

# Creating Places through Listening

The sociological possibilities of sound art in shared public spaces

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Introduction

1. Sound and place
  2. Sound Art Installations in public space
  3. Listening and Sound walks, exploring the city
  4. Sound walks, immersion and narratives
  5. Urban public space
  6. Artistic approach and political motive
- Conclusion

My interest in sound originated from the question: if I ask people to speak about what they see, will the collective of answers provide something more than the sum of its parts? Having some familiarity with interviewing people as a clinical psychologist, approaching and recording stories was a natural step. Sound and words became the material in my artistic process. My experiments have led to an exploration of the field of sound art. In particular sound art that is placed or listened to in public spaces caught my attention. Places, their sounds and people's engagement with these places are what I find beauty in and want more of. This thesis is a result of that exploration. It features the concept of place, which reflects partly a personal search to find my own place within the art academy as a student, a longing to belong. What makes a place? And what makes it mine?

Sound (art) in public spaces triggers the mind to focus differently and triggers the imagination in both a visceral and visual way. You could say it creates both a physical connection to the place you are and a mental sense of that place. It shifts your attention towards what you hear. Especially when headphones are used, this focused listening creates an inward direction, a personal experience. The combination of this inward experience within a public setting provides a kind of playground field in which the sound artist shifts perception, manipulates and allows the listeners to explore.

Art within public space and artists working with a participating or interactive audience in public spaces cannot ignore social and political connotations. The artist's approach to their sound material and audience, relates to their political views. For example, the degree of invasiveness of their sound work and the amount of freedom or restriction they allow their listeners to have. Sound art stimulates forming new views on the use of shared public space and urban planning. It can potentially provide different ways of regarding people's place within a community. In this thesis I have tried to provide a sociological context for these ideas and describe different artistic approaches.

An indebt exploration of sound art that addresses social political issues goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Further exploring of the transformative potential of sound art on a community level, besides the personal experience level, will be an interesting topic for further writing. This thesis started with a curiosity and a small gut feeling about the interlocking of sound, place and social issues. It has for me resulted into an inspiration to explore sound as material even more and develop an artistic approach that is congruent with my own views and opinions.

Chapter one describes the concepts that are at the base of this thesis: the definitions of a place, the perception of sound and the phenomenon that is simultaneous perception. Chapter two describes three acclaimed sound artists that have made sound installations in public spaces. The chapter illustrates how in different ways sound installations create a space, interact with its surroundings or change the experience of moving through a space. Chapter three and four focus on sound walks. Chapter three explains how sound walks allow the listener to explore the city through listening to a recording and/or written instructions. Sound installations and sound walks let people refocus and form a new interaction with public spaces. Unfamiliar spaces are explored and familiar spaces rediscovered. Chapter four describes sound walks that use narratives and provide an immersive experience. In often subtle and playful ways sound installations and sound walks can open up new ways to regard public spaces and question their social purpose and use. Chapter five describes sociological ideas about safety and how perceived ownership of public spaces effects urban citizens. These topics are relevant to provide context for the potential of sound art to reflect, raise criticism and provide alternative views on political and social use of public spaces. In addition, chapter 6 describes a few different sound artists' approach and political motives.

Short historical background of sound art

What is now called sonic art or sound art took shape as an specific art form in the 1950-ies when experimental musicians (Neuhaus, Lucier, Reich) and visual artists (Nauman, Bernhard Leitner) started to explore the relationship between space and sound. Brandon Labelle has made an historical overview in his book *Background Noise* (2006) of this development. However, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there were already several simultaneous developments that lead to the use of sound by artists<sup>1</sup>. First, technological developments provided means to record and broadcast sound: the radio and the phonograph were invented. Before, sound could only be used in a performance. Now it could be used as a material. Technology has been a driving force in the field of sound art. New ways of manipulating and researching the properties of sound within spaces has been the focus of many artists. A famous example of Alvin Lucier's *I'm sitting in a Room* (1969)<sup>2</sup>, in which he records himself narrating a text and continuously plays back and re-records the previous recording in the room, gradually loosing the words to the resonance of the room.

The concept of noise was already an artistic interest in 1913 when the futurist Luigi Russolo published his manifest on 'The art of noises'. Modern music composers Edgar Varèse and Walter Fährndrich started making compositions for particular spaces and for specific times in the day. Within the Dadaists movement Marcel Duchamp and Hugo Ball used sound, inspiring later conceptual artists in the 1960-70ties to create sound sculptures. Since the 1950ies John Cage has been the most prominent figure as a composer and artist, known for using chance in his compositions, scores for prepared piano and exploring ambient sounds.

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<sup>1</sup> L. Heon, "In your ear: hearing art in the twenty-first century", in *Organized Sound* 10(2): 91–96 (2005), Cambridge University Press. Text written for the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

<sup>2</sup> Audio file accessible: <http://www.ubu.com/sound/lucier.html>

Nowadays there are many art forms that use sound, such as performance art, experimental music, ambient recordings, soundscapes, sound installations, sound walks, etc. What they all have in common, is that sound is a core material.

The selection of sound artists in this thesis is limited. I have focused on well-known artists that primarily use sound and works that are purposely made for public spaces. I have tried to describe a variety of art works in each chapter to illustrate the diversity in material and approach in each particular field. In this thesis you will frequently encounter the work of Max Neuhaus. I have taken his oeuvre as reoccurring thread for my exploration. His work provides a broad spectrum of sound art (sound walks, gallery installations, public space installations, radio projects). He has made short-lived works and long lasting works, some with very simple means and other are complex installations.

This thesis is focused on public spaces, to be precise: shared urban spaces. Therefore, most art works discussed are located in big cities. Not surprising, a reoccurring place referred to is New York City. A few places in New York are described because of its sound. Neuhaus' installation in Times Square is an important work, as well as his LISTEN sound walk series that originated in New York City. While finalizing this thesis I had the chance to take part in an excursion to New York City. This gave me the opportunity to visit these specific places myself and record many more sounds of the city that never sleeps. This has materialized into a recording that accompanies this thesis.

## Chapter 1 Sound and place

### Place

A place has many definitions<sup>3</sup>. It can mean a physical environment, a location or a spot, determined by coordinates or markings on a map. It can be a particular area or building for a specific purpose. It can be an area that a person or a group regards as theirs. It is then regarded as owned (regardless its factual ownership) and its borders are determined sometimes by rules, sometimes by intuition, sometimes by agreement. Space is widespread. When space is marked and maintained as territory, it can become a place. The borders of a place are unstable because its existence is temporal. A place, in contrast to a space, sustains as a whole over time because of its use.

For example, a house is a space which dimensions are determined by the walls and roof. The property is outlined on the map, including the house and the garden space around it. The home that is created by the people living in it is a place that exists by different dimensions. What makes the home? The objects in the house can be part of it, the mailbox or bicycles against the fence in front of the house. What is part of the home goes beyond property lines. The view of the park from the window can also be part of that home, as well as the sounds of the floorboards and the smell of the basement. Another dimension is time, for the home is there for the period of time it is occupied.

A place can be a relative position. To have a place means to be in relation to others in a series, a competition or a hierarchy. One has a social place within a group, a city, a community, or a system. One has to know their place, fight for it or defend it. A place can be somewhere to belong. A place can be a status, an identity, and a means to know them from us.

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<sup>3</sup> For a complete list of definitions of the word place: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/place>

Thus, a place can describe a physical area, a temporal concept, a relational status or a mental representation. Sometimes definitions overlap. For example, in English one can say: 'I find it difficult to place you', when struggling to find the connection between the person and the last event that you met that person.

## The sense of place

To have a sense of place is the subjective feeling that a certain area is a whole. To feel at place, means that you belong in a certain area. What determines that a space is regarded as a place? When a person has a sense of place, there are both the physical and the mental and emotional attributes to consider. An example in daily life: a coffee mug can have its specific place in your cupboard. You put it there because it fits the cupboard and because of the convenience of being near the coffee maker. Also, it has a place in you, because it reminds you of your college days when you used it during exam periods. The mug belongs to a physical cupboard and nostalgic memory place.

A sense of place is closely connected to whether or not there is safety and comfort. Most people have experienced entering a place and feeling right home. The opposite is also not uncommon; to feel immediately unsafe in a place and feel the urge to leave. Safety can be provided by the closeness of walls in house or a room, but also by the closeness of other people; the acceptance experienced in a group and the interaction with people near to us. Sound plays an important role in the sensation of safety. It is needed for orientation in a space, to alert to danger and its congruency with what we see provides us with valuable information.

What is needed to create belonging? Earlier I used the example of a property, a house, to illustrate a home. Shelter is one of the basic needs for a person to belong somewhere.



*(...) the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter. He experiences the house in its reality and its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams*<sup>4</sup>

An art project that illustrates together the sense of place and displacement is the photo series *Shelter* by Henk Wildschut<sup>5</sup>. Between 2005 and 2010 he photographed shelters made by refugees at the port of Calais, who hope to cross over to the United Kingdom. Photographs show shelters made of found waste materials, wood, plastic and cloth, but also non-structures; people sleeping under a blanket on the street, or a single suitcase sitting underneath a park bench. That single suitcase and the knowledge to whom it belongs to, turns that space into a shelter. Wildschut describes that these shelters are structures that symbolize the misery these people experience. I would add that his photographs show places that are symbolic of the absence of place in the world for these people.

The temporal aspect of a place makes it interesting to the field of sound, which is inertly temporal. Usually when we think of a place, we think about its visual characteristics. However it can be very interesting to think about places in their timeliness and how this determines how we use and regard them. I will first explain what I mean by this and then come back to the ways sound shape our sense of place. Public urban places are designed for a specific use and people are supposed to use them for specific lengths of time. The shelters at the port of Calais are misplaced, because a border is meant to pass, not to occupy. Cities are filled with designed places, all with different time frames that determine how fast and how long a person should move through them. Bus stops are places to *wait* in transit,

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<sup>4</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 1994, Beacon Press, p. 5. Translation of: *La Poétique de l'espace*, 1958, Presses Universitaires de France.

<sup>5</sup> Description to the project "Shelter", (online, Henk Wildschut, date unknown) <http://www.henkwildschut.com/work/shelter-2/shelter-photo/> (accessed 22 Oct. 2015)

benches are places to *pause* and observe, sidewalks are to *pass* and make short and purposeful pauses, such as an encounter with a familiar person. If you run into a friend and want to chat longer you don't sit down on the pavement but move to more appropriate place to chat. Large cities are packed with fast places, which give it a busy, hurried, non-stop, rat-race character. When places are used differently than they are supposed to, there is a shift or friction. For example, the simple act of occupying a sidewalk for a longer time can become a nuisance, a threat, or a protest. These are all descriptions of obvious and known things. What I want to point out by describing the obvious, is that almost all of our urban public spaces are designed and prescribe a way of behaving, thus can be re-designed to use for different behavior.

The function and use of places also changes without force over time. Sometimes a place still bears its old purpose on its sleeve. Take again the example of refugee shelters. These are places made for temporary use; they substitute a home. Even though a person might use the shelter for years and call it their home, a shelter will still evoke a sense of being in a temporary place, which can be uneasy and unstable. On the other end of the spectrum there are examples of structures build to surpass lifetimes, such palaces, churches or temples. Such structures evoke the sense of being in the presence of immortality and make you aware of how your life is short in comparison to the time frame of this place. The Koninklijk Paleis op de Dam (the royal palace on Dam square) in Amsterdam has an interesting history in regard to its use as public space. It was build during the Golden Age as a city hall; the house of the people. It was the largest non-religious building in Europe at that time and a symbol representing Amsterdam as a place for people from all walks of life<sup>6</sup>. After 153 years the current king took ownership of it and in 1936 the city sold its remaining rights to the royal family, an important reason being that the city could not afford renovation

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<sup>6</sup> Paleis op de Dam, (online, Wikipedia de Vrije Encyclopedie) [https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paleis\\_op\\_de\\_Dam](https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paleis_op_de_Dam) (accessed 6 November 2015)

costs. After WO II the plans for a new city hall in 1964 drew attention back to the Koninklijk Paleis, when the Provo party and Pacifist Socialist Party argued that the city should reclaim the palace for the people, instead of building an expensive new building<sup>7</sup>. Their pamphlet was to the point: *Het stadhuis staat op de dam / City hall stands at Dam square*. Currently, the Koninklijk Paleis op de dam is used for official events of the Royal Family, exhibitions and is open to the public at an admission price. As a citizen of Amsterdam I wonder how different would it be if the building had kept or regained its public use. Would I not feel more connected to the building and its history when I can enter it freely, perhaps to renew my passport, instead of entering as a paying customer there to view the royal riches?

## Perception and sound

Time, use and purpose all play a role when experiencing places, consciously and mostly unconsciously. Our experience of places is constantly influenced by sound and hearing is omnipresent; sound reaches us from 360 degrees. In comparison, our field of vision is 180 degrees in the horizontal plane and only partly covered by both eyes, leaving us with only 114 degrees of binocular vision. Both hearing and vision allow us to locate things and orientate ourselves in our surroundings. Auditory and visual information are constantly combined within the brain. Most of our attention is focused on the visual, leaving the subconscious to process the sound. While navigating through a city we synchronize what we see and hear without consciously thinking about it. When there is an alarming sound behind us, we look to see its source and listen. Listening is basically shifting our attention to sound.

## Simultaneous perception

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<sup>7</sup> Prijsvraag Amsterdams Stadhuis (online, Nederlands Architectuur Instituut, ) <http://static.nai.nl/stopera/nl/index.html> (accessed 6 November 2015)

Becoming conscious of the sounds around you changes the perception of the spaces and places you are in. Focused listening can reveal and change otherwise ignored sounds. Former staff writer for *The New Yorker* Tony Hiss<sup>8</sup> is an author and consultant on the restoration of American cities and landscapes. In his book *The experience of Place* (1990)<sup>9</sup> he describes how shifting attention changes the way people experience public spaces in cities. He describes a phenomenon that he calls simultaneous perception, which is the human ability to have 'a general awareness of great many things at once; sights, sounds, smells, and sensations of touch and balance, as well as thoughts and feelings'<sup>10</sup>.

In general we tend to focus our awareness towards one thing. Either what is external to us, what we see, hear, smell or touch, or our thought and feelings. Both occur simultaneous, yet our attention is usually either inward or outward. This way our internal world is kept somewhat separate from our environment. Sometimes it happens that we are surprised by a place and our awareness is pulled to both directions at once; outward while connected inwardly. This experience of simultaneous perception is Hiss describes as feeling relaxed yet alert, 'like a clear, deep, reflective lake'<sup>11</sup>. He illustrates this with two examples of places in New York City that greatly invite such an experience: the Grand Central Terminal train station and a pathway in Prospect Park, Brooklyn. For such experience, richness in sensory information and a sense of safety by an absence of alarm signals, are needed. Both places are very different yet provide this experience in similar ways.

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<sup>8</sup> "Tony Hiss" (online, Project for Public Spaces),

<http://www.pps.org/reference/thiss/>, (accessed March 26, 2016)

<sup>9</sup> Tony Hiss, *The experience of place*, 1990, Alfred A. Knopf New York pp. 3-52

<sup>10</sup> Idem.

<sup>11</sup> Idem.

The main hall of the Grand Central Terminal provides a constant soundscape of people walking and talking. The sounds echo off the walls and dome shaped ceiling. Entering the large hall your attention is pulled towards all sides, while at the same time you are aware of and attentive to your own body and mind in this space. When I visited the Grand Central Terminal it struck me that despite the business of travellers passing and the many sounds, the collective sound created a surprising calm atmosphere. Despite being a place to pass through or wait, its sounds evoked a pleasant feeling to stay. During my visit I also noticed that in the Apple Store located within the hall several people used the computers to check their emails or even work on projects. Asking one of those long-stay visitors how they experienced the place and its sound, the answer confirmed my feelings: the murmuring was regarded as pleasant 'like waves of the ocean'.

It is in such moments, like entering the Terminal, when attention is equally split outwards and inwards, that it is possible to combine sensory information and you perceive multisensory patterns of information. A multisensory pattern is observed only when the senses are combined, for instance when observing the cooperation of a moving crowd; the flow and patterns that a crowd of people create. Because you are simultaneously aware of the crowd and your own movement it can be possible to navigate smoothly through the crowd without bumping into people.

In Prospect Park Hiss describes a walk towards The Long Meadow that leads through a tunnel, the Endale Arch. When you walk through the tunnel you are faced with 75 acres of open space, thought to be the longest continuously open space in any urban park in the United States, which provides a view of only grass and sky. The noises in the park are subtle and more diverse because sounds from the city are blocked by the hills. Hiss describes hearing little sounds, such as birds, from all around, which add to the perception of distance. I walked this part of

Prospect Park on a warm Sunday afternoon in March. Although all the trees were still bare, everybody in Brooklyn seemed to have gathered in the park with their children. This provided me with a lively tableau stretching out in front of me. People were playing, having a picnic and enjoying the last hour of sun. With the chatting of so many people, there was less of a change from hearing the traffic sounds and then entering the field. However, it did resemble the busy but comfortable soundscape of the grand central terminal.

Sound art can enhance the experience of simultaneous perception. I walked the sound walk *Case study B* by Cardiff & Miller in London, which starts at the Whitechapel gallery and ends at Liverpool Street Station. Walking up to the railing of the station, looking down to the central hall I saw the crowd of moving commuters. Their collective movement was similar to a colony of ants: chaotic, but purposefully moving in each direction. A singer approached me through the headphones, invisibly moving around me while I was watching the movements of the crowd. This combination of sensations made me more aware of where I was standing, yet slightly disorientated. If I would translate it into film language I would use a slow dolly zoom effect. The ending of the walk felt unsettling, very similar to stepping out of the cinema after being emerged in a film.

Perception of space changes through walking, listening and seeing. Sound artist exploit this by making small shifts in attention; they point out, confuse, diffuse or stimulate to explore. Sometimes the simple instruction 'listen!' is enough, other times elaborate ways are used to direct your attention, for example with electromagnetic microphones or binaural auditory devices.

## Chapter 2    Sound installations in public space

I focus on the early installation works of Max Neuhaus. They were one of the first site-specific sound installations, outside the museum and galleries and his work connected people in New

York City with their city<sup>12</sup>. Neuhaus changed from being a musician to an artist at a time when Fluxus and Minimalism were happening, John Cage had been exploring sound for a while and installation art was taking shape. Neuhaus was a professional drummer and percussionist in the 1960ies who wanted to reach a larger audience. He wanted to reach people outside of the conventions of the concert hall. Neuhaus uses sound as his material and builds a certain sound for each work to bring an imaginary moment or place<sup>13</sup>. His site specific installations 'replace the insular domain of musical performance with spatial geographies, investigation of electronic systems (...) and their subsequent noises, with the conditions of urban space and its planning, positioning a listener inside a greater geographic field'<sup>14</sup>.

Reflecting on his body of work, Neuhaus categorizes some of his works as 'place works' and others as 'moment' or 'time' works. Neuhaus: "For a place work you have to go to the place; for a moment work you can be in any of many places at the moment." For the moment works he creates a sound that blends into the background, it is not attended to and is not consciously heard until it stops. So the moment it stops, you realize it was there. An example of a similar sound in daily life is the droning air conditioning that, when it is turned off, evokes a feeling of relief. Creating such a sound work means working with time; the listener needs to be in the space for a while in order to experience the work. *Time Piece Beacon* (2005) in the Dia:Beacon, New York museum consists of a sound that can be heard through the whole museum, its source unknown. It starts every seven minutes before the hour and lasts a few minutes, increasing in volume and presence, usually not noticed until it abruptly stops.

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<sup>12</sup> Brandon Labelle, *Background Noise*, 2006, The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc. pp. 149 - 165

<sup>13</sup> "Notes on place and moment", (online, Max Neuhaus, 1993) [www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/place/notes](http://www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/place/notes), (accessed 23 oct. 2015)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151 - 152

Complementary to the moment works are the place works. These are site-specific works, which can be experienced as an almost physical presence of sound and create a realization of time. A well-known example is the work *Times Square (1967)*.

### Max Neuhaus: Times Square

A sound installation placed in the ventilation system of the New York City subway transmitting a sound that can be heard through a grid in the middle of Times Square. It was there from 1977 until 1992 and reinstated in 2002, where it still is<sup>15</sup>. The work, according to Max Neuhaus, is not the sound, but the place that is created through the use of this sound<sup>16</sup>. Imagine yourself being in the heart of downtown New York, in a busy plaza surrounded by cars, taxis, tourists, closed in by skyscrapers and your eyes pulled to every angle by large video advertisements. If you know about this sound work, you will have to find it. There is not a sign or visual indication of where it is located. Because there are photographs of the grid where it is placed, I was able to find it. When you step into the work, it hits you very clear. Walk a few meters off the grid and it diminishes. You can locate its borders by listening and moving around, creating a three-dimensional image of a block of sound in your mind. Neuhaus describes that he builds a sound that is less 'visible' but very plausible, meaning that it fits so closely to the sound environment that even though it is very loud, it will not be noticed unless you know it is there and search for it. Then when you notice it, the work takes shape, you enter it and 'aurally refocus'. Sometimes the work changes also when you stay longer in its space.

Thus when it comes to sound, both time and place are always a factor. If we regard Neuhaus' works as fundamental

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<sup>15</sup> Max Neuhaus: Times Square. (online, Press Department, Dia Art Foundation, May 06, 2002) [http://www.diaart.org/press\\_releases/main/87](http://www.diaart.org/press_releases/main/87) (accessed January 29th 2016)

<sup>16</sup> "Notes on place and moment", (online, Max Neuhaus, 1993) [www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/place/notes](http://www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/place/notes), (accessed 23 Oct. 2015)



minimalist examples of sonic art in shared spaces, then the following important factors can be distilled:

1. For creating a realization or sense of place, aural refocusing is needed. The artist creates the conditions for a shift in listening.
2. The place is created in the mind, as the sound itself is invisible. Yet the place is regarded as a physical entity and can have a temporal presence.
3. A certain inaccessibility to the work or the need for discovery seems necessary. In the chapter three Listening and sound walks, exploring the city, this will be described in more detail.

Christina Kubisch: Oasis: 2000, music for a concrete jungle

Christina Kubisch (born 1948) started making sound installations in 1980 and is considered one of the pioneers in her field. She makes works that reveal sounds that are not heard normally using electromagnetic induction. The technique of electromagnetic induction is based on the interaction between electromagnetic fields. Wireless headphones that carry an electrical coil inside them react to the electromagnetic fields of the wires. Every movement, even turning the head, will change the tones that are heard. It is like you receive a new set of ears to explore a hidden aural world.

One example is the sound installation *Oasis: 2000, music for a concrete jungle*. Electrical wires were strung on the balcony of the Hayward Gallery in London, from which you could look out onto South London. Participants could walk around with headphones and the sound would change according to where they moved<sup>17</sup>. They would hear animal and nature sounds, which

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<sup>17</sup> Electromagnetic Induction (online, description of the installation 'Cloud' on the artist's personal website)

contrasted the urban surroundings: grey concrete buildings surrounding the balcony.

Max Neuhaus: Passage works

Another series of works by Max Neuhaus is called 'Passage' works. In essence these are sound installations in outdoor spaces made to move through. For example, *Drive In Music* (1967-68). The installation is created on a long stretch of space to let the listener experience a passage from one point to another. In Buffalo, New York, Neuhaus placed seven antennas along a stretch of highway, each transmitting different samples of music within a short range. Listeners could tune their car radio to the frequency of the antennas, drive and park according to their music of choice. The antenna's broadcasting regions would partly overlap, thus mixing the music. Drive In Music works was a rebellious act at the time. Neuhaus looks back in 1980 on the work:

*The work was finished in October of 1967 and ran through April of the next year. It wasn't easy. I was taken into custody several times, but then I hadn't learned my disguises yet, nor had I much verbiage, and I had no knowledge whatsoever of the anatomy of the institutional beast<sup>18</sup>.*

Another example of a passage work is *Suspended Sound Lines* (1999). This is a series of speakers transmitting two kinds of sounds in an ABABAB set up on a suspension bridge. Neuhaus builds up these works step by step; setting up one speaker, combining it with another, testing out how they mix while moving

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<http://www.christinakubisch.de/en/works/installations/2> (accessed 13 november 2015)

<sup>18</sup> "Modus Operandi" (online, Max Neuhaus, previously published in Artforum (New York), January 1980, and in Max Neuhaus: Sound Works, vol. I, Inscription (Ostfildern-Stuttgart: Cantz, 1994), 18-19.) [http://www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/passage/modusoperandi/Modus\\_Operandi.pdf](http://www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/passage/modusoperandi/Modus_Operandi.pdf) (accessed 22 December 2015)

through it, then the adding additional sounds. In the passage works the listener has an active role by walking or driving through. Neuhaus chooses places that are meant to traverse through normally on a daily basis. To experience the work fully, the listener will have to notice the change in sounds. Sometimes the sounds of the installation are obscured by surrounding sounds or are hard to distinguish from ambience sounds. This transforms the work into an entrance, when you hear it you discover the whole space in a new way. Michael Tarantino<sup>19</sup> has written about these works based on his own experience of walking on the suspended bridge and a conversation with Neuhaus. He describes that one cannot locate where the sounds in *Suspended Sound Lines* come from, sometimes surrounding sounds will interact with the work and the different section overlap, making the experience mysterious. He associates the sound with 'breathing' and I rather quote his description than summarize:

*One block of sounds mounts up, the other slides down. A leads to B leads to A.... The use of repetition and variation makes us anticipate the next block before we even hear it, until it becomes as natural as breathing in and out. It creates, indeed, a tension, which is 'dense', voluminous, one that you can almost feel. A tension, however, because it is endless, because it has become part of this bridge, which can also elicit a kind of relaxation, a state in which we hear the sounds almost subliminally. As we walk across this bridge, as we cross this 'suspended sound line', we ourselves become suspended, in an experience which is always present but always elusive.*

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<sup>19</sup> "Two passages" (online, Michael Tarantino, Oxford, December 1998)  
[http://www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/passage/twopassages/Two\\_Passages.pdf](http://www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/passage/twopassages/Two_Passages.pdf) (accessed 22 December 2015)

## Ann Lislegaard

When sound is heard but the source is not known, this is called *acousmatic* sound. In sound art this can be used to create a tension, a feeling of being out of sync with reality. An artist who exploits this quality often is Ann Lislegaard, born Norwegian and situated in New York City. Her works *Short Cut* and *Off Stage* (1998) are both sound installations in passages in a city. *Short Cut* is a speaker placed in an alleyway. Lislegaard recorded the sound in that exact same place where the speaker was placed later. Thus, listeners hear both the unrecorded/natural and recorded/unnatural sounds in the alleyway; footsteps, doors slamming, etc. It creates the 'uncanny feeling of being in an authentic space and time that turned out to be partly manipulated and illusionary'<sup>20</sup>. For *Off Stage*, she recorded footsteps. In a passage the listener hears these footsteps simultaneous with their own footsteps. The time of day that the passage was visited changed the work gradually; during the day it can be fun to hear, but at night the sound of extra footsteps causes uneasiness, you might be followed.

Important qualities of the sound in sound installations set in public spaces are: discovery, fusion and acousmatic. Sound walks are another way in which artists use these qualities, in addition activating the listener to explore the city.

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<sup>20</sup> Eric Granly Jensen, *Acousmatic Space, Ann Lislegaard's Sound Projects*, (2007) published in the catalogus Ann Lislegaard, science fiction & other worlds for the Astrup Fearnley Museet For Moderne Kunst in Oslo.

## Chapter 3 Listening and sound walks, exploring the city

Sound walks are a way to walk while listening, explore and discover unknown places or experience familiar places in a new way. I will describe a few artists that are relevant in the field of sound walks that stimulate exploration of the city.

### Max Neuhaus: LISTEN

Max Neuhaus made a remarkable series of 15 sound walks called *LISTEN* in various locations. He describes that it started with the idea to bring the people to the sounds, instead of bringing everyday sounds into the concert hall. He invited a group of people to meet him, stamped the word LISTEN on their hand and walked through Manhattan, passing a power plant, highway and the river. He later reflects on this work, saying he wanted ‘to use the word LISTEN to refocus people’s aural perspective’<sup>21</sup>. To focus the attention to the sounds of the city, the difference in sounds and to find appreciation in what first was regarded as noise. Neuhaus called it lecture demonstrations, with the stamp being the lecture and the walk the demonstration. The action of stamping has a certain power. It creates a commitment to the event, I think, which is an important part of the work. By getting stamped, just like when you enter a club, you become part of the group and allowed to join in. The participant receives a simple instruction, follows, and then is left free to perceive whatever it is that comes. They are made aware of the ability of listen, which was already there. Both in the *LISTEN* series and in his work *Drive In Music*, discussed in chapter 2, I admire Neuhaus’ way of experimenting; simply doing, without first convincing or explaining people the purpose.

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<sup>21</sup> “Listen” (online, Max Neuhaus, 1988, 1990, 2004) [www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/walks/LISTEN](http://www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/walks/LISTEN) (accessed 23 oct. 2015)

## Christina Kubisch: Electrical Walks

*Electrical walks*<sup>22</sup> are a series of sound walks that allow people to listen to the electromagnetic fields that are emitted by devices in public spaces of the city, such as light systems, security camera's, neon signs, wireless communication devices, etc. Similar to her work *Oasis: 2000, music for a concrete jungle* listeners receive wireless headphones that can pick up electromagnetic fields and change them into sounds. Participants are given directions to areas that have interesting sounds. Between 2004 and 2015 there have been *Electrical Walks* in 54 different cities around the world.

In a Hardware Hacking class I have made a simple version of this kind of electromagnetic microphone, using a coil from a television. The coil functions as a microphone. With my classmates I explored the art academy; listening to the walls, elevators, printers, etc. Mostly, I found that the sounds itself were not that exciting (mostly rhythmic ticking, humming and buzzing). What was interesting was the act of going out on a search and discovering a hidden world of otherwise not heard sounds. But being a detective loses its appeal after a while and you get bored with the game. What makes this kind of sound walking interesting is its connection with the issue of public safety and the prevalence of security systems in public spaces.

## Edwin van der Heide – Radioscape

Dutch artist and researcher Edwin van der Heide lets his audience explore and interact with his compositions that are set up in an area of a city. For *Radioscape* (2000-06)<sup>23</sup> he placed fifteen radio transmitters around in a neighborhood, each

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<sup>22</sup> *Electrical Walks* (online, description of the installation 'Cloud' on the artist's personal website) [http://www.christinakubisch.de/en/works/electrical\\_walks](http://www.christinakubisch.de/en/works/electrical_walks) (accessed 13 november 2015)

<sup>23</sup> *Radioscape* ( online, Edwin van der Heide, artist's own website <http://www.evdh.net/radioscape> ) (accessed 23 December 2015)

transmitting a layer of a composition. Listeners were given receivers that could pick up multiple channels at the same time. By navigating through the area, which was indicated by a small map on the receiver, listeners made their own mix of Van der Heide's 'meta-composition'. This composition could not be heard as a whole, only in its parts. Van der Heide describes it as a 'immersive environment that redefines the radio medium, establishing a new bodily relationship to the medium (...)'.

*Radioscape* reminds me of a pair of walkie-talkies I bought at a flea market and tried out with a friend. We walked in opposite directions around a block to test out the range of the signal. While walking I kept thinking about my own position in relation to my friend, imagining the other's speed (would she already have turned the corner or not?) and in my mind an invisible line was connecting the two devices. This kind of exploring somehow puts you back into your body. Your own movement and speed connects with your environment. The fact that Van der Heide's whole composition could only be experienced in parts emphasizes for me the mapping quality of sound; listening to the whole meta-composition would be like making an areal photograph of the city.

Duncan Speakman: work in progress

In the spring of 2015 I participated in a workshop of Duncan Speakman in the Vlaamsch cultuurhuis de Brakke Grond in Amsterdam. Duncan introduced our group to his sound walks and urban games that take place outside in public spaces. I wandered in the city center of Amsterdam while listening to a sound/music recording, 'letting the sound be my guide', as Duncan simply instructed. That were the only instructions he had given us. It was a mix of classical instrumental and electronic music that instantly felt like a personal soundtrack to my own small adventure. Everyone fanned out by him or herself, chose their own path and returned when the recording ended. Afterwards the group exchanged their experiences. There were

similarities, as well as unique personal discoveries. Most of us felt drawn to look at the sky, to go inside small alleyways and felt that the changes in the music accompanied timely with things we saw, such as; ‘when the music changed into a more lighter and upbeat mood, the sun came out just at that moment, and it was a perfect timing’ as someone described. These were experiences of serendipity. Most of us also had noticed the large amount of people on the street wearing headphones. For each of us small observations had jumped out and caught our attention; one would notice the gait of people and another had a new awareness of all the boats in the canal. Wandering through the streets we all seemed to be more aware of what was around us, while at the same time feeling separate from other people in our experience.

#### Chapter 4    Sound walks, immersion and narratives

Coupling and synchronizing sounds with image occurs naturally. Automatically we combine what we hear and see. For example, when we talk to a stranger on the phone we can quickly create an image of the person on the other end. We consciously and unconsciously make assumptions about their appearance and character within seconds, based only on their voice. Movies play greatly with combining image and sound. The music soundtrack gives the images meaning, creates an atmosphere, and tells us what emotions are at play. We get emerged in the movie and don’t question the combination of sound and image; they are one. However, mistakes will jump out to us: when a voice is slightly out of sync with the movement of the actor’s mouth you will notice it immediately. The filmmaker manipulates the viewer by playing with this. We somehow accept some sound/image combinations and others we don’t accept. What makes someone emerged into a story or fantasy? In a dark cinema our attention can focus on the movie and it is easier to emerge, compared to outside. Listening to music while walking through the city I get into a certain mood, but it doesn’t create this filmic experience.



Surely, I've had moments that a certain song, at a certain day, at a certain part of my route seemed to sync up perfectly. Somehow a sound walk can create a strange immersive feeling that feels similar to watching a movie, yet you are now outside in the real world and become part of the story. Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller made immersive sound walks by combining sound, narrative and sometimes video.

### Cardiff & Miller: Alter Bahnhof video walk

Janet Cardiff has been making audio walks, alone and together with her artistic and life partner George Bures Miller, since 1990. Where Kubisch let's participants discover their own route, Cardiff & Miller guide the participant through a predetermined route as a narrator. The narrator gives instructions on where to go and shares thoughts, addressing the listener directly. The recordings consist of recordings from the same route, additional sounds from different places, fragmented narratives and music. All these layers are mixed with a nonlinear method of composition<sup>24</sup>. You are not told a story, but get bits and pieces. The recording creates an augmented experience of the places you walk through; fiction and reality merge. Cardiff uses binaural microphones placed in the ears to record the sounds on the route. That way you hear what she heard, and this way of recording creates a great three-dimensional effect.

Cardiff & Miller have made several walks that combine audio with images using photographs, small cameras or smartphones. They are most known for their video walk *Alter Bahnhof* in Kassel (2013), which was part of DOCUMENTA 13. The participants received a smartphone and headphones. The walk lead them around the Alter Bahnhof. While listening they watched footage on the smartphone, which was shot on the same places they encountered on the route. By holding out the small screen in front of them people could frame the image at the

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<sup>24</sup> Karen O'Rourke, *Walking and mapping*, The MIT Press, p. 39

right place. John Wray has interviewed Cardiff and Bures New York Times Magazine about the video walk<sup>25</sup>. They explain:

“You could say our work is about time travel, in a way,” (...) “The walks especially. A step away from reality — consensus reality — in the interests of seeing it better.”

### Cardiff & Miller: Case study B audiowalk

In March 2014 I went to London and walked the audio walk *The Missing Voice: Case Study B (1990)*, which leads from the Whitechapel library to the Liverpool Street Station. On the way I had to listen carefully to follow the directions, not to get lost or fall behind. Artificial sounds really evoked the feeling of being in a movie. For example, while walking in a quiet street I suddenly heard a helicopter approach, followed by a tape-recording about someone being followed. Other times, it was hard to distinguish which sounds were real and which were recorded. The fact that the earphones sat loosely on the ears made it possible for sounds from inside and outside the headphones to merge. It was great fun to do. I felt like being in a game, as a spy, walking, running and observing everything around me. Sometimes I would be instructed to stand still and these moments allowed me to take in the surroundings more, while the recording created a mood. My experience was that I did not form a new perspective of the places on the route. The audio walk put me into a story that was layered over the reality. After it was done, walking back to the library, the same streets seemed dull. It had not enhanced the places, just left me with bits and pieces of memories from the experience.

In her book ‘Walking and mapping’ Karen O’Rourke describes her own experience of one of Cardiff’s audio walks:

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<sup>25</sup> Janet Cardiff, John Bures Miller and the power of sound (online, July 26, 2012) [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/magazine/janet-cardiff-george-bures-miller-and-the-power-of-sound.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/29/magazine/janet-cardiff-george-bures-miller-and-the-power-of-sound.html?_r=0) (accessed December 24, 2015)

*Her Long, Black Hair* (2004). It is set in Central park, New York City<sup>26</sup>. Two things O' Rourke points out that are relevant about the work: firstly, Cardiff, who is the narrator, does not tell a story. She flirts with narrative, giving layer over layer, introducing roughly sketched characters, providing evocative details but never a plot. This makes it distinctly different from an audio tour. On the one hand this way of composition adds to the experience, because you cannot pay attention to everything that is happening. While walking, following directions and seeing your attention is already going all directions. The narrative is scattered and almost subconsciously is taken in. This is not at all the calming experience of simultaneous perception that Tony Hiss talks about. You are trying to keep up, some fragments of the message will linger, others will not. But this, dare I say, cut-up way, is quite effective in adding to the immersion. However, the fiction and cinematic qualities are so strong, that for me it loses some of the connection with the environment. What can be the strongest quality of a sound walk is having a new sensory experience while fully being in the present moment. Cardiff & Miller however have a different focus. Their work is about memory and history. You are only in one place at the same time, yet both you and the places carry many memories within them.

Secondly, O' Rourke points out that audio walks change because of changes in the surroundings; each time listeners will encounter different things on their route determined by chance. This adds beautiful possibilities to the work. For example, you might hear the narrator talk about sadness and at that moment you are stricken by a person's contemplating face passing by. This is the serendipitous quality I describes before about the work of Duncan Speakman. Another change over time happens over weeks, months, even years as the places on the route change. You might hear the narrator describing a building that since then has been torn down. The past and present is connected.

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<sup>26</sup> Karen O'Rourke, *Walking and mapping*, The MIT Press, pp. 34 - 43

## Chapter 5 Urban public space

### Safety and social control

Social safety in public spaces has been researched since the 1950-ies. Jane Jacobs published 'Death and life of the great American cities' in 1961<sup>27</sup>, in which she describes the major principles of diversity in the city. Her work is regarded as one of the most influential in the field of urban development and her ideas are still used today. She describes a few important characteristics of large cities that determine how safe one feels in an urban area. The important feature of the large city that distinguishes it from smaller cities is the amount of strangers a big-city-citizen is surrounded by everyday. By strangers, I mean people who you do not recognize as co-habitants of your neighborhood. People who you recognize because you frequently encounter them in your area, on the street, in a shop, become familiar. Over months and years you map them. A person in a large city will each day see more strangers than familiar acquaintances. Even people that live close to one another can be strangers to each other.

A successful neighborhood is one that is regarded as safe. Jacobs describes that safety is first established by the unconscious surveillance of the people that live in the area, and only secondary by forces like the police. This kind of social surveillance is most prominent in neighborhoods where the private areas and the public areas slowly transition into each other. The private (the home) and the public (the street) areas transition in the sidewalk. The more a sidewalk provides this function for its residents, the safer it feels. The mailman chats with a woman on her stoop, a shopkeeper puts a sign out in the street and corrects children playing too loudly in front of the store,

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<sup>27</sup> Jane Jacobs, *Dood en leven in grote Amerikaanse steden*, translation of: *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 1961, based on the 1993 edition, Modern Library, pp. 51 – 108.

etc. Sidewalks that facilitate many 'strangers' and are not occupied by residents, such as shopping streets, do not provide this kind of transitional social area and social surveillance.

On a trip to Brussels with a friend I experienced how social unsafe such a space can be. We had spent the day strolling through the city. In the evening we returned to our hostel, a short walk through a large shopping street that during the day had been very busy and lively, but at night was deserted. The large concrete shopping mall buildings looked gloom and uninvited. A few guys came up to us and tried to get our attention. When we ignored them, they kicked us in the leg. After we got up from the ground, we ran, scared and made it safely to the hostel. This shopping street lacked three things, according to Jacobs, which made it unsafe:

1. A clear distinction between public and private space.
2. Social control or 'eyes on the street' by owners of the buildings.
3. Consistent use of the street.

The absence of homes and no transition from public to private space makes it unclear who holds ownership and thus responsibility of the area. Nowadays there is an abundance of 'eyes' on the street in the form of surveillance cameras that monitor public spaces. However, this is not the type of social control Jacobs meant. She refers to subtle and unconscious social control that forms when people spontaneously use the streets. Bars that are open at night might be seen as attracting strangers, thereby causing unsafely situations, but the presence of these bars, restaurants and shops that are open in the evening and night create social interaction and surveillance. It attracts people to these public spaces and as well to spaces that are not attractive but happen to be connected to them. Thus, public spaces that are shared by different people across the day and

night can provide safety by spontaneous social control. How this works is described by the term public familiarity.

## Public familiarity

Public familiarity is an important term when it comes to the feeling of safety in public spaces. As Jane Jacobs described, in the city strangers surround us. This can create feelings of anonymity, alienation and distance. We encounter 'strangers' mostly outside of our houses, work and social gatherings, in publicly shared spaces. Some people you don't recognize as your neighbor, but based on their appearance you can categorize them as such. For example when you see a person jogging or a parent bringing their kids to school, you assume they live close by. Other people are complete strangers. Citizens of a large city are very accustomed to seeing unfamiliar faces. They deal with this by categorizing others quickly into groups: ethnic groups, social groups, locals or tourists, neighbors or strangers. We recognize people that live in our neighborhood, such as neighbors, mailmen, regulars of the pub on the corner, etc. and each single encounter adds to this familiarity. Although we have few deep social interactions with these people, sometimes none at all, we get more familiar with them.

A recent Dutch publication 'De Stoep'<sup>28</sup> has analyzed the social relevance of sidewalks (stoepen) in the Netherlands and found that more public familiarity is related to a greater sense of safety. The book is a collaboration of an urban sociologist, architecture historian, urban psychologist, city planner, architect and a visual artist. They describe the sidewalk as the transitional zone between the private and public domain. It is a buffer zone for social interaction, an extension of the private space of the home into the public space in which people have a comfortable position to enjoy the interact with strangers. By adding garden space in front of the house on the sidewalk and fill that space

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<sup>28</sup> Eric van Ulden, Daniel Heussen en Sander van der Ham, 'De stoep, ontmoetingen tussen huis en straat', 2015, Nai010 uitgevers.

with garden furniture, plants, garden gnomes and other nick knacks, residents take ownership of the side walk. When people take ownership of this transitional space, they interact more with people in their neighborhood, which creates a greater public familiarity. It is not actual ownership, because the sidewalk is still publicly owned property, but it is the perceived ownership that is important.

## The art of listening

Perceived ownership and personal mapping of safe versus unsafe spaces has been the research topic of by sociologist Les Back. Especially interesting in the context of place and belonging is his: *Finding a way home project*<sup>29</sup>. Back's main question: how do young people make the city a home? Groups of young people in two multicultural areas of London were asked to document and map out areas of risk, danger and refuge. They were given exercises in a multitude of media (photography, written stories, art works, mapping, audio and video interviews) so that each participant would find at least one medium they were comfortable with. Audio diaries and video walkabouts provided subtle personal maps that broke down areas that were known as safe/unsafe or tolerant/racist into more nuanced pieces. Most adult social maps are based of urban safety are based on the dominance of crimes by young males. Interviewing girls, for example, you get a different story. A group of Bengali girls explained that they would prefer to venture out of the 'safe' center of the Bengali community. They felt more comfortable in 'racist places' because, there they could be away from the prying eyes of the adults in their community. In another area, a participant explained that the landing outside her flat was the most dangerous place for threats of harassment, an area she crossed through quickly to reach the safety of her house. In contrast, a group of girls would regard a certain landing as their refuge. Although in the streets surrounding this landing gang

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<sup>29</sup> Les Back, *The Art of Listening*, Berg, 2007, p. 17

violence took place, they did not feel afraid and even felt protected because the gang members knew them. Back concludes that each individual young person projects a map onto his or her area, depending on race, gender and social background, and uses that to navigate through it.

In his book 'The art of listening' Les Back advocates a new way of sociological writing. He stimulates other sociologists to pay attention to the otherwise ignored voices in society. He regards sociology as a listener's art. 'Sociological listening is needed in order to admit the excluded, the looked past, to allow the 'out of place' a sense of belonging.'<sup>30</sup> Sociologists, since Jane Jacobs, go out into society and collect their data by observation and interviews. According to Back there should be more of a two- way street interaction between sociologist and subject. The sociologist should do more than simply record what people say: "Put simply, quotation is not portraiture and it is the task of sociological writing to bring to life the people we work with and listen to"<sup>31</sup>.

When artists start to work within shared public space and address social issues, they will sometimes overlap with the domain of the sociologist. I want to look at how sound artists approach their audience, use their subjects and which political motives they have.

## Chapter 6 Artistic approach and political motives

I wonder what message sound artist can express about public spaces, with the choice of sound as material. Does sound in public spaces entail the same consequences in provocation as visual art? Or does the medium of sound have different consequences for the artistic attitude? It may seem contradicting, but working in a subtle way with acousmatic sound, this gives a powerful political value to the medium. Just as there

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 22

<sup>31</sup> Les Back, *The Art of Listening*, Berg, 2007, p. 17



are many different artists and art disciplines, there are many different artistic sound approaches. I would like to discuss a few different ways in which sound artists approach and involve their audience.

### Max Neuhaus: Public Supply I

*Public Supply I* (1966) was made at a radio station. Neuhaus made a kind of answering machine that consisted of ten telephones with microphones attached to the receivers. People could call in to the station and the sounds that people send in were recorded, and connected to a switching/mixing system that would allow Neuhaus to mix and alter the sounds, creating a soundscape that would then be broadcasted on the radio. Callers would hear their own sounds mixed with those of others. This was in the time when answering machines or call-in TV shows did not exist. Neuhaus exploited the existing technology to let people interact and connect through the city. The radio show connected one listener to a network of listeners. Some people would only tune in to listen and others would actively participate and contribute sounds. This is a very open way to operate; allowing people to choose their level of participation.

### Improv Everywhere

Another approach is engaging with people through a happening in public space. Improv Everywhere is a prank collective based in New York City with a comedic and lighthearted approach<sup>32</sup>. They are known for flashmob-like actions, what they call 'missions', such as *Frozen Grand Central* (2007) and the since 2002 annual *No Pants Subway Ride*. They are not specifically sound artists, but their projects for the exhibition *Stillspotting NYC* in 2012 use sound and are relevant to mention. They organized four

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<sup>32</sup> <http://improveverywhere.com/>

missions<sup>33</sup> and an audio walk called *Audiogram* (in collaboration with audiologist Tina Jupiter) that was commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum New York for the exhibition<sup>34</sup>. A description of *Audiogram* can be found on the website of the exhibition:

*Drawing from Improv Everywhere's Mp3 experiment series, Audiogram combines the format of a live hearing evaluation with ambient sounds from the Joyce Kilmer Park off the Bronx Grand Concourse. Participants will engage with pre-recorded sound downloaded to personal Mp3 players or borrowed iPods. Walking through the park, a narrator will guide listeners through changing perspectives on sounds in the city so that, among the aural bleeps and blips, participants may encounter surprises along their way. By disorienting its test subjects with layers of fiction and reality, Audiogram intends to heighten awareness of the constant noise surrounding people within New York City.*

A collective of volunteers performs the missions of Improv Everywhere. Important is the element of surprise and the goal is to bring a smile to the face of unsuspected strangers in public space. For the mission 'Say something nice' a lectern with a small megaphone was placed in a busy square. A sign with the title was attached. Their humorous approach let's people interact with each other and provides a playground to take ownership of the public spaces. Boundaries of what normal behavior is and what behavior is condoned in public spaces are explored. Sometimes this leads to security guards or police getting involved to stop the mission. Unfortunately, since their fame is grown and the concept of flash mobs is more wide spread, their controversy has lessened and for me their more recent missions lack the strength of the earlier ones.

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<sup>33</sup> Car Alarm Symphony, The Mute Button, Say Something Nice, The Sleeper Car

<sup>34</sup> <http://stillspotting.guggenheim.org/>

## Mark Bain

Mark Bain's Psychosonic systems are made to share a provocative political message. In the 2005 publication of *Open! Magazine*<sup>35</sup> he describes four of such systems; devices that are a critical gesture in reaction to the use of non-lethal (but harmful) sound techniques in warfare and crowd control by government forces. Two of these works are relevant, as they are meant to activate people in public spaces.

*Action Unit; Instant Riot for Portable People* (2003) is a battery run sound system with angry mob sounds, cut up in a way that the content is obscured but the emotion is clearly emitted from the tape. Bain placed the installation in a shopping street of Lyon and it took close to seven minute to trigger a small riot and police to shut it down. Another work is *Acoustic Space Gun* (2004), which is a microphone attached to a speaker and looks like a weapon. It picks up sound from far away and emits it through a speaker up to 900 meters in the opposite direction. This way sounds and conversations can be moved through the space, amplified, causing sounds to echo off the surrounding buildings and cause confusion.

Bain describes psychosonica as invisible materials that can influence people psychologically, rally them up and manipulate them. He wants to make people aware of how sound can be harmful, that even regular urban noises have negative influences and that anyone can be manipulated through sound.

## Moniek Toebosch

Moniek Toebosch is a Dutch artist that has made sound art installations who has similar ideas as Bain, but has a different artistic attitude when working with sound in public spaces<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> M. Bain, 'Psychosonica en de module van de publieke ruimte', in *Open* (9): 94-109 (2005) Nai Uitgevers, Rotterdam.

<sup>36</sup> B. van der Sande, 'Grenzen stellen en grenzen verleggen. Over het werk van Moniek Toebosch.' in *Open* (9): 48-58 (2005) Nai Uitgevers, Rotterdam.

Similar to Bain she sees sound as a material that very quickly becomes invasive. She regards certain limits to what people should be confronted with. In her opinion people should be able to avoid art in public spaces. Thus, she chose to have her work *Engelenzender* (1994 -2004) to be broadcasted on the car radio. People could only hear it while driving on a certain dike road if they tuned in. This work is similar to Max Neuhaus' passage works.

In a gallery setting Toebosch has made very different sound work, as if there she felt free to manipulate her unsuspected audience using sound. In 1978 she performed *Joyful Anticipation* in the gallery De Appel in Amsterdam, known for performance art at that time. Toebosch turned the gallery space into a bar. Out of sight, she sat behind a sound mixer and played pre-recorded bar noises into the space, while arriving guests gathered in anticipation of a performance that would never happen. She also controlled the music Jukebox inside the bar and transmitted sound from outside inside the room. Eventually most visitors left angry. I think these contrasting approaches to sound work set in a gallery and in public space interesting.

Justin Bennett

Bennett has made a sound walk about the financial district in Amsterdam (de Zuidas) called *Zuidas Symphony*<sup>37</sup>, It is a combination of his own narration, different observations of people he interviewed and environmental sounds. The area at the time was fully in development. Large corporate buildings were being build (and still are), showing ambitious new architecture. At the time Bennett made this project, the high concrete walls made it a very cold and bare area, associated with hard economics, excesses and crime. Bennett was then invited to do a residency and show an exhibition about de Zuidas in the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague. The artists who with a sound

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<sup>37</sup> Information and soundtrack available at:  
<http://www.soundtrackcity.nl/amsterdam/en/wandelingen/zuidas/>

walk made a subtle yet clear critic of the socially accepted behavior in corporate businesses, was now commissioned to make a gallery work for the established art business people. The result was the *Shotgun Architecture project*, a series of works for which Bennett fired an alarm gun in several open spaces in de Zuidas and recorded the impulse responses. Works that he showed based on these recordings included a sound composition on vinyl record, computer-made drawings and a site-specific sound installation. Compared to the *Zuidas Symphony* sound walk this was completely different work. Freek Lomme, curator and director of Onomatopee in Eindhoven, makes an interesting comparison between the sound walk and the museum installation.<sup>38</sup> The sound walk can be seen as a personal observant approach, he says. It has a critical political message in a subtle way; enfolding a world containing diverse opinions to the listener, allowing diversity without judgment or moralistic plot. It shows that 'contrasting views can and will be heard'. In contrast, the act of firing a gun for the *Shotgun Architecture project* is a provocative action. The public area between the corporate buildings, neat, orderly and highly controlled by camera surveillance, is by firing the gun for a moment taken into the possession of the artist, perhaps as a radical act, perhaps an act of despair.

Rahma Khazam, art critic, curator and head editor of Earshot magazine, describes *Shotgun Architecture project* as 'highlighting the repressive nature of public space, which is thrall to rules and regulations and public in name only'<sup>39</sup>. According to her, Bennett suggests that these spaces are instruments of social control, condoning the aggressive and anti social behavior that is thought to be controlled by surveillance. The work itself is then a representation of that action, situated in a conventional space; the museum. The work becomes an illustration or a mapping. That to me would probably be a disappointment.

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<sup>38</sup>Freek Lomme, Gehoor geven (aan) (2009), part of the publication *The City Amplified* – Justin Bennett,, Stroom Den Haag, p. 39-47

<sup>39</sup> Rahma Khazam *The City Amplified* – Justin Bennett,, Stroom Den Haag

However according to Lomme, this is a well-made choice of Bennett, because it speaks specifically to an audience of museum goers and proposes notions about expectations of space and environmental planning, that are stimulating for a political elite.

## Conclusion

The beginning of the thesis focused on the concept of a place. What is important to conclude is that a place can mean both a physical space and a relational position. We perceive places both as a physical and a mental representation. Belonging and displacement are issues related to our sense of place. For my thesis I did not focus on all art that directly expresses these topics. Instead, I have explored sound art. Sound influences our perception more on daily basis than we are consciously aware of. Therefore, when we really listen, we can create a situation where our awareness is divided simultaneously over sound and sight, connecting our body and mind to our surroundings. Sound lends itself well to explore publicly shared spaces. Sound art lets listeners discover familiar places in an unfamiliar way and question the ownership of these public spaces.

Sound installations can change a place or passage through sound. These works function as triggers for aural refocusing. For that, they need to be discovered by their audience. Alienation and tension are created through fusing recorded sound with ambient sound, acousmatic. The listener needs to be surprised and confused, to get interested.

Sound walking has great potential to address sociological views on shared public space by enhancing perceived ownership. A sound walk allows people to explore their city in a playful and safe way. It gives them control over their route and let them rediscover their familiar environment. Locals get the opportunity to open up existing perception patterns and rewrite their mental maps. Places that were first ignored become visible. Places that were familiar become interesting. Through sound walks citizens can reclaim public passages, urban no man land, corporately dominated or restricted spaces. This will not happen instantly. Our mental representation of those spaces changes slightly, just for a moment, and opens up a possibility to shape new mental landscapes. When we walk and listen, we interrupt our existing urban rhythms. We can feel more in control.

Perceived ownership is an important factor that determines the sense of safety in urban surroundings. In urban surroundings where shared spaces are controlled by remote surveillance systems and borders, sound art can be observant of these methods and provide a playful way to take ownership. By providing the listener with the opportunity to observe, sound walks can express criticism about the repressive nature of public spaces that sometimes only in name are owned by the public. In a way, sound installations and sound walks create artificial places for people to safely observe and interact with their environment, similar in function as the transitional zones between the home and the street. There are sound artists that actively explore this interaction, involving their audience to exchange words or sounds. Most sound installation and sound walks discussed in this thesis involve an interaction that is more one-way directed and subtle. It mostly exists of encountering others, observing them with new attention, exchanging a look, being aware of your self while walking amongst others. Subtle, yet it has the potential to create public familiarity.

Narratives in sound walks link us to the history of that place, linking our own history with that of our surroundings. They can place us in a fictional story, creating a simultaneous perception experience in time; the listener is both in the current moment and in another time. It links a personal experience and memory with that of the narrator(s). This can create a beautiful diversity of views, that you are part of. However, when the cinematic qualities are too prominent the listener emerges with the fictional world, that the connection with reality becomes just an effect. The work then takes over; the listener has no control over its discovery and just goes on a ride. The place that is created only exists within the experience of the sound walk.

Both in the work process of the sociologist and the sound artist there is much attention given to listening to the experiences of others. The sociologist observes, analyses and informs public policy, the sound artist manipulates, shifts and triggers. It manipulates listening, shifts attention, triggering associations and



memories, while giving some control over to the listener, confusing and challenging them at the same time. A subtle approach in sound art in shared public spaces seems necessary to function as a successful trigger. Artists that use invasive and provocative approaches (Bain and Bennett) do the opposite, and I think it is more difficult for these sound-related actions in public spaces to really find their audience appreciation when placed in a documentation form within a gallery setting.

Thus, it seems that within public spaces, sound art lends it strength from being open enough to a large audience, just as Max Neuhaus intended when he started making sound art, simultaneous being subtle enough. Also, sound art in public spaces explores a balance between manipulation of the listener and giving the control over to the listener.