

Koen Nutters

*Playing outside – the long-form music
of Martijn Tellinga.*

Having played in five iterations of Martijn Tellinga's multi-day pieces I was asked to write down some of my experiences to be included in this publication. Not being the most comfortable writer in the world, I still managed to jot down a daily dose of impressions, thoughts, memories, musings, or just related words in random order. I hope this may clue-in the reader a bit more when it comes to the feelings, thoughts, and experiences a musician might have while playing in a void: A daily hour-long part of a much larger whole, so expansive and multi-layered, it is beyond the reach of human awareness or comprehension. Only in the distance can we understand its form, and relive it in our dreams. Layer upon layer of experiences, meetings, and unexplained time lapses. Lying in wait for the next note to appear, for the next action to arise.

This feeling of floating in an infinite space was mirrored by the size and whiteness of the W139 art space's back room, where I had some of my first experiences in the temporal maelstrom of Martijn Tellinga's pieces. Where anything you play seems to disappear into a present-less now, a future-less sea, a wave without a past. There might be spectators, or even other players to relate to, but mostly you're just by yourself. Alone in a room, with a room, guided by spaciousness and room tone. Playing outside of a linear conception of time. Playing outside of the margins. Playing sustained tones that add to a much bigger constellation of sounds and actions. It is the comfortable feeling of losing track, you cannot see the path, even though it is right in front of you, all around you, vibrating forward, outward, inward, and toward, back and forth between your instrument and the walls, between clock time and an altogether different experiential time flow. I feel like I'm asleep. And it is a pleasure...

The performance spaces before and after the W139 were smaller in scale, and there was the addition of an audio/visual feedback system, re-playing recordings of the space and its temporary inhabitants from

the days before, slowly building a generative archive of moments in the void. This is when you could play notes against notes that were played before you even entered the space, and experience parts of the performance you (as an audience member or as one of many players) were not there to witness. Only to be recorded and layered again (and again) creating an even more interactive environment together with the addition of several sine tones amplifying the room tone. Something or other. Playing against and around those tones gave the musicians something to hold on to, something more physical to relate to, a shifting anchor dragging along the ocean floor. An aural fog hiding everyday life from plain sight.

Playing into the void, or against a space, gives you the feeling of interacting with something enormous. Stretching your durations to reach beyond human observance, unending, startling, vast, slow. Although your daily hour flies by, the piece doesn't really seem to move forward. A dreamlike environment navigated by the musicians in one hour chunks. Fluorescent lights hanging at different heights illuminate the stillness, acquire the dark. Keep it going and going.

for any number over 5 players of any sustaining sound as many positions in an exhibition space are chosen

Consider me the voice of reason, a not so innocent bystander, or an affiliate that has been tasked with a drifting, documentary mission to explore our state of mind in a vector of abundance. Silence is absence, and sounds are sparse, structural commas indeterminate. While thunder gathers energy lines of waves turn into musical scores. Thinking captures the sounds and throws them into the storm. The emphasis went from any sounds to pitches, played around a set of shifting central tones floating around filling the space up with

something both ephemeral and full, both still and moving, shifting slowly, slowly, slightly shifted, until we rest on another intervallic pillar. Something to hold on to. Something to cherish, daily, hourly, forever.

The first time we met in the void was in Berlin, 2014. In the front space of Brandon Labelle's studio in Kollwitzstraße: Errant Bodies. Konzert Minimal, the ensemble I was playing in, was in its prime, playing almost every week in different spaces around Berlin, and these kinds of pieces were right up our alley, so to speak. None of us seemed the least bit surprised or perturbed by Martijn's idea for a piece that lasts for five days.

We came and went and carefully played our notes, each day, being recorded by the watchful eye and hearful ears of Martijn's camera and microphones, just for documentation purposes, this time. To us, the ensemble, this piece seemed like a logical step inside of the Post-Cage universe we were inhabiting. From the sparse pages of Antoine Beuger's Peckinpah Trios to the written out actions of Michael Pisaro's Harmony Series to this larger than life environment filled with notes, barely ever touching, mostly in post.

It's hard to talk about something that can hardly be felt, a scale larger than life, or nearly as big. This all seemed un-ending. Instinct taking over, never letting go. Days on end, days do end, and so does the exposition of this process. But the process itself never dies. Endless, it keeps going, archived, it keeps spinning. Musicians enter, play and leave. Notes hang in the humid air. Writing about this is a process. Writing about this is a process. Keep going, keep going...

When I first walked into Errant Bodies I found Lucio Capece there. Sitting in his chair, looking at his note stand. No notes, just suggestions, instructions, written in words as clear as a seascape on a Monday afternoon. Numbers turn into actions, days turn into nights. Playing until nightfall. A full day of music. A number of musicians, nearly meeting in the void. Clear rooms, breathing, sound-dust. The air is thick with random processes. Two notes meeting in the air is enough to create a singularity. Sliding into deep sleep the brain erases all, cancels itself.

For us it was already the norm to play without an ego, without immediate aims, without absolute structural goals. But in Tellinga's environment things were stretched out a lot more than usual, even for the members of Konzert Minimal. Our repertoire of Wandelweiser pieces by (mostly) Beuger, Houben, Malfatti and Pisaro were still hardly ever longer than an hour or so. Many of them even more compact than that.

These pieces connected nicely to the daily hour of playing inside of Martijn's piece. It had prepared us for the mission: the daily ritual. Observing resonances of Luigi Nono's 80s music, Pauline Oliveros' massive underground cistern, Alvin Lucier's research strategies, stretched out into a sprawling sonic landscape. A long-form, fairly open but surely guided, interaction of multiple musicians with a set of changing sine tones leading the way, and an archive to be filled with experiences. Sound scribbles on the walls, lines across the room, the air heavy with tones.

An empty room, a large window, a door, chairs for the musicians that need them, music stands on fixed positions. Musicians entering, exiting, readjusting, readying themselves in the back room. Playing long notes

at a slow pace, resonating with the space, blending with the outside noises coming in through the windows and door. Audience entering and exiting as punctuation. If there is an obvious form to these pieces, it is too protracted to really be aware of. This gives you a lot of space, as a listener, and as a player, to just experience what there is and what there isn't. Spend some time with the piece, with the room, with the musicians, the music stands, and the tones. As long as you like. There's plenty of it. "Come on Friday, when it will end."

While moments gather energy, lines and waves turn into scores. A situation captured, returned, layered again, letting it go. Bryan Eubanks plays the soprano saxophone. Sparse, dim, weighed down, we go into a flurry of moments, notes, and relational operations. That makes four when I count down from sixty to zero. Spinning around moments that are foundational, frontal, and out.

Resonance/Recursivity: When an energetic system evolves itself by reworking its own outputs as inputs to change a continuous alteration of form from within.

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Kollwitzstraße, 2014, seems like decades ago, every day a frame inside of a room. Time stands still as notes hang in the air. A camera and a set of microphones, documenting our tracings, seemingly still. Can a phrase just hang in the air, now and again? These things happen. Things happened. And we remember them, clearly. Listening to a 10 hour recording of a process full of hazy beauty. And yet, its tonal austerity is such that one does not even find a single pizzicato.

One site counting, 2018. The space of the Punt WG gallery is a lot smaller than the void of the W139. And there are constant sine tones floating around. Listening to the 6 hour long audio documentation, one hears a field of tones, scanning the space, filling it up like drizzle, and accompanied by acoustic occurrences taking place around, above and below, in and out of the light. Resonance: "the quality in a sound of being deep, full, and reverberating".

And the recording is gorgeous, listening for hours becomes an afternoon of slow, sustained, extended form. Something audible that continues at a glacial pace with sudden hubs of activity, of maybe two or three tones colliding. Big chunks of ice falling off the main surface, creating timelessness and space for contemplation about music, society, and the vibrational world around us. Could this music heal deserts? It could certainly heal a person's anxiety. Give them some time to listen to the things around them, happening in this micro-verse, this room full of music. Even when it's empty. Even when it's gone. We resonate for our own sake. Always.

Under the watchful eye and hearful ears of the composer for the entirety of the piece. Other audience members only catch a glimpse. If this was a 20 minute piece the average, impatient, audience member would only catch a few seconds of it. But the Errant Bodies audio/video registration gives a good sense of the general mood, the calm in which the actions are being undertaken, the notes played, heard, received, connected. Looking at the 36 minute long video documentation of the Errant Bodies performance reveals a coming and going of people, situations, notes played, silences held, a room, ongoing, during, lasting... for days on end. Participating pairs, rotating.

Sometimes things need to be done for a while in order to gain a certain validity, though a form arises inside of every single note. A process sustained by its duration. Awareness of the larger form could come through marathon listening, but also simply by reading the description of the piece, by being aware of the formal elements, and the attendance ritual, for both audience and players. The long notes combined. At certain points they overlap, as if it was planned. Which of course it was, yet it wasn't. Not quite like this. Composing is generative. Loading up timeframes with a certain amount of activity deemed enough to create some kind of coherence, some kind of continuity, relying on the vibrational qualities of both instruments and room, a note becomes a moment in time, and two notes sounding together become an event.

Connection between players is sound and space-based. No conscious attempt at rhythm or harmony is necessary

These pieces resist comprehension and interpretation. The randomness of the daily appearance of the players makes it not only unpredictable when to hear any 'music' at all, but also breaks down the micro-form of the piece that causes it to seem totally formless on a moment to moment level. In retrospect a form does arise, and of course we can always see its outer limits, the macro-structure. It does make it hard for the audience to connect to the actual performance, which creates a feeling of distance for the performers and initiator. Can this be avoided?

Martijn imagined other actions besides playing pitches. To blend tones with movement. I could also see poets, writers, workers, narrators, and moderators, people living their lives, in public spaces. Everyday life is a generative framework. Society in seven acts. What else can music be? So much more. So many applications to consider. News cycles are insufferable. Whence.

Resonate. Pass sounds around, follow up on sounds between each other.

Creating disintegrating structures. Falling apart by stacking up moments onto moments onto moments. Structures that when you play into them, disappear. Is this true? The beginning and end are only a formality. It is infinity that is reached for, open-ended gateways to spatial resonance. Resonance as archive, flooding back, back into a space filled with tones. Tones shining, radiating, emanating a glowing sound, like a courtyard in China, full of daily life. A sonic fog emanating from these rooms, still. We occupied a space in history, a room in a field, afloat.

When the beginning and end of a piece of music are days apart. You begin to feel it is actually always there. The nature of the material helps generate this feeling. Playing along with the enhanced room tone. That is always there as long as there is room. But nothing lasts forever, not pieces, not music, not rooms. Similar experiences in different locations and times (years apart) become a fluid oneness. A work becomes a series of works becomes an oeuvre. And the work has not stopped. It is ongoing. Forever placing tones in rooms, in the world, worlds ongoing.

I remember listening to Leo Svirsky playing during the last hour and a half of the last day of the version of _one site, counting_ at Punt WG in July 2018. I think Germaine Sijstermans and Seamus Cater were there as well. And we listened, holding our breath for the full duration, as Leo interpreted the score in personal ways that probably only he can fully understand, against the aural backdrop of seven days of recorded fragments, the sine tones, the room, and the outside world occasionally dipping in. Unusual forms, unexpected timbres, and slippery counterpoint and rhythms, all shaped by the composer's structural proceedings. Whether:

His accordion pitches and clusters sounded gorgeous. It was such intense beauty played with such deceptive ease. We all floated along for an hour and a half. This is where Martijn's piece really came together for me, after years of playing inside of it, after seven days of input, response, and environment. It was worth the wait, worth the investment. But who still has time to listen to a piece of music for seven days? It should be self-evident that immense beauty will show itself at some point. But which point is that? Not just at the end but throughout. Every carefully played note, in any constellation with the environment is in itself a wonder to behold, to carefully listen to the intentions of each player, re-played, and re-constellated. There should be more time in society for such activity. Music as a daily activity, listening as informed relaxation.

Listen attentively.

Listening to a 10 hour soundfile documenting the W139 performance I hear tones, footsteps, voices, resonance, as it merges with sounds coming through my window, airplanes, more voices, bangs, works.

Thinking back of that familiar white space it was a seminal experience, also retro-actively. Later on we would do many more things in that space. But I had been on the precipice of nothing, of stretched out formlessness, playing sounds into the void. Connections come easy when the circumstances are right. Nearly not there, we were. It was not sold as an experience, nor as submersive, it just was what it was. The DNK Ensemble playing into the void.

A piece of music that has no real beginning and no real end, just a ritual that's being enacted. And at some point it ends, just because there is no point in going on forever. Life is only so long. Hardly long enough to listen back to the accumulation of tones and actions in the archive. After a week in the vibrational container the structural point has been made. Is it too empty? Is it too busy? Is there too much or not enough connection between actions, sounds, and words, intention, meaning, things, and events? Are there too many listeners, or not enough? What's the point of all this? Going beyond linearity has its advantages, there is no more anticipation, but what is left? A unique experience, inside of a time-free chamber. Sound atoms bombarded, vibrations clashing, an endless combinatorial game, free floating in the void, calculating infinity.

The camera makes me think of Vito Acconci in the basement, chained up, blindfolded, waving a lead pipe around. "Leave me alone" he shouts. As we play our notes in our own personal space, we throw our vibrations all around us, creating a bubble in this sea of sine tones, this constant hum, these waves moving up and down, a life raft at the bottom of the stairs. This is a time to be alone, for both listener and performer, both listening, both adding presence, both hitching a ride on a slowly moving wave, a stream, an afforded consciousness.

Dear visitor, you might encounter a space void of performers and sound, you might encounter a space with only a single musician, you might encounter many of the 9 that participate. ... Please take your time after entering the gallery. All situations, also the still ones, are part of the work, equally important and about to change...

The W139 art space has a huge space in the back, painted white. To enter it one must walk through a long white corridor. And cleanse yourself of your experiences in the world. Ready yourself for a long-lasting bath of periodic events, of meetings in a large space, of notes, people, musicians, dancers, audience, difference-tones, vibrations. Life passing by at the other end of the corridor. Condom vendors, coffeeshops, the stock market across the narrow street of Warmoes . All connected, all significant. As we continue to breathe, life moves on. Hooze.

2 5 3 2 4 1 7 1 3 8

We start with numbers, with an almost empty space, with nothing but resonance, sound inherent to this very location. Place a listener in it, or a musician, who is also a listener, and before you know if, you have a piece of music. What else can it be? Nothing as obvious as the activity of music being made: all the elements involved. What's so weird about that? Stretch it out and become one with it. A practice for all. Although still a very specialized activity, it nearly reaches across the divide. But only for the ones that want to hear beyond their own horizon. To hear beyond the set societal limits of musical enjoyment. This might be a small revolution. A new way of spending time with your senses. Dive deeper. Hear beyond. Feel long-form. Ditto.

A feedback loop, a slow tornado of images, a maelstrom of sounds.

The version for two pianists of two / six by 2 in October 2020 at A rose is a rose gallery, in Rozenstraat, Amsterdam: one piano each in yet another neutral space filled with tones. The doubling of the instruments made the individual players disappear into a blend of distant human touch, touching keys, hitting the strings remotely, where two players become a combined source of roughly defined tones, impact, and cluster, surrounding the sine tones and the space.

The way the players generate material and navigate themselves around the room tone on a daily basis gives this version a lot more fluidity, still in a non-linear sense. It goes on, but there is no narrative. It is purely a reaction to stimuli. The players do things for a while and then change strategy and/or material. And the duration or scale gives it another feeling of wholeness, another character that isn't directly observable. I think something very interesting is happening that can only occur at such a grand scale, in such long pieces. The breakdown of form and personhood.

Feldman thought of pieces longer than an hour in terms of scale, not form.

To see what else music can be. To create something that doesn't lean on any conventional musical or structural devices. Music as something that can be felt, rather than immediately recognized or understood and anticipated. Very much in the tradition of experimental music. To stretch out the canvas of form to enormous proportions, with all the consequences thereof.

Pauline Oliveros found an enormous underground cistern to stretch out the sounds and notes she and her friends were playing. Martijn's structures function, on another operational level, in a similar manner; it makes everything you play seem to last forever, it invokes long, stable yet fragile tones to rub against the fabric of the available space and the allotted time.

The sine tone's slow shift creates a form that moves too slowly to perceive the change from one part to another; you might not even be aware that it does change, but surely it does. It gives the players a fresh perspective to play from, and emphasises different aspects of the room tone.

"Composition is frozen improvisation," said Igor Stravinsky. "Improvisation could be called speeded up composition," said Pauline Oliveros.

I was always surprised just how linear and actually quite constraining a lot of the pieces in the Wandelweiser canon felt while playing them. You'd expect huge periods of inactivity, but actually, if the mind wanders for just a second, you're lost, you're out. There is much less space than you'd think to only play 3 or 4 notes inside of 5 minutes. Especially Pissarro's Harmony Series pieces were much more defined than you'd think when reading the score. Similarly, Martijn's pieces gave you enough things to do in an hour to keep things going, to keep things moving. Never a second without tension. Playing slow is in a way just as intense as playing very fast. Just a different physicality.

enter, explore and leave the space quietly, slowly though intently

All elements are connected somehow, forcing the players, and sometimes the audience as well, to pay full attention to, for instance, the invariably small amount of notes that have already been played in the first 5 minutes of a piece. No more, and no less. Who's keeping the count? We all are. Collectively we count to five. One Two Three Four Five... Nothing has been accomplished.

There is no need for such real time analytics in Tellinga's pieces. Fitting an indefinite number of actions inside of an hour. Just follow the score at your own pace, and connections will occur on a larger scale, on a level that needs the aural equivalent of a bird's eye view to catch sight of it.

This reminds me of a story Martijn told me about a certain ensemble that refused to take his structures seriously. Probably thinking they are not musical enough, for players of such stature to perform. Little did they know just how un-musical things would become. And shame on them for being so boring. Music can be so much more than that. We are not on Broadway after all.

The beginning of the end? Neither the beginning nor the end. The end or the beginning? The first minute spells out the last. all interchangeable, recap, rewind, spend 10 hours listening to something non-linear. The first minute is the climax. After that it's all downhill. It gets better and better. Until the exposition ends. Until the players go home to catch some sleep. To prepare themselves for another day of playing notes in spaces where people gather. Where sounds lay.

There is nothing more satisfying than two notes meeting randomly in a large space, during a long period of time. It makes you feel connected, texture as a soothing interpersonal web. Alone but not alone. Beauty doesn't only reside in gesture, it also positions itself in form. Long poetic forms, not leading anywhere, but here, and here again, and now and again, it meets. We met.

As we fade out in this long-form passage all that needed to be said was done. Approached from different sides, embarked and disembarked, entered, to and fro, What were we talking about? Nothing much, but everything as well. We continue down a different road. We continue. Down?

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Epilogue

Infinite spaces in the shape of E.A. From here on in, from here on out. Looking at a sea of possibilities. Hearing it, it becomes clear as water. Waves of infinity host chance encounters. The sea becomes a metaphor for a large body of work. The notes we play are still moving. Vibrating in a liquid archive. The mother of all works awakens and careens over the hills.

Playing into the void. A large room of tones, and even more space in between. Searching for connections, rewarded in vibrations. Playing large scale canvases. Carpets rolled out on the seafloor. Sine tones scanning the walls for resonance. Searching, piercing, carrying acoustic tones on waves of electricity. Foreboding movement. Unknown entities in the here and now.

Form seems endless, nothing much to hold on to. Just keep going. It is not a hard task, it just takes some concentration, relaxation, also connection, but separate from the others. I just keep playing until my hour is over. Play these notes and it will sound like the sea. Waves breaking off, some at the top. Keep writing for the font to connect. Keep it. Keep at it. Keep it on and...

When I first walked in I saw Lucio Capece there. Sitting in his chair, looking at his note stand. No notes, just suggestions, instructions, written in words as clear as day, numbers turn to night. A space full of sound, five musicians, hardly ever meeting in the void. Clear rooms, aired out. The air is thick with random processes. To create a singularity of two notes meeting around us.

This seems unending. Self doubt taking over, never letting go. Hard to write about something that can hardly be felt, a scale larger than life, just as big, days on end. Days do end. And so does this exposition of a process. But the process itself never ends. Endless, it keeps going. Archived it keeps spinning. Musicians enter, play and leave. Notes hang in the humid air.

Kollwitzstraße, 2014, seems like yesterday, every day a frame inside of a circular shape. Time stands still as notes hang in the air. A camera, a set of microphones, documenting our tracings, seemingly still. Can a phrase just hang in the air? Now and again. These things happen, things happened, and we remember them, clearly. A 10 hour recording of a process, once undergone.

While moments gather energy, lines and waves turn into musical scores. A situation captured, returned, layered, let go. Bryan Eubanks plays the soprano saxophone. Sparsely dense, weighted. Down we go into a maelstrom of moments, notes, and relational operations. That makes four, counting down from 60 to zero. Spinning around moments foundational to us.

Writing about this is a process. Cutting and pasting, forever editing, keep going. We need roughly the same length paragraphs for the shape of E.A. to emerge. The sea as / is an analogy. We are looking at pieces of time. Wringing our hands, like blood from a stone. The process is about inspiration, inspiration is key. Key lime piece of pie. Writing about this is about progress.

Living in scarcity, surviving on falafel sandwiches and free beer at the gig. Berlin was a tough place for experimental musicians. But also a warm

center of comradeship. We were all in it together. Nothing to gain but experience. And being in a space with friends for days on end, playing tones caught for posterity, made us feel closer, become better, more patient musicians.

Starting a monthly series at Neukoelln's hole-in-the-wall O Tannenbaum bar with Johnny Chang. Ending up playing with some great people in some very nice places. Parks and lakeshores, bar chores, time sped up, endlessly. Endless summers of dawn mornings going home. Until it was suddenly over. Looking back at warmth and collaboration. And the sea was nowhere near us.

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Notes on notes on notes.

In this situation therefore, I, an ostensible observer, became a virtual performer.

Feel free to make connections, to free associate.

To make connections that are personal and no need to explain why.

Curren\$y is the king of the underground summer.

Playing within a piece of music without borders, limits. So-called 'free' improvisation is often described as such. But it is not possible to have limitless space for personal expression without actually breaking down the structural barriers you are referring to. Without creating a non-linear situation that carries its own rules. And I think this is what we have been

doing in these pieces, for many years now. What have we learned? What have we seen? Archived or not. -0- Done.

All is about to change.

A real sense of freedom will come to music, and start inside of it.

And it will be universally accepted.

Even though this is still an incredibly specialized music performance practice, there is a certain democratization of listening going on. The duration and the accessibility of the space are such that it encourages *just being there*, just listening for the sake of listening, just spending some time in a pleasant environment. And since no one will be there for the whole performance, it widens the form into a situation to experience rather than something to follow along and understand. Comprehension of situation rather than perception of form. Compendium of things happening. Things are happening in the space and we get to hear them while we are there.

Use these moments to write down your thoughts.

If you have any, that is. Any at all, at all, at all, at all.

Right now there's not so much, not many, of them.

Just a thought about writing some thoughts down.

And that's what I'm doing. I hear voices on the record.

Death in the carwash. What's in a name?

A piece of floating synths and strumming.

Did I make her mad? I don't think so.

Who knows, these young people are unpredictable.

These things happen. Things turn green,
in the fridge, in life. It's life and we know it.
One more sentence to make three.

Now I have not much left to say.
Already, sentences are
growing shorter.

Almost
Done
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K
B
Y
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Koen Nutters, Amsterdam - July/August 2025

This article contains quotations from amongst other sources: Etel Adnan's
Sea