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EXPERIMENTING THE LISTENER.

SOUND ART AND THE DOING – DONE TO AUDIENCE

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‘we must arrange our music, we must arrange our art, we must arrange everything, I believe, so that people realize that they themselves are doing it, and not that something is being done to them.’ (Cage quoted by Nyman in: Cox and Warner 2005: 219)

We Do Experiments

I am in the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht during the preparation of a musical performance called *Surge*.<sup>1</sup> In this piece, music from different era’s is performed by a choir and a saxophone quartet, accompanied by improvisations from two glass-players: Two people drawing their fingers around the rim of glasses they empty and fill with a mechanism controlled by their feet. It is to be performed on the huge wooden staircase in the centre of the museum, in some of the galleries, in the adjacent café. Walking through the museum and discussing the performance are the composer, two people from the museum, the choir’s managing director, the director of Intro | in situ (the small sound and music studio initiating and managing the project), and me. The question at hand is how to begin with the rustling of the newspapers the composer has envisioned at the beginning, and whether to use the lockers in the hallway, maybe by putting radio alarm clocks in some of them and having

them tuned to different stations. Then, the director of Intro | in situ smiles and says: ‘It is an experiment after all’.

Sound art is regularly described as ‘experimental’. Sound art is a term describing a hybrid collection of performances and installations, gathering together artists with a variety of approaches to sound, sound recording and listening. Sound artists often make use of recording technologies, sometimes in combination with live music, and stage their work in unconventional locations, with the aim of exploring and challenging listening conventions. Through these explorations, sound artists often aim to create an awareness in listeners of both the act of listening itself and the quality of the sound environment. As sound artist and theoretician Brandon LaBelle has it: ‘Sound art as a practice harnesses, describes, analyzes, performs, and interrogates the condition of sound and the processes by which it operates’ (2006: ix). Sound art has a heterogeneous lineage, counting among its inspirations genres such as *musique concrète*, electronic and computer music, performance and installation art and, crucially, experimental music.<sup>2</sup>

The term ‘experimental’ is used loosely (Mauceri 1997: 188) but evokes the genre of experimental music, a genre emerging in the 1950’s and 60’s in which listeners were to be liberated from their constrained, passive behavior by an experimental music that drew attention to the act of listening itself. Unpredictable compositional processes, strange technologically produced sounds, and unusual performance locations were used to address listeners who were supposed through these innovations to become free, aware and experimental. This ideal of experimentation in which an active, unconstrained, reflexive audience – and its implied opposite: a traditional, passive, receptive audience (see Johnson 1995, Smit-huijsen 2001) – is still pertinent today for sound art, as can be witnessed in the habitual co-appearance of the two terms sound art and experimental.<sup>3</sup>

The Dutch sound and music studio Intro | in situ mentioned above – the main empirical site in this article – regularly describes its work as experimental. The project mentioned above was called experimental because the audience would hear ‘sound-things that you do not immediately recognize as music’ (director of Intro | in situ). Generally, Intro |

in situ wants ‘to work with an audience’. People should ‘experience something’ and ‘that is also the experiment, to make people conscious of their way of listening’ (ibid.). Moreover, the way it describes these experiments resembles the characteristics of experimental music that will be sketched in the following section.

To understand Intro | in situ’s ‘experiments’, I will make use of research conducted within the interdisciplinary field of Science & Technology Studies (STS). This field has a venerable tradition of studying *scientific* experiments and the way in which the experimental subject is constituted within them. While in traditional philosophy of science, experiments were seen as ideals of scientific virtue, STS became interested in the difficult and messy work of experimentation.<sup>4</sup> Although it would also be interesting to compare scientific and sound artistic experiments, in this article I will draw on this tradition of research first to leave the realm of experimental ideals and focus on the mundane, practical work of producing and managing sound art productions in constituting its experimental subject: the listener.<sup>5</sup> I will look closely at the work done at Intro | in situ to produce and perform three, what they call, experiments, to find what notion of an ‘experimental listener’ emerges from its practice, and how within this practice attempts are made to achieve such listeners.<sup>6</sup> This focus, secondly, allows me to try out a recently developed normative conception of scientific experiments on these sound artistic ‘experiments’. This recent work within STS has problematized the opposition between control and freedom within scientific experimentation. I will analyze three performances focusing respectively on *technology*, *audience guidance*, and *space and music*. I will conclude by using STS work on experimentation to formulate whether and how these sound art performances try to produce experimental play for the audience not in spite of but through the way they guide their listeners.<sup>7</sup>

## The Experimental Listener

So what does the ideal of the experimental listener deriving from experimental music really look like? With an eagerness to circumvent ‘the

usual routes and the usual public’ (Griffiths 1995: 100), experimental music emerged in the 1950’s and 60’s, primarily in America, and is associated with the then emerging counterculture as well as with attempts to break from the European tradition of serialist music. It has a strong interest in the *process* of composition (Cox and Warner 2005, Mauceri 1997) shifting the emphasis away from musical composition to the act of listening: ‘The listener has to become aware of how he is listening’ (Lucier in: Holmes 2002: 275). Because of this interest in process, the listener takes center stage since music only *becomes* in the act of listening. The listener belonging to experimental music is thus a more active agent than the traditional recipient of composed music (Nyman in: Cox and Warner 2005: 218).

The listener envisioned within experimental music results from explorations with performance space and newly emerging electronic recording technologies. The circumstances of American composers forced them to use unusual performance sites, allowing them to explore the conditions for active listening and to widen what sounds might also count as music. These explorations were facilitated by the newly available electronic technologies which helped to democratize what might count as music and which were given a role in making the listener listen anew (see, for instance: Griffiths 1995; Nicholls 1990; Taruskin 2005).

‘The listener’, according to composer Michael Nyman ‘should be possessed ideally of an open, free-flowing mind, capable of assimilating in its own way a type of music that does not present a set of finalized, calculated, pre-focused, projected musical relationships and meanings’ (Nyman in: Cox and Warner 2005: 219). The idea was that such a ‘free-flowing mind’ could be achieved by drawing attention to the circumstances of performance. While ‘we do not normally focus very much on the social conventions and practices within which music is embedded, as human activity. A concentration on these media, on this mediality, is, however, a distinguishing feature of experimental music’ (Grant 2003: 182). Grant goes on to argue:

‘Much in experimental music is designed to draw our attention to a specific performance situation: this may involve the use of open form,

where certain elements of the performance are not preordained, or not fully preordained; or it may include the creation of music for a specific place or time – many sound installations come into this category, but this characteristic also comes to the fore in other pieces whose structure is so simple (or makes such extensive use of silence) that it draws our attention to the environment of the performance; this is in stark contrast to virtual space-within-a-space which forms the basis of the traditional concert hall, whose dimmed lights urge us to forget the physical walls around us' (ibid. 184-185).

Experimental music's working with environments and sound technologies that are to become part of the work itself (also see Tone 2004) in order to produce an aware and free listener is taken up in many current sound art productions. Folklorist Regina Bendix found such a free, experimental audience during a 'sound experiment' (Bendix 2000: 39) she witnessed in the Austrian Alps. 'Yet how to behave during this unusual listening experience?' Bendix wonders.

'There was no code of conduct, other than the designation provided by the announcement itself – 'a hike within sound.' This signaled only a contradiction to one stereotypical way of how Westerners are accustomed to consume classical music: hiking, not sitting quietly, outdoors, not in the concert hall. The predominant response on the part of the audience was thus experimental' (ibid.: 38-39).

Experimental music defines the listener as a free, unconstrained entity, liberated by experimental music and all that belongs to it: strange sounds, strange technologies, strange places. Let us go and see what the listener is like in three of Intro | in situ's performances.

## Listeners and Technology

*Op 'e' Riid* – a 'sound show for the backseat. Performed by a mobile transmitter, 20 car radio's and a five piece brass band.' (Stichting Intro / in situ 2005) – was performed on Terschelling, a small island at the north of the

Netherlands with a few villages set among dunes and scatterings of holiday-houses (<http://www.oerol.nl>). Intro | in situ's plans for this performance described what was supposed to happen:

'Islanders literally take the audience over the island in the car. [...] The soundscape is broadcast by a mobile transmitter. Through the mobile transmitter that drives over the island, the concert visitors, moving by car and listening to the car radio, become part of the musical landscape. [...] At the end of that journey there is concluding acoustical live-music' (ibid.).

Here we have several elements conjuring the experimental ideal sketched above: an unusual concert situation, technology to play a soundscape, the active involvement of listeners. I will show how the experimental ideal of audience and technology interaction shifts towards a more traditional role for both listeners and technology.

Originally, local car owners were supposed to drive a fixed route following a mobile transmitter while the car radio would play a soundscape. The car as 'concert hall and the concert hall as meeting place' (ibid.). Composer Andries van Rossem made the soundscape for the car radio consisting of a combination of ambient sounds. It was made through an improvisational process and started with the sound of church bells and the sea, linking the outside setting with the sounds on the car radio. The composition further included sounds of a hot air balloon, footsteps, a frog, a foghorn, but also a trumpet, singing and an accordion. The ambition was to make a soundscape that people would not talk through, even though it was played on a car radio. To make sure people did not perceive the radio-composition as an introduction to the 'real' concert afterwards, the two compositions were to have the same length and elements from the radio-soundscape would be re-used in the live composition. The audience in the car would listen to the car radio along with everything that ordinarily belongs to that situation: turning on the radio, unstable transmission, and tuning in again. The director of Intro | in situ emphasized that he liked the idea of such an intimate, strange, uncomfortable concert hall in the car.

Although the car, the car radio-soundscape and the active engagement of listeners with these were central to the concept of *Op 'e' Riid*, ten days before the first performance, the organizers of the festival of which the composition was a part turned out not to have taken care of the cars. The festival-organization offered an alternative which Intro | in situ, after some hesitation, accepted: a transmitter riding along with three horses and carts in which passengers would sit and listen with headphones to the soundscape on small portable radio's. But both before and during the performances studied, the quality of transmission and people's ability to tune in properly changed from being a central part of *Op 'e' Riid* into a problem that had to be fixed.

Before as well as during the several performances of *Op 'e' Riid* the reception of the radios was a recurrent theme in debates and disagreements among the participants: Where should the mobile transmitter be put? Could it be put on top of a cart or should it ride in front in a separate cart, and would the metal frame on top of the carts make a difference to reception? Thus, although the instability of reception and the act of tuning in were part of the original concept, these issues started to raise concerns that could only be quelled by getting the transmission to work, and making the reception stable.

In the rain at the beginning of the premiere, the audience was welcomed:

'The first good news is that you are now dry; the second good news is that you can keep the portable radio's you have been given. The bad news is that reception of the mobile transmitter is poor' (director of Intro | in situ).

Besides the now regrettably poor reception, the tuning of the radios by the audience was in itself problematic. Afterwards a visitor would complain that the 'radios are not easy to operate and, apart from a clear radio 2-signal, we hear some vague noises and a lot of noise' (Boonen 2005). During the performances people struggled to find out how the radio worked, shaking them and holding them up. Others searched for sound, but were unaware of what particular station or program they were

supposed to be looking for, or even of the fact that there was a sound that they should all be hearing on their headphones.

After the premiere and in response to these problems, Intro | in situ decided to explain the working of the radio to the audience. At the right frequency you would now hear jazzy wind orchestra music. Thanks to this, almost everyone was tuned in quickly. So again, although the act of tuning in and the instability of reception were supposed to be an integral part of the performance, faced with people struggling and with technological problems, Intro | in situ tried in different ways to streamline the process of sound reception. Rather than being part of the intended listening experience, the attention demanded by the radio technology increasingly became defined as problematic and had to be overcome so listeners could properly enjoy what came after, what had therefore now become the performance per se.

It may not be surprising that projects like this one develop into something else than was originally intended. But the direction of the drift is interesting here. In April 2005 Intro | in situ 'still opts for the mobile transmitter which for me is worth the trouble.' A draft for a note was included in the email sent to the festival organization to find islanders who would want to drive their cars in the performance (Luijmes 2005). Moreover, when troubles started to loom, Intro | in situ actively defended the idea of the car radio. Only if the choice for a mobile transmitter would threaten the go-ahead of the performance, would they be prepared to work with a tape. So even though the aim was for the listeners' interaction with the radio to remain a crucial part of the performance, it changed. The project became less experimental and more traditional: Rather than embracing the unpredictable and demanding nature of the car radio technology to involve listeners, the technology and the listeners were separated and streamlined in order for – what became – the soundscape proper to be better appreciated by the now more traditionally passive, listening audience.

## Listeners and Guidance

Looking back, Intro | in situ explained its dissatisfaction with *Op 'e' Riid* by pointing at the radio's, the change from cars to carts, the lack of a real experience for the audience... In the above analysis it became clear that technology was not used in *Op 'e' Riid* to actively engage an audience now listening not only to the music as such, but also exploring the medium that is used to produce music. Instead the audience emerged as a more passive receptor of music. In this and the following section I will analyze two performances that Intro | in situ considers more successful.

*Valley of Desolation*<sup>9</sup> seems at first the perfect occasion for a free audience to emerge: The performance was staged in a huge marl pit in the hills near Maastricht and began in the growing darkness of the twilight. People wondered around encountering different performance elements, sometimes at quite a distance. Live whispering/singing by Alan Belk – at times through a megaphone – of texts from Dante to Shakespeare, was combined with recorded sounds of owls and the tolling of bells, and with the playing of mediaeval wind instruments and odd sound makers such as an old alarm siren and an aqua phone (Schols 2005). The audience was to enter the valley of desolation in which they would meet both 'injured demon' Lucifer (the performing composer) and the angel (singer Alan Belk) trying to soothe the devil (NPS 2005). The rural area, the darkness, and the huge, imposing surroundings of the rising walls of the pit, combined with echoing, sometimes sinister sounds and the chanting of lines made for a dramatic performance: 'the devilish sounds of Harry de Wit's soundscape *Valley of Desolation* in a cold marl pit' made for 'overwhelming impressions of nature and music' (Frusch 2005).

Before the performance began, the audience members had already been informed in leaflets, in local newspapers, on websites. Intro | in situ's program prepared people by portraying a certain atmosphere in a poetic way (Luijmes 2004).

'For this pit "the devilish paradise" a sound poem is composed that overshadows the idyll of the landscape. This soundscape: a whispering, murmuring earth, is illuminated in 7 live compositions by the musical

representation of the virtues. [...] The audience gathers round musicians, and walks on [...] into the falling evening' (Intro / in situ 2005).

Almost incidentally, the audience also gained a sense of how it was expected to behave. The audience was both to encounter the music, but also to move through 'the surroundings, the enormous space and the atmosphere in the pit' (Musica Sacra Maastricht 2005).

The thus prepared listeners attended a performance in which their role was also well-prepared. In the staging of the performance in the days before the opening night, the placement and movement of performers, technical support staff, electronics, audience accompaniment and the audience itself was discussed. To give an indication of this process, here are some excerpts from the discussions about the choreography on the day before the premiere:

'Because we know that the audience is here. Harry is still there. You only leave there when Allen is here.'

'In the tape-part of four minutes Allen goes to the second spot, you can maybe do things with percussion.'

'We are just going to see where Allen is going to go to and then we are going to think up how the audience has to see that.'

'The audience has to stay standing there in order to see me there, and Allen there.'

People had to be maneuvered to be able to see the performance. The lights, the speakers, the instruments had to be positioned so the audience would encounter the various performance elements in the right way. To support this, audience accompanists were used to guide the visitors: Volunteers who walked among the audience and had been instructed beforehand.

The sound technician, the composer and the electronic sound producer – all involved during the performance itself – discussed how to make sure people would go where they were supposed to: 'The audience accompanists should say "people, now we have to go this way."' But will the audience listen? The men laugh and 'do not have a lot of faith in that.' So

rather than simply trusting the audience accompanists to be persuasive ‘there should be some pressure’. They make fun and in a crazy high foreign voice one of them says that what they should do is to ‘ask the gameshow hostess’ to stop them here: Stop! Stop!!’

Together, the program, the carefully arranged performance elements, and the audience accompanists were to make sure that the audience could properly appreciate the performance. These attempts conjure an audience that resembles that encountered in *Op ‘e’ Riid*: a receptive audience supported by the neutralized radio technology to listen to the soundscape properly. However, the amount of effort and the amused references to ‘pressure’ by the ‘gameshow hostess’ also indicate how *difficult* it apparently is to guide listeners. The necessity of guiding them reveals them as a force. This becomes visible when in the midst of their discussions of how to choreograph the audience, one of the participants reflects that: ‘We don’t put the audience anywhere, the audience itself does something.’

That the audience ‘itself does something’ becomes apparent when after the premiere, the performance has to be adjusted. There was, for instance, ‘some confusion about where the audience would stand for most of the time. And we hadn’t anticipated that it would stand so far back.’ To solve this problem, ‘we turned the speaker’ (Postema 2005b). For other indications of what people have done, the walky-talkies of the performers and technicians were useful. They were used to give cues when to start or finish certain parts of the performance, but they also ensured access to what people heard. Marijke Reuvers, responsible for coordination and production was ‘really *between* the audience.’ She and others ‘give instructions about the sound, and about how the mix is. And that is very important because the sound technician hears nothing of what the audience hears because of the distance’ (ibid.). Mingling with the audience, Marijke was also able to tell that a piece of tape that was used ‘was not interesting enough, six minutes long. I don’t think the audience could bear it. You started to look around at a certain moment’ (ibid.). To accommodate what the audience could not bear, the passage was shortened.

As is not unusual also in other performances, in *Valley of Desolation*, the audience was prepared and guided for it to properly appreciate the performance. The necessity of guiding listeners here and elsewhere, however, reveals their activity, it shows them as an audience that ‘does something.’ Besides trying to steer the audience, in *Valley of Desolation*, the audience is also monitored so its force can be reckoned with, and the performance can be adjusted to it. In *Op ‘e’ Riid* listeners appeared as crucially different from experimental music’s ideal listener: they were not actively engaged with the technologically mediated music. In *Valley of Desolation*, the management of the audience seems at first to accentuate this conception. However, here the audience also appears as an actor that has to be considered. The audience is not only guided to fit the performance, the performance is also changed to suite what the audience does.

## Listeners, Space and Music

*Surge* was performed at the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht. As noted in the introduction, the performance was made up of compositions from different era’s and three groups of performers; a choir, a saxophone quartet and two ‘glass players’ distributed and moving around in the museum. The atmosphere was solemn with an audience that wandered and flocked and spread. At moments it gathered around the performers and listened, attentive, silent, reverential.

According to composer Daan Manneke, *Surge* was about different kinds of transformations, particularly from the outside to the inside: from a diffuse situation to a concentrated ‘concert’ situation, and back again. This was realized for instance by introducing elements from outside, such as newspapers that were read by the choir. People waited for the piece to begin in the café where they had entered. The choir started by mingling with the audience, reading and rustling newspapers, and addressing the audience: ‘get up my love.’ The use of the café indicated a transitional moment from the outside inwards to the museum and the music itself. Then, the audience was taken inside by the choir members who walked among them into the museum. *Surge* was to be ‘a wonderful journey

through the museum by night' (Intro / in situ 2005) drawing listeners into music and museum at once. From the beginning, the importance of the location as an integral part of the performance was stressed: 'The architecture of the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht formed the starting point of [...] "Surge".' (Intro / in situ 2005: 17). Literally, *Surge* means 'rise/get up' and as the composer visited the museum for the first time, he imagined the choir slowly moving up the central staircase: '*Surge* in practice. A beautiful image. A slow procession' (composer). The main theme of the piece externalized as a movement within the space of the museum.

Some areas of the museum were particularly crucial: the staircase and the cupola. Early on it became clear that at the time of the performance, the Bonnefantenmuseum would be renovated. Intro | in situ deliberated about this renovation: Do we want a finished building? Will they renovate at the planned time? Are there alternatives? But these worries were warded off: The renovation 'does not have to be an obstacle. It can be a challenge too' (director of Intro | in situ). Later, it became clear that the renovation had been postponed, but that there might be scaffolding in the cupola where Sol le Witt's *Wall Drawing # 801:Spiral, 1996* was being reapplied. The composer's response was carefree and even enthusiastic: 'scaffolding? No problem. Maybe they can be climbed? Great!' Although Intro | in situ liked the idea of an empty cupola ('beautiful'), 'scaffolding in the cupola would not be a problem.' In fact, 'even if the reapplication is finished: leave the scaffolding' (director of Intro | in situ).

Following the experimental ideal of merging environment and music, the museum – even with scaffolding – was embraced to be included in *Surge*. But in practice, it turned out to be difficult to incorporate the space of the museum as integrally as hoped. Early on, the choir asked about the possibility of rehearsing in the museum. But rehearsing in the museum turned out to be very expensive, because guards would have to be hired after opening hours. In the end, the choir practiced in the museum two or three times, although the members remained unsure about their exact roles, because the choreography kept changing. The saxophone quartet and the glass players were present only in the last hours before the opening night for a run-through.

During the rehearsals and between the three performances, suggestions were made that further undid the ideally close relationship between performance and place. Although Intro | in situ was at first interested in what the museum would be showing at the dates of the performance, in the end it was just as well that 'the collection isn't very disturbing, but even so, maybe we can take it away?' (director of Intro | in situ). And when confronted with the scaffolding in the cupola during the preparation, climbing was not even considered. The museum space, rather than being taken as it was, was treated more and more as a concert hall: neutral and empty.

That the museum should resemble a concert hall is also noticeable in the way the café was discussed:

'I lie awake at night about the café. Is something planned that makes noise? We do experiments, sound-things that you do not immediately recognize as music, like newspapers rustling. It would be nice in the café, but most importantly they should not interfere with one another acoustically. Noise from the café is really a problem. It is really important that it is quiet' (director of Intro | in situ).

This focus on quiet again moves away from an experimental ideal in which the listeners' attention is drawn to the performance situation, towards the ideal, spatially but also acoustically, of a concert hall.

It seems unavoidable: The museum became a concert hall and the visitors traditional listeners. But this conception of the listener is not typical of the rest of the performance. During the preparation of *Surge* the composer, for instance, talked of the gallery, where part of the performance was planned. 'People don't have to be in the gallery, they should also not be: Everywhere is somewhere.' What is topicalized here, is that people might go where the music is not. Often, the way Intro | in situ's programs are formulated already prepare visitors that they might 'miss' something, for instance by telling people that 'you cannot hear everything. If people *know* that, it is all right.' (Luijmes 2004) But 'people want to be there' (composer) so having them *not* be where the music is, will not happen by itself.

Director of Intro | in situ: ‘They shouldn’t walk along like lap dogs. How do we organize that?’

Composer: ‘That has also been composed. The Amstel Saxophone Quartet and Studium Chorale are not always in the same place. A choice for the audience!’

The listener is not to be a passive follower of the music. Like in *Valley of Desolation*, s/he appears as an actor, as an entity that ‘does something’ (‘it wants to be there’) the performance will have to accommodate. It does so by providing visitors with a choice: they will have to decide where they want to be, what they want to hear. On the other hand, ‘the audience is not supposed to wander around like lost souls. They will be driven a certain way by their ears’ (director Intro | in situ quoted in: Anonymous 2005). While the audience is not to passively follow the music, it is also not to wander around in the museum space completely independently. The music is to make people move, but the way they are to be moved lies *between* two extremes: the listener as a lap dog versus the listener as a lost soul.

With the music, the museum space itself is also used to move the audience without resorting to the figures of lap dog and lost soul. The different performers, for instance, are put in different locations creating ‘a choice for the audience.’ This space that is created for the audience was noticeable during the performance. People shifted from quiet attention to restless movement. In the beginning, as the choir read and addressed the audience, one audience member joined in. Later, while the saxophone quartet was playing, people kept moving around. Some people were standing in other galleries, away from the musicians although they could see and hear them. And when the audience climbed the stairs it was as if the saxophones below were pushing them up. Meanwhile the choir members shifted from being performers, to members of the audience, to separate listeners. Throughout, the spatial arrangement, the composition, and timing of *Surge* seemed to allow enough room for the audience to move and shift and to sometimes be where (some) music was not.

While the experimental ideal of a close relation between museum and performance was lost in practice when the museum space was treated as a concert hall, the audience was not simultaneously turned into docile, traditional listeners. Rather, a role for the audience was sought between passive receptor and separate actor. Where in *Valley of Desolation* the listener as a force was brought to the fore, here listeners appear in a reciprocal process with the performance. Situations were created in which listeners were driven more ways than one, creating ambiguous moments, moments of space and choice.

## Between Lap Dog and Lost Soul

Looking at Intro | in situ’s work through the lens of the ideal of experimental music at first gives a disappointing impression: We do not see sound art performances in which the listener appears as a free, reflexive, exploratory entity. Instead of listeners who becomes aware of their own *doing*, in the terms used by Cage at the opening of this article, we seem to see only Intro | in situ’s attempts for their performances *to do something to* listeners. Intro | in situ’s ideal of experimental listeners seems far, far away.

Through the STS focus on the mundane practice of experimentation, however, ways of conceptualizing, of treating listeners became apparent that ask for an elaboration of this conclusion. While *Op ‘e’ Riid* was not considered a success, in the other two performances a different notion of the listener and a different way of relating to it emerged. The efforts to guide listeners in both *Valley of Desolation* and in *Surge* show that doing something to listeners is not as simple as it sounds. Listeners are not treated as passive recipients, but appear as a force demanding adjustment from the performance. Moreover, the adjustment of the performance to reciprocate the force of the listener does not take the form of increased control. But nor are people set loose completely in an attempt to allow a truly experimental listener to emerge. Rather, within the process of preparing, rehearsing, staging and performing *Surge*, attempts were made to address the force of the listeners by trying to create a space for them

between freedom and control, doing and being done to, lost soul or lap dog. *Surge*'s composer calls this a choice for the audience, an ambiguous moment composed and staged in which more than one possible compliance – stay here, go there, listen to this, find out what can be heard there, follow these performers, stay put, take distance, stay close – creates space for movement, for choice, for action. The opposition between an audience *done to* versus a *doing* audience, between control versus freedom, between a traditional, quiet, contained listener versus an experimental, active, reflexive one makes invisible the process of mutual adjustment and tuning that has become visible in Intro | in situ's practice.

This conceptualization of Intro | in situ's practice as a process of mutual adjustment of the force of the listener and the guiding, constraining attempts of the experimental setting, is reminiscent of the way in which recent STS research characterizes a good experiment. This tradition of research of scientific experiments comes as it were from the opposite side of the spectrum. Where in experimental music the ideal is a free listener, unconstrained by previous listening conventions, STS has shown how within scientific experiments, the experimental subject is highly constrained in order for it to perform in such a way as to be relevant to the scientific question at hand. STS research (Despret 2004; Despret 2005; Gomart 1999; Latour 2004) aiming to arrive at a normative understanding of scientific experiments has argued that revealing the highly structured nature of experimental settings is not enough to criticize and dismiss them as simply hemming in the experimental subject. Or rather, such hemming in, it is argued, can be constitutive of new and fascinating behavior of the experimental subject. In order to create an innovative and exciting experimental subject, this research tries to show, a call for more freedom for that subject is mistaken. Instead, experiments should give the experimental subject 'a chance' (Despret 2005) to behave differently, by constraining it in new, different, sensitive ways. It will not become interesting or active all by itself. The experimental setting should care for and try to help it to do so.

What I have tried out in this article is what an application of such a normative analysis of scientific experiments to Intro | in situ's practice might yield. What becomes visible, is that experimentation looks like

something else than is usually imagined when speaking of sound art. The guidance of a compliant listener can no longer be taken as an indication of Intro | in situ's failure to live up to its own ideal of experimentation. On the contrary, Intro | in situ might be understood as trying very hard to bring about an experimental listener in the process of mutual adjustment between performance and listeners. In this process, the listener is recognized as a force in response to which ambiguous moments are arranged, to make possible another manifestation of the listener than its traditional role. Moreover, this perspective also provides a different way of understanding the failure of *Op 'e' Riid*. It did not fail because of the unexpected use of the carts or because the technology did not work as well as it could have. Rather, in this performance people may have behaved in unexpected and new ways – trying to get their radios to work, trying to figure out what they were supposed to hear, shaking the radios, etc. –, but in spite of Intro | in situ's attempts to streamline and minimize the interaction with technology, this experience did not turn out to be of interest to the audience. The issue is not whether or not to have listeners interact with technology, but to address the listener in a – to her – interesting way.

What becomes abundantly clear is that listeners are not set free completely from any code of conduct, moving music, or performance setting: they only *do* in reaction to what is *done*. In terms of the STS research discussed above, the stakes here are high: will what the performance does to listeners be sensitive and supportive enough to give them a chance to manifest themselves differently? In his musings about their musical experiments, Intro | in situ's director reflected that 'an experiment cannot do without an audience. It is to make people aware of their way of listening, and it fails when people do not become aware of that. But I cannot force my research question on the audience.' Intro | in situ's practice of experimentation, as studied here, suggests that to ask whether or not you can force a question on the audience is not the relevant issue. The problem is how to ask a question that interests the listener and allows, invites it to behave in an experimental way.

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Ruth Benschop – Experimenting the Listener

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## Notes

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1. Concept: Johan Luijmes and Daan Manneke; production: Intro | in situ; performed by Studium Chorale conducted by Daan Manneke, the Amstelsaxophonequartet, Manuel Holterbach and Sophie Durand with improvisations and compositions by Orlando di Lasso, Iannis Xenakis and Daan Manneke. Performed at the Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, 25-27 February 2005 (attendance: 204) (Intro / In Situ 2005).

2. On what sound art is, see, for instance, LaBelle 2006; de la Motte-Haber 2002; Stoter 2005; Wishart 1996. Festivals (and their catalogues) gathering sound artists together are also a valuable source for understanding what constitutes the genre of sound art. See for instance, festivals like Sonambiente, Ars Electronica, DEAF, and Audio Art Festival.

3. Sound art is often associated with experimental music, as well as with experimentality as such. See, for instance, wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound\\_art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sound_art)), or look at announcements for festivals (for instance [www.subtropics.org](http://www.subtropics.org)) or at attempts to define and historically position sound art (for instance La Belle 2006).

4. STS research of scientific experimentation comprises a large body of literature, classic references include Galison 1987; Gooding et al. 1989; Latour and Woolgar 1979.

5. For a similar study using STS in an analysis of art, see Yaneva 2003. For a variety of STS research on the careful constitution of the experimental subject of research, see Coon 1993; Gomart 1999; Lynch 1991. For research comparing scientific to musical experiments, see Mauceri 1997. Most studies of experimental music show how the genre appropriates notions from the realm of science, such as ideas about chance and automation.

6. The focus of analysis is thus on *how* and *whether* a notion of an 'experimental listener' emerged within and during the preparation and performance of the performances studied. For this article, I have not analyzed audience composition or other factors predetermining audience behaviour, nor have I focused on the – obvious – differences between the works, for instance in terms of the usage of live music versus recording technologies, which could well throw light on other reasons *why* people responded (differently) to the works in the ways they did. Research within the tradition of the sociology of taste may throw light on things that predetermine audience response. Both historical research on the impact of recording technologies on techniques of listening (for instance Katz 2004; Siefert 1994, 1995; Sterne 2003), as sociological studies of the various practical usages of recording technologies in daily life (for instance, Bull 2000; De Nora 2000), though often focussed particularly on popular music, shed light on the question how people respond to live and non-live music, showing how this has changed over time and how varied it is.

7. My analysis is based primarily on fieldwork before, during and after the three performances at issue here, including observations, documentation relating to the performance, either gathered during fieldwork, or afterwards, and some interviews.

Fieldwork was conducted by Annelies Jacobs and by me: For *Surge* in 2004/2005, and for *Op 'e' Riid* and *Valley of Desolation* primarily in 2005. The citations from documentation, fieldwork and interviews that were originally in Dutch have been translated into English and slightly adjusted to improve legibility by me.

8. Direction/concept: Johan Luijmes; Composition: Andries van Rossem; Visuals: Nick Hellegie; Performed by Baltic Brass, Victor Piskunov, Valery Shulyatikov, Dimitry Smirnov, Aleksander Yakovlev, Viacheslav Minnekov performed on Terschelling, 11-17 June 2005 (attendance: 461). (Oerol 2005: 17; Intro / In Situ 2005).

9. Production: Intro | in situ; composition and performance: Harry de Wit; soundscape and mediaeval wind instruments: Tomas Postema; singing: Alan Belk; technology coordination: Ad de Leeuw; sound: Jos Mulder; production: Marijke Reuvers. Performed at Groeve 't Rooth, Musica Sacra, 16-18 September 2005 (attendance: 240) (Intro / In Situ 2005).

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