

Dear Mayor Keppeler,

First, I would like to share my personal reaction to Olaf Nicolai's performance "An Undeciphered Dream is Like an Unread Letter": When I first heard the recording, I was immediately appalled – and then very sad, without initially knowing exactly why. Only gradually did I realize how much the specific soundscapes in this location were not only disturbing, but could also unintentionally revive old antisemitic stereotypes.

My connection to the Stommeln Synagogue is a very special one: In 1993, as a guest student at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, I visited the local art project for the first time. The unique atmosphere and the intense engagement with history moved me so deeply that it became one of the reasons why I stayed in Germany, especially in Cologne. Over the years, the synagogue has inspired numerous renowned artists to make extraordinary contributions. Arising from this personal bond to the Stommeln Synagogue art project, I am reaching out to you with a concern that goes far beyond the Jewish community: the responsibility of everyone for a culture of remembrance, respect, and a determined resistance to antisemitism, to protect this special place and its spirit.

The performance "An Undeciphered Dream is Like an Unread Letter" exemplifies how problematic the unreflected use of certain musical forms of expression can be in a place like the former Stommeln Synagogue. The sounds used – "wailing," "animalistic," "hissing" – are not only unsettling in their historical context, but also, even unintentionally, activate centuries-old antisemitic stereotypes. Even if this was not the artist's intention, the fact remains that such sonic images were once deliberately used to defame Jewish life.

Especially at sites of remembrance like synagogues, it is not enough to rely solely on artistic freedom. Rather, it must be examined what societal meanings, associations, and effects an artistic work can trigger. My impression was confirmed through discussions with independent experts – especially Prof. Dr. Jascha Nemtsov, a renowned musicologist and expert in Jewish music. He expressed clear discomfort with the artistic implementation and emphasized the necessity of a sensitive, reflective approach to art projects in former synagogues.

The current debates, for example regarding Documenta Fifteen, and now the performance in Stommeln, make it clear that such cases cannot be dismissed as mere "isolated incidents." They instead reveal structural problems and an organizational failure in dealing with antisemitic stereotypes and sites of Jewish history in contemporary art.

The former Stommeln Synagogue is, in particular, a place of remembrance and a monument representing our obligation to act with special vigilance and empathy. It is not enough to rely on the intentions of artists – what matters is how the works resonate

in context and which societal responses they can provoke. Sites of remembrance like synagogues demand special respect, public discussion, and clear, binding standards regarding the handling of Jewish history, especially in contemporary art.

In this context, I would like to emphasize: Antisemitism is not a “Jewish issue,” but concerns us all as members of an open, democratic society. The decisive fight against antisemitism is our shared foundation and requires broad awareness of responsibility in politics, administration, art, and the public. Anyone who tolerates or relativizes hatred of Jews endangers the very foundation of the Federal Republic.

With this in mind, I urge you:

- to ensure that performances and projects in the former Stommeln Synagogue are especially thoroughly examined for their aesthetic and substantive sensitivity in relation to the site of remembrance.
- to include Jewish expertise and perspectives at an early stage.
- to develop, together, ways in which art at this special site can contribute to a respectful and discrimination-free culture of remembrance, without – even unintentionally – playing into old stereotypes.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that, even though the former Stommeln Synagogue is the property of the City of Pulheim, it should, in a broader sense, be regarded as a loan – a loan that could also be reclaimed if the responsibility for its appropriate use is not guaranteed.

I am happy to make myself available for a personal conversation and further exchange.

With kind regards,

Boaz Kaizman

on behalf of: Initiative for the Revitalization of the Stommeln Synagogue Art Project i.G.