GENDER
OPEN
REPOSITORIUM

# The Sound of Silence

**Buyse, Nadia**

**2021**

**https://doi.org/10.25595/2097**

**Veröffentlichungsversion / published version**
**Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article**

**Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:**

Buyse, Nadia: *The Sound of Silence*, in: FKW : Zeitschrift für Geschlechterforschung und visuelle Kultur (2021) Nr: 69, 53–56. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25595/2097.

**Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY NC ND 4.0 Lizenz (Namensnennung - Nicht kommerziell - Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

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

**Terms of use:**

This document is made available under a CC BY NC ND 4.0 License (Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivates). For more information see:

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

GenderOpen – Repositorium für die Geschlechterforschung: www.genderopen.de

FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

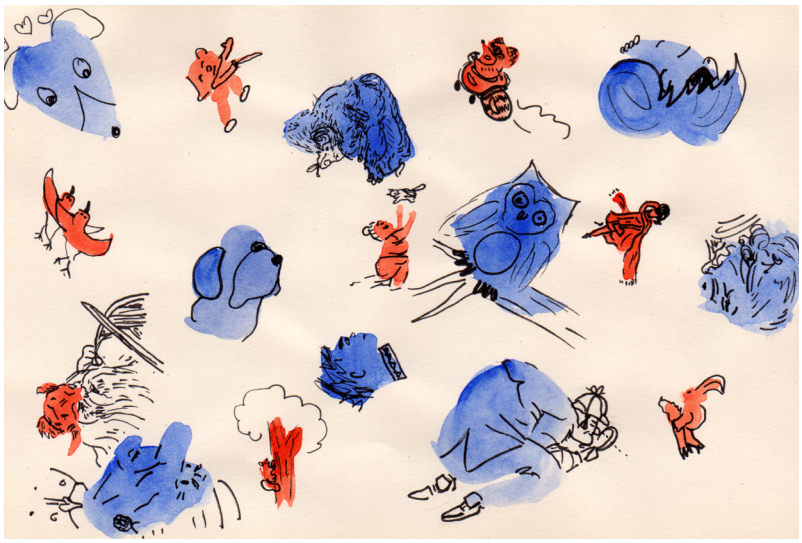
HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

# 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 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



// Figure 2
*Untitled* by Nadia Buyse and Joe Blann

## "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?!



// Figure 3
*Untitled* by Nadia Buyse and Joe Blann

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

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