

Harbor–Soundscape–Soundwalk.* Flensburg Maritime Museum, Flensburg Germany. February-April 2010.

Reviewed by Arnika Peselmann

Sounds and tones are omnipresent elements of our sensory surroundings and are the constituting parts of the so-called *soundscape* (Schafer 1993). Changes in our spatial environment have consequences not only on the visual but also on the aural perception of a place. Sounds are ephemeral phenomena but when they are recorded, they bear witness to a particular historical period. One of the major aims of the exhibition *Harbor–Soundscape–Soundwalk* was to raise awareness of our sonic environment, in particular that of the Flensburg harbor, as well as to break the often visual-focused customs of a visit to the museum. Another concern of the curators was to use the harbor's soundscape to encourage visitors participate in the discussion of the future usage of this northern German city's harbor.

Accompanied by the sounds of trains and ship horns activated by a motion detector, the visitor entered the exhibition hall on the top floor of the museum. The exhibition was divided into two major sections. One part contextualized the recorded sounds with historic pictures (mainly paintings) and a panoramic aerial photograph on the floor. In the second, more experimental part, people were encouraged to create their own harbor sound in a so-called "harbor workshop." After picking up the audio guide, an introductory text conveyed to the visitor the idea of a soundwalk and the conception and genesis of the exhibition: The exhibition was designed in co-operation between the Flensburg Maritime Museum and the Institute of Folklore/Cultural Anthropology at Hamburg University. Twelve students, supported and tutored by the two lecturers, Johannes Mücke and Thomas Hengartner, as well as the museum's director Thomas Overdick, had recorded 26 hours of sounds and tones at different locations around the Flensburg harbor. Interviews with eight harbor officials working in the management and the development of the harbor were conducted. According to these interviews, the entire area was separated into six social spaces (e.g. the ship building yard, the historical, and industrial harbor, etc.). In the exhibition, these six spaces were represented by sound stations where the recorded sounds could be listened to. The 26 hours of footage were compiled into 37 sound collages of approximately two minutes each. A short textual description informed about date and place of recording as well as of content: the examples consisted of the sounds of everyday life as well as the sounds of special occasions such as festivals. A track with excerpts of 70 short interviews with passers-by complemented the sounds with explicit statements on sound imaginations of the harbor.

The first part of the exhibition area was divided by display walls showing paintings of the Flensburg harbor over the last four centuries. These were meant to confront the sounds with some (partially idealized) visual displays of the harbor. Even though the curators' intention to develop frictions between the visual and aural perception of the harbor became obvious, I personally felt a bit distracted by the pictures. Plain walls might have taken the concept of the

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exhibition a drastic step further and would have enabled a more intensive involvement with the sounds and thus a deeper aural experience.

Leaving the sound stations one walked to the second section, where visitors had the possibility to mix their individual harbor sound collage at a computer and leave a comment on the aural guestbook (i.e. a cassette recorder). Furthermore, brochures were provided to inform the visitors about the ongoing discussion of the harbor's prospective usage.

This debate has a long history: The city of Flensburg, founded in medieval times around the already existing harbor, lost its prominence when a channel connecting the Baltic with the North Sea was opened in 1895. From then on the naval construction industry as well as passenger shipping became less and less important. Moving the naval construction industry from the city center to the outskirts made industrial ship manufacturing less present or, as it is phrased in German, "out of senses." The controversy in Flensburg deals with the question of whether the harbor should maintain its industrial parts or shift its focus fully to usage for leisure time activities and tourism. In the understanding of a museum as a place of social negotiations, the curators designed the last part of the exhibition to provide information on the tentative master plan developed by the municipal council and a local development association. Visitors were encouraged to write down their ideas of what belongs to the harbor—pun with the German word for belonging "gehören," which contains the word for listening—and pin it on a board.

The idea of taking visitors on a soundwalk through the Flensburg harbor was realized in a carefully considered and quite innovative manner. Most appealing to me appeared to be the linkage to the current political discussion. The exhibition was perfectly accessible to a wide audience and introduced everyone in a comprehensible way to the concept of sound studies. For visitors trained in the field of anthropology it would have been interesting to receive further insights, especially in the empirical research of this ethnography of the senses.

A companion volume dealing with these issues is currently in preparation but was not available during the exhibition. Public presentations, however, were held during the exhibition and were meant to give a deeper understanding of the entire concept of soundscapes and of the harbor in general. The recording of sounds in the preliminary phase of the exhibition opening also meant that a sound collection belonging to the Maritime Museum was established. This allowed for the archiving of dwindling sounds, such as the bell indicating the break at the shipyard—considered an aural *Lieux de Mémoire* and a relevant component of the harbor's soundscape for many Flensburgers.

Reference Cited

Schafer, R. Murray

1993 *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books.

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