

## Undergraduate Theory and Practice Essay Cover Sheet

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**Sound in Museums as Curatorial Practice  
Learning about the use of sound in museums from the Van  
Abbemuseum Choir**

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# **Sound in Museums as Curatorial Practice**

**Learning about the use of sound in museums from the Van  
Abbemuseum Choir**

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## **Abstract**

Art institutions and practices has been a prominent field for alternative cultural and political discussions. There have been several ways that these discussions are being approached, one of those approaches being through the medium of sound. This research will look at the use of sound as praxis in the context of museum. In doing so, I will be taking Paolo Freire's understanding of the term praxis as action and reflection directed at structures to be transformed, Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck's argument on curatorial practice, François J. Bonnet's theory on being-listening, as well as Julian Henrique's theory on sonic bodies to apply to an empirical case study. The case study which I have chosen for this research is the Van Abbemuseum choir in Eindhoven, The Netherlands. By analysing the Van Abbemuseum choir's organisation and practice, it will then be illustrated how the theories can give insight to the way we think about sound in museums. Through this research, I have found that the use of sound has the potentiality of being a medium for activism praxis in museums by employing means for action and reflection. Furthermore, I have also found that the use of sound also has a potentiality of bringing a constellational condition in which the museum's hegemony is being negotiated upon and the curatorial trajectory of the museum being an agonistic space gradually occurs.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Topic Introduction

“Through this voice, I shall guide you through to listen to the dreams and memories that are revolving around me. Perhaps my body is stiff, frozen through time, but my voice is fleeting, flowing the course of time.” (Outside Within The Colonial Theatre Audioguide, KUNCI Cultural Studies Centre, 2017)

I am interested in the use of sound as part of the practice done in the museum. Focusing on aural events in the museum, I would like to examine the forms of engagement that the phenomena of listening in museum context employ. Aside from analysing the modes of intervention and knowledge transmission that happens in museum spaces through aural forms and the act of listening, I would also like to analyse the potential of the medium of sound when used in the political and cultural context of the museum.

Walking through the Van Abbemuseum during my summer holiday in 2018, in the midst of the silence and somewhat focused observation on the artworks and wall texts, singing voices pass through the walls bringing a sudden shift of ambience throughout the space and a newfound curiosity of the source of these sounds for me. The choir was doing their rendition of the traditional Kurdish song, *Ahmediye*, complete with choreography around a Jonas Staal’s installation, *Museum As Parliament*. This finding opened me up to the field of sound studies as well as the use of music in curatorial practices.

Taking the Van Abbemuseum Choir as a case study, this research looks at the unique use of sound which encourage multiplicity in the cultural transmission of knowledge in the museum. As discourse of museum studies come to extend the from artefact or materials on display to events and affects, doing research on the field of

curatorial seems more relevant than talking about the space or semiotic meanings of materials in it. Not to mention the cultural capital and power held by cultural spaces in cities, meant that political discussions of urban commons and decoloniality is alive and well in art institutions. These relevant issues would suggest that the Van Abbemuseum choir could be an exemplary practice into using musical medium as curatorial practice.



*Fig. 1: Ahmediye Performance*

Through these examples, I would investigate into what can we learn from thinking curatorially about sound in museum? Whilst doing so, I will also try to answer two other questions related to my case study. These questions are:

- What are the ways of thinking about the use of sound in museum space?
- How can sound/music act as praxis in the museum space?

In order to answers those questions, firstly, I will be outlining relevant literatures in the theme of curatorial, sound studies, and praxis. The result of these outlines will be an in-depth understanding of the field I am working with and lay the groundwork for the analysis of my case study. After doing so, I will be specifying the context of my research through descriptions of the ways sound has been used in museums, the curatorial background of the Van Abbemuseum, as well as a history and practice of the Van Abbemuseum choir. Lastly, I will be combining the insights from my literature review and the cast study context, towards an analysis of how the two fits together to illustrate the arguments.

## 1.2 Methodology

In doing this research, I have chosen to use qualitative methods including literature research and participant observation as well as conversations to gather data. A way to approach the data that I have gathered through these methods is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns, also known as themes, within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A theme in the purest sense of the word is the capture of something considered important concerning the data and research question, yet researcher judgement is necessary to determine what a theme is (ibid.). Therefore, during the course of my literature review and research process I have determined select themes I consider to be prominent. These themes are; 1. Curating and the Curatorial; 2. Sound; 3. Events and Affects; 4. Social and Cultural Praxis of Museums.

Through the said primary data collection done by qualitative research technique, it would be also important to mention that there would be setbacks in this use of limited methodology. However, it is just as necessary to mention that due to the scale and topic nature of research in my instance, I would argue that the qualitative would greatly outweighs the prospect of gathering quantitative data. Media research has been heavily influenced by multi-disciplinary approaches in social research and it is for this reason that there are multiple ways in which we can approach studying media. One of those ways is approaching it through the methods of anthropology. Thus as the setting of anthropological research process is to grasp the complex nature of community and I would be talking mainly about a limited (albeit the impact might be wider) context of museum spaces, it could suggest that my qualitative research techniques is justified. Furthermore, as I consider different resources, this qualitative

research is done thoroughly to ensure that I am not simply describing a discourse but also engaging with it through analysis.

I firstly conducted secondary research, in the form of a literature review comprised of relevant existing academia. I also used a selection of pieces from different disciplines including media, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, music, as well as visual cultures. I will draw upon existing theories when their work proves relevant and make connections between the resources from different disciplines to ensure that a rigorous research and analysis. Secondary data is of particular value due to the fact that it allows the potential for “additional calculations.” (Sobal, 1981) Therefore, my secondary research supports the need for my primary research.

In addition to theoretical literature, I have also done historical research by considering the development of sound usage in museum spaces. This historical research not only formed the basis of my literature reading, but also provided insight into the subject I selected. History has long been considered important particularly in sociological research, with Griffin stating “History’s complexities must be preserved and recaptured to *get sociology right*.” (Griffin, 1995). Even though media research like the one I am doing here is interdisciplinary, gaining insight into how the theme and subject of my research has been talked about in the past — as advised in sociological research — gives me an insight into the main theories that I will be considering in my analysis.

Furthermore, I have also used resources from the Van Abbemuseum’s website on the subject of the choir as well as the publications they release to advertise their events.

After obtaining a base understanding on the subject of embodiment, sound, and museum studies, I consulted various existing academia. This literature review

provided a deeper understanding of those subjects in ways that I would like to approach my case study. Furthermore, it has also allowed me to determine important considerations in my primary research. Existing literature gives way for me to build my arguments and move past the debates around 'objectivity' and 'interpretation.' In this instance, I would refer to Donna Haraway's (1988) text, "Situated Knowledges" to implicate that the result of this research is a proposition of one way to incorporate sound in museum's curatorial practice rather than an 'objective' or 'interpretive' view of how sound *is* used in museum's curatorial practice.

In her text, Haraway (ibid.) talks about acknowledging *situated knowledges* or feminist objectivity as a way to have simultaneous account of "...radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognising our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world." (ibid.: 579) Explaining this, I am particularly interested in Haraway's view on positioning being vastly occupied by vision. Through following her feminist objectivity, I admit that all the knowledge in this research which I pull upon are situated and embodied in various forms of locatable nodes (ibid.: 582-583). Ranging from the simple, my embodiment and situated-ness of language — compromising between my experiences of the English language, the experience of people I've interviewed, and every other language in between — through to the complex, embodiment and situated-ness of being an international student in the UK and doing research in the Netherlands where through education, familial history, and identity as an Indonesian I have epitomised in myself regardless of my awareness of it or not — and everything in between is to be accounted for. I am hoping that throughout doing this research, I have done what Haraway has argued for, "... [of] politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and

not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims of people's lives; the view from a body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity." (ibid.: 589)

On top of secondary qualitative research that I have mentioned, I also conducted primary qualitative research. The primary qualitative research I have done included participant observations through visit to the Van Abbemuseum by interacting with the events and joining the choir's practice as well as conversation with the conductor and participants of the choir. The key themes I chose to include within my interview are the history of the choir, the events they do, as well as their personal thoughts on the choir, museum, and the events they do. I selected these themes due to their relevance on the finding of my secondary qualitative research. As the result of this, secondary qualitative research in turn provided insight concerning what themes to include in my primary qualitative research.

I have been particularly fortunate that during the research process I have gained close acquaintance with the conductor of the choir, Willy de Rooij, whom I contacted in the beginning of this research as well as two singers, Fleur Brom and Jenneke Lambert, whom I was introduced to by Willy. In my conversations with them, I decided to construct a casual and open conversation with each question building upon the answer and thus it is more of a discussion rather than an interview with strict demarcation between interviewer and interviewee.

On the field, I have done participant observation to build on my case studies. These data will be reflected on my description of the event and thus it is through personal experience that I will describe in my accounts. The advantage of this method is that it has allowed me to immerse myself in the context of my study and also to

record extensive details. The records that I have collected are in the form of field notes, sound recordings, photographs, and video recordings.

At the very last, I would also like to mention that critically, I am deeply aware that despite the justification for using this method, I am still much likely prone to idealisation of accounts. Thus, to conclude, I need to state that the outcome of this research is a proposition, influenced by my positionality and the resources that I have.

“Perhaps the world resists being reduced to mere resource because it is — not mother/matter/mutter — but coyote, a figure of the always problematic, always potent tie between meaning and bodies.” (Haraway 1988: 596)



## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Curatorial and Curatorial Events**

Discussing about knowledge and the knowing produced in the museum, it is useful to take into account the curatorial. Thinking about events in museum as curatorial events enable us to reflect upon, sense or make-sense the world around us through the use of time-based forms of practices such as exhibition, performance, and discursive events. By understanding what curatorial events are, the discussion can then be opened up to thinking about knowledge and the experience of knowledge – what an experience at the museum brings and arise to and from the outside – rather than in just the vacuum of museum space or a discourse of semiotics.

As argued by Foucault (1977) in 'What is an Author?' discourse is created through a relationship between the author and the text rather than by the author or the author themselves being the discourse. Thus in the case of events in museums, such as the like of curatorial tour or musical tour to collections and exhibitions, meaning is not only created through text and narration by curators or the context of institution, but also through the participation of the audience. Even further, Foucault also suggest that discourse could even circulate without any need for an author. This suggestion, I would argue, propel us to look into the curatorial as discourse which goes beyond the representational meaning of curatorial projects to an epistemic understanding of it.

Following Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck (2012) text on the difference between curatorial and curating, I would disseminate events and affects in the museums as being related to curatorial rather than curating. According to Rogoff (in *ibid.*: 22-23), 'curating operates in the realm of the representational [where] focus is put on the end product and therefore response and meaning are made through that representation.' Museum then, as a space for production of knowledge and

subjectivities, could potentially be a space which put ‘trajectory of activity’ (ibid.: 23) as its emphasis of practice. This thinking of curatorial as ‘trajectory of activity’ marks practice in the material form as ‘not an isolated end product but a blip along the line of an ongoing project.’ (Rogoff in ibid.: 23) This dissertation will use this line of thought on thinking of the Van Abbemuseum Choir as a curatorial project and their material forms of practice, namely *Musical Tours* and *Singing Manifestations*. By doing so, it will also identify and take into account the different constellations composing this particular curatorial project. “[T]he curatorial is the dynamic field where the constellational condition [combining things that haven’t been connected before — artworks, artifacts, information, people, sites, contexts, resources, etc.] comes into being” (von Bismarck in ibid.: 24).

Thus in relation to the audiences of the museums or reception of events curated within the space, curatorial expands and allows the thinking of these experiences in their conjunction with what is on display and whatever might be going on within and through the relations rather than what is and is not seen or experienced. “Within the curatorial, objects, people, spaces, and contexts connect and are themselves connected among and with each other. The audience is part of this set. Anything happening as an argument within the curatorial has equal value no matter at what time it has taken place” (von Bismarck in ibid.: 28). The objects of knowledge and the material events created through the curatorial processes become sites of a new relational mode of the subject. As Rogoff (in ibid.: 29) argued, “...beginning to think of the audience in terms of a community of singularities allowed for a new relation between both the audience and what is on display as well as between one another, rather than being a demographic category within these spaces. That is what constitutes the “event of knowledge.”

## **2.2 Thinking About Sound**

### **2.2.1 Sound and Material Cultures**

In talking about the aims of bringing in sound and material objects as means of communicating in museum context, Witmore's (2006) text on the percolation of time in mediation of material culture will be a useful starting point. As in the gallery the often understood way of obtaining knowledge and/or formation of narratives is built through art-objects, it is useful to bring in a perspective from material culture. If material culture is thought of as "a descriptor of any and all human constructed or human-mediated objects, forms, or expressions, manifested consciously or unconsciously through culturally acquired behaviours" (Bolin & Blandy 2003: p. 249) then we must also take into account that the entanglement that human has with objects and spaces are not only through textual means but also cognitive means.

In his text, Witmore talks about how so often in the museum, the cognitive is too much emphasised on the visual sense, whilst other senses such as tactility and hearing are often dismissed. Tactility, as he described, has its own reasoning for not being able to be delivered in museum setting — one of them being the need to 'take care' of the artefacts or the impossibility itself to bring a whole landscape of archeological site to the museum. However, Witmore propose that it could be argued that the aural is a fundamental quality to material presence. Even when museums prescribe to the 'sacred silence' it is still a specific silence different to other contexts. In this text, Witmore uses sound to grapple with the tension between archeological objects and time. He argues that "the denial of sound as a relevant category of archaeological inquiry arises out of modernist notions of space-time that reside at the heart of the discipline" (Witmore 2006: 267)

Witmore stated that “while the visual is linked with spatial properties that are resistant to change, the aural is connected with the temporal and is considered momentary and fleeting in nature.” (ibid.: 267) He suggests that by thinking of sound in a different way, then the study of archeology can percolate time. By percolating time, Witmore argues that sound has the potentiality to encourage a subjectivity relating with the space where in which it evokes. Thus phenomenology is also applicable to study sound. Witmore uses Michel Serres’ concept of *‘belles noiseuses,’* the understanding that background noises that are not only fundamental to our experiences of place but also fundamental to our very being. He argues that due to the quality of some background noise is resistant to the ‘flow’ of time, for example the sound of waves, noise is transient but also recurrent. This, he argues, concludes that the temporality that could be evoked through the aural medium is ever-changing and alternative to a lineal temporality. By using the ‘acoustical properties of the material past’ Witmore suggest that we can understand the entanglement and percolation of entities and events which are quite distant in a lineal temporality.

“...sound is not solely temporal so long as the things remain. Moreover, sound is not simply like the material; it constitutes a form of material action.” (ibid.: 276)

In relation to museum displays and also archeology, Witmore suggest that this does not mean to reproduce an unnecessary dualism between seeing and hearing, but we should relearn how to see and hear at the same time through other complimentary modes of articulation and engagement. Thus it is not to make a museum filled with sound recordings but instead to consider augmenting the visitor’s experience using other mediums that could mediate the recurrence of things. In the text, Witmore suggests of using located media, where what was an event can remain

a continuing event. Such as the work of artist Janet Cardiff's work, *In Real Time*<sup>1</sup>, where she created a 'video walk' for the Carnegie Museum of Art (Pittsburgh, USA). Through this work, participants move to align with a pre-recorded video to the physical world and experience the same architectural space (between the video and the walk) with augmentation of difference in situation (temperature, people, noise, etc.) during the walk.

In short, this Witmore's text talks about the way that sound can help us think of time as simultaneously percolating and entangling with our lives rather than linear. Mediation of the material world that is ocular-centric contributes significantly to the way of thinking time as linear, thus we need to find alternative ways to mediate the material world that also constitute material action which can in turn stimulate alternative knowledge and ways of being.

### **2.2.2 Sound and Listening**

Thus to continue on Witmore's argument, situating sound and/or music in the museum also requires extending upon ideas raised in relation to affect and the body. According to François J. Bonnet (2016), affect and awareness of the body occurs in the event of perceiving through listening. "Sound is not something self-sufficient and isolated within nature. It cannot *be* for itself. So *regardless of whether it is audible or not*, it is always coupled with a listening. The apprehension of sound is always articulated with the listening that corresponds to it, even if this listening is virtual." (ibid.: 71) By arguing that sound is always coupled with listening, Bonnet takes into account of how the subjectivity created through this event of perceiving through is intertwined across different spatiotemporality and between various subjects, "... being-listening,

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<sup>1</sup> Cardiff, Janet. *In Real Time*. 1999. Video walk. <https://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/realtime.html>.

conscious of the audible world that surrounds it, does indeed fabricate a relation between subjects, one listening and the other resonating. So that the sonorous landscape, the soundscape, can be understood as the time-space that unifies all the sounds that present themselves to *listening* in a given moment and a given place.” (ibid.: 78)<sup>2</sup> Bonnet’s argument about sound as always coupled with listening concludes to an understanding that, which correlates to the previous theory about curatorial as ‘ongoing project,’ sound and the body as beings in the constellational condition. Thus, “[w]hat is revealed by the twofold tension we have described, where hearing is at once turned toward the intimacy of being-listening and toward the sensible environment that envelops it, are two possible becomings of the nature of sound: a becoming-phenomenon and a becoming-event.” (ibid.: 83) As both bodies *and* sounds are part of being-listening, Bonnet argues for the apprehension of sound as related with the body prior to the event of listening, “...our relation to sound must face up to, an alternative whose resolution must in a certain sense, in every case, be a preliminary to any *intentionality of listening*.” (ibid.: 97) Thus if Bonnet’s argument alone were to be taken in the application of a curatorial event, it is to be differing between the apprehension of the event itself and the perception of the material in the event which, in the case of Van abbe Museum Choir, is music. “Apprehending sound is a disparate enterprise; in apprehending sound oneself and one’s perception are like a continent bordered on every side by the ocean, perceptual multiplicity against perceived multiplicity.” (ibid.: 97-98)

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<sup>2</sup> Italics added by author

### 2.2.3 Sound and Embodiment

According to Julian Henriques (2011) on the other hand, this interest in metaphysics that lean towards sound as prominent in the paradigm for perception, lights upon an attitude towards thinking *through* sound to discover more than just understanding of where listening/sound sits in the perceptive but also, “[t]he idea of an imagination [which] has merit compared to the more formal alternatives of auditory philosophy, epistemology or metaphysics, in so far as it expresses the potentialities embodied in knowing that sounding is being used to explore.” (Henriques 2011: xxxii)

Arguing for an embodied knowing, Henriques explained that “...auditory communication is as meaningful as the visual, representational and discursive forms of expression that are commonly assumed to have the monopoly on meaning. Such sonic cultures encourages the values, qualities and intensities of audition to be given the same weight as the measure, quantifies and intensities of audition to be given the same weight as the measure, quantifies and spread of visual information. It is intended as a step towards understanding the meaning of audition and the sense of sound.” (ibid.: ix)

Through using the example of Jamaican dancehalls as an example, Henriques argues for a different way that sound can occur as a prominent sense in perception.

“With the sound system, bodies are placed inside sound, whereas with earphone listening it’s the opposite, *sound is placed inside bodies* [added italics]. As with much to do with sound there are two sides to this auditory saturation — receptive and expressive. On the one hand, this current immersion in auditory abundance can be experienced as sonic *invasion* of our bodies and their personal space.” (ibid.: xvi)

This way, Henriques argues for an understanding of the embodiment of sound in terms of sonic bodies. This meant understanding subjectivity in a sonic event is thinking *through* sound rather than thinking through the metaphysics of sound or listening. He argues that “sonic bodies proposes auditory propagation itself, that is the

periodic movement of vibration through a medium, as a suitable model for sociocultural as well as corporeal and material processes. .... Both sonic bodies and sound themselves, as events situated in time and space, are always distinctive and unique. Indeed, with embodiment we can never forget ourselves. It is our own subjectivity, as with a sound event itself, that needs to be recognised and appreciated — rather than sacrificed on the altar of objective science.” (ibid.: xviii-xix) This meant that in the event of auditory saturation, the body itself becomes a medium through which the sound is broadcasted and also a device for sounding. As sounds that are being propagated through the sound system of the Jamaican dancehall being music, Henriques offer to draw attention to more than the social and cultural processes of auditory propagation — but also to the mechanical processes of it (ibid.: xxvi). The frequencies and space that is created through this auditory propagation.

“Sounding encompasses everything, everyone and all the activities that go into the making of sound.” (ibid.: xxix)

Furthermore, taking into the account the various actors involved in the creation of sound system, Henriques argues for the expression of these actors being not just delivering a form of embodiment to the reception but also an embodiment to the knowledge being used for this very event.

“...the crew’s connoisseurship and expert evaluations express their embodied ways of knowing, or “logic of practice,” to use Pierre Bourdieu’s phrase. Dealing with sound and music, their performance expresses a kind of rationality that is not necessarily tied to formal logic, discourse or representation, though of course it can be so purposed. The sound crew’s evaluative techniques are described as the *analogia*, rather than the logic, of their practice, as they are not restricted to analysis, calculation, inscription or visual representation.” (ibid.: xxvii)



## 2.2.4 Sound and Museums

Nikos Bubaris (2014) focused his analysis of sound in museum on the spatiotemporality qualities of sound experience which in turn he argues to contribute in the reconsideration of the "...distance between the visitor and the exhibit." (ibid.: 393) Bubaris explained that "[t]he cultural logic of [a] strict demarcation of the museum audio space determined an analytical experience of motion in space, namely the temporal and spatial experience of the exhibition narrative unfolding through the interconnection of fixed points of reference." (ibid.: 395) Championing situations of auditory saturation in museums, Bubaris argues that it could "tests the limits of exhibit integrity and visitor individuality by creating a common, overlapping and somewhat confused space," (ibid.: 395) Differing from Boon, Bubaris claims that sound not only 'animate' exhibitions or visitors, but also brings in an 'attunement' component in the encounter. "[Sound evokes] ... an environment for the exploration of [bodily encounter] ... It activates attributes of cultural intensity, which may defy conventional axioms of sound design." (ibid.: 396)

Although using the example of Holocaust Museum in Berlin and National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, Bubaris focused his analysis of knowledge production and sound in terms of exhibition designs and cultural communication, I argue that this could be particularly useful in my latter application of analysis for the *Singing Manifestation* programme which is held in a tower-like part of the Van Abbemuseum.

Lastly, I would like to bring into the discussion, Noel Lobley's (2014) research about curating the experience of sound and music in museum. In this text, Lobley emphasise on the importance of museums being a place for archiving and broadcasting sounds. Carrying out his analysis through the anthropology of sound and music, Lobley argues that "[t]he spaces, histories, and visitors in museums can all be sonically engaged

allowing curators and audiences to consider what it means to collect, document and broadcast the sound of other cultures.” (Lobley 2014: 243) While doing so, Lobley also acknowledges the importance of live performance and how archival practices affect the sonic events. Museums then has an important role in the delivery of sound as “...archives, as venues, curators, interpreters, and repatriating agents.” (ibid.: 244) Lobley argues that museum context needs to reframe the archival practice so that the sacredness of sonic events is also retained through making it *for* the communities who created these archival contents. On this matter, Lobley claims that “[t]his requires responding to the changing modes and methods of musical transmission and cultural performance in order to reflect the ways people actually choose to experience and listen to music in their everyday lives.” (ibid.) By using research on the reception of music in contemporary times and applying it to the distribution of archival materials, Lobley argues that it is in fact possible to repatriate sound, in its understanding as event and as archive, to the communities it belongs to.

## 2.3 Museums as Political Spaces

“...institutional critique must accept the institution as its ally. Not the institution in its present organisational, operational, and sometimes opportunistic form, but the institution as a value regime and keeper of an imagined ideal.” (Gielen 2013: 29)

In this part of the literature review, I would like to address the political dimension of art and museum spaces. To do so, I am taking Chantal Mouffe's (2008) arguments in her text, 'Art and Democracy – Institutions as Sites of Agonistic Intervention.' As implied in her text, art and politics are not independent to one another, they are already related, or in the language of curatorial: belonging in the same connected constellation. “There is an aesthetic dimension in the political and there is a political dimension in art. This is why I have argued that it is not useful to make a distinction between political and non-political art. ... The real issue concerns the possible forms of *critical* art, the different ways in which artistic practices can contribute to the questioning the dominant hegemony.” (Mouffe 2008: 11)

The artistic practices which Mouffe is talking about also involves the visibility of the acts of social institutions (ibid.: 9) such as museums. Mouffe is arguing for social institutions such as museums of contemporary art, to be a place where antagonistic dimension and contingent nature of social order could perform well. She explains that, “[w]hat is needed to widen the field of artistic intervention, by intervening directly in a multiplicity of social spaces in order to oppose the programme of total social mobilisation of capitalism. The objective should be to undermine the imaginary environment necessary for its reproduction.” (ibid.: 7) Furthermore, through this point, Mouffe highlights the importance of people who are involved in the projects of such institutions to be accounted for as artists/art workers rather than being exploited *for* art.

There multiple ways of doing antagonistic practices within a museum space, but the main idea is to take it as political but not fall into the hegemony of liberalism. In order to do so, Mouffe is arguing towards a vision that a collective demand could be achieved by recognising heterogeneity. "...united not by a common essence but by a multiplicity..."(ibid.: 8) And such that social is a realm of sedimented practices or a practice which conceal originary acts of their contingent political institution and taken as granted, Mouffe stated that "[e]very hegemonic order is susceptible to being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices — practices that will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install another form of hegemony." (ibid.: 8-9) Thus to not fall into another hegemony, Mouffe puts forward the 'agonistic approach.' "According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony." (ibid.: 12) Though this, it can be concluded that artists can play an important role in subverting the dominant hegemony, by understanding the crucial place of the cultural dimension in the establishment of a hegemony (ibid.: 13). Critical art practices can disrupt the smooth image that oppressive reality/condition of contemporary time is trying to spread and it can also contribute to the construction of new subjectivities.

Additionally, I would also like to take some insights from Paulo Freire's (2005) text, 'Pedagogy of The Oppressed.' In the said book, Freire theorises on education and revolutionary action and argued for commitment to the struggle for liberation from oppression. As with Mouffe's arguments in the previous paragraphs, Freire also believes that the oppressed in a hegemony would be able to wage the struggle for their liberation. In order to do so, Freire suggest that "...[the oppressed] must perceive

the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.” (Freire 2005: 49) This is possible, according to Freire, through praxis. He explains that,

“One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings’ consciousness. Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.” (ibid.: 51)

Praxis, consisting of action and reflection, requires also theory to illuminate it. “Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot ... be reduced to either verbalism or activism.” (ibid.: 125) Though Freire’s thoughts are mainly done from the example of education of student-teacher relationship, I think the way he talks against narrative in education could be useful in thinking critically about the museum and curatorial. Narrative education, Freire suggest, emphasise on ‘the sonority of words, not their transforming power.’ (ibid.: 71) Thus, instead, Freire argues of dialogical education, I would like to highlight here, Freire’s point on using thematics and marking ‘situationality.’

“Both education and the investigation designed to support it [thematics] must be “sympathetic” activities, in the etymological sense of the word. That is, they must consist of communication and of the common experience of a reality perceived in the complexity of its constant “becoming.” (ibid.: 108)

I believe that Mouffe and Freire’s text, when brought in conversation with each other, would give useful insights on the analysis of the Van Abbemuseum Choir events and what potential it has to be deemed as revolutionary social praxis in the museum.

### **3. Case Study**

#### **3.1 Context**

##### **3.1.2 Sound and The Museum Experience**

As a start to my case study, I would like to give a brief overview over the different use of sound in museums relating to the museum experience.

There are different aural forms present in museum spaces, to name a few, audio guides, oral iteration of historical and cultural background of artworks/space/exhibition through guided tours, soundscapes, interactive display exhibits, and sounds of the space (which includes auditory rules that govern museum spaces). The main source which I will be using in doing this brief overview is Loïc Tallon and Kevin Walker's edited reader, *Digital Technologies and The Museum Experience* (2008).

There are several examples on the use of digital technology which are specifically related to sound and a foreword by James M. Bradburne which talks about visitor engagements in terms of its enhancement and transformation in relation to the use digital technology and mobile devices in museums (Bradburne in Tallon and Walker 2008: ix). As argued by Bradburne, the museum is a controlled space whereby from the moment visitors arrive, the museum (its designers, its educators, and its curators) is constantly placing constraints on experiences and that visitors is engagement is ideal as it is self-absorbed concentration in which users direct their own learning (ibid.: ix-xi). In other words, Bradburne argues that as much as museums are controlled spaces, there are still unconstructed and unmediated moments which shapes a visitors experience. Bradburne (ibid.: xi) also argues for speaking of the ways in which the alteration and enhancement of visitor engagement qualities to be done in the term of "user language". It is by this means, he argues, that "...[museum actors] structure a specific relationship to the visitor by means of [the] exhibits is the user language."

(ibid.: xi) Additionally, Bradburne stated to illustrate his argument that “In the museum, the most significant user languages are “textual authority,” “observation,” “ variables,” “problems,” and “games,”” (ibid.) each of which employ a different relation between visitors and exhibitions in different ways. I would like to mention that in my research I have found Bradburne’s approach to be applicable to a certain extent. This is so, as I believe that the notion of a ‘user language’ could easily push a description and analysis to be confined in terms of content and intent and not affect or embodied experiences.

The texts from the reader which I have engaged in are related to the mobile, digital and personal qualities of handheld guides in museum (Tallon in Tallon and Walker 2008), the ways in which technology allows for museum engagement to go beyond its own walls (Samis in Tallon and Walker 2008), and the case studies done on the impact of orally presented information on viewing practices in the gallery (Smith and Tinio in Tallon and Walker 2008).

The Tallon text contextualise the concerns and issues that shape how technology use, particularly audio guides accessed through the internet and the use of mobile phones, is applied across the museum context. Tallon suggests that through researching mobile, digital, and personal devices use in museums, there is a trend “...toward personal relevance and interpretations, interactivity, and easy access and control of content to shape the twenty-first-century museum visitor’s experience.” (Tallon in Tallon and Walker 2008: xiv) Furthermore, he argues that this trend could be fulfilled by handheld technologies as it has the three defining qualities which is important to the experience making by museums: mobile, digital, and personal. (ibid.: xx)

The Samis text has helped in understanding subjectivity of experience and how effective it has been mediated through different technologies in museums. Samis (in

Tallon and Walker: 4) begins by stating that the museums is "...the sum of not the objects it contains but rather of the experiences it triggers." He argues that the tradition of wall texts and object labels have typically been monovocal or 'written in an anonymous and authoritative "museum voice"' (ibid.: 5). However, technological developments has challenged the 'monopoly of the expert' in gallery texts such as through personal research by mobile phones in gallery spaces, and audio guides made by outsourced companies. Samis (ibid.: 9) argues that this challenge has brought for visitors to desire for interpretations that are "...accumulation and juxtaposition of different experiences, none definitive but each building a case for what is commonly held or individually specific."

And lastly, the Smith & Tinio text helped my research to consider how orally presented information has affected visitor experience in other context. Smith & Tinio (in Tallon and Walker: 64) argued that "[a]lthough most people like to have information presented with works of art, they do not typically wish to be inundated, and their preferences depend in part on the nature of the art they are viewing. ... Interpretive information has been shown to enhance people's view of the power, personal meaning, and expressiveness of artworks." By using the example of audio guides, Smith & Tinio concludes that visitors desire '*both* freedom and structure' in a comfortable level of its tension (ibid.: 65). They suggest that as as "the question of unique characteristics of individual visitors can be addressed by allowing some variability *around* the presented information and the means of accessing that information. It is in this area where audio augmentation could be at an advantage over textual information..." (ibid.)

From all these, the qualities of sound that I have found to be useful from these contexts are, its ubiquitousness, its relationship with the visual, and experiences in



terms of synchronisation. I would argue is its ubiquitousness. Thinking critically about listening practice and also the technology which allows for it to be propagated widely and immersive. Furthermore, it is also useful to consider its quality in terms of the relationship it has with the visual. Juxtaposition of dead image, sculptural objects, or text with live performance or the specific spatiotemporal quality of sound. Lastly, I would also like to consider the quality of sound in which it multiplies the value of not just solely interpretation, but also experience. Visual and aural mediums when thought of hand-in-hand could be analysed through its quality of being in-sync or in-counter/tension.

### 3.1.2 The Van Abbemuseum

The Van Abbemuseum was officially opened in 1936 with the name “Stedelijk Van Abbe Museum” and the first director, Dr. W.J.A Visser. This museum, as stated by Visser, is made with the vision for it as “above all [the place] ... it deserves in the future and to be a permanent point of contact between the whole population of the city and surrounding area of Eindhoven and the Museum: it must become part of the living community.”<sup>3</sup>

The museum was named after the cigar manufacturer H.J van Abbe, who financed the building and made a sum available for purchases and for running the museum for the first few years. As the Van Abbemuseum’s practice generally is critical of things such as financing and the history, the business of H.J van Abbe is talked about in one of the rooms at the museum with works by artists of former Dutch colonies decent to illustrate the source of wealth that built the museum.

Van Abbemuseum is also talked about by Claire Bishop, in her publication ‘Radical Museology’ (2013) as one of the examples of museums which have innovated to turn new collection display paradigms that present a new category of contemporaneity. As stated by Bishop (2013: 27), Van Abbemuseum is one institution which has presented its collection to suggest ‘...a provocative rethinking of contemporary art in terms of a specific relationship to history, driven by a sense of present-day social and political urgencies, and marked by particular national traumas ... [namely] Islamophobia and the failure of social democracy [in Eindhoven]. ...’

Bishop’s description and analysis of the Van Abbemuseum’s practices I think could be relevant as well in understanding the Van Abbemuseum choir’s programmes as there are inevitable institutional culture and organisation in which the actors of the

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<sup>3</sup> <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/about-the-museum/building-and-history/1936-the-opening/>

museum's work. There are a few notes by Bishop's observation of the museum that I would like to bring forward in this research.

Firstly, the fact that Van Abbemuseum has a culture of using the collection as temporary exhibitions rather than staging temporary loan-based exhibitions (ibid.: 29). Secondly, an iteration in which the museum attempted to think of itself as a series of interconnected displays, rather than as a concatenation of individual installations in which the main idea of the programming being emphasising institutional transparency and historical contingency (ibid.: 30). As argued by Bishop (ibid.), these *curatorial frames* "...rendered the displayed works subject to a double temporality: as individual voices speaking in the present, but also as a collective chorus once considered essential at a previous historical moment." Lastly, the museum's current director Charles Esche's stance on the task of the museum being to take a position (ibid.: 33), or as phrased by Bishop (ibid.: 35), partisan historical narrator. Succinctly summarised by Bishop,

"...Esche's selections and priorities as a director are based around a set of ideals and identifiable concerns: the emancipatory drive of modern art and its continuation in certain strands of contemporary art ...; the memory of cultural internationalism and a need for planetary thinking, as the museum places continual emphasis on the legacy of communism and the possibilities of its reactivation; the social value of retelling histories that lead to other imagined futures, by revisiting marginal or repressed histories in order to open up new vistas." (ibid.: 33-34)

### 3.1.3 The Van Abbemuseum Choir

The Van Abbemuseum choir was founded in January 2013 by the current conductor, Willy de Rooij. The choir is mainly made up of volunteers who work at the museum as invigilators and guides but also members of the general public who are interested in joining. The choir aims to get closer to art through singing and, as through reading about art, to reach a deeper understanding. The choir embrace the quality of sound and music being able to fill up space aurally thus allowing for others – not necessarily audiences – to hear. Van Abbemuseum choir aims for its performances to reach and involve a large audience, both within and outside the museum.

From personal conversation, Willy de Rooij has mentioned that her inspiration to start the choir is Chto Delat's work *Lied Van De Zaalwachters Voor De Inwoners Van Eindhoven* (2009), (translated with Google Translate as Song of The Room Watchers for the Residents of Eindhoven) a project which films invigilators singing greetings for visitors and exhibiting/screening them around the museum. Another inspiration is said to be the exhibition of Ahmet Öğüt's work, *GUPPY 13 VS OCEAN WAVE; A BAS JAN ADER EXPERIENCE* (2010) which includes sheet music by Bas Jan Aders.



Fig. 2,3: Ahmet Öğüt (left) and Chto Delat's (right) works

The Van Abbemuseum choir is comprised of a group of voluntary museum invigilators and as of lately also a few members of the public. The decision to invite new members, not just limited to the museum volunteers, as told by de Rooij, is due to practical reasoning of lack of male singers in the choir. Demographic of the group is more or less 50 to late 70 year olds, who are residents of Eindhoven and surrounding villages. There are about 20 members of the choir, with about 15 members joining in performance events according to each of their availability as membership is solely voluntary.

In the beginning, the Van Abbemuseum choir started off as just a singing group, with de Rooij picking songs that she believes would make her better relate to artworks within the gallery and inviting volunteers to join her to sing along. The choir practices every Monday, when the museum is closed, so as the choir could freely use the museum space to sing in and explore. As stated by de Rooij in personal conversation, she initially begins to conduct singers to sing in a meeting room, but felt that it is often lacking emotions. Thus de Rooij started to get an idea to make use of the fact that the museum is closed on Monday and conduct practice in front of the artwork to bring into their singing and music the emotions and experience of each of the artworks and corresponding artists who did the work. It is at one of these practice sessions that a curator of the museum initiates the idea to do performance events for members of the public. It took the choir and de Rooij sometime to finally make a performance event for the public, as the original idea she says is to make the process intimate from song choices to singing so that the goal of connecting or experiencing the artwork with expression is achieved.

Nevertheless, as of now, there are three main types of performance events done regularly by the Van Abbemuseum choir: concerts, *Musical Tours*, and *Singing Manifestation*.

Concerts are done with a standard setting of singers on the stage in front of an audience. During my first visit to Eindhoven, I joined the Van Abbemuseum choir on their concert at a local retirement house, Residentie Wilgenhof. This concert was done



Fig. 4: Performance at Residentie Wilgenhof

as part of the Van Abbe on Tour programme, where artwork replicas of the museum collection are brought outside of the museum walls to be exhibited in 7 different locations of Vitalis living facilities for seniors. As stated on the website<sup>4</sup>, the 15 masterpieces work replicas has brought to reach around 3000 seniors, employees, and volunteers. The openings and closings of the travelling exhibits are open to the general public, with one of the main events for the closing is a performance by the Van Abbemuseum choir. On top of special events such as the concert, the museum also provided the host location with multiple activities on exploring the artworks and a crash course in art appreciation for the employees of the living facilities to further engage the seniors in an accessible conversation about art. During the particular concert which I joined, the choir sang 10 songs with 9 of them related to the works which are brought to the living facility and as such, at the beginning of each song a volunteer talks about the corresponding artwork and a bit of story about the song they are about to sing. I

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<sup>4</sup> <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/van-abbe-on-tour/>

have included this list of songs in the appendix (see appendix 1.) The concert ended with a distribution of a small music sheet of the song 'Make New Friends' to where the choir invites the entire audience to sing along.

Another type of performance event by the choir is called *Musical Tour*. The tour invites visitors of the museum to join in a walk around the museum with the choir and a guide, focusing on a few artworks where the guide will introduce the artist and the relevant subject matter of the artwork and the choir sings in relation to both. From the website<sup>5</sup>, the *Musical Tour* is marketed as a means to “See art in a different way!” through sharing an experience with the artist and contemporaries, rather than trying to understand. An interesting part of the statement for *Musical Tour* is the question “What is sight and hearing, view and sound collide?” I think this is particularly interesting to highlight as it shows the choir’s way of creating a different experience of the museum.



Fig. 5,6: Performance of *Alhamdulillah* (left) and *Manifesto of the Utopian Union of Unemployed People* (right) during *Musical Tour*

<sup>5</sup> <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/musical-tour/>



Lastly, another performance event the Van Abbemuseum choir does in the gallery is called *Singing Manifestation*<sup>6</sup>. In *Singing Manifestation* events, the choir organises a singing event where they invite guest singers and musicians to fill in the different floor of the Van Abbemuseum's tower where an exhibition of 'Who owns the street?' is held. The choir and invited guests would sing in respond to each other, filling in the tower with sound and the entire museum with echoes of their music. This event is done every two months, with the Van Abbemuseum choir singing what they describe as 'protest' songs, as a way to embody the subject matter of the exhibition, which is the different ways of seeing public spaces and the question of public spaces' ownership.

As described through the exhibition's publication material<sup>7</sup>, the four levels of the Van Abbemuseum tower is filled with four guest artist/architects/collectives to work on a particular aspect of the use of public space. The four different contributions talks about: public space as a place for protest, a classification of a hundred different streets, the design of the public space in The Strip in Las Vegas, and the project Refugee Republic about daily life in a refugee camp.

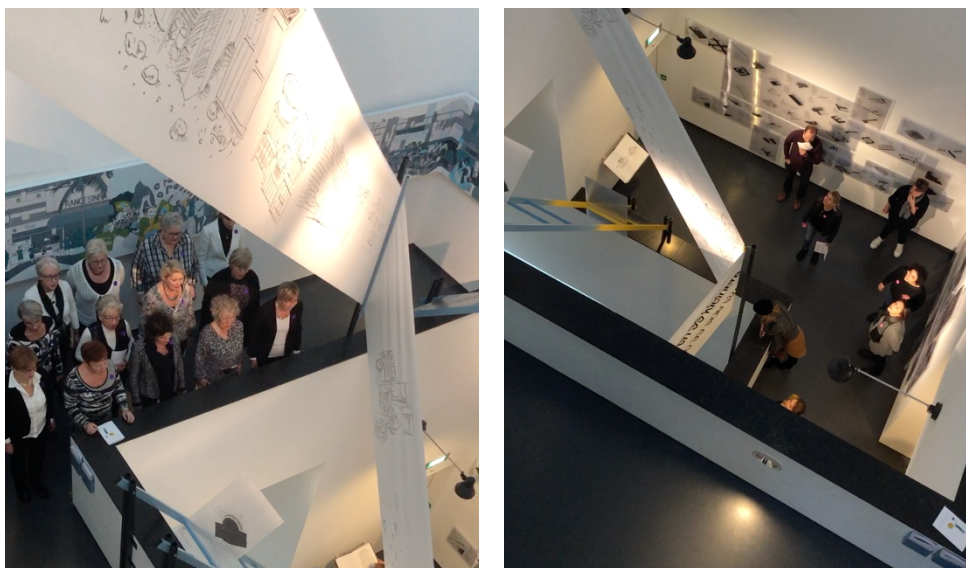


Fig. 7,8: Southern Comfort Barber Gals (left) and visitors (right) during *Singing Manifestations*

<sup>6</sup> <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/singing-manifestation/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/who-owns-the-street/>



## 3.2 Analysis

### 3.2.1 The Van Abbemuseum Choir as Curatorial Practice

Thinking about the Van Abbemuseum Choir as a curatorial project means that thinking about their material forms of practice, particularly *Musical Tours* and *Singing Manifestations*, goes beyond its representational meanings and intent. It is also the experiences of visitors and constellation of different ways of being and resources created in every particular event which forms knowledge, ways of knowing, and subjectivities.

Being initiated by museum's volunteer, I would argue that this is a unique quality of their organisation and nature of their curatorial project. As museum's narrative are usually built within a frame of a top-down way of organisation, or in the words of Freire, non-dialogical. It is rare that for a performance or commissions, or any events, happening in the museum to be done by people who are not considered as artists or art workers in its validated term of the wider society. The fact that singers in the choirs are volunteers, though the conductor has had formal education in conducting a choir, and furthermore these singers are not professionally trained outside of this organisation.

The development of their project to be included in the museum's curatorial framework is also interesting in terms of grass-root organising. Having established from an idea of building a deeper relation or connection to the museum where they spend time in, it is important to note that in the museums, there are actors which are thought less of in their contribution. There is alienation and oppression in the social hegemonic structure inside of the museum. Thus to take into account the museum as a space which has power in the cultural realm of hegemonic reproduction, and a space

for which the alternative and consequent revolution of hegemonic structure to be possible, it is for the museum itself to act outside of its own hegemonic structure first.

I would argue that the Van Abbemuseum Choir has at least successfully made a discussion from their practice. Rather than the museum being a narrator of how the community is related to the museum, the existence of the volunteer-led body in the museum questions the very notion of how alternative narratives could be built inside the museum. In regards to whether or not these narratives are in fact alternative to the hegemony — or in Freire's term, dialogical — or not, I would argue is more appropriate to discuss in the following part of the analysis about the events they hold.

In short, my analysis would suggest that — following the said analysis and connecting it to theories of curatorial as well as Chantal Mouffe's view that art institutions has the potentiality to be used as space for agonistic practice — the Van Abbemuseum choir could be regarded as a form of critical art. This is due to their ability as an organisation to create multiplicity within the museum's hegemonic organisational order. Their organisation and the events they hold are not solely an end to itself, but each of the occurrence is a means towards a bigger end of the museum as a 'living part of the community' as the word of Dr. W.J.A Visser, the first director of the museum. Their inclusion in the curatorial frame in the museum through the invitation to make events, has a potential to bring in discussion about whose voice (literal and figurative) are allowed and supported by the museum. It is through this practice, that I believe the Van Abbemuseum Choir itself builds on a form of collectivity: extending the community, using the pool of resources together, and being continually becoming through different constellations of people, time, and space.

### **3.2.3 Musical Tour and Singing Manifestations as Praxis**

In this part of my analysis, I would like to expand on the events the Van Abbemuseum choir holds and analyse it through the musical and aural part of their practice. The particular events which I would like to address is *Musical Tour* (9<sup>th</sup> of December 2018 iteration) and *Singing Manifestation* (18<sup>th</sup> November 2018 iteration). I am specifying the iteration in which I attended to do a participant observation for as it is on those iteration which I have resources on such as personal experience and song list. Through the analysis of these events I would like to highlight the value of Van Abbemuseum Choir's affective communication through music.

Firstly, I would like to elaborate on the *Singing Manifestation* event. In the 18<sup>th</sup> of November iteration of this event, the Van Abbemuseum Choir sang in the tower with two other musical groups: Southern Comfort Barber Gals (Eindhoven, The Netherlands) and Trio NUR (The Hague, The Netherlands). During the event, three out of five floors of the tower is occupied by the musical groups; Van Abbemuseum Choir in the top/fifth floor, Southern Comfort Barber Gals on the third floor, and Trio NUR on the first floor. Each of the group sang in response to each other and audiences were scattered between the floors and there were also people going from one floor to another — looking at other exhibition galleries, I am assuming — and every once in a while stopping by to see the performance or rather what is happening at the tower. I have also included the song list for this iteration in appendix 2.

I would like to highlight the spatiality of the performance being held in the tower of the Van Abbemuseum. Bringing forward Henriques's theory on sound systems and sonic bodies, the space of this performance plays a monumental effect. While visitors are not prescribed to a strict viewing rule and the tower allows for the music to penetrate almost every part of the museum, bodies in the museums can be argued to

be placed inside the sound. There is an instance of auditory saturation, where visitors, individuals in the musical groups, staff of the museum, are sonic bodies. Each of these subjects are doing what Henriques calls ‘sounding.’

“Sounding is a dynamic patterning propagated through a medium. Though it cannot be expressed outside its embodiment in such a medium, it is in itself entirely immaterial and insubstantial. Sounding is a transitory event in time, rather than an often more permanent mark on a visual surface. Such events are entirely distinctive, unique and unrepeatable. ... In practice it is not object at all, but a process or event, not a coded representation but medium, not a thought but a feeling — often independent of conscious reflection.” (Henriques 2011: xvii)

Through this, there can be a meaning behind the movements of people inside the museum when the performance is going on, behind the thoughts that people might have of the exhibitions or artworks they are looking at, that is outside the hegemony of museum-viewing practice.

Furthermore, the invitation of other choirs also brings in a different context to the Van Abbemuseum Choir’s practice. Through understanding the positions of the musical groups on different levels of the tower as a sound system, the Van Abbemuseum choir is now part of the hegemony. As they position themselves and the other musical groups, the agonistic practice of their musical practice becomes the music rather than the introduction of aural material in the space.

In the case of *Musical Tour*, the choir and a cicerone leads the visitors to the artworks that they have created a connection with. There are a few different ‘performances’ done in front of artworks: ones where the choir are just standing like in a concert, a dance-party-like performance with boombox with disco music and them singing on top of it, and in another its like a theatre performance where its all spoken words rather than music. Before each of the choir’s performance, a cicerone does a bit of speech concerning the artwork and how the song relates to the work being

performed. I have included the ‘script’ of the *Musical Tour*, written and translated from Dutch by Fleur Brom, in appendix 3.

Within this performance, the choir brought forward a ‘tour around the world’ theme. They invited an embodied experience of the artworks through the connection of contemporary issues which the works brought forward. Bringing forward Bonnet’s idea of becoming-phenomenon and becoming-event to analyse a sonorous event, I would argue that this performance incites an embodiment to the participants which moves across spatiotemporality. In illustrating this argument, I would like to take the Van Abbemuseum choir’s performance of a composition by Iris Kensmil and Rocco Brunori, *Darker than Blue*, during this event. The music itself is a mix of songs by Black artists, which as stated by Kensmil<sup>8</sup> is a compilation of her past work in which she asks Black artists to sing protest songs. I would argue that the spatiotemporal context in which the individual songs were composed, — the music were played, the struggle being sung were real, the artworks were made, and the works were chosen to be put in the museum, — becomes intermingled with the spatiotemporal context of the instance of this performance. On top of that, all these intermingling once again becomes an intimate experience for being-listening, including participants of the *Musical Tour*. This sonorous event is then at the same time a practical and reflective one, where different cultural and political context come together in embodied forms.

Using these events as my case study, I have illustrated the specific form of practice and reflection done by Van Abbemuseum choir. To illustrate the practice and reflection, I would like to bring in the theory of musical participation. Musical participation could be analysed through the concept of *musicking*. In the words of

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<sup>8</sup><https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/collection/details/collection/?lookup%5B1673%5D%5Bfilter%5D%5B0%5D=id%3AC12621>

Christopher Small, one of this view's main proponents, "We could say that it is not so much about *music* as about people *musicking* ... To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing." (1998: 9) The event then, could be argued as an activity which refers to social relationship. In this case, the relationship is built as the choir sang: connections are made between the individuals in the musical groups, between the groups, between the performing group and the exhibition space they inhabit, between the music and both the artworks and exhibitions, as well as between the music, performers, artworks, space, and visitors.

In conclusion, I would argue that both of the events which I have elaborated on qualify as praxis. Action in these events is found in the form of musical participation, whereas reflection of these events is through the form of embodiment that music employs. Furthermore, through doing these praxis, the condition of the museum space changes from relation between the space and people in it being a mere demographic to a relation of singularities which come together for a curatorial event, and perhaps even further for a curatorial project of using the museum as an agonistic space.

## 4. Conclusion

Throughout this research, I have analysed the Van Abbemuseum choir's practices through the lens of theories about curatorial, sound, and praxis. I have organised this research by dividing it into two chapters: Literature Review and Case Study. In the Literature Review, I have summarised and analysed literatures which I have found to be relevant to my research. The themes of these literatures are Curatorial Event, Thinking Through Sound, and Museum as Political Spaces. In each of those themes, I have outlined the main ideas which are relevant to my research and each of their limitations. On top of the Literature Review, I have decided to use a Case Study to illustrate the theories and how they can apply in empirical practice. In order to do so, I have specified the context of my case study, by providing the reader with an overview of how sound has been researched as part of the museum practice, a description of the Van Abbemuseum curatorial frame, and an introduction to the Van Abbemuseum choir. Lastly, to synthesise the insights I have gained from the literature review and the case study, I have analysed the practice of the Van Abbemuseum choir and build on two arguments which will show that I have completed my research objectives.

The first argument which I have outlined is the Van Abbemuseum choir is an exemplary curatorial practice. In this argument, I have thought of the use of sound in museum space as a curatorial event. The curatorial event which the Van Abbemuseum choir creates, contribute to a larger project of the museum as an agonistic space. In it, the constellational condition of music, artworks, information, people, sites, contexts, and resources, comes into being as an agonistic affective event. The Van Abbemuseum choir invites a constellation of condition in which the museum's hegemony is being negotiated upon and thus the trajectory of the curatorial gradually occur.

The second argument which I have outlined is the *Musical Tour* and *Singing Manifestation* being an institutional praxis of museums. In this argument, I have reflected on the specific events which the Van Abbemuseum choir held and found that their practice involves action and reflection. Van Abbemuseum choir events generates action in the form of musical participation. Moreover, these events also employ a form of reflection through the cultural and political embodiment which auditory saturation induce.

Lastly, by doing this research, it is also found that the exploration on sound and the use of sound in museum space has the potentiality of being a medium of praxis. Rather than focusing on the experience of subjects, I have used the case study to learn about practice and reflection of the museum space. Albeit experience being part of this praxis, it is useful to think about the use of sound as more than just mere unique experiential medium, a form of knowledge transmission, augmentation, or attracting feature of the museum. Sound/music has the potentiality to act as praxis in the museum space, through the practice of musical participation and the reflection of non-linear spatiotemporal embodiment. The use of music, as shown by the Van Abbemuseum choir, could act as a dialogical practice in activism praxis within the institution of museums.



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## List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: Ahmediye Performance (personal collection)

Fig. 2: Part of Ahmet Ögut's installation which was exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum

(Bas Jan Ader, Bulletin 89, published by Art & Project, Amsterdam (August 1975), photo lithography on paper, 11 5/8 x 16 9/16 inches (unfolded))  
(© Estate of Bas Jan Ader / Mary Sue Ader Andersen, 2016 / The Artist Rights Society (ARS) New York, courtesy Meliksetian | Briggs, Los Angeles)  
(sourced from: Hyperallergic, <https://hyperallergic.com/336146/in-search-of-bas-jan-ader-the-artist-who-disappeared-at-sea/>)

Fig. 3: Part of Chto Delat's installation which was exhibited at the Van Abbemuseum  
(sourced from: [https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/collection/details/collection/?lookup\[1673\]\[filter\]\[0\]=id;C8510](https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/collection/details/collection/?lookup[1673][filter][0]=id;C8510))

Fig. 4: Performance at Residentie Wllgenhof (personal collection)

Fig. 5,6: Performance of *Alhamdulillah* and *Manifesto of the Utopian Union of Unemployed People* during *Musical Tour* (personal collection)

Fig. 7,8: Southern Comfort Barber Gals (left) and visitors (right) during *Singing Manifestations* (personal collection)

## **Appendix**

Appendix 1: Residentie Wilgenhof Concert Song List

Appendix 2: *Singing Manifestation* (18/11/2018) Flyer and Song List

Appendix 3: *Musical Tour* (9/12/2018) Script

Appendix 4: Videos of the Van Abbemuseum Choir by author – access through the address: <https://bit.ly/2KDHgDW>

Tabel 1

Vitalis Wilgenhof 11-11-18		
1	Mens durf te leven	Picasso
2	Molihua	Warhol
3	Marc groet 's morgens de dingen	Permeke
4	Ta lendab mesipuu poole	Jorn
5	Lobelia	Van Doesburg
6	Plovi plovi	Leger
7	Winterlied	Beckman
8	Vstrjetsnij	Lissitzky
9	R/	Mondriaan
10	Make new friends	Kawara



## PROGRAMMA ZONDAGMIDDAG 18.11.18 15.00 - 16.30 UUR

1	Van Abbemuseumkoor	Do you hear the people sing?
2	Southern Comfort Barber Gals	Anthem
3	Trio Nur	Yamma Mweel Al Hawa
4	Southern Comfort Barber Gals	The Rose
5	Van Abbemuseumkoor	Daye
6	Trio Nur	Al Hiwa
7	Van Abbemuseumkoor	Al zijn wij zwakke vrouwen
8	Southern Comfort Barber Gals	Lullaby
9	Trio Nur	Lamouni
10	Southern Comfort Barber Gals	Girls
11	Trio Nur	Ana Feen
12	Van Abbemuseumkoor	Plovi plovi
13	Trio Nur	Awwil Marra
14	Van Abbemuseumkoor	Darker than blue
15	Southern Comfort Barber Gals	Hallelujah
16	Trio Nur	Dalaona
17	Van Abbemuseumkoor	A life on the ocean wave
18	Southern Comfort Barber Gals	Brabant
19	Trio Nur	Nahawand

Meer informatie over activiteiten van het Van Abbemuseumkoor vind je via:  
[www.vanabbemuseum.nl/vrienden/museumkoor](http://www.vanabbemuseum.nl/vrienden/museumkoor) en [facebook.com/VanAbbemuseumkoor](https://facebook.com/VanAbbemuseumkoor)

# 18.11.18 VAN ABBE- MUSEUMKOOR NODIGT UIT...



## 14<sup>E</sup> ZANG- MANIFESTATIE ZON 18 NOV

Een nieuwe sprankelende zang-manifestatie met het Van Abbemuseumkoor. Beeldende kunst, muziek, zang en dans vloeien samen, voor U. Leitmotiv is de inspiratie die kunst teweegbrengt bij muzikanten en toeschouwers. Dit keer vinden we die onder andere bij Angela Davis, Artist at Work en het Volksparlament van Rojava. Het Van Abbemuseumkoor nodigt uit: het Eindhovens koor Southern Comfort Barber Gals en de rasmuzikanten van trio NUR. Onze zangers en muzikanten performen met enthousiasme! Wij zien u graag op 18 november!

Wist u dat het Van Abbemuseumkoor óók muzikale rondleidingen opluistert? Samen met een van onze deskundige rondleiders loopt u langs de geselecteerde kunstwerken, waar het koor bij zingt. Schone kunsten worden op die wijze verpakt in schone klanken. Let goed op onze website.

Heb je zelf belangstelling om eens mee te doen? Neem contact op met Willy de Rooij: [museumkoor@vanabbe.nl](mailto:museumkoor@vanabbe.nl)

## TRIO NUR



TRIO NUR, bestaande uit Hamed Alshaabi op de Ney (Arabische fluit), Amer Shanati op de Ud (Arabische luit) en Karim Darwish op de Riq (percussie) zetten de eeuwenoude muzikale tradities voort uit Palestina en het verdere midden oosten. Samen creëren zij een klankbeeld dat het lichaam, de geest en de ziel meevoeren en verheffen. Het optreden van Trio NUR belooft een betoverende muzikale reis langs de kruispunten van west Azië.

## SOUTHERN COMFORT BARBER GALS



De SOUTHERN COMFORT BARBER GALS zingen barbershop, een muziekgenre overgewaaid vanuit de Verenigde Staten, waarbij vierstemmig a capella wordt gezongen. Het repertoire van dit vrouwen-barbershopkoor uit Eindhoven is zeer divers, van ballads, love songs tot uptempo liederen. Het koor, zo'n 40 dames groot, bestaat al sinds 1987. Zij treden regelmatig op in het eigen Brabant, maar ook daarbuiten, voor verenigingen, bedrijven, verzorgingscentra en in winkelcentra. Wil u vast een voorproefje? Kijk dan op de website: [www.barbergals.nl](http://www.barbergals.nl).

## VAN ABBE- MUSEUMKOOR



Het VAN ABBEMUSEUMKOOR bestaat voornamelijk uit vrijwilligers die verbonden zijn aan het museum. Sinds haar oprichting in 2013 heeft het koor met het repertoire steeds aansluiting gezocht bij kunst en tentoonstellingen in het museum. Onlangs vierde het koor haar vijfjarig jubileum met een speciale muzikale rondleiding. In deze tour waren vijf premières te horen die speciaal voor het koor waren gecomponeerd door vijf verschillende kunstenaars. Een van die werken, "Darker than blue", staat deze dag ook op het programma.

**VAN  
ABBE  
MUSEUM** **KOOR**



Welcome everybody on this “tour around the world” !

In this tour we will connect different places in the world, places, where the geo-political situation is in fragile condition. By singing in the languages of the countries, we will try to get more empathy with the situation and a deeper understanding of the work of art. At the same time we wish you a pleasant tour.

I introduce you to Willy de Rooy and the van Abbemuseumchoir. They welcome you in *the living room* of **Sandi Hilal**, a Palestinian artist living at the moment in Sweden Stockholm. There, being a foreigner, a migrant herself, she started this project. She got this idea to open a place where refugees, migrants and other foreigners could be a host to whoever wished to make a visit to her or his place, with her or his own customs and manners, their own drinks and food.

In the van Abbemuseum the *living room* is offered to Shafiq – originally from Afghanistan - one of guards in the museum.

**We will sing here the traditional Afghaan song: *Al ham du lilah***

The next stop is on the second floor. As a background for our next song we choose the cartoonesque drawings by the Romanian artist **Dan Perjovsky**. In his sketchy drawings he shows us his comments on the world and the community we live in. We see for example the artist in front of his easel, but more important using his work to protest against whatever is wrong or right.

We see the drawing he made about the EURO the stars in a circle, where Germany is prominently in the middle. At the moment we fear to lease a star: United Kingdom, and that is where our next song is about:

**EU UK OK, it is specially composed for us by **Laure Prouvost**. It is a plea: **No Brexit** but to stay with us .....**

I'll bring you to the next issue. The world wide problem of racism, decolonialism.

We see here two portraits of black people, by the dutch/Surinamese artist **Iris Kensmil**. One is *Angela Davis* the other is a portrait of *Marcus Garvey* (1887-1940), both heroes and icons for the black community. Angela Davis, philosopher and activist who was wrongly captured in prison for many months, and the Jamaican born Marcus Garvey. He fought for civil rights and the unity of the Afro Americans.

**We will sing here **Darker then blue**, specially composed for us by Iris Kensmil and Rocco Brunori.**

In the tower you will find an exposition called *who owns the street*, On each floor you will find a different aspect of the public space. On this first floor we are confronted with different protest groups in different countries, from the US to Paris, Brasil and Hong Kong.

**We will sing here the well known South American song **El pueblo unido**. The song initially composed for the socialist movement in Chili in the time of Salvador Allende and later used for various protestgroups around the world.**

Lets go to another part of the world: China.

In these days where Trump and Chi Gi Ping are competing for the power in the world, in the changing blocks of power. We will have a look at one of the “mind mappings” of the chinese artist **Qui Zhijie**. It is an assessment of political movements from communism to kapitalism, from Marx to Reagan.

**Lets sing here the traditional chinese song **Molihua****

**It is not about politics, but about a lovely flower the jasmijn, the singer wants to offer to somebody he loves.**

We go back to the times of *the cold war*, when the world seemed simple East and West: the Sovjet Union and the United States as an ally of Europe. Lenin is a bit of anachronistic but the icons are obvious: Communism against Kapitalism.

**We will sing: **Vstrjetsnij**, composed by Shostakovich. Although he had profound objections against Stalin and his regime. He managed to live on by composing some film and propaganda songs. Like this one: *wake up young boy and serve the country...***

Down in the studio we will find the Parlement build by **Jonas Staal**, for the province in North Syria. It is the region conquered on the army of Assad where, Arabs, Kurdish and Assyrian people live in peace together.

Here we sing and dance the traditional Kurdish song **Amediye**. Amediye is a town in Irak Kurdistan, where it is good living with fruits like pumpkin, watermelon and pears.

The end of our tour is in an imaginary place where artist and refugees come together and try to form a better society with equal chances for everybody.

**Manifesto of the Union of the unemployed people**, composed by the Russian artist Glucklya.

