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In the Dark: Audience Experience of Music Events when Sight is Restricted or Absent.

The concept of an 'experience economy', originally a business philosophy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), has exerted a growing influence during the last decade across a range of industries and organisations - including the Arts. Consumers (particularly in affluent societies) have been shown to value experiences above material objects (Gilovich et al., 2014), a finding which, in the UK music industry, is reflected in an upturn of spending on live (as opposed to recorded) music events (UK Live Music Census report, 2017). One intriguing phenomenon has been audience interest in attendance at musical (and non-musical) events advertised as taking place in darkness, perhaps reflecting a desire to escape the increasingly ubiquitous sensory bombardment afforded by digital technologies in daily life. What happens when the visual is intentionally removed from musical experience?

This paper focuses on a pilot study of immersive sight-less musical reception which utilised semi-structured interviews and focus groups to explore the phenomenology of both audience and artist experiences with relation to a performance by the group *Tactile* - a sextet of professional musicians drawn from the blind, visually-impaired (VI) and sighted communities. They create music under blindfold, using tactile scores realised through improvisation, performing in darkened spaces so that the audience inhabit the same sightless world as the performers. Interview/focus group data was subjected to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Findings highlight a range of experiential phenomena, (including heightened/altered sensory and spatial awareness, sensory recalibration, visual imagery, relaxation, reduction of thought and self-awareness), pointing towards the self-regulatory potential of such performances.

References

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- Pine, B.J., & Gilmore, J.H. (1999). *The Experience Economy: Work is Theater and Every Business a Stage*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.