Chapter 1: Delimitation of place and time

I believe performance locations have a considerable impact on how the audience perceives music. Therefor, a performer should -when possible- be able to choose a location that fits the music or find ways to use a given place and transform it in (an) appropriate concert space(s) or at least be aware of the surroundings. Any place is a potential concert space, and having this in mind all the time is a typical characteristic for an immersive performer (see chapter 3). This is a first and important step to immerse an audience in whatever atmosphere the interpretation desires. This obviously doesn't mean that musicians shouldn't take advantage of well-equipped concert venues anymore in order to create immersive environments. This chapter is a plea for being aware of location, place and space and consequently making any performance somewhat site-specific.

The Changing Significance of Venue

Because people want want to be more actively engaged in performance and because our inherited performance spaces are often stuck in traditional concert settings, the conception, design and reconfiguration of venues are important to reshape the relationship between performer and audience. In formal theatre venues the placement of audience, lighting and conventions about respect and silences make the psychological distance between performer and audience bigger, even though the audience may be emotionally moved by the performance. This challenges artists to think more broadly and creatively about where audiences encounter art. As a result artists choose to create and present art in a wider range of settings that both animate the art and capture the imagination of audiences in new ways. Brown cites the rise of site-specific festivals, experiments with temporary or pop-up productions and the use of outdoor space for music performances. More artists are choosing to curate the settings for their work as an integral part of the production. (Brown, 2012)

Performance location, place, space and site-specificity

Even though Nick Kayes book *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation (2000)* doesn't tell the least about music but focuses more on visual and performance art, the information is relevant and inspiring for this research. The book is concerned with practices which, as the writer describes in the introduction, articulate exchanges between the work of art and the places in which its meanings are defined. Still in the introduction, Kaye refers to *The Practice of Everyday Life (1984)*, a book in which the French philosopher and scientist Michel de Certeau reflects on the relationship between place and space. De Certeau reads 'place' as an ordered and ordering system realised in 'spatial practices'. Defined by its internal stability, a place is an exclusive and self-regulating system of rules, an instantaneous configuration of positions. A place is the order (of whatever kind) in accordance with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (de Certeau 1984: 117). De Certeau notes straightforwardly that spatial practices may give multiple expressions to the stability and orderliness of place.

Spatial practices do not reproduce fragments of a given order, but operate as ordering activities, whether that activity be walking, reading, listening or viewing. Space, as a practiced place, admits of unpredictability. Rather than mirror the orderliness of place, space might be subject not only to transformation, but ambiguity (Kaye 2000: 5).

As mentioned before, a concert could happen at any place: big or small concert halls, shopping malls, forests, abandoned factory buildings, living rooms or even a swimming pool. All have own characteristics and atmosphere defined by their architecture, the elements they exist of and their specific orders. It's very interesting for a performer to analyse those elements and try to link them to the music and your interpretation. This way it transforms in an exclusive concert space for the performer to play and for the audience to get immersed in.

In the world of theatre, the awareness of performance space is a lot bigger than in music. [Brith](#) [Gof](#) is a performance company that is internationally acknowledged as a leading experimental performance company developing innovative ways of working across different media in the nineties. Using explicitly 'hybrid' practices, and seeking to provoke a series of dialogues and confrontations between performance and location, Brith Gof construct their site-specific work through exploring unresolved relationships between various channels of address, creating a 'field of activities' (McLucas et al. 1885:17) rather than linear structures. Confronted with multiple, and often interpenetrating narratives and voices, their audiences are invited to encounter the site in which these works are realised as re-framed and overlaid by narratives which challenge and draw on the place of their presentation. Rather than focusing on the dramatic script, its work is part of an ecology of ideas, aesthetics and practices which foregrounds the location of performance, the physical body of the performer, and relationships with audience. This amplifies a fundamental exchange between site and performance, where, McLucas suggests, the installation of 'ghost' architectures seeks to engage with and activate narratives and properties of a 'host' site. In this context, McLucas observes, the site may offer particular and unavoidable history, particular use (a cinema, a slaughterhouse), particular formality (shape, proportion, height…) and/or particular political, cultural or social context (Kaye 1996: 213).

Performance space may be delineated, cordoned off, set aside: marks, surfaces, structures, both planned and improvised. Activity may be confined to and conditioned by a particular area, volume or architectural feature. Or space may be organised through the displacement of the spectators by arrangements of seating: chairs randomly scattered over the area with the performers moving in and around the spectators; laid out in lines, alleys or even blocks or round the edge of an open square. All of which may mediate the nature and quality of activity. (Pearson, 2001: 22)

Performance space for a Birth Gof production, picture taken from their website

Where site-specificity arises in a disturbance of the opposition between 'virtual' and 'real' spaces, in dialectical relationships between the work and its site, or in a questioning of the art object's material integrity, so the very possibility of establishing a work's proper location is called into question. Indeed, here, site-specificity is linked not only to a transitive definition of site but, more broadly, to shifts in visual art toward the conceptual and performative contexts in which the idea of the work is defined. For Miwon Kwon, writer of *One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity (1997)*, this development is reflected in certain paradigmatic concepts of site where, Kwon proposes, 'in advanced art practices of the past thirty years the operative definition of the site has been transformed from a physical location -grounded, fixed, actual- to a discursive vector -ungrounded, fluid, virtual' (Kaye 2000: 183).

Kwon (1997) describes two different conditions within which site-specific and site-oriented art have been "circulating" in recent years. First, since the late 1980s, there have been increasing numbers of *traveling* site-specific art works, despite the claim that to move the work is to destroy the work. Concurrently, re-fabrications of site-specific works, particularly from the minimalist and post-minimalist eras, are becoming more common in the art world. The increasing trend of relocating or reproducing once unique site-bound works had raised new questions concerning the authenticity and originality of such works. Secondly, now that site-specific practices have become familiar (even commonplace) in the mainstream art world, artists are traveling more than ever to fulfill institutional/cultural critique projects in site. The extent of this mobilization of the *artist* radically redefines the commodity status of the art work, the nature of artistic authorship, and the art-site relationship (Kwon, 1997: 31).

Naturally similar approaches have by now reached the world of music theatre, opera and (contemporary) classical music concerts. In a previous research (*Meer dan een concert, onderzoek naar de intermedialisering van het hedendaags-klassieke concertgebeuren aan de hand van de programmaties van toonaangevende Vlaamse concerthuizen en muziekensembles (2015)*) I concluded that intermedial performances have a big attraction to the audiences of today. Concert houses and music collectives want to give their audiences an immersive experience and this is often realised by creating innovative concert spaces. It is important to remember that this creative input should always support the musical composition, in order to bring the audience closer to the music. (Bonny, 2015: 17).

In his article '*Muziek in het museum*' *(Rekto Verso: 2013)*, Dutch historian and philosopher Floris Sollevelt states that music is moving outside concert halls, to alternative venues and outdoor locations, to internet and lately also more to museum halls. Considering the latter, he points out that the opposite is true as well: musea are entering the concert halls. Many ensembles and collectives are now creating concert experiences in which scenography has an important role. This way they break with the traditional concert format.

A great example of today is the immersive opera *Boys of Paradise* (by workshOPERA and Tête à tête, with music by Vahan Salorian) that premiered in London in 2015. It's a contemporary opera that reflects the dangers of gay clubbing in a non-preachy way. The audience is invited in a gay club to follow a trio of friends called Twink, Cub and Fag Hag – a comment on the prevalent (and surprisingly detailed) Grindr-fuelled world of labelling. Through the course of the opera the audience is taken through different locations of the fictional club, Paradaezia. People go to the toilets to powder their noses, they "come up" on the dance floor, stumble into a dark room and eventually find themselves in the VIP lounge. The show is immersive so the action takes place all around the visitors. They take shots with the cast, explore the club and get offered powders and pills on the dance floor, where they also have the opportunity to grind against a scantily opera singer or three. The audience would never have the same connection with this specific environment (most of them haven't been in gay clubs) if they wouldn't be drawn into it like that. Obviously this potentially improves the understanding of the story, appreciation of the music and identification with the cast.

Boys of Paradise

Delimitation and manipulation of place

Reading and understanding the content of any performance could be strongly influenced by the location in which the work is being presented. Perception might also be twofold if it switches the focus from the exterior phenomena of the presented piece performed to the interior emotion or imagination evoked by it. (Schacher, 2008: 3)

As a performer you always have the possibility to create your personal performance space. Within the (chosen or given) location, there are still plenty of opportunities to create immersive environments. It's a good idea to delimit the place and thus decide from what point you want your audience to be immersed: you can create intimate spaces around the performer(s) on stage or huge spaces that start at the entrance of a large festival. The bigger the place, the more difficult it gets. The delimitation can be physical (entrance door, fences, decor), manipulated (for instance with lighting or visuals) or a combination.

Delimitation of duration and time

In many concerts, the stage (or performance place) is empty when the audience enters the room. Musicians wait for everyone to be seated before they take place (usually in a very serious and almost sacred mode). When they enter the room the performance begins. For better immersive experiences however, it's probably a good idea to synchronise performance place and time. From the moment visitors enter the performance place, they should imagine themselves in the performance. Of course there are many ways to start immersive performances: specific atmospheres could be created beforehand with lighting and/or decor or the performers could already be present or even playing. You can also choose for a concert format in which the public can enter and leave the performance place any time. In my opinion, the (traditional) concert is over when performers bow during the last applause. Often, and unfortunately, this is the first time you see a musician without the (serious) performance mask. Of course I realise this has to do with relief and finally being able to loose the concentration, but also here I am looking for ways to end performances and thank an audience still in the spirit of the concert.

As most musicians know, the performance time also has an impact on the overall experience (for both audience and performer). A sunday morning concert feels completely different than a saturday afternoon or a friday night one. When you're aiming for an immersive experience, it's wise to think about how the performance time relates to your performance concept and if it doesn't, think about ways to manipulate this (also here: lights can do magic!).

IN - place and time

I decided to divide the concert in three sections, each with their own immersive atmosphere (corresponding to the music of that part).

The first part of 'IN' (also called 'IN') ideally takes place in a blackbox hall (in the case of the premiere: the backstage of the Kees van Baaren hall of The Hague's Royal Conservatoire). In 'anonymous' places like that, there are many possibilities for creating the atmospheres. Often they also have the advantage of being well-equipped with light and sound system. For this part I will have built a big tubular steel scaffolding for the audience to sit on. Obviously this relates to the instrument Kate Moore made (see picture below) for her composition *PUUR, Miniatuur I* in collaboration with choreographer Neel Verdoorn. This piece outlines a barren environment where dancer and musician from their own center are looking for extremes. In a dialogue they collide two worlds and they create a new, abstract and self-contained universe. For me it makes a lot of sense to confront my audience directly with the harsh physical material the piece is musically and visually built on. As a performer I will be inside the audience most of the time, which also makes it easier to connect. Another advantage of this setting is that it creates many possibilities to oppose the 'interior' (of a composition, performance space, speaker and/or instrument set-up, scaffolding…) to the exterior.

PUUR, Miniatuur I (Neel Verdoorn, Kate moore) by Juan Martinez and Andreas Kuck ©Robert Benschop

The second piece *Intérieur I*, by the German composer Helmut Lachenmann is an important piece in the core percussion repertoire. For many (especially inexperienced) people the aesthetics are quite difficult to understand. Nevertheless it's a super interesting and important composition and making it accessible for a bigger audience is a good challenge within this research, or even better: a good opportunity to support my faith in immersive concert experiences, especially when it comes to (difficult) contemporary music. The big set-up (marimba, vibraphone, timpani, 2 tam-tams, tom-toms, …) is incorporated in the scaffolding and screens that show the scores are surrounding the audience. The interior (me playing inside the set-up) and exterior (the score) are strongly connected because of the performer's focus and the public is literally going to be in the middle of that. The instruments are amplified at some points in the music (not always to make people well-aware of the inside versus outside). The third piece of this first part is a new composition for marimba and tape, written by the Ghent-based composer Ruben De Gheselle. The starting point for this music is the confrontation of the composer with his audience, and also the tape will give some clear hints of that idea.

The second part, *Music for Bars,* is a concept that composer Brendan Faegre worked on together with Slagwerk Den Haag and Club Guy & Roni's Poetic Disasters Club. It's a 60-minute amplification and manipulation of sonic, physical and social elements of a bar, so obviously it needs to take place in a bar-like environment. The audience of 'IN' will think they are having a break, but things will start to get weird pretty soon.

Dancers and percussionists react on and interact with the foyer space and crowd and eventually present some fixed compositions (Gesprek by Louis Andriessen and Martijn Padding, Music for the Pub-lic by Brendan Faegre) and choreographies. Even though it's quite an aggressive way of performing. The audience has more freedom in how to react to the performers. Social rules and conventions in a bar or foyer environment are completely different than those within a traditional concert hall, which is an important aspect of this experiment.

Music for Bars at Bar Botanique (Amsterdam) ©Laura Lee Huisman