

**TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES
OF SPATIALITY IN PERFORMANCE**

-

**Towards emancipating
the audience's attention**

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Bevezető

A következőkben a doktori disszertációhoz kapcsolódó két mestermunka dokumentációja és részletes leírása olvasható. A döntés, hogy két, a doktori kutatás ideje alatt elkészült munkát is megnevezek mestermunkának, annak tudható be, hogy alkotói nyelvem két fő irányát is képviseltetni szerettem volna. A *Drift* című hang-koreográfiában a köztéri, sétálás és interakció alapú formai világ jelenik meg, míg az *Áthallás/Overheard* című hangperformansz a hang performativitásának lehetőségeire és filozófiai vonatkozásaira fókuszál. Tekintve, hogy mindkét darab megértéséhez fontos a fizikai térbeli jelenlét, ezért a jobb érthetőség kedvéért a munkák bemutatásához a videó- és hangdokumentációk mellett a dolgozatból átvett, egyszerűsített darab leírásokat is használni fogom, azok eredeti, angol nyelvén.

Introduction

The following contains the documentation and detailed description of two master works related to my doctoral dissertation. The decision to designate two works completed during my doctoral research as master works stems from my desire to represent the two main directions of my artistic language. The sound-choreography titled *Drift* embodies the public space, walking-based and interactive formal world, while the sound performance titled *Áthallás/Overheard* focuses on the possibilities and philosophical implications of sound performativity. Considering that physical presence in space is crucial for understanding both pieces, I will use video and sound documentation alongside simplified piece descriptions taken from the dissertation in their original English language to aid better comprehension.

1. Public square sound-choreography - *Drift* (2019)



For fifty minutes the Széll Kálmán square is turned into a spatial symphony, with a feeling of an ungraspable, unidentifiable, invisible energy. This is a beautiful, immersing, mesmerizing dance, which we can perceive not with our eyes, but with our ears, bodies and self. Dorottya Albert on Drift (2019)

Drift (2019) is a complex example of a dynamic relationship between performers, audience, and accidental spectators devised for busy transitional urban spaces. In the piece, 15 performers follow a slowly evolving walking choreography while carrying hidden portable sound sources. The choreography consists of five parts following a clear dramaturgical arc. It starts by using the largest possible space on the square and moves towards the smallest possible space - which directly translates to a gradually intensifying atmosphere, from the least understandable and sparse beginning towards the condensed whirlpool of bodies and sounds of the ending. Each choreographic section is accompanied by a new musical part - each a single harmony, slowly waving texture of drone music that creates a resonant space while mysteriously intervening in the aural sphere of the public space.

I developed *Drift* for its premiere in the Formations section of the 2019 **Prague Quadrennial**. The piece was created for the large square (approximately 8,000-10,000 sq m) in front of the

Prague Expo building, which became the reference size for subsequent adaptations in various cities. With this space in mind, I developed the concept during a two-month residency of Workshop Foundation, Budapest with my collaborator, anthropologist Dániel Makkai, and the choreography during a two week residency at Cross Attic, Prague.

As a spinoff of Drift, one of the research observations developed into a thought experiment of watching and narrating public space movement as an elaborate choreography, which then developed into the short film [One of the World's Largest Choreography](#) (2021).

In the following, I will present the detailed choreography along with experiences from the dozen repetitions. These were all written on the first occasion when the performance took place at Széll Kálmán tér, Budapest.¹ The video documentation is linked in connection with the respective parts.

The choreography

The piece [begins](#) outside the square where it is performed. I start the composition on the attached MP3 players one by one and give the speakers to the performers, who then enter the square at 10-second intervals over a 2-minute period. They start their walk from a set pre-assigned angles to ensure different starting routes.



The first part ([Full space ping-pong](#)) lasts 11 minutes and uses the largest part of the square. In this part, performers walk in straight lines across the full space of the square at a

¹ Where I repeat it yearly, in 2024 it will be the 6th repetition.

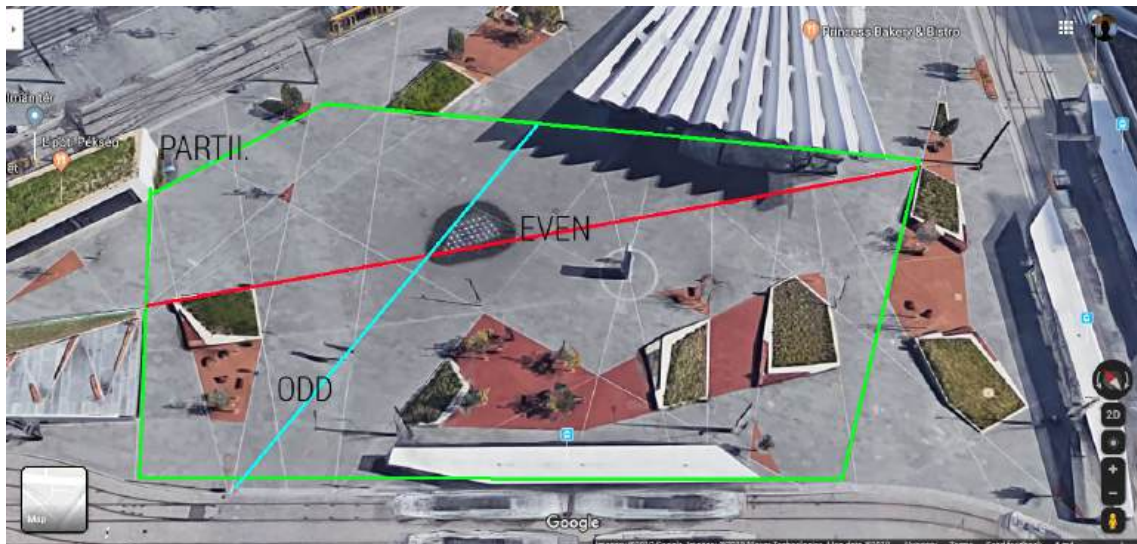
general walking pace². When they encounter an obstacle (wall, lamppost, static people) or reach the edge of the space, they turn 90 degrees in the more natural direction and continue. When crossing paths with someone (either another performer or a passerby), they have two options: quicken their pace or stop until the person passes in front of them. They are instructed to be precise and not slow down or curve their paths. In their interactions with people in the square, they are asked to be gently confrontational - they can cross through groups or move close to individuals, but should avoid anything that feels too uncomfortable.

The choreographic effect of this simple yet effective task is to generate movement directions that are seemingly similar to regular public space movement, but without directionalities that 'make sense'. This becomes even more evident in the oddity of direction changes. However, this obviousness is only apparent to the trained and alert eye³ - in squares of these sizes, even with 15 performers, most people can only sense that *something* is happening. This sensation is primarily perceivable from the enveloping resonant ambient soundscape emanating from the performers' hidden belly bags, and from the attention of the audience who came to see the show. The precision of the crossings with other passersby, and the occasional, unusual closeness that the generative task creates, further elevates the intangible strangeness of the situation. After 11 minutes, the transition to the next part is cued by bell sounds from the speakers, while the music crossfades to the next section. The suddenness and more perceivable, point-like spatiality of the bell sounds create a surprising and revealing effect for passersby, signaling that *something is really happening*.

The second part ([*Reduced space ping-pong with running*](#)) is a variation of the first and lasts for 6 minutes. Once the performers hear the cue, they transition to an area approximately 40-50% smaller than the original square. The full transition is preferred to occur within 1-2 minutes to create an organic and soft crossfading transition, an effect aimed for throughout the entire piece. Within this reduced space, the performers continue their *ping-pong* movement with one added task: there are two assigned landmarks (preferably long lines crossing the space), each assigned to one half of the group.

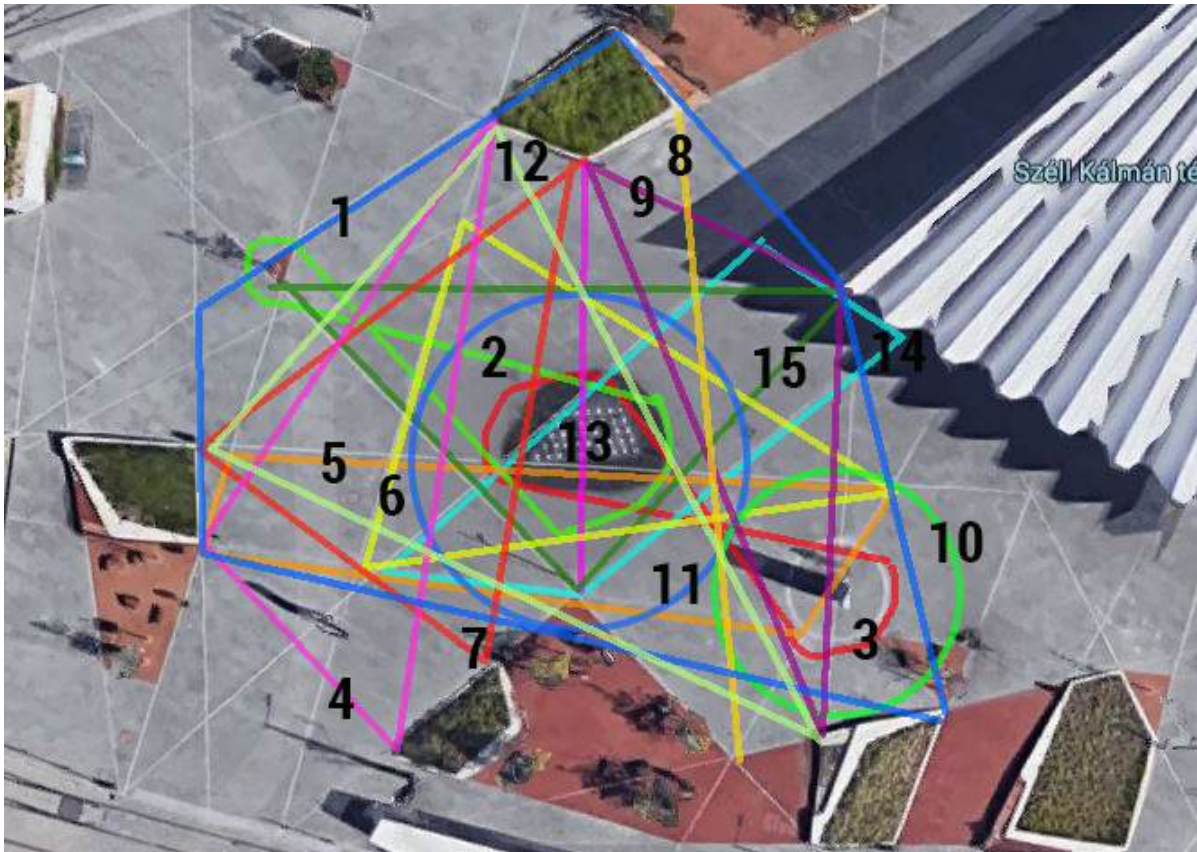
² I identify the 'general' walking speed in a busy transitory public space as a quick normal tempo, which is around 5 km/h.

³ And for those living on the streets, during both pieces of *Length of a Distance* and *Drift*, I noticed that homeless people are the first to identify what is happening and who is responsible for it.



When a performer crosses their dedicated landmark, they need to perform a short run (6-8 steps) and then return to their original tempo. This added pattern makes the energy of the square more dynamic, and the movement of the performers mimics and randomly interacts with passersby who are running towards public transport vehicles. As a result of these more dynamic movements and the higher concentration of performers, the fact that a performance is taking place becomes evident to most people present, as does the identity of the performers.

The third part ([Pathway loops with tempo changes](#)), lasting 8 minutes, introduces more complex directionalities and collective shifts in tempo. After hearing the second cueing bells, performers transition within 1-2 minutes to their previously assigned pathway loops. These loops cover a space 40-50% smaller than in the previous part, while performers maintain their normal walking tempo. The assigned loops intersect each other and are placed in the middle of the busiest transitional part of the square.



This creates a moving, clockwork-like obstacle for passersby that is impossible to avoid, thus inducing interactions. The loops are 'senseless' not only in terms of their repetitive nature but also because their shapes are atypical to public space movement. Consequently, they feel more unpredictable and difficult for passersby to relate to. From this point, due to both the more recognizable choreographic parts and the natural increase in volume from the concentration of sound, the piece begins to take on a 'spectacular' quality for the audience and passersby.

During this part, three collective tempo changes are cued by one of the assigned performers, who follows the timing of this section on a wristwatch. This responsible person cues the change simply by altering their own tempo, which the others must copy as soon as they notice, creating (if well executed) a quick chain reaction of collective tempo change. After each change, the cueing person returns to the original tempo, and others follow. The three changes are: I. Slowing down at 3:00 for one minute, II. Running at 5:30 for 20 seconds, and III. Standing still at 7:00 for 30 seconds. The timing and duration of these sections are designed in a non-periodic way to create an unpredictable, more surprising dramaturgy. The sudden, spatially concentrated collective changes produce a strong effect and can immediately alter the square's movement dynamics. At these moments, the

spotlight falls on passersby crossing through the performers: as the spread-out slow walk or standing still appears, the performers become living contrasts to the 'performers' of busy urban movement flow.

The 4th part ([Circles in the Square](#)) which lasts six minutes, presents a shift in the choreographic material from the abstraction of pedestrian movement to forms resembling spiritual walking practices of circumambulation. After hearing the cueing bells, the performers transition to collective circular motion one by one, in the order of their numbers, with around 15-20 seconds difference from each other. The circle's center is formed away from the loops, making audience members move along with them, and opening them up for possible interactions.



At the end of the transition, all the performers walk around on a cca. 1-meter wide perimeter of a cca. 5-meter radius circle in the same direction, and they need to balance the tempos so that various speeds are present simultaneously. From this point on, they can cross pedestrians intuitively and are asked to do so in a rather unapologetic manner, focusing on keeping the dynamism of the circle. The aimed effect is a dynamic, natural flow of circular energy created by bodies and sounds. Even at the first rehearsals, the effect of this circular movement on viewers became apparent, as random passersby started to join out of curiosity, which was not a directly intentional aim of this part - although it might have been an unconscious artistic intuition. From this point on, the piece clearly becomes gently spectacular, as any organized mass movement is spectacular.

After hearing the next, last cues of bell sounds, performers gradually start spiraling inwards, initiating the last section ([Spiraling in](#)). The progress of the spiraling is aimed to be slow and organic, happening within three minutes. When all the performers have arrived into the center of the spiral, they naturally slow down and circle around in one tight bunch - which depending on the number of people sucked in by this whirlpool, can mean that they are passing through among a tightly compressed group of audiences.

By this time, a highly processed recording of a solo female acapella opera singer appears to enhance the dramatic effect of the already loud and vibrating mass of sound. When the music crossfades to the outro section, the performers start to spiral outwards in a quickening tempo. After a few outward spirals, they promptly leave the square and walk away, creating an extremely subtle fade-out of the sound and a satisfying disappearance of the performance.

"When the carriers of the sound disperse and withdraw from the space, the tinkling, murmuring waves of music linger in our ears and bodies for a long time afterwards."
(Albert, 2020)

2. Blindfolded sound-performance - *Overheard* (2021)



*There is often that sense of there being more to what I am hearing (...): an excess, a background, or a push of energy that stirs below or around hearing, and yet which I know, or intuit, as being present. (...) It is precisely this more, this background which often influences or affects the quality of what I hear. (...) Sounds upon sounds; the overheard upon the heard. - Brandon LaBelle, from 'The Overheard' chapter of his book, *Sonic Agency* (2020, p. 60)*

Overheard (2021) was a 70-minute sound performance for blindfolded audience members. The piece premiered at the main stage of Trafó House, Budapest. The dramaturgy that focuses on the auditory senses, attention, and perception of the listeners is completed with a mix of 'found' and written text, as well as enigmatic performative presence. The main spatial attribute of the piece is that the audience members are spread around seated in the performance space, while a dozen speakers are placed around and among them, creating an immersive sonic environment. The periodic appearance and disappearance of the performers and activation of household objects expand and enliven the experience. The

piece was developed with the creative contribution of Hungarian performer-choreographer Imre Vass⁴ and Slovenian composer-performer Ivan Mijacevic.

I've chosen the starting focal theme of the piece to be the notion and metaphorical connotations of 'overhearing'. My interest in working with the implications of this listening experience came with a realization during my previously discussed installation *Every Sound is a Thin Blue Line*, which is: *Everything, both living and non-living, is connected by an infinite chain of vibrations* or - in a less poetic phrasing - the constant overhearing of urban everyday life and diffusion of sounds of other people's lives into our own creates interconnectedness. But this is true for any sounds, and all the time, whether we like those sounds or would like to connect with others or not. As it is said in the piece's narration, "*Ears don't have eyelashes.*"⁵

The piece was performed in near total darkness, thus uncapturable meaningfully on video. Hence, the description is accompanied only by audio samples linked to the corresponding parts of the text.

The setup

The piece was designed around audience members seated on the 10x14 meter stage of a large, empty, black box theatre space. Audience members were arranged in sparse lines facing each other, with three paths intersecting at the stage's center, allowing performers to move among them. A central stand held a cassette player and mobile phone, with another cassette player near the door and four ventilators in the stage corners facing the audience.

The sound setup utilized the theatre's PA system: two pairs of speakers hung 5 meters above the audience, facing the performance space; floor-placed sub-speakers for vibrations. From my set of speakers, I used four monitor speakers at the midpoints of each side, facing the walls; two upward-facing monitor speakers on custom stands at diagonal center points; a portable speaker contacting a ventilation shaft near the entrance; and a Bluetooth speaker behind the theatre wall in the backstage corridor.

⁴ Vass also performs in the piece.

⁵ Remark by Ivan Mijacevic

I operated the sound desk from the empty seating area, 10 meters from the audience, launching various scenes from my computer. Imre Vass began the performance seated among the audience before moving to different positions.

The piece

The following description and analysis of the piece is the version that developed for the premiere at Trafó House, Budapest. Although the piece is perfectly playable at other sites, many parts were composed site-specifically, so it makes sense to discuss them in their original context.

Preshow/Entry

In the preshow, we incorporated various elements from the piece, hidden in different parts of the theatre. This aimed to build up the piece's world of interconnected elements either consciously or as subliminal messages.

At the restroom entrance, there was a hidden speaker in the bin, which alternated between the recorded sound of the room's hand dryer (creating confusion, of course) and distant-sounding snippets from the piece, which one could think were blending in from another room.

For the theatre's bar, a specific setlist of songs was created that repeatedly mentioned listening, hearing, or sounds in their lyrics⁶. I slowed all the songs down to establish a gently eerie, Lynchian vibe.

On the suggestion of Imre Vass, we decided to rerecord a customized version of the pre-show announcement of Trafó with its original voice⁷, which we played while audience members were queuing for their blindfolds prior to entering the performance space⁸. The announcement asked the audience to mute their phones, as noises can interrupt the piece, and stated that making sound recordings was forbidden, which was a joke on the regular request of not taking photos or videos during a piece. Additionally, we changed the melodic theme of the announcement to the melody of the tape loop that enters at the cathartic peak of the piece.

⁶ Some examples include Buffalo Springfield's 'For What It's Worth (Stop Hey, What's That Sound)', Alan Jackson's 'Listen to Your Senses', Chuck Berry's 'Stop and Listen', and INXS's 'Listen Like Thieves'. Unfortunately, no one has ever given me the feedback that they had realized this Easter egg.

⁷ When we inquired about who the voice was, it turned out that it was singer-songwriter Vera Jónás, my only guitar student, who I started to teach as a covid-lockdown project.

⁸ [Sample](#) of the announcement.

Part I. - Arrival and introduction

The first part of the piece served as a transition from the outside world to the inside, both in terms of the piece itself and the audience's internal focus. The introductory text provided framing and context for the piece, especially for audience members less experienced with sound-based and non-narrative works. By introducing its sound world, it aimed to slowly bring listeners into a state of alert, deep listening.

Audience members received their blindfolds at the entrance and were accompanied to their seats by ushers. In the space, the first soundscape was already playing and blending with the real sounds of people moving around and settling. This soundscape featured recorded sounds of setting up the actual space (placing down audio cables and adjusting the speakers)⁹. From time to time recordings of people talking emerged in various places - without sight, one couldn't necessarily distinguish if the talking was live or recorded, but they were immediately in the situation of *overhearing* conversations. These elements were complemented by the harmonized recording of the room's heating, a periodic rumble from upstairs¹⁰ an enigmatic pattern of wooden knocks¹¹. Once everyone had taken their seats, the knocking finished its pattern, the sounds of the harmonized heating faded out slowly, and the audience experienced the true silence of the room.

In this silence, my voice as the narrator-creator welcomed the audience, followed by a slightly confusing statement about my own presence, establishing the performative language of the piece: *'My voice that you hear - maybe you've already realized - is only a recording, like most things in the performance. But it doesn't mean that I am not talking to you, who is here right now.'* This statement raised the question of whether I am really present or not, and if so, where I am in the room.

From this point, the narration is joined by the sounds of walking through different audible spaces within the recording itself. The first space of walking is an underground foot tunnel. While a train passes above the tunnel in the recording, the bass frequencies actually shake the performance space, in connection with the narration: *'Because sound is the resonance of*

⁹ [Sample](#) of the entrance soundscape.

¹⁰ Regular audiences of Trafó are often aware that above the main stage, there is a dance studio where similar sounds of movement can be heard. The rumbling sounds I used were performed on the roof of this dance studio while I was recording them from within the studio itself.

¹¹ A recording of the Soto Zen meditation (zazen) preparation signal which starts 15 minutes before zazen. This was recorded in my sangha (community).

air which unstoppably fills every space, and resonates with whatever it touches. It resonates through the walls, the doors, your chair, and even through your body.'

The scene transitions to walking in a building's stairwell, where one could overhear the talk of the cleaning ladies, creating a situation of eavesdropping and overhearing. Then the narration reflects: *'By the way, it doesn't bother me if some sounds are coming into my recordings. Actually, that's when my ears get really sharp. That's when I am listening the most. Like now.'* This statement opens up attention to both possible nows - of the performance and of the recording time.

After some tense quiet sonic exploration of an abandoned train station, the scene slowly crossfades to a recording of a noise street. There, a blind homeless woman repeats a line in a mantra-like way - *'Forever and ever I will be a dirty homeless here'*. This saddening, one-liner protest song ends with her outburst, *'Fucking hell now, no one is helping me, fuck you all'*. With the use of such disturbing elements, I aimed to deromanticize deep listening and its possible subjects, meanwhile creating tension and alertness.

Soon the narrator raises the pivotal question of the piece about the inevitability of sounds: *'Have you noticed that you can't hide from the sounds? Your ears don't have eyelashes, you can't close them. Whatever you do, wherever you go they are always going to be there.'* The spatial walk/narration ends with pointing towards the imaginary mental space of the blindfolded listeners: *'Sometimes when I wake up in the dark in a new place, I can't decide where I am. Then I try to hear it. Where am I? Where am I?'* As a response to the uncertainty of the question, the out-of-place sounds of flamingos appear, and then the soundscape fades into a dreamlike scene.¹²

Part II. - In between realms, questioning reality

The dramaturgical role of the second, central part was to create scenes that would challenge the listener's perception of the experienced space and their ability to confidently determine the sources of the sounds; what is recorded and what is live; what is part of the performance and what isn't. All these elements subsequently point towards the question of what is 'real'. At this point, I must underline that the recorded parts of the following sound events were meticulously edited, processed, and sound staged so close to the feeling of reality that most of the time it was impossible for audience members to decide if what they heard was live or recorded - which is what I called the *holographic* quality of working with

¹² [Recording](#) of the full intro. The full text can be read in the appendix.

sounds in a performative setting. Many people I talked to after the show recounted that after a while, they gave up even trying and arrived at the state of immersing themselves in the constructed reality of the piece.

Arriving from the precisely constructed scenes of walking, where the spatial connotations were always clear and familiar, listeners now faded into a dreamlike mix of a dozen distant, muffled, and moving sounds. As the sounds constantly moved around in an unpredictable pattern, each fading out of audibility as they shifted among different spatial positions, I wanted to create a soundscape where the listener's attention naturally had to move along, gently pushing them further into an active state of deep listening.¹³ After 5 minutes, the scene slowly faded out, causing the audience to strain their ears more and more, until at one point, what only remained or rather appeared was the distant sound of Hungarian folk music from above the performance space.¹⁴

The following scene aligned with my dramaturgical idea to work with mistake and disruption. By creating events that suggest something might have gone wrong, or something happened that shouldn't have, I aimed to further enhance the state of blindfolded insecurity and disorientation - resulting in stronger attention. As the recording of the folk music sonically stood apart from the previously played sounds and came from the upper side of the space without a distinct directionality, it created the feeling as if it just diffused into the space from another room - maybe from the dance studio above, from where we heard the muffled dancing at the beginning.

While the listeners were settling into this new soundscape, they could start to hear a very distant, but recognizable aggressive shouting of a man - which could be understood as coming from the street, but actually was played from the Bluetooth speaker in the backstage corridor. Then this ambiguous soundscape was disturbed by (the recording of) someone knocking on the entrance door several times - maybe a latecomer. In response, I articulately and audibly stood up and went to fix the situation, with a loudly whispered fake conversation with no one at the door.

Meanwhile, hand in hand, the folk music and shouting got progressively louder - revealing their recorded nature - until the sound of the angry man shut the door in the recording

¹³ [Sample](#) of the dreamy soundscape.

¹⁴ [Sample](#) recording of a Hungarian folk dance class, made from outside the room through the door.

precisely at the same moment I shut the real door of the theatre, creating a moment of highly punctuated synchronicity of the recorded and live sound, resembling a 'Zen slap'¹⁵.

To this cue, the recorded sounds of intense and urgent chair organization by several people immediately started, highly spatialized around and among the audience.¹⁶ Once the intensity of the recorded organization began to lower, Imre and I joined in, organizing the extra chairs placed around the space. In the following minutes, the intensity of the recorded and live action exchanged places, mixing the live and recorded sounds of the same event. As our movement became faster and rougher, and our bodily presence and physical movement from close proximity became more apparent, the tension of the audience elevated. The disorienting quality of this scene was demonstrated by the fact that at an after-talk, some people guessed there were 5-10 performers in the room.

Once the organization had finished and silence settled, the audience could hear someone walking to the center of the stage, inserting a cassette in the player and pressing play: '*This is the end*' said my voice on the cassette, then the person left and slammed the door behind them. As the reverb of the closing door dissolved, what remained was the subtle sound of rain¹⁷, and a very tense situation: Although it could feel quite early for ending the piece, this near-silence could also be understood as an outro, confirming the stated end. Nonetheless, no one dared to move,¹⁸ and everyone listened for others moving.

In this heightened intensity of listening, slowly one by one far away sounds were appearing - someone practicing on electric guitar, flushing of a toilet, '*Ah Zabenya*' Simba's birth song from *The Lion King*¹⁹ -, recreating the soundscape and experience of real life overhearing, if one is sitting in their living room of an apartment building. As the soundscape became more and more complex, audience could relax into the certainty that the show goes on, and they were not left behind. After a few minutes, the sound of knocking appeared again and gently knocked around the room, which is of course physically impossible, but to hear it happening is a very satisfying auditory experience.

¹⁵ In Zen Buddhism, the master or the lead monk can occasionally hit the practitioner's trapezius muscle with a wooden stick called 'Kyosaku', to diminish drowsiness. This is sometimes used to suddenly hit the floor, creating a loud sound, therefore bringing back the attention of all the practitioners to the same point, and to the hear and now.

¹⁶ [Sample](#) of the organization. It was recorded in the same room using the same chairs. We placed one recorder at one end of the room and the other recorder at the opposite end. When playing it back, I organized the playback to maintain a similar spatial arrangement.

¹⁷ [Sample](#)

¹⁸ At least, in the 9 repetitions of the piece, no one ever walked out at this point.

¹⁹ [The Lion King - Circle of Life](#), (John & Rice, 1994)

Once the knocking finished its circle around the space, (a recording of) someone finally entered the room, went to the cassette player, inserted another cassette and pressed play. But this time instead of calling the piece off, the voice of a lady in her sixties could be heard, leading a physiotherapy session for bedridden, elderly people, slowly walking around in the room.²⁰ Her voice was matched with steps recorded in the space and were moved around among the audience. Although the sound quality of the voice was quite low, and not matching the high-fidelity of the steps, as they were moving around in a realistic manner, one could still match the two sounds and feel that someone was moving around them. With the subtle addition of a distant recording of Debussy floating in the air, it created an easily imaginable scene, with very few carefully selected ingredients.

This scene cross-faded into an eerie, dense harmony of modulated sounds of my microwave making popcorn²¹. Although it was quite a simple composition, many people noted that it was either very soothing or nerve-stimulating. As the buzzing sound of the microwaves faded out, the audience could hear a similar sound appearing: in the middle of the room, a phone rang in vibrate mode. Of course, it was the prepared phone on the stand that I was calling from behind the sound desk. The ringtone was the announcement signal of Trafó²², but this time the smooth female voice of the announcer apologized that she forgot to say that loud and unexpected noises could disturb the audience during the performance. She then started to count down from 10, suggesting a jumpscare. Once the countdown ended, after a moment of pause, Imre Vass pushed a large box of metalware off behind the back wall into a stairwell. The disturbing loud noise indeed happened, but in another room - a true spatial sound joke.

While some pieces of the metalware were still finding their place, some kept moving in an unusual sounding manner. It was because, behind the scenes Imre took on a prepared jacket with a dozen various kitchenware sewn onto it, as if the fallen objects came alive. Then the 'Tinman'²³ opened the door, and slowly moved around and among the lines of the audience, creating an extremely high-fidelity and detailed moving sound²⁴. While he was moving around, I opened the side door of the theatre as an exit to him, while opening the

²⁰ [Sample](#) of the physiotherapy. This recording is a found sound in its fullest sense, as it was in a cassette player that was found on the street.

²¹ Also can be seen as hidden reference to the [trailer](#) of the piece.

²² [Sample](#)

²³ The official nickname of the metalware being.

²⁴ From the feedback of the audience it turns out that it was not obvious for everyone that this scene was live.

separating wall between the two realms, letting in the uncontrolled live sounds of the city, which had been simulated until now.

As the 'Tinman' walked outside, and slowly crossed the street, he passed by a dog runner, from which the dogs started to bark each time as if it had been directed²⁵. The high-pitched metallic sounds of the jacket could be heard for a long time as Imre walked away creating an extremely subtle fade out and sound of distance. Meanwhile, from a Bluetooth speaker that I was holding at the open door, a recording of a barking dog appeared, aiming to create the illusion that one of the dogs came to the open door. After a few barks (the sound of) the dog finally sneaked in and started to run around on the stage, pushing chairs and barking in excitement²⁶.

While we listened to the dog running around, sounds of a few coughs from here and there appeared. These small coughs initially sounded ordinary, as they're often heard in theatres, and because they could already be heard earlier in quieter scenes - placed there strategically by me. But within a minute, the coughing became more and more regular at an alarming rate - a reminder that the premiere was in autumn 2021, still during the Covid-19 pandemic. For some time, it was confusing and disturbing as more and more people seemed to cough around the space, leaving the audience unsure if it was real or not. To further mix up the situation, sounds of laughter slowly appeared - partly for a release of the tension, but also simulating that some people realized that the coughing sounds were fake and were starting to laugh. Consequently, people really started to cough and laugh as sympathetic reactions. To add to the growing, over-the-top theatricality of the situation, the sound of crying people appeared - perhaps evoking sadness over the situation or Covid memories. Then, to add the cherry on top, loud animal sounds joined in - goat, horse, cat - while Amper barked occasionally. The whole cacophony of sound intensified to an almost unbearable level, then slowly decreased until just one desperate sobbing woman remained, responded to by a single cat's outcry. Then silence.

²⁵ The real dogs. Regular audiences of Trafó know that there is no show when you don't hear the barks of the dogs at least once.

²⁶ This was recorded by inviting a dog named 'Amper', from the same dog park during a recording session. The stage was set up in the way it was during the performance, and we were at two points of the stage with the owner, calling Amper back and forth. While he was dutifully running around he often bumped into the chairs, creating a very realistic sound of the actual space. This was then spatialised around in the different speakers, trying to imitate the speed and spatial movement of the dog.

Part III. - The embodied - emotional listening

For this final section, I aimed to release the audience from the attention-demanding, often tense listening experience that had preceded it. I wanted to conclude the piece with a more musical segment, allowing listeners to immerse themselves in the growing intensity and emotionality of the sounds. This shift was designed to engage the audience on a more visceral, embodied level, providing a cathartic resolution to the complex auditory journey they had undergone.

From the silence, the sounds of ventilators turning on appeared one by one from all four sides, processed slightly to emphasize their tonal qualities. These sounds were accompanied by the actual feeling of moving air - as I remotely turned on four ventilators placed in the four corners of the room. Building the final, main musical piece from the sound of such an everyday and often sonically unpleasant object was a deliberate decision to highlight their musicality. Soon, this harmony of ventilators was joined by synthesized drone sounds and a tape loop melody²⁷, moving around in the speakers, creating a constant movement of all the layers, and symbolizing a melody that is growing out of the tiny details of the ventilator sounds. The composition peaked in a large, ceremonial crescendo, reaching the loudest part of the performance.²⁸

As these sounds slowly faded out and the ventilators were turned off, a far-away sound—the song *Llorando* from the pivotal and unsettling scene of *Mulholland Drive* (2001)—appeared from the ventilation shaft on the side of the stage, distorted by the metal wall of the shaft²⁹. This is a contextual 'overhearing' or reference both to Lynch and the analysis of the scene by Slavoj Žižek:

There is a short scene in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, which takes place in the theatre, where behind the microphone a woman is singing, then out of exhaustion or whatever, she drops down. Surprisingly, the singing goes on. Immediately afterwards, it is explained. It was a playback. But for that couple of seconds when we are confused, we confront this nightmarish dimension of an autonomous partial object. Suddenly we become aware of the traumatic dimension of the voice, the voice which

²⁷ To give an example of the highly detailed interconnectedness of the material: This melody was transformed for our customized announcement signal of Trafó, using sounds resembling the original. It could be heard at the beginning in the entrance announcements, and again from the prepared phone in the middle of the piece.

²⁸ [Recording](#) of the whole ventilator composition.

²⁹ [Recording](#) of the song.

freely floats around and is a terrifying presence, feared, the ultimate moment or object of anxiety which distorts reality. (Žižek & Fiennes, 2006)

In my version, the scene went in the opposite direction: Slowly, the recording also appeared in a more articulate form at the opposite side of the stage, and soon I also joined the singing from behind the sound desk—thus, the voice of the recording came alive, and the real emotionality of the voice appears with the live human presence, stripping off the distance of the modulated recording. After the long-held last note of the song, the recording and the singing stopped. I audibly went to the middle, opened the cassette player, and put in a cassette - this time, the real cassette repeated "This is the end" on a loop. Then I went to the second cassette player, put in a cassette which repeated "This is really the end," and left. Although the audience laughed at this joke, their perception was tricked so many times during the piece, that it still took 5-15 minutes³⁰ for everyone to take off their blindfolds and leave in the Lynchian red wash of lights.

³⁰ With two exceptions where audience members stayed for an additional 60-90 minutes. Initially, I interpreted this as extreme dedication, but later it became clear that they were foreign attendees at a Hungarian-speaking version. Unable to understand the double "The End" cues, and thoroughly confused about what was real or not, they didn't dare remove their blindfolds for an extended period. In one instance, a person listened through the entire stage breakdown while still blindfolded, believing it to be part of the performance. We hesitated to disturb her, respecting what appeared to be a deep state of listening.