eager. Our last jam was called "Gentle listening to unfinished tracks." People brought songs that they were working on, and we listened to each song collectively, two or three times in a row. The first time we just listened, the second and third times we tried to jam to the song. That's a format I'd like to repeat. It worked, people were enjoying themselves.



// Figure 2
Sounds Queer? sound installation at
the exhibition at Format.strk, Vienna,
31 January 2020. © Sounds Queer?

KPH ____ In sound art studies, it is often suggested that sound and listening don't answer to the same dominant power dynamics that structure looking and relating via visible codes. The hope expressed in these publications is that listening opens up spaces for less hierarchical ways for humans to engage with each other. Without going into the details of the particular theories: how does this general suggestion resonate with you?

ZH ____ I think that there is a lot of vulnerability connected to listening, because you cannot shut it off. This is why I always have the audience in mind when I compose or play. I don't want to hurt them. I understand that art doesn't always need to be pleasant, and that we're also here to challenge each other, but I don't think that playing an hour of extremely loud, high-pitched tones is artistically new, or a revelation. It's very unpleasant for the audience. I have the feeling that some artists just forget that they compose for people with ears and a human hearing range. Listening, teaching, and power – that's delicate, too. When I'm teaching workshops, I am sometimes annoyed with myself that the first hour is just me talking. I really don't know how to do it differently yet.

KPH ____ As a workshop participant, I loved it that you talked in the beginning.

ZH ____ (laughs)

KPH ____ It was a good way of learning for me. To hear you speak.

ZH ____ Yeah? I also like learning through listening. I learned it from the vocal trainer I was studying with. She doesn't allow you to record when you learn a song, because you don't only listen with your ears, you also listen with your muscles and your bones, and she wants you to observe how the sound feels in your throat when you sing back, how it resonates in your muscle and bones. This is how you learn. Especially when you learn group singing, it's vital that you experience the relationship between the voices through your bones and muscles. That's the best way to study harmony. A recording can't capture that vibration, this resonance. You need to learn how it should feel in your bodies, like muscle memory.

KPH ____ Let's move to your experience of the spring 2020 lockdown, and the situation it put you in, especially with the SQ? workshop space. Most of your workshops, as I know them, are presence-based. This is necessary because you provide the equipment the participants play with. What happened to your teaching work when physical gatherings were no longer possible?

ZH ____ We stopped doing workshops. The difficult thing in the spring of 2020 was not having a timeline. At first, the lockdown was announced for a week, then for a month, then for another and another, and we never knew how much longer it would take. I hated this limbo. We kept the space empty for two months, losing money, before we decided to pack up and leave. Now, in September 2020, we still have the funding, but we don't know how smart it is to organize events. We don't know if another lockdown is going to be imposed over the next months. We don't know if we should look for a temporary space, or another permanent space. We spend so much time on worrying. It really eats us up. I was thinking about doing SQ? workshops online, but then I did one online workshop, and didn't like it much.

KPH ____ What workshop was it? How was it different from teaching in presence?

ZH — Teaching online, you can never make sure that you and the participants are on the same page. My workshop was for the Academy of Fine Arts, about making a podcast, or a radio piece. You'd think that the technologies for streaming and online learning were developed enough for such a task, but they're not. When you are using a digital audio workstation and a stream, it's not always possible to route the audio properly, so you have to switch back and forth between two or more streaming platforms – between Zoom and Twitch, for instance. On Zoom, the participants cannot always see all the windows that are popping up in the software that you want to show them. When you're using Twitch, they cannot ask you questions unless they have an account. They can join a chat, but the chat takes time, so their questions always come in five minutes late. If I have the participants in the same room, in front of their computers, I can walk over to them and show them the button they are looking for. But when I'm teaching software online, I don't even know which sound monitors they're using. If the participants are using their computer speakers, they won't be able to hear the low frequencies of the spectrum, so it is impossible to explain certain features of the software where hearing these frequencies becomes important. The other thing I hated about the move online was how overloaded the Internet became, and I don't want to contribute to that. People asked why I didn't just make tutorials. I answered that there are already so many tutorials, on everything. A lot of them are crappy, commercially sponsored content produced by bro-y bros, but I don't have the energy to retrain myself. I spent many years learning how to produce music and teach workshops, and then suddenly, within two months, I'm supposed to figure out how to make a tutorial?

KPH — I remember a lockdown article by a New York City-based theater maker called Nicholas Berger that you reposted on Facebook in April 2020.⁷⁾ Berger argued that artforms that depended on assembly to unfold their artistic and social relevance couldn't easily be moved online. "Assembly," to him, is a gathering of artists and audiences in real time, physical presence and a shared physical space, with the participants giving their undivided attention to the immediate experience they share – a situation of corporeal liveness and togetherness that the Internet wouldn't accommodate. Speaking from your experience: could teaching be considered an artform that works better in assembly, as well?

ZH — A thousand times yes. I cannot handle the Zoom dynamic.

7)

<https://medium.com/@nicholas-berger/the-forgotten-art-of-assembly-a94e164edf0f> (18 February 2021)

To me, Zoom is an uncanny valley.⁸⁾ It's close enough to a real interaction, but it's actually so awful as an experience – dropping connections, yelling “Can you hear me!” for ten minutes. It's hard to focus for me that way. I can't imagine teaching any more workshops in this setting.

KPH ____ What about your music practice? Did you participate in online showings at all?

ZH ____ A little bit. It was fine, because I didn't have to organize it, I just had to show up in a room and play. I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't had professional technical help, with someone else bringing all the cameras and doing all the lights. I'm a musician. I'm not a PR person or a cameraperson, and I'm not going to spread myself thin to provide disposable content-on-demand for free. I am wary of the 'pandemic content' some artists are putting out. Just because you have a lot of free time, it doesn't mean that you are obliged to be creative, put out ten records, and write a book. What I'd rather wish for this experience to teach us is to break the cycle of completely unsustainable self-exploitation.

KPH ____ For you as an artist, what's the difference between playing a live show in a physical space, and performing for an online broadcast?

ZH ____ Playing live, I feed off the energy of the audience. I see their reactions, they keep me going. And I have a message, which I think transgresses words. The message is in the melody, and in the rhythm. Having a big PA allows for a completely different experience than listening to something on your headphones, it affects your entire body. I believe that dancing together, and listening to music together, is something really sacred. In contrast, performances online that isolate me from the audience feel like theater to me. And I don't want my music to be theater. I have theatrical costumes and makeup, but paradoxically, it's not for people to sit and look at me.

KPH ____ When you stream, do you record a show and then broadcast it? Or do you do live performances that are transmitted in real time?

ZH ____ I did two real time live sets during the lockdown. And I'll be broadcasting two prerecorded performances over the fall of

8)

Mori, Masahiro (2012 [1970]): The Uncanny Valley. In: IEEE Robotics & Automation Magazine, Vol.19, issue 2, pp. 98–100. doi:10.1109/MRA.2012.2192811

2020. However, even though I do miss playing for live audiences, I'm not so miserable that I cannot play gigs. I enjoy getting a break from worrying about everything that comes with DIY touring, like arriving in a city that you don't know on your own, having to drag the equipment around, not knowing your promoter or where you're going to sleep, not knowing whether it's going to be cold, and how many stairs you'll have to climb (laughs).

KPH ____ Do you miss your work with SQ?

ZH ____ I don't think we miss it that much. The last project was hard work, ten times as hard as we thought it would be. We really didn't know what it means to run a space. Of course it was sad that we closed down, but we were also a little relieved to have a break. It opened up space for us to do our own things, to go in our different directions.

KPH ____ Have you heard from any of the workshop participants during the lockdown?

ZH ____ One or two of them wrote us that they miss it. I don't think we've broken too many hearts by stopping.

KPH ____ I have one last question that is addressed to you as an audience member: did you watch and listen to online shows during the spring 2020 lockdown?

ZH ____ I listened to a lot of streams, but I didn't look at them. I listened to them while I was cooking. I didn't watch shows online, I didn't watch festivals online, I only watch music streams when they are paired with visuals, or some animations. I like the format *Twelve Minutes Live* on OKTO TV,⁹⁾ for instance, I already enjoyed watching it before the pandemic. With Oramics,¹⁰⁾ a collective platform for femme, non-binary, and queer musicians that promotes electronic music from Eastern Europe, we did a digital festival for our third birthday. We included multi-media collages (DJ and live music sets, animations and artistic texts ranging from poetry to essays), discussions on the Eastern European music scene, and workshops. It was supported by an artistic grant from Krytyka Polityczna. That was fun too.

KPH ____ Did I miss anything to ask? Is there anything you'd like to add?

9) <https://www.okto.tv/de/sendung/12minuteslive> (18 February 2021)

10) www.oramics.pl (18 February 2021)

ZH — I'm not so sad that we stopped doing workshops at SQ?. I learned that I cannot continue this self-exhaustion. And now we can figure out what we are going to do next.

(Editors' note, February 2021: Sounds Queer? started offering online workshops in December 2020, and is still active at the time of publication of this special issue of FKW.)

Sounds Queer? can be followed online at: <https://www.soundsqueer.org>

// Funding note

This article was completed as part of the Elise Richter project "Situating Cinesonics: Materialities of Sound in Audiovisual Art Acts," Austrian Science Fund (FWF): V770-G.

// Image credits

Fig. 1: Circuit bending workshop at Sounds Queer? Festival, SSTR6, Vienna, 9–13 January 2019. © Sounds Queer?

Fig. 2: Sounds Queer? sound installation at the exhibition at Format.strk, Vienna, 31 January 2020. © Sounds Queer?

//About the Authors

Zosia Hołubowska (born 1988 in Poland) is a queer sound artist, musician, and music curator, working and living in Vienna since 2016. They also create sound designs for performances. Most recently they have been curating and coordinating a queer synth laboratory Sounds Queer? where they organize, facilitate, and run workshops on electronic and synthesizer music for women, queer and non-binary people. Currently, they are a Ph.D. Fellow at the Academy of Fine Arts. Their research deals with experimental queer methodologies in sound art and singing as a knowledge creation process.

Kristina Pia Hofer is a media theorist, musician, and performer based in Vienna. She currently holds an Elise Richter postdoc project at the Department of Media Theory, University of Applied Arts Vienna, and is working on a *habilitation* entitled *Situating Cinesonics: Materialities of Sound in Audiovisual Art*.

// FKW is supported by the Mariann Steegmann Institute and Cultural Critique / Cultural Analysis in the Arts ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann / www.fkw-journal.de

// License

This work is licensed under the CC-BY-NC-ND License 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>



SOUNDS QUEER? BENEFIT COMPILATION TAPE
SOUNDS QUEER? WITH AN EDITION FOR FKW NR. 69



// Sounds Queer?

Benefit Compilation Tape

Audio cassette tape, nine tracks by nine artists, 42 minutes.

Includes unlimited streaming of Benefit Compilation Tape via the free Bandcamp app, plus high-quality download in MP3, FLAC and more.

Orders: soundsqueervienna@gmail.com

In 2019, the Sounds Queer? collective produced this compilation tape of “odd, weird and queer and mostly unpublished tracks by former SQ? teachers and supporters” (SQ? on bandcamp.com). The tape features nine previously unpublished tracks by Aja Ireland, Masha Dabelka, Zdrada Patki Waterflower, Qeei and Carlin Dally, and the SQ? organizers Mala Herba, Matte/Glossy and Krach. The tape can be purchased on a pay-as-you-can basis, with a minimum donation of €8 (+ shipping). All profits directly support the project.

„A SYNTHESIZER CAN BE A FEMINIST SPACESHIP TO CHALLENGE NOT ONLY RULES IN MUSIC BUT ALSO SOCIAL NORMS:“¹⁾ ZUM *BENEFIT COMPILATION TAPE* VON SOUNDS QUEER?

Wien (und Österreich) wird in den letzten Jahren von einer national geprägten Variante populärer Musik dominiert, die in den letzten Jahrzehnten sehr unterschiedliche Phasen durchlaufen hat, sich aber nun mehr und mehr als konstant gegebene Realität, denn als eine (staatlich-)mediale Konstruktion etabliert (Reitsamer 2017). Das Phänomen nennt sich „Austropop,“ und äußert sich trotz einer konnotativ mitschwingenden Komponente von Sozialkritik zu allererst in einer absoluten Dominanz *weißer*, heterosexueller Cis-Männer, die in lokal eingefärbtem Deutsch die Imagination eines ethnisch homogenen Wien besingen. Dessen Bewohner*innen, Strizzis, Hansis, Gittis sind – wenig erstaunlich – ausschließlich heteronormativ verstehbar. Sexistische Ausdrücke und Erzählungen sowie Elemente von Bodyshaming sind in den Texten durchwegs präsent. Der mediale Hype um diesen vermeintlich authentischen Ausdruck lokalen Musikschaftens ist so weit fortgeschritten, dass es nicht mehr verwundern mag, wenn die linksliberale Wochenzeitung *falter* im Sommer 2020 eine *Liste der 50 wichtigsten Austropop-Platten*²⁾ zusammenstellt und das Wiener Rabenhof Theater Anfang 2021 ein Stück mit dem Titel *Keine Angst! 50 Jahre Austropop – eine Hommage*³⁾ präsentieren. Österreich scheint damit mittlerweile da angekommen zu sein, wo für Frankreich und das *chanson française* schon länger eine nationale Mythologisierung im Sinne von Roland Barthes’ *Mythen des Alltags* (2012[1957]) der im Land produzierten Musik festgestellt wurde. Ein solcherart strukturiertes „Pseudo-Genre“ (Sputnik 2019) definiert sich über Ausschlüsse. Und diese Ausschlüsse sind verknüpft mit aktuellen (gesamt-)gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungen.

Demgegenüber war Wien in den letzten Jahrzehnten immer wieder auch Ausgangspunkt und Basis queer-feministischer Projekte und Initiativen, die sowohl lokal als auch international arbeiten und interessieren. So formierte sich 1998 rund um Electric Indigo aka Susanne Kirchmayr mit female:pressure eine internationale Plattform für weibliche*, queere und trans* DJs und Produzent*innen elektronischer Musik. 2009 gründete Christina Nemeč aka chra ihr auf elektronische Musik konzentriertes Label comfortzone. Das Musiker*innenkollektiv unrecords unterstützt in Wien seit 2012 die Veröffentlichung von nicht heteronormativ

1)
<https://www.soundsqueer.org/about>
(07.01.2021)

2)
Stöger, Gerhard: *Aus lokalem Anbau* (FALTER 28/20 vom 07.07.2020), online unter:
<https://www.falter.at/zeitung/20200707/aus-lokalem-anbau> (07.01.2021)

3)
<https://www.rabenhoftheater.com/saison-2020-21/premierer-2020-21/keine-angst/> (07.01.2021)

performtem Experimental, Noise, Punk und Rock aus Österreich und anderen europäischen Ländern.

— Auch das 2014 gegründete Projekt Sounds Queer? hat in Wien einstweilen eine Basis gefunden. Nach queerem Aktivismus und Musik-, Kunst- und Workshop-Aktivitäten u.a. in Polen, der Ukraine, Tschechien, Dänemark und Australien fand Zosia Hołubowska in Wien ein Standbein, und in Kulturmanager*in, *tech nerd* und Musiker*in Violeta Gil Martínez sowie der Künstlerin, Radio-Produzentin und Musikerin (Dritte Hand, Und De Scheenen Hoa, etc.) Adele Knall zwei Mitstreiter*innen. Das dezidiert queer-aktivistische Kollektiv organisiert Sound-Installationen, Shows, Festivals, kollektive Jams und Workshops. Das Queer DIY Synth Laboratory fand nach einer längeren Phase von konstantem Raumwechsel zuletzt im Creative Cluster im Wiener Bezirk Margareten eine (befristete) Bleibe. Mitglieder konnten den Raum um 20 Euro für acht Stunden im Monat nutzen, bevor die Beschränkungen aufgrund der globalen COVID-19 Pandemie, die seit März 2020 besonders auch die lokale Kulturlandschaft betrafen, das Kollektiv zur Aufgabe der Räume zwang (siehe den Beitrag von Zosia Hołubowska und Kristina Pia Hofer in diesem Band).

„We share knowledge and tools because we believe that music can create a safer space to exchange experiences and express yourself. [...] Such a space is understood as a situation where different experiences can be celebrated and privileges challenged.“⁴⁾

— Das Kollektiv Sounds Queer? setzt sich besonders für mehr Sichtbarkeit von weiblichen* und queeren Künstler*innen in der elektronischen Musikszene ein sowie für mehr Gleichberechtigung und Diversität in den *digital media arts*. Dies ist wesentlich, da, wie das Kollektiv female:pressure in ihrer seit 2013 regelmäßig veröffentlichten Studie *Facts* verdeutlicht, die Zahl von weiblichen* Acts im Line-up von internationalen Festivals elektronischer Musik nur langsam steigt. Betrug ihre Zahl im Jahr 2012 knapp 10 Prozent, so stieg ihr Anteil bis 2019 auf nur 25 Prozent an. Dass es überhaupt einen Anstieg gab, dürfte nicht zuletzt auch der durch die Studie ausgelösten Diskussion geschuldet sein. Eine Ausgeglichenheit bildet sich allerdings nach wie vor noch lange nicht ab. Die Zahl der gemischtgeschlechtlichen Acts blieb im selben Zeitraum durchwegs unter 10 Prozent. Auch bei nicht-binären Künstler*innen zeichnet sich kein Aufwärtstrend ab. Deren Anteil erreichte bisher nie mehr als 0,8 Prozent (FEMALE:PRESSURE 2020). Die

4)

<https://www.soundsqueer.org/about>
(07.01.2021)

Workshops von Sounds Queer?, die nach Eigendefinition der Betreiber*innen genau diesem *slow change* auf die Sprünge helfen sollen, finden derzeit online statt. Im Dezember 2020 gab es etwa Einheiten zu „Ableton Live III – Audio“ mit Zosia Hołubowska, „Pauline Oliveros’ Deep Listening and Sonic Meditations“ mit Tony Renaissance, „Modular Synthesizer für Anfänger*innen“ mit Karolina Preuschl, „Musiktheorie I“ mit Adele Knall oder zu „Stage Performance“ mit Mataya Waldenberg. Die Teilnahmekosten sind sehr niedrig gehalten und bei jedem Kurs gibt es einen freien Platz für Migrant*innen, Geflüchtete und ökonomisch Benachteiligte. Menschen, die sich als queer identifizieren und Frauen* werden bevorzugt.

„The project prioritises women, girls, queers, trans, intersex and non-binary people but there’s no identity policy. Everyone is welcome but before coming think about how easy is it for you to get access to this kind of skills and tools? How easy is it for you to feel comfortable and safe at a workshop with strangers?“⁵⁾

— Wie aber klingt queer? Kann es einen feministischen oder queeren Sound geben? Die Betreiber*innen von *Sounds Queer?* – das Fragezeichen bildet nicht zufällig Bestandteil der Bezeichnung – haben sich exakt dieser Frage verschrieben, und damit auch der Suche nach bzw. dem Experimentieren mit einer Idee von queerm Sound. Kann elektronische Musik einen Raum erschaffen, in dem Gender Performances genauso wie musikalische Kompositionen herausgefordert werden? Dieser Ansatz ist nicht neu: Schon 2010 zeigte Tara Rodgers in ihrem Buch *Pink Noises*, für das sie 24 DJs, elektronischen Musiker*innen und Sound Artists interviewt hat, dass es wichtig ist, Beziehungen zwischen Sound, Gender und Technik (auch historisch) neu zu denken. Rodgers formulierte damals, dass „differences – as well as various strategies and combinations of individual achievement and collective organization – can challenge and fortify feminist movement“ (2010: 18). *Sounds Queer?* verfolgen ebenfalls einen intersektionalen Ansatz und stellen sich in ihrer Arbeit genau diesen „challenges.“

— In einem Interview mit Bianca Ludewig für *mica – music austria*⁶⁾ antwortet Violeta Gil Martínez auf die Frage, ob es so etwas wie einen feministischen oder queeren Zugang zu Musik geben kann: „Für uns geht es mehr um den Ansatz des Musikmachens. Klang ist fließend und kann vieles sein. Wenn man Musik auf eine queere Art und Weise macht, sucht man nicht nach

5) <https://www.soundsqueer.org/about> (07.01.2021)

6) <https://www.musiccaustria.at/diejenigen-die-bereits-zugang-haben-bitten-wir-hoeflichst-zurueckzutreten-das-kollektiv-sounds-queer-im-mica-interview/> (07.01.2021)

einem bestimmten Klang oder Genre.“ Zosia Hołubowska ergänzt: „Mein Verständnis von queeren Klängen ist direkt mit queerem Aktivismus verbunden, es geht also um gemeinschaftliches oder kollektives Komponieren. Und es geht auch darum, queer zu dekolonisieren, einen Raum für Verwundbarkeit und Fehler zu schaffen.“ Auch für Adele Knall geht es um Privilegien, Macht und Zugänglichkeit: „Es geht darum, die eigene Position zu reflektieren. Diejenigen, die bereits Zugang haben, bitten wir also höflichst zurückzutreten.“ Der Fokus des Kollektivs auf das Soziale ist eine vielversprechende Strategie, denn Musiker*innen und DJs sind weniger „autonome, künstlerische Subjekte [...], deren Erfolg auf Talent rückführbar wäre,“ sondern „aktive Akteur/innen“ in Musikszenen, die sich im Sinne Bourdieus als kulturelle Felder darstellen, in denen kulturelle Praktiken wirksam werden, wie Rosa Reitsamer in ihrer Arbeit zu Do-it-yourself-Karrieren von DJs und Produzent*innen elektronischer Musik herausgearbeitet hat (Reitsamer 2013: 2019).

—— Das im Oktober 2019 veröffentlichte *Benefit Compilation Tape* vereint neun Künstler*innen internationaler Provenienz. Was die Musiker*innen verbindet, ist der Bezug zu Sounds Queer? als Workshop-Leitende oder Unterstützende. Manche leben in Wien, andere lassen sich gar nicht ohne Weiteres einem nationalen Gefüge zuordnen. Präsentiert werden auf dem auf Musikkassette realisierten Tonträger „*odd, weird and queer*“ Tracks, von denen ein Großteil zuvor nie veröffentlicht wurde. Musikalisch decken die Sounds beim Versuch sie in etablierten Kategorien zu schuladisieren von Dark Wave über Experimental Electronic und Noise bis Synth Pop einiges ab. Während in den Stücken sowohl Drones, als auch langsame und schnelle rhythmische Teile, dichte, fette und ‚dreckige‘ Sounds, sphärische Synth-Klänge und zuweilen auch tanzbare Beats mit Disco-Anleihen vorkommen, werden die traditionell weiblich* gedachten musikalischen Bereiche Melodie und Gesang auf dieser Compilation nur sehr spärlich eingesetzt. Neben geschlechtlichen wird auch mit musikalischen Erwartungshaltungen und Gewissheiten gebrochen.

—— Die Sounds Queer?-Betreiber*innen sind allesamt mit eigenen Projekten vertreten: Zosia Hołubowska steuert als Mala Herba⁷⁾ das Stück *mermaid seduction* bei. Adele Knall taucht mit ihrem Projekt Krach und dem Titel *xxx*, Violeta Gil Martínez als Matte/Glossy mit *let it die* auf. Auch die übrigen Künstler*innen verschreiben sich durchwegs gegen heteronormative Geschlechternormen und sind international aktiv. Die in Novosibirsk geborene und in Wien lebende Sound Designerin Masha Dabelka ist mit

7)

Mala Herba liefert seit mehreren Jahren unvergessliche Live-Auftritte und hat im Jänner 2021 mit *Demonologia* einen ersten Vinyl-Longplayer beim Berliner Label *aufnahme + wiedergabe* veröffentlicht. <https://aufnahmeundwiedergabe.bandcamp.com/album/demonologia> (07.01.2021)

einem *mexico drone* ebenso beteiligt, die aus Polen stammende Musiker*in und Performer*in Zdrada Pałki mit *o królu popielu* und die Argentinierin Tatiana Heuman aka Qeei mit *caen*. Dazu kommen Stücke von Carlin Dally (*Trust*), und von Sabine Moore aka Waterflower (*Trash*) aus Riga. AJA Ireland, Gründerin* eines *Queer Noise Club* in Nottingham, steuert den Track *grimeInside* bei. Vielen der auf der Compilation vertretenen Künstler*innen ist ein DIY-Zugang genauso wichtig wie die visuelle und körperliche Komponente von Performance des eigenen Schaffens. Das Tape ist per Mailorder erhältlich. Die Songs sind aber auch digital via Bandcamp verfügbar. Der Mindestpreis für eine Kassette beträgt €8, es kann aber beliebig viel mehr bezahlt werden. Alle Einnahmen fließen an das Kollektiv zurück.

<https://soundsqueer.bandcamp.com/album/benefit-compilation-tape>

// Literaturverzeichnis

Barthes, Roland (2012[1957]), *Mythen des Alltags*. Übersetzt von Helmut Scheffel. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

FEMALE:PRESSURE (2020). FACTS. <https://femalepressure.wordpress.com/FACTS/> (07.01.2021)
Reitsamer, Rosa (2013), *Die Do-it-yourself-Karrieren der DJs. Über die Arbeit in elektronischen Musikszenen*. Bielefeld: transkript.

Reitsamer, Rosa (2017), *Popular Music from Austria*. In: Ahlers, Michael and Jacke, Christoph (eds.): *Perspectives on German Popular Music*. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 213-217.

Rodgers, Tara (2010), *Pink Noises. Women and Electronic Music and Sound*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Sputnik, Al Bird (2019), *The Great „Austropop“ Swindle*. FM4 Schnitzelbeats vom 26.10.2019. <https://fm4.orf.at/stories/2993526/> (07.01.2021)

// Angaben zur Autor*in

Birgit Michlmayr hat Geschichte und Französisch in Wien und Paris studiert, sich im Zuge der Diplomarbeit mit Gender im französischen Chanson befasst und dieses mit methodischen Zugängen aus Populärmusikwissenschaft und Gender bzw. Cultural Studies bearbeitet. Ein ähnliches Forschungsinteresse besteht zum sich gegenwärtig aktualisierenden Phänomen „Austropop“, wobei auch hier der Schwerpunkt auf (sexistischen und rassistischen) Ausschlüssen liegt. Derzeit unterstützt Michlmayr das Forschungsprojekt *Telling Sounds* an der Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien, das sich mit der Historizität von musikalischen Phänomenen, jenseits der großen Erzählung von in kulturellen Zentren wirkenden „Tonheroen“, beschäftigt. Birgit Michlmayr ist außerdem Labelbetreibende (unrecords), Leitende von Musik-Workshops und Bandcoach (pink noise Girls Rock Camp). Als Musikschaffende ist Michlmayr mit Gesang, Geige, Schlagzeug und Gitarre bei diversen Bandprojekten (Mayr, Mutt/Mayr/Hackl, First Fatal Kiss) sowie für Theater und Performance musikalisch aktiv (zuletzt etwa beim Stück *Endlich wird die Arbeit knapp* unter der Regie von Sheri Avraham).

// FKW wird gefördert durch das Mariann Steegmann Institut und Cultural Critique / Kulturanalyse in den Künsten ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann // www.fkw-journal.de

// Lizenz

Der Text ist lizenziert unter der CC-BY-NC-ND Lizenz 4.0 International. Der Lizenzvertrag ist abrufbar unter: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.de>



LINDA HENTSCHEL: SCHAUEN UND STRAFEN. NACH 9/11, BAND I, KULTURVERLAG KADMOS, BERLIN 2020

Bilder grausam gefolterter, verletzter, leidender, sterbender und toter Körper zirkulierten im Kontext des so genannten *War on Terror*, der den Anschlägen vom 11. September 2001 folgte, durch die Medien. Sie bilden den Gegenstand von Linda Hentschels Studie *Schauen und Strafen. Nach 9/11*, in der sie sich der Dekade nach den Anschlägen bis zur Tötung Osama Bin Ladens im Jahr 2011 zuwendet. Unter anderem anhand der Folterbilder aus Abu Ghraib, Enthauptungsvideos, den Tötungen von Uday und Qusay Hussein oder der Exekution von Saddam Hussein – um nur einige Beispiele zu nennen – untersucht sie die visuellen Politiken, in die diese verstrickt sind.

— Ihr Interesse gilt in erster Linie medienethischen Fragen, die sich im Umgang mit Bildern von Krieg und Terror nicht erst seit 9/11 stellen. Einer repräsentationskritischen Perspektive verpflichtet, richtet sich die Aufmerksamkeit auf das Verhältnis von Sichtbarkeits- und Machtverhältnissen und das Ineinandergreifen Ungleichheit re_produzierender, u.a. rassistischer, sexistischer und heteronormativer Strukturen westlicher Repräsentationsregime. Das Entweder-Oder von Zeigen vs. Nicht-Zeigen von Folter-, Exekutions- und Leichenbildern wird dabei gleich zu Beginn zugunsten komplexerer Überlegungen zu einer Ethik des Visuellen suspendiert. Im Vordergrund steht vielmehr eine Reflexion der Voraussetzungen, unter denen solche Bilder zirkulieren und betrachtet werden: „Wie,“ lauten einige der Fragen zu Beginn, „konstituieren sich westliche, dominant weiße trans/nationale Sicherheitsgemeinschaften mittels visueller Politiken? Welche ästhetischen Regime gefährden diese Visualitätsgemeinschaft? Wie hängt der Glaube, sich vor Bildern schützen zu müssen, mit dem Willen zusammen, sich durch Bilder schützen zu können? [...] Wie mit, wie an Bilderpolitiken Kritik üben?“ (S. 15) Diese Fragen werden in vier unterschiedlich perspektivierten Kapiteln diskutiert, in denen dezidiert kunstwissenschaftliche und philosophisch-ethischen Überlegungen mit Analysen des visuellen Materials verknüpft werden.

— Das erste Kapitel *Die Zirkulation der Bilder von Abu Ghraib: Jacques Derridas Schurken* verbindet, wie der Titel verrät, die 2004 und 2006 in Teilen veröffentlichten Fotografien aus dem Bagdader Gefängnis mit Überlegungen zur Auto/Immunisierung

im Anschluss an Derrida. Im Vordergrund steht die Frage, inwiefern die Medienpolitik der westlichen Kultur als Immunisierungspraktiken beschreibbar und von der Vorstellung gespeist ist, sich vor und auch mit Bildern schützen zu können – als Bewältigungsfantasie also, wie sie paradigmatisch im Mythos der Medusa angelegt ist. Die Skizzierung von Derridas sich wechselseitig konstituierenden und letztlich in eins fallenden Figuren des Schurken und des Souveränen und seiner Kritik am als autonom imaginierten, eben: souveränen Subjekt westlicher Demokratien ist eingebettet in eine Analyse der Repräsentationspolitiken der Bilder aus Abu Ghraib.

— Die Konzentration auf wenige Fotografien – neben dem sogenannten ‚Kapuzenmann‘ und dem ‚Shitboy‘ war die US-Soldatin Lynndie England besonders präsent – wird als Selbst-Immunisierungsstrategie einer imaginären Sicherheitsgemeinschaft diskutiert, die auf die Unsichtbarmachung des *weißen*, männlichen Täters abzielte und an seine Stelle eine Täterin setzte, die als ‚Schurkin‘ nicht nur eine Ausnahme, sondern auch das Andere des westlichen souveränen Subjekts zu verkörpern vermochte, das auf diese Weise unangetastet bleiben konnte. Skepsis gegenüber dem Glauben an eine apotropäische Macht von Bildern und die Möglichkeit, dem Bedürfnis nach Immunisierung zu widerstehen, bilden deshalb einen ersten Baustein für das Konzept visueller Verantwortung.

— Im zweiten Kapitel *Die Kunst, sich selbst visuell zu regieren: Gouvernementale Schauordnungen mit Michel Foucault* wird die mediale Schutzfunktion der Bilder weiter konturiert und historisiert. Wie einleitend anhand sogenannter *Rogue Galleries* exemplifiziert wird, die seit dem 19. Jahrhundert bürgerliche Subjekte einer Sicherheitsgemeinschaft mit_konstituieren, erhält die Vorstellung, sich mit Bildern schützen zu können, mit Foucaults Konzept der Gouvernementalität eine weitere Ebene: „Eine Hauptaufgabe von Bildern als Regierungstechnologien ist [...] ihr Versprechen, mit ihrem Betrachten für Sicherheit zu sorgen“ (S. 85).

— Diese Macht- und Sichtbarkeitsverhältnisse regulierende Funktion wird anhand unterschiedlicher Bildbeispiele erörtert: Als Bewältigungs- und Überblendungsversuch anderer, u.a. der Abu Ghraib-Bilder, wird etwa die Repräsentation *weißer*, heroischer Männlichkeit durch die im November 2004 hundertfach abgedruckte Fotografie eines rauchenden Soldaten nach einem Einsatz, dem ‚Marlboro man,‘ gelesen. Und auch die offizielle Fotografie aus dem *Oval Office* mit Condolezza Rice und George W. Bush vom 12. September 2001 erscheint vor diesem Hintergrund als Inszenierung pastoraler Macht und Souveränität, mit der die US-Regierung der massiven Verletzung ihrer Sicherheitsgemeinschaft

zu begegnen versuchte. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit erhalten auch die Medienbilder von 9/11. In der aufschlussreichen Analyse werden die Heroisierung von Rettern (sic) und die Feminisierung der Opfer ebenso beleuchtet wie die Unsichtbarmachung der bei den Anschlägen Getöteten, die schließlich der spektakularisierenden Sichtbarmachung der durch US-Soldaten getöteten Söhne von Saddam Hussein gegenübergestellt wird. Mit erneutem Rekurs auf Derridas Immunisierungspolitik wird aufgezeigt, dass der Preis für den Glauben an Schutz und Sicherheit gewährleistende Bilder der Einen die Erniedrigung der Anderen ist. Die durch das Buch leitende Frage nach der visuellen Verantwortung wird hier entsprechend mit der Zurückweisung der Sicherheitsversprechen durch Bilder beantwortet, das, nun als Regierungstechnologie konzeptualisiert, eine weitere Perspektive auf die medienpolitische Lenkung von Un_Sichtbarkeitsverhältnissen eröffnet.

— Unter der Überschrift *Gefährliche Bilder – gefährdetes Leben: Verletzendes Schauen mit Judith Butler* steht im dritten Kapitel weniger die Schutzfunktion von Bildern als ihre Metaphorisierung als Waffe im Vordergrund, die die Mediendiskussionen um die im Internet veröffentlichten Videos von Enthauptungen US-amerikanischer Zivilisten durch Al-Qaida prägten. Geht es um die ‚eigenen‘ Toten, konzentrierten sich die skizzierten medialen Debatten um eine Ethik des Visuellen vor allem auf die Frage des Zeigens oder Nicht-Zeigens.

— Doch, so argumentiert Linda Hentschel, führt die Analogisierung von Zeigen/Betrachten mit Gewalt und Nicht-Zeigen/Nicht-Betrachten mit Gewaltlosigkeit ins Leere: Weder sei die oftmals in diesem Zusammenhang vorgebrachte Kompliz_innenschaft zwangsläufig, noch transformiere das Nicht-Betrachten als Immunisierungsakt die Gewaltverhältnisse, aus denen die Bilder hervorgehen. Mit Judith Butler wird daher für eine Reflexion der Un_Sichtbarkeitsverhältnisse plädiert, innerhalb derer die Aufrechterhaltung der Souveränität der Einen gegen die Menschlichkeit der Anderen ausgespielt wird. Ein Ausweg aus diesem Dilemma wird in der Anerkennung der Abhängigkeit, Verletzbarkeit und Gefährdetheit des eigenen Lebens verortet, die sich von der Vorstellung des souveränen Subjekts löst. Die Überlegungen münden deshalb in ein Plädoyer für eine Ethik des Visuellen, die sich ungehorsam und kritisch gegenüber der strukturellen Gewalt westlicher Repräsentationssysteme verhält und an die Stelle des affektregulierenden Schauverbots und Schauzwangs einen Schauzweifel setzt.

— Das vierte und letzte Kapitel, *Überlegungen zu einer Betrachter_innenscham: Ein Ausweg mit Emmanuel Levinas?*,

beleuchtet schließlich die Potenziale einer visuellen Ethik, die den Affekt der Scham als produktive Basis eines Mit-seins begreift. Verbunden werden diese Ausführungen mit einer Analyse der Bilder von Osama Bin Ladens Tod im Jahr 2011 – oder eher: dessen visueller Leerstelle. Im Unterschied zu George W. Bush setzte die US-Regierung unter Barack Obama auf eine Bilderpolitik, die sie als vermeintlich respekt- und schamvoll im Umgang mit dem Toten inszenierte, indem sie ihn eben nicht zeigte.

— Dass das Nicht-beschämen-Wollen der Anderen, das in den offiziellen Fotografien aus dem *Situation Room* stattdessen zum Ausdruck kommt, allerdings keineswegs gleichbedeutend mit eigener Scham ist, bildet den Ausgangspunkt für die abschließenden Überlegungen dazu, „wie eine Ethik der Scham eine Widerstandstechnik und einen Ausweg aus diesem gnadenlosen, autoritären, selbstimmunisierenden Schaukarussell darstellen kann“ (S. 185). Mit Levinas und Jean-Paul Sartre entwirft Linda Hentschel Scham nun als ein potenziell widerständiges Moment, das das Fantasma des autonomen Subjekts ins Wanken bringen kann, dessen Aufrechterhaltung die Entmenschlichung und Dämonisierung der Anderen, der ‚Schurken,‘ braucht, um sich der eigenen Abhängigkeit, Fragilität und Verletzbarkeit nicht gewahr werden zu müssen. Die Politik des Nicht-Beschämens durch den Verzicht auf Bilder des toten Osama Bin Laden wird entsprechend als ein Versuch der Kompensation und Verweigerung von Scham gelesen, die nur vermeintlich mit den Souveränitätsgebaren der Bush-Regierung brach. Mit der Betrachter_innenscham, die diese Verweigerung verweigert, wird eine weitere Perspektive skizziert, solchen visuellen Politiken zu begegnen.

— Skepsis gegenüber dem Glauben an eine Immunisierung durch Bilder, das Zurückweisen ihrer Sicherheitsversprechen, das Anerkennen von Verletzbarkeit und die Betrachter_innenscham werden in den einzelnen Kapiteln diskutiert, um die Gewaltförmigkeit des westlichen Repräsentationssystems zu analysieren, zu problematisieren und ihr eine Ethik des Mit-seins als Alternative zur Seite zu stellen. Eine ethische Haltung, für die sich Linda Hentschel auch im abschließenden Ausblick ausspricht, ist folglich eine kritische, widerständige und ungehorsame gegenüber visuellen Regierungstechnologien, die um die Verwobenheit von Un_Sichtbarkeits- mit Machtverhältnissen weiß.

— Dass es gelingen kann, der Forderung nach Reflexion und Kontextualisierung nachzukommen, wird in *Schauen und Strafen. Nach 9/11* anhand des ausgewählten Materials überzeugend vorgeführt. Als Studie zu den visuellen Politiken des *War on Terror*

behandelt das Buch eine Fülle von Bildern, die mal den Gegenstand ausführlicher Betrachtung, mal weitere, auch aktuellere und historische Bezugspunkte bilden, die in die abstrakteren ethischen Überlegungen eingebunden werden. Die über sechzig Abbildungen sind in Schwarz-Weiß und zum Teil – gerade bei Folter- und Leichenbildern – sehr kleinformatig abgedruckt, sodass die Entscheidung, sich mit diesen Bildern in ihrer Drastik zu konfrontieren, den Leser_innen überlassen bleibt.

— Trotz der Konzentration auf (hauptsächlich) eine philosophische Position pro Kapitel stehen die jeweiligen Ausführungen nicht isoliert, sondern werden im Gegenteil durch Rückgriffe und Querverweise Verbindungen zwischen den Kapiteln hergestellt, die dadurch rekapituliert und konkreter erfasst werden können. Angesichts der Dichte der Argumentation und des visuellen Materials erleichtern diese Passagen nicht nur das flexible Lesen, sondern bieten auch zusätzliche Orientierung innerhalb des Textes. Durch ihre Konzeption als miteinander verbundene, aber dennoch eigenständige Essays lassen sich die Kapitel auch einzeln oder in beliebiger Reihenfolge lesen. Mir erscheint es dennoch empfehlenswert, der Struktur des Buches und damit den Überlegungen zu folgen, die sich sukzessive zu einem Konzept visueller Verantwortung verdichten.

— *Schauen und Strafen. Nach 9/11* bietet nicht nur Anknüpfungspunkte für weitere Analysen der visuellen Politiken des *War on Terror*. Als Entwurf einer ethischen Forschungshaltung und -perspektive eröffnet die Studie vor allem Möglichkeiten des Nachdenkens über die eigene Situiertheit als Betrachter_innen, dessen politische Notwendigkeit in den Analysen der hegemonialen Repräsentationsweisen umso deutlicher wird – und zeigt gleichzeitig auf, wie produktiv diese Perspektive für eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der visuellen Kultur sein kann, die Fragen von Un_Sichtbarkeits- und Machtverhältnissen ernst nimmt. Dabei weist die zentrale Frage nach einer Ethik des Visuellen, nach einem verantwortungsvollen Umgang mit expliziten wie impliziten Gewaltdarstellungen weit über den spezifischen Kontext des *War on Terror* hinaus. Schließlich stellt sie sich überall dort, wo durch und mit solchen Bildern regiert wird.

// Angaben zur Autorin

Lena Radtke ist seit 2018 wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin am Institut für Kunst und visuelle Kultur der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, wo sie an ihrer Dissertation zum Thema *Generationen und Geschichte/n. Historiografische Praktiken in der feministischen Kunst seit 2000* arbeitet. Zuvor hat sie ihr Studium der Kunstgeschichte an der Philipps-Universität Marburg mit einer Masterarbeit über die Performance- und Medienkünstlerin Lynn Hershman Leeson abgeschlossen

und das Zertifikatsstudium Gender Studies und feministische Wissenschaft absolviert. Ihre Forschungsinteressen gelten der kunstwissenschaftlichen Geschlechterforschung, feministischer Kunst und Kunsthistoriografie, Kanon- und Repräsentationskritik, den Generation Studies sowie insbesondere historiografischen und referenziellen künstlerischen Praktiken.

// FKW wird gefördert durch das Mariann Steegmann Institut und Cultural Critique / Kulturanalyse in den Künsten ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann // www.fkw-journal.de

// Lizenz

Der Text ist lizenziert unter der CC-BY-NC-ND Lizenz 4.0 International. Der Lizenzvertrag ist abrufbar unter: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.de>



IMKE GIRSSMANN (2020): HAUPTSTADTMITTE ALS ORT NATIONALER ERINNERUNGSKULTUR? DIE BERLINER DENKMÄLER FÜR FREIHEIT UND EINHEIT UND FÜR DIE IM NATIONALSOZIALISMUS VERFOLGTEN HOMOSEXUELLEN, BIELEFELD, TRANSCRIPT, REIHE: STUDIEN ZUR VISUELLEN KULTUR BD. 27

Bei einem Spaziergang durch die Berliner Mitte zeigt sich eine Mischung aus historischen und neu gebauten Orten. Dieser Stadt- raum zwischen Reichstag, Brandenburger Tor, Potsdamer Platz und Berliner Dom sowie ganz neu auch dem Humboldt-Forum, dessen Schlossfassade sowie seine inhaltliche Ausrichtung um- stritten sind, ist geprägt von Botschaftsgebäuden, Landesver- tretungen, Restaurantketten, Cafés und Geschäften auf dem Bou- levard Unter den Linden und dem Tiergarten mit seinem alten Baumbestand und seinen weitläufigen Grünflächen. In diesem Stadtareal finden sich vergleichsweise viele Gedenkort, die nach dem Mauerfall entstanden sind: das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas sowie das dazu gehörige Dokumentationszentrum, die Denkmäler für die im NS ermordeten Sinti und Roma und für die im NS verfolgten Homosexuellen. Außerdem finden sich Holz- kreuze, die den an der Berliner Mauer Verstorbenen gewidmet sind, am Potsdamer Platz ist ein Teil der Berliner Mauer plaziert, der ehemalige Mauerverlauf kann durch eine Einlassung im Asphalt verfolgt und imaginiert werden, am Checkpoint Charlie finden sich multimediale Informationen zum Leben in einer geteilten Stadt, am Bebelplatz kann man in einen Glasschacht blicken, der leere Bücherregale birgt. Hier wird an die Verbrennungen verfemter Bü- cher am 10. Mai 1933 gedacht. Die umgestaltete Neue Wache ist mit einer in ihrem Zentrum platzierten Pietà nach Käthe Kollwitz der zentrale Gedenkort der Bundesrepublik für Opfer von Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft. Dieses Areal, das Schauplatz vieler historischer Ereignisse war und gefüllt ist mit historisch bedeutsamen Bauten – zum Teil auch mit abgerissenen Bauten, wie beispielsweise der Palast der Republik –, nimmt Imke Girßmann als Kontext für ihre Analyse der Entstehungsgeschichten der Denkmäler für Freiheit und Einheit (noch nicht realisiert) und für die im Nationalsozialis- mus verfolgten Homosexuellen in den Blick.

— Girßmanns Untersuchung, mit der die Autorin 2020 an der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg promoviert wurde, stellt einen Zusammenhang zwischen der sich nach dem Mauerfall

verändernden Berliner Stadtmitte und den im Zuge dessen geplanten und entstandenen Erinnerungsorten her. Fundamental sind für Girßmann hierbei „Ansätze zu Besetzungs- und Umschreibungsprozessen von Gedächtnis und Raum“ (S. 24). Eine Grundannahme der Ausführungen ist, dass „Denkmäler als Repräsentation nicht nur eines Gedenkens zu lesen (sind), sondern auch von Nation, Hauptstadt und Identität(en)“ (S. 25). Den Untersuchungen der Denkmäler stellt Girßmann ihre zentralen Begriffe und Werkzeuge der Analyse voran: Repräsentation und Begehren, Diskurs und Praktiken. Den Begriff der Repräsentation erläutert die Autorin mit den Ausführungen des Kulturtheoretikers Stuart Hall, der kulturelle Repräsentationen immer gleichzeitig als dar- und herstellend versteht (S. 25). Ausgangspunkt für die Begriffe Diskurs und Praktiken ist Michel Foucaults poststrukturalistische Theorie zu Wissen und Macht und zu Praktiken ihrer Herstellung und Regulierung (S. 26). Für ihre Analysen der Entstehungsprozesse von Erinnerungsorten differenziert Girßmann die Begriffe in den Terminus „diskursive Praxis“ „als Überbegriff für alle Aussagen und Handlungen [...], die auf gesellschaftliche Ordnungen wirken“ und in „Praktiken.“ Unter Praktiken sind „Handlungen im sozialen Raum“ zu verstehen, „mit denen die Akteur_innen – Individuen und Zusammenschlüsse oder Institutionen – die Denkmalvorhaben (versuchen) durch(zu)setzen“ (S. 27). Vervollständigt wird das analytische Quartett mit dem psychoanalytisch konzeptualisierten Begriff des Begehrens. Das Ziel der Autorin ist es, sich „in einer der psychoanalytischen Herangehensweise angelehnten Übersetzungsarbeit auf die Spuren latenter Wünsche zu begeben, die zum Beispiel auf kollektive Zugehörigkeit, Kontinuitäten oder Beruhigungen von gesellschaftlichen Uneindeutigkeiten oder auch [...] auf einen Schlussstrich abzielen“ (S. 29). Aufgrund unterschiedlicher Prämissen von Diskurs- und Psychoanalyse knirscht es hier etwas: Diskursiven Formationen ist keine Latenz eingeschrieben und Psyche umfaßt mehr Ebenen als das Sagbare. Als heuristisches Instrumentarium mag die Zusammenstellung interessant sein.

— Das Korpus der Untersuchung besteht aus Texten und Bildern, die in den Planungs- und Werbephase der beiden Erinnerungsorte entstanden sind. Zentral sind die Publikationen der Initiator*innen, die Websites und Protokolle der Akteur*innen sowie die Ausschreibungstexte. Aspekte der Rezeption im sozialen Raum, formal ästhetische Beschreibungen und die Praxen der Aneignung in individuellen und kollektiven Erinnerungsprozessen stehen nicht im Fokus der Analyse. Gerade an Erinnerungsorten

gibt es performative Möglichkeiten in der Auseinandersetzung mit Geschichte, die sie zu sozialen Räumen machen und derart von Intentionen und Absichten der Initiator*innen abweichen können. Diese Rezeptions-Prozesse wären auch in Hinblick auf das Ziel der Autorin, „möglicherweise problematische Entwicklungen von wiederholten Nationalismen, hegemonialen Ordnungen und Ausschlussmechanismen“ zu benennen und zu kontextualisieren (S. 31), spannend gewesen.

—— Beginnend mit der Arbeit der Initiative *Denkmal Deutsche Einheit* 1998 schildert Girßmann die Entwicklung des (bis heute noch nicht realisierten) Einheitsdenkmalprojekts, dessen Standort zwischen Spree, Auswärtigem Amt, dem ehemalige Staatsratsgebäude und dem soeben eröffneten Humboldt-Forum geplant ist. Die Modellsimulationen des Denkmals für Freiheit und Einheit von Milla & Partner zusammen mit Sasha Waltz zeigen eine große Wippe oder Schale auf einem Sockel stehend. Auf unterschiedlichen Darstellungen wird die Position im Stadtraum simuliert und der „Gebrauch“ der Schale durch fiktive Besucher*innen imaginiert. Girßmann analysiert, wie der Umgang mit dem Denkmal als „körperliche Aneignung“ (S. 160) geplant ist, indem die Schale begangen, befahren und fotografiert wird. Gleichzeitig sind die Nutzer*innen des Denkmals stereotyp dargestellt. So sind beispielsweise fotografierende Asiat*innen zu sehen sowie Mädchen, die Arm-in-Arm stehen und so die Verbundenheit der weiblichen Körper zur Repräsentation einer einheitsliebenden Nation genutzt wird. Besonders in den Hearings zu dem geplanten Denkmal im Bundestags wird, so kann Girßmann aufzeigen, das Narrativ einer stringenten Nationalgeschichte genutzt, beginnend entweder mit der Revolution 1848/49 oder mit der Reichsgründung 1871. Das hier etablierte Narrativ klammert leidvolle Erfahrungen, Unterdrückung und Gewalt ebenso aus wie die Toten an der Grenze zwischen DDR und Bundesrepublik. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Bundesrepublik und der DDR, ihrem Verhältnis zueinander und ihren Konstruktionen des jeweiligen anderen Staates findet nicht statt. Stattdessen soll das Denkmal ein Ort „der Besinnung auf glückliche Facetten der Nationalgeschichte sein“ (S. 171).

—— Die Entstehungsgeschichte des Denkmals für die im Nationalsozialismus verfolgten Homosexuellen legt Girßmann ebenfalls ausführlich dar. Im Zuge der Errichtung des Denkmals für die ermordeten Juden Europas und in Auseinandersetzung mit bereits bestehenden Gedenkortern, wie beispielsweise der *Rosa-Winkel-Steinplatte* am Berliner Nollendorfplatz, kamen 1993 die Initiator*innen zusammen und begannen ihre Überzeugungsarbeit

für das *HomoMonument* mit einer Denkschrift und einem Symposium (S. 181). Im Januar 2006 wurde der Siegerentwurf des dänisch-norwegischen Künstlerduos Michael Elmgreen und Ingar Dragset gekürt. Ein Betonquader in Schrägstellung am Rande des Tiergartens stellt nicht nur durch seine räumliche Lage eine Verbindung zu Peter Eisenmans Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas her, sondern der Quader korrespondiert auch visuell mit den Stelen. Durch ein Guckloch, das die Betrachtenden gleichzeitig in eine Entdeckerposition als auch in eine voyeuristische Position versetzt, ist eine Videosequenz zu sehen, die zwei sich küssende Männer zeigt. Girßmann stellt dar, wie nach der Prämierung eine Kampagne der Zeitschrift *Emma* das Projekt beinahe zum Scheitern brachte. Nach einer öffentlich geführten Diskussion, „ob schwule und lesbische NS-Opfer gleichgesetzt werden dürfen“ (S. 195) wurde 2007 schließlich ein Kompromiss gefunden. Dieser sieht vor, alle zwei Jahre einen Filmwechsel vorzunehmen und derart Küssende vielfältiger Identitäten zu berücksichtigen.

— In ihrem vergleichenden Vorgehen kommt Girßmann zu dem Schluss, dass sich bei beiden Initiativen Parallelen in der Aufmerksamkeitsgenerierung erkennen lassen, beispielsweise indem Veranstaltungstermine auf historisch besetzte Daten gelegt werden. Beide Initiativen verbindet auch, dass hauptsächlich männliche Akteure in den Entstehungsprozessen agieren. Jedoch erkennt Girßmann in dem zweijährigen Wechsel des gezeigten Videos als Teil des Denkmals für die verfolgten Homosexuellen eine Dynamik, die auch auf veränderte Bedingungen in der Gegenwart eingehen kann. Dieses Potential erkennt die Autorin in dem geplanten Denkmal für Freiheit und Einheit nicht. Hier geht es „um ein Zeichen einer starken und einheitlichen Nation“ und um „das Begehren, eine stringente Nationalgeschichte herzustellen“ (S. 243).

— Das Verdienst der Forschungen Girßmanns ist es, die Debatten um die Entstehung der beiden Denkmäler minutiös nachgezeichnet zu haben. Auf diese Art konnte die Autorin legitimierende Narrative und Gründungsmythen offen legen. Dass es hier häufig auch um eine Konstruktion von Nationalität geht, die mit der Realität in der Bundesrepublik wenig zu tun und einer idealisierten Vorstellung entspricht, zeigt die Autorin ebenfalls auf. Manchmal erscheint der Begriff der Nation dabei jedoch etwas schwammig. So schreibt sie: „beide Denkmäler gelten als nationale Bauten [...], da über die Vorhaben und ihre Finanzierungen im Bundestag debattiert und schließlich auch abgestimmt wurde. Nicht zuletzt damit werden sie auch zu einem Puzzleteil nationaler Repräsentation“ (S. 16). Beim Lesen regte sich hier bei mir die

Frage nach der Verhältnismäßigkeit. Im Januar 2017 sprach Björn Höcke als Mitglied der kurz darauf im Bundestag vertretenen AfD vom Holocaust Mahnmahl als „Denkmal der Schande“ und forderte „eine erinnerungspolitische Wende um 180 Grad“. ¹⁾ Die AfD trat seitdem an Gedenkorten wiederholt störend auf. Rechtspopulismus kämpft also massiv um Deutungseinfluß auf Erinnerung, um ein von NS-Geschichte befreites Bild der Nation zu erschaffen. Vor diesem Hintergrund erscheint der von Girßmann konstatierte Nationalismus noch eine sehr verträgliche Form zu haben. Auch den Brückenschlag der Denkmäler von „der Kennzeichnung als national“ zu „als zentral beworben“ (S. 19), der auf die nationale Aufladung der neuen Berliner Mitte abzielt, würde ich als historisch arbeitende Rezipientin vorsichtiger formulieren. Denn das hier gewählte Areal war sowohl in der Kaiserzeit als auch im Nationalsozialismus ein Stadtraum mit einer vergleichsweise hohen Dichte an systemrelevanten institutionellen Bauten. So wurden hier im Berlin der NS-Zeit die Neue Reichskanzlei, das Reichsluftfahrtministerium, die Reichsbank sowie das Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda neu (an)gebaut. Außerdem finden sich landesweit vom Bund (mit)finanzierte Gedenk- und Erinnerungsorte, wie beispielsweise das Zeitgeschichtliche Forum Leipzig, der Tränenpalast in Berlin und das Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn sowie Gedenkstätten an Orten ehemaliger Konzentrationslager, etwa Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Flossenbürg und Dachau. Einzuwenden ist also, dass Einrichtungen, die vom Bund (mit)finanziert werden auch ‚in der Fläche‘ an deutsche Geschichte erinnern und Nation repräsentieren. Trotz dieser gewünschten Ergänzungen sind Girßmanns Analysen sehr lehrreich. Nicht nur für Initiator*innen von Gedenkorten sondern auch für alle, die sich für Bottom-Up-Prozesse sowie Begründungsnarrative von Erinnerungsorten und die Debattenkultur in der neuen Berliner Mitte interessieren.

1)
<https://blog.ard-hauptstadtstudio.de/bjoern-hoecke-und-die-erinnerungspolitische-wende/> (30.12.2020)

// Angaben zur Autorin

Silke Förschler, Dr., momentanes Forschungsprojekt zu „Vegetable Seiden. Eine globale Ver- und Entflechtungsgeschichte des Textilen in der Frühen Neuzeit.“ Gemeinsam mit Christiane Keim und Astrid Silvia Schönhagen (Hg.) (2019): Heim/Tier. Tier-Mensch Beziehungen im Wohnen. (Bd. 6 Reihe wohnen+/-ausstellen), Bielefeld, transcript; mit Rebekka Habermas und Nikola Roßbach (Hg.) (2014): Verorten – Verhandeln – Verkörpern. Interdisziplinäre Analysen von Raum und Geschlecht. (Bd. 1 Reihe Dynamiken von Raum und Geschlecht), Bielefeld, transcript.

// FKW wird gefördert durch das Mariann Steegmann Institut und Cultural Critique / Kulturanalyse in den Künsten ZHdK

Sigrid Adorf / Kerstin Brandes / Edith Futscher / Kathrin Heinz / Anja Herrmann / Marietta Kesting / Marianne Koos / Mona Schieren / Kea Wienand / Anja Zimmermann // www.fkw-journal.de

// Lizenz

Der Text ist lizenziert unter der CC-BY-NC-ND Lizenz 4.0 International. Der Lizenzvertrag ist abrufbar unter: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.de>

