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## Fundamental limitations of THz and Niobiumnitride SIS mixers

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**Fundamental Limitations  
of THz Niobium  
and Niobiumnitride  
SIS Mixers**

Pieter Dieleman

The cover picture is taken the morning after the 1953 flood disaster in the province of Zeeland, the Netherlands. Clearly visible are the holes in the sea dike through which the water flows with great force. Apart from the devastating effects, the apparent huge stream of water through these holes provides an expressive analogue to the effects of pinholes in tunnel barriers as described in this thesis. (Copied with permission from "De watersnood in Zeeuws-Vlaanderen", by G. Sponslee and E. Steyns, van Geyt productions, Hulst, the Netherlands).

The reading committee for this thesis consists of Prof.Dr.Ir. J.E. Mooij, Prof.Dr. M.J. Feldman, and Prof.Dr. K.H. Gundlach.

This thesis is typeset in Times Roman with L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X.

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————— Rijksuniversiteit Groningen —————

Fundamental Limitations  
of THz Niobium  
and Niobiumnitride  
SIS Mixers

————— Proefschrift —————

ter verkrijging van het doctoraat in de  
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op gezag van de  
Rector Magnificus Dr. F. van der Woude  
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door

————— Pieter Dieleman —————

geboren op 24 mei 1970  
te Kommerzijl.

Promotor: Prof. Dr. Ir. T.M. Klapwijk  
Referent: Dr. M.W.M. de Graauw

# Preface

This thesis describes the use of superconducting niobium and niobiumnitride tunnel junctions as heterodyne mixing elements in the submillimeter frequency range from 600 to 1000 GHz. In this frequency range Nb as well as NbN layers exhibit significant absorption of submillimeter radiation, making them unsuitable as impedance matching embedding structures. This brings about the inclusion of normal metals in the design of these detectors. The frequency range obtainable with these "hybrid" detectors as well as the attainable ultimate sensitivity are the main topics of this thesis.

Ch. 1 is an introduction to the work presented in the thesis, and describes the historical development and the basic principles of operation of heterodyne receivers based on superconducting tunnel junctions. The fabrication, materials properties and their effect on the electrical characteristics of Nb and NbN tunnel junctions are discussed in Ch. 2 as well as the fabrication related RF radiation losses in superconductors and normal metals.

The operation of the receiver as a whole and the junction in particular will be illustrated in Ch. 3 by means of a "case study" of a Nb junction with aluminum circuitry. Measured data are compared in detail with the quantum theory of mixing.

An interesting observation when employing aluminum embedding is an improved transport of the heat generated by Joule heating of the device when operated as a detector. The cooling efficiency of aluminum *vs.* niobium embedding of the junction is investigated in Ch. 4. Using the simulation developed in Ch. 3 the effect of this enhanced heat transport on the mixing properties is investigated.

Ch. 5 deals with the feasibility of NbN junctions in the frequency range of 600 to 1000 GHz, in which an analysis method is employed similar to that in Ch. 3. The NbN junctions exhibit a significantly enhanced shot noise which dominates the performance of the device. The physical mechanism behind this is described in Ch. 6. The same noise enhancement mechanism is found to be present in high

critical current density Nb junctions as well. This observation, described in Ch. 7 answers a long-standing question on the discrepancy between the noise measured and theoretically expected.

Appendix A discusses the lay-out of the used waveguide mixers and the experimental methods used to determine the physical properties of the devices.

A summary of the work performed and the implications of the results for the feasibility of superconducting tunnel junctions in the THz regime is given in Ch. 8. The thesis ends with a summary both in English and Dutch.

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