

Anaëlle Vögeli aka Semiotic Sakura

Sonic Frictions

According to the anthropologist James Clifford (1997)¹, museums contribute to the construction of cultural identity and difference. Like museums, institutions such as schools have contributed significantly to the construction of 'otherness' and the legitimization of hegemonic structures in the colonial – and postcolonial – context. A case in point is the visualization of the alphabet on the wall of the Wylergut school building in Bern. Following Clifford, museums are "contact zones" in which different power relations and modes of interpretation meet. For me this raises the question: Are institutions capable to create spaces of reflection, where society can collectively address societal issues and takes steps towards structural change? And furthermore, I ask if it could eventually be helpful to create and explore soundscapes as digital spaces and nonphysical places?

Visiting the exposition, the first impression is an overwhelming flood of information. Different voices collide and question the supposed rigid order of "harmony" and "objectivity" of the knowledge-systems of museums. Its messy-like and archive-like installation is on purpose, it is a metaphor: Dealing with the colonial legacy requires continuous commitment to confront the suppressed past. I wonder if sound can create a sensual and affective space to process societal issues? Is it possible to deepen the understanding of society its inequalities by *Critical Listening* of its soundscapes? Confronted with the exhibition "Widerstände", I wanted to explore whether I could translate the experience

of the visit into a musical language. By embracing the transformative aspect of sound, I aimed to create a sonic immersive experience that resonates with the disruptive quality of the exhibition.

Inspired by Pauline Oliveros' concept of *Deep Listening*,² I seek to shift the focus from passive hearing to active engagement with sound. This heightened awareness can lead to increase a deeper understanding of oneself and the world.³ What if sonic immersion could provoke critical reflection and implicate knowledge about the positioning of the listener and if sonic immersion allows to deal with the suppressed past and unpleasant truths embodied in society in a more direct way, than the intellectual reflection? I would call it *Critical Listening* then. With my soundpieces, I hope to get closer to the concept of *Critical Listening* of the disruptive soundscapes of racism and antiracism in the public space of Berne and perhaps Switzerland – condensed in the exhibition.

To do so, I composed two soundpieces which are reflecting on the exhibition. The first takes a well-known children's song as an entry point. Suddenly, the public projection of innocence and harmony begins to crackle. I am juxtaposing the melodic children-like voice and the school bell with "noises" and distorted, "aggressive sounds". The second uses manipulated recordings of the exhibition to explore themes of space and the construction of identity. The constant repetition of the question "what does it mean to be in a room?" in the

sound installation by Fatima Moumouni and Li Tavor is similar to the experience I made, walking through the exhibition and hearing the voice close to me and from further away. I tried to depart from a thoughtful mood to go to a slightly angrier mood. I pitched the Bernese rapper Native's song, it's faster and now almost sounds like a sped-up version for TikTok. This symbolizes the online presence of norms that are consolidated in institutions but also permeate the internet and are maintained by all of us. The perception of the sound recordings in the exhibition is fragmentary and that is the reason why I arranged them as fragment-scrap in my own piece.

I seek out sounds that challenge expectations as well as the conventional perception of the dichotomy music versus noise. Two artists from Stockholm, Berglund and Sunde, postulate: "Just as music is whatever people choose to recognize as such, noise is whatever is recognized as disturbing, unpleasant, or both."³ I wanted to play with these culturally defined norms of interpretation and create a sonic landscape that is both familiar and estranged. This sonic dissonance reflects on the uncomfortable aspect of confronting racist socio-structural

norms and living in a society where socialization is shaped by hegemonic power structures and amnesia.

Through this sonic exploration, I invite the listener to question their own perceptions of sound and to consider the power dynamics embedded within cultural and historical contexts. How do you experience the harmony and innocence, that is produced by suppressing a colonial past and contemporary racism in Switzerland? How do the glitches and disturbances affect you? What is disturbing, what is harmonious? Which objects, perspectives and voices are supposed to be presented in a museum or art exhibition? Which ones are not presented? What is noise, what is music? Who has a voice? Which are the silenced voices and perspectives? And where are they? How does it feel, when they suddenly speak up?

I hope with my soundpieces I was able to create a little space and I kindly invite you to listen closely and reflect critically.

Anaëlle Vögeli, Semiotic Sakura
February 15, 2025

1 Clifford, James (1997). Museums as contact zones. *Representing the nation: a reader: histories, heritage and museums*, 435–457.

2 Oliveros, P. (2005). *Deep listening: A composer's sound practice*.

3 The artist duo published "a queer noise manifesto". Seroconversion / Berglund and Sunde (2013).

As part of the exhibition "Resistance: Dealing with Racism in Bern," the association "Das Wandbild muss weg!" (The Mural Must Go!) has collaborated with the Public Anthro Lab at the University of Bern. In this collaboration, students have developed their own ethnographic, musical, literary, and journalistic approaches to the exhibition and the mural process.

How does it feel and sound when the invisible walls of racism begin to crumble and new voices enter the room? Based on her practice as a producer, Anaëlle Vögeli aka Semiotic Sakura explores the world of sound in the exhibition. In the two tracks she created, she develops a mixture of sound, noise, and music to analyze and make tangible how power relations were shifted in the mural process. In her statement, she classifies her practice as falling between anthropology and sound research/art.

The track *ABC Of Innocence* was presented on March 18, 2025, at the Dampfzentrale Bern as part of the event "Zuhause in der Diaspora: Das Wandbild ist weg – wie weiter?" (At Home in the Diaspora: The Mural is Gone – What Next?).

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