TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES OF SPATIALITY IN PERFORMANCE

Dávid Somló

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—
Towards Emancipating the Audience's Attention

Acknowledgments

Abstract

This dissertation explores transdisciplinary approaches of spatiality in performance and other live arts, focusing on works centered on the audience's experience. Through analysis of the author's body of work and relevant contemporary practices, the research investigates how spatial composition can direct audience attention to their environment and relationalities within, enhancing presence and perception. The study proposes a set of creative-conceptual themes to offer fresh perspectives on the underlying intentions and mechanisms of these approaches. Special attention is given to works in public spaces, participatory modes, and the unique aspects of sound performativity in creating immersive experiences. By examining these emerging spatial practices, the research aims to contribute to the understanding and development of transdisciplinary approaches that, due to the complexity and holistic nature of the subject, often resist definitive categorization, while offering insights for both practitioners and theorists interested in this field of contemporary performance and arts.

Absztrakt

Ez a disszertáció a térbeliség transzdiszciplináris megközelítéseit vizsgálja az előadóművészetben és más élő művészeti ágakban, olyan művekre összpontosítva, amelyek középpontjában a közönség élménye áll. A szerző munkásságának és a releváns kortárs gyakorlatoknak az elemzésén keresztül a kutatás azt vizsgálja, hogy a térbeli kompozíció hogyan irányíthatja a közönség figyelmét környezetükre és az azon belüli kapcsolódásokra, fokozva a jelenlét érzését és az észlelést. A tanulmány kreatív-konceptuális fókuszok sorát javasolja, hogy friss perspektívákat kínáljon e transzdiszciplináris művek mögöttes szándékainak és mechanizmusainak megértéséhez. Kiemelt figyelmet kapnak a köztéri munkák, a participatív formák és a hangok performativitásának egyedi aspektusai az immerzív élmények megteremtésében. A térbeliséget középpontba helyező munkák vizsgálatával a kutatás kísérletet tesz olyan transzdiszciplináris megközelítések megértéséhez és előmozdításához, amelyek a téma összetettsége és holisztikus természete miatt gyakran ellenállnak a határozott kategorizálásnak.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. What?

Walking backwards following a white line; a mysterious bike tour in a half-abandoned factory complex; establishing intimate relationships with walls and other architectural landmarks; repetitively crossing lines with strangers while carrying loudspeakers; sitting blindfolded on the stage while sounds move around[1] – these are all simplified images of spatially focused transdisciplinary[2] pieces centered around audience experiences. In this dissertation, I aim to outline and contextualize this emerging field of work, highlight how spatiality can serve as one of its primary organizational principles, and situate my artistic practice within this context.

I place myself within the growing – though not yet precisely defined – group of transdisciplinary artists working at the intersection of post-dramatic theatre, contemporary dance, contemporary music, sound art, and fine arts, often integrating perspectives from social and cognitive sciences[3]. These artists aim to devise open-ended experiences around their audiences that closely interact with the surrounding socio-spatial reality and require active engagement from the receiver. As curator Melissa Bianca Amore notes: "The site of art has become the subject, object, and medium, shifting the traditional "viewing process" to an experience of space or a "situation" placed in space. The emphasis on "interactivity" and "inter-disciplinary aesthetics" has challenged expectations and reception of art" (2017). The enhanced attention, perception, and presence of one's surrounding physical-social space – states that are often induced by these works – frequently become the source of participation, interaction, and a sense of ownership over the experience, achieving what is essentially the *emancipation of the spectator*[4]. To extend Rancière's concept further, I propose that working closely with the experience of one's deepening attention itself is the process of transition towards the *emancipation of artists from creating spectacles*.

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1   In the same order: Johannes Bellinkx – *Reverse*, David Somlo – *Horizon*, David Helbich – *Scores for the Body, the Building and the Soul*, David Somlo – *Mandala*, several pieces such as David Somlo – *Overheard*, Benjamin Vandewalle – *Hear*, and Verity Standen – *Hug*. All to be discussed.

2   To provide a short definition: *"Transdisciplinarity occurs when two or more discipline perspectives transcend each other to form a new holistic approach. The outcome will be completely different from what one would expect from the addition of the parts. Transdisciplinarity results in a type of xenogenesis where output is created as a result of disciplines integrating to become something completely new."* (Caldwell, 2015)

3   In this liminal field, identifying and explaining 'what you do' is a constant struggle and requires elaborate circumlocution.

4   Jacques Rancière's concept of the "emancipation of the spectator" challenges the traditional view that spectators are passive receivers of art and meaning. Rancière believes true emancipation occurs when we recognize the equality of intelligence between creators and audiences, blurring the line between them. This idea promotes a more democratic and participatory approach to art, education, and social interaction, where everyone is seen as capable of thought and agency. (Rancière, 2011)

Moving beyond the traditional passive audience, active performer relationship – which often persists even in relatively recent site-specific theatre traditions[5] – this approach frequently shifts the creative process's focus and starting point from narrative, intellectual, and emotional elements to the phenomenological, sensorial, and participatory aspects of the immediate present. While these approaches maintain a dialogue with traditional artistic disciplines – often leaning towards one of them – I argue that they transcend conventional compositional[6] focuses and creative approaches. I propose that spatial focus can be one of the leading compositional aspects in these works, centered on heightening and altering the audience's perception of their relationality to their surroundings. Therefore, while the analyzed pieces – natural to this holistic field – vary widely in form, I aim to deconstruct their compositional intentions into elements related to broadly understood spatial organization and interaction. By articulating these compositional focuses, approaches, and aspects primarily from an artist's perspective and secondarily from a theoretical standpoint, this research aims to take a step toward clarifying the creative endeavors in this field.

Over the past decade, beginning with my master's studies at Goldsmiths College[7], I have developed nearly two dozen projects of various scales, almost exclusively within this domain. These creations evolved in close relation to one another, often growing out of each other[8], forming a coherent artistic and compositional language centered on spatiality, sound, and interactions combined with forms of post-dramatic theatre and postmodern dance. As I was employing composition techniques either borrowed from other disciplines[9] or derived through experimentation and trial and error, I decided to engage in practice-led research, allowing my research and artistic practice to function as a feedback loop. Shortly after embarking on this research, during the creation of 'Drift'

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5   See most examples in Mike Pearson's 'Site-specific Performance' (2010)

6   In composition I simply mean the conscious organization of elements and materials in an artistic process.

7   The antecedent of this research was my thesis and masterworks created for my Creative Practice MMus at Goldsmiths College (2015). The thesis, 'This (space) is the place', contained a detailed analysis of three of my works connected by their focus on various uses of spatiality: Through my solo guitar album ***Movement***, I explored foregrounding spatial sounds in recorded music. The participatory performance *The Space Is In Between Us* examined active audience engagement with space and spatial organization as an improvisational starting point. The sound choreography *Length of a Distance* used distinct qualities of public spaces to create compositions. Given their relevance, I will include analyses of the latter two works in this dissertation.

8   As Belgian artist Benjamin Vandewalle – whom I will mention frequently – phrased his creative growth process in our conversation, *"Each piece has the embryo of a next one"*.

9   My interdisciplinary background has shaped a holistic compositional approach, synthesizing knowledge from experimental composition, sound art, postmodern dance, and conceptual art, with an incorporated perspective from the social sciences – as my first degree is in Sociology.

– one of the masterworks in this study[10] – I encountered a moment of doubt about my choreographic skills. However, I soon realized my underlying, yet unarticulated intention: rather than choreographing movement to create a visually enthralling dance piece, *I am choreographing the audience's attention through moving sounds and bodies in relation to the physical and social space surrounding them*. This revelation reframed my perspective on the related compositional processes and provided a key to analyzing and integrating my body of work with relevant theories and practices from other disciplines.

Exploring the territories where sound[11], space, and performance intersect, or in other words, the performativity of spatial sound is one of the central focuses of my work. I regard this aspect as one of my *specialist* areas of knowledge, embedded within my broader *generalist*[12] approach that covers a wide range of subjects at a foundational level. This artistic focus aligns with the recent directions of the emergence of sound from its supporting role. As Czech curator Petr Dlouhý notes this process: "Sound recently underwent a significant emancipation and now flourishes as a medium of expression, prioritizing self-definition and identification through its activity in the frame of (live) performance art" (2018). As I see, in this emancipation the sound's relational–spatial dimension has a prominent role. Renowned sound theoretician Brandon LaBelle emphasizes the importance of this aspect: "It is my view that sound's relational condition can be traced through modes of spatiality, for sound and space in particular have a dynamic relationship. This no doubt stands at the core of the very practice of sound art—the activation of the existing relation between sound and space." (2015, p. ix) Hence, I believe that shifting the question from *What is that sound?* to *Where does it come from?* and *What does it imply if it comes from there?* is crucial in creating performativity with sounds.

To conclude the starting point of this research: I propose that spatiality can be one of the leading compositional aspects of transdisciplinary artistic works, capable of directing the audience's attention to the here and now, enhancing their physical presence and perception. By analyzing the intentions, approaches, aspects, and compositional decisions of these pieces, I aim to reveal the complexity and detail of these often seemingly simple works.

10   The other one is *Overheard.*
11   Contrary to the traditional view that places music above sound, I consider music to be part of the broader category of all auditory experiences – collectively called sounds – not dealing with the rather outdated question of ‚What is music?'.
12   The concept of specialists and generalists describes two distinct approaches to knowledge and skill development. Specialists focus intensely on a narrow field, becoming experts in a specific area. Generalists, on the other hand, cultivate a broad range of knowledge across various domains, prioritizing versatility over depth in any single subject.

From the perspective of a practitioner, I analyze my own practice and compare it with emerging approaches in the field. This analysis is contextualized alongside a broad range of established and contemporary theoretical works from various spatially-related disciplines. Acknowledging the fluid, interconnected nature of spatial compositional approaches, with special attention to the performativity of sound, I hope to expand our understanding of the field of spatial composition in contemporary artistic practices. I approach this analysis with a broad range of readers in mind, aiming to bridge specialized knowledge with wider accessibility, rather than focusing solely on experts in a particular field.

1.2. Why?

In what follows, I delve into the motivations driving various aspects of this research. My artistic intentions align closely with the ideas of Edward T. Hall, a pioneer in studying human experience of distance:

> In writing about my research on people's use of space, the space that they maintain among themselves and their fellows, (...) my purpose is to bring to awareness what has been taken for granted. By this means, I hope to increase self-knowledge and decrease alienation. In sum, to help introduce people to themselves. (Hall, 1966, p. ix-x)

I believe that in our increasingly alienated world, distanced from physical presence and refined attention, the activation of these elements holds great importance. This sentiment is also articulated in the artistic and philosophical discourse and may be the main reason for the growing prevalence of spatially-related performance and art. Miwon Kwon argues that, "The breakdown of spatial experience in both perceptual and cognitive registers – being lost, disoriented, alienated, feeling out of place(...) – is the cultural symptom of late capitalism's political and social reality." (Kwon, 2004, p. 34-35) In response to these phenomena, Nicolas Bourriaud suggests that relational practices aim "at the formal constructions of space-time entities that may be able to elude alienation, the division of labor, the commodification of space and the reification of life." (Bourriaud, 2004, p.48) Marxist geographer, David Harvey describes the modern condensation of temporal and spatial distances with the notion of 'time-space compression' (Harvey, 1989). By paraphrasing this concept, the intention to create such works can be seen as an attempt at 'time-space decompression'.

The approach of placing the audience's attention and presence at the center aims to focus on universal – yet also very personal – human experiences, rather than contextual and symbolic content whose interpretation often creates difficulties for inexperienced audiences. I believe that the conscious demystification of artistic processes and situations is a major step towards the integration of virtually any audience, regardless of age, education, experience, or social status. Curator and academic Kersten Glandien concludes this artistic direction in the broader context of sound art:

> Art shifts here "from creation to discovery" (Mersch 2002, 258) – both in execution and conception – leaving it up to the encounterers what to do with the situation presented and how to engage with it: "passively or actively according to [their] talents for 'engagement'." (Kaprow 2003, 11) Thus art and life truly fuse, since the kind of experience the encounterer draws from a situation depends on the particular sensorial complex he or she brings to it. In consequence, autonomous high art conventions, based on genre perception and expertise, no longer have traction, and are replaced by models that are experiential. Artists do not pass on messages that have to be deciphered by their audiences, but rather facilitate experiences, which encounterers make their own by mobilizing sensibilities developed over the span of their lives and in relation to their specific cultural circumstances. (Glandien, 2012)

Or as street artists Bongo Mike and Extremely Frank Jeremy aptly stated in their 1983 leaflet 'An Artistic Disturbance of Peace', "A situation artist comes down from the pedestal of 'high art' and respects both educated and uneducated audiences."

The highly frequent use of walking as an artistic form is one of the prime examples of this intention. As walking-art theorist Elena Biserna observes,

> Walking is not a traditional artistic technique. For most, it is an action that does not require any virtuosity. Its centrality in the arts is deeply linked to the fact that it generates a multiplicity of relationships, at once phenomenological, perceptive, physical, cultural, social, and political. (...) It leads artists – materially and symbolically – to abandon the contexts of production and presentation of art and to invest instead in everyday reality and spaces. (Biserna, 2022, p.6)

In this regard, working with sound holds a special and not immediately apparent position, with deeper implications of its own. In our current era, when the auditory sense is overwhelmed by the oversaturated acoustic fields of interconnected urban life, people often need to either diminish their attention to the sounds around them or retreat into

their own sonic space via earplugs or headphones – thus practically nullifying spatial hearing. With the combination of omnipresent visual dominance and information overload, this represents a great loss of what listening and sounds can offer to the human experience. As fellow Swiss artist Dimitri de Perrot phrased the importance of listening in his artist statement:

> "Listening brings people together and is built on empathy. Listening needs time. Given someone or something time means giving them space – space in one's own perception, in one's own space. It is the essence of an encounter, discovery and the potential for understanding and change." (De Perrot)

And beautifully put by opera director Peter Sellars,

> "The first thing you could offer a human being is (...) to say you have my complete attention, I am listening. This quality of listening is liberatory, is the first step in healing. And (...) what you offer back, what the resonance is that allows someone's words and feelings to feel not alone, (...) but, in fact, resonating in the world that has resonance with another human being (...). In fact, none of us ever were alone, which is what sound is about." (2018)

But to achieve this depth of listening experience, one needs conscious attention and practice, which has to be introduced or re-introduced into public knowledge. As Sellars points out, the "practice of acute, deep listening, helps you recognizing that you can shift reality through deep listening and that, in fact you're not, most of your life, really perceiving sound in its depth, its power and its immediacy" (2018). In artistic endeavors aimed at achieving the state of 'deep listening', I argue that the enhanced spatiality of sound can be one of the most important tools.[13] Rooted in our everyday, embodied experience of listening, spatially articulated sounds can organically intertwine constructed and existing sonic elements, resulting in a complex connection to our surrounding reality both within and beyond the auditory realm.

Finally, I would like to address the potential pedagogical and theoretical implications underlying this dissertation's aim. In my understanding, both transdisciplinarity and spatially oriented practice inherently demand a holistic and generalist approach. They form a complex interplay of diverse phenomena, ranging from somatic perception to

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13   Anecdote: As a small child, during the period when I was discovering my strengths and weaknesses as part of my identity construction, I remember telling my mum after listening to a busy street while carefully moving my head from left to right: "I think I'm really good at figuring out where sounds are coming from."

social context, where elements from various disciplines blend into a non-hierarchical and inseparable composition in service of the imagined experience. Although these artistic approaches began to emerge in the latter half of the 20th century, there remains – as far as I can discern – a scarcity of substantial analysis and proposed compositional methodologies of these creative processes[14]. While this dissertation does not offer a comprehensive compilation of compositional techniques or principles, nor does it provide a coherent theoretical framework, it may contribute to articulating an approach that, due to its complexity and holistic nature, often defies definitive categorization and could benefit from developing its methodological foundations.

1.3. How?

> Since space relates to everything, it is inevitable that this book would cross disciplinary lines. (Hall, 1966, p.ix)

An initial aim of this research was to establish a system or model within which my body of work, compositional decisions, and focuses could be analyzed, compared, and contextualized. For the major part of this process, I aimed at a precise, multi-layered categorization of spatial composition techniques, but the inherently relational and holistic nature of this material resisted rigid classification. Instead, what emerged was a series of creative directions and focuses, serving as reference points for thinking about spatial composition in an artistic context, compiled into four conceptual themes:

The section **Performing what is already there** focuses on works that aim to highlight various aspects of the space where they are performed. The chapter **Intervening in the usual flow of things** discusses pieces that manipulate the various dynamics of social spaces in order to highlight their specificities. The chapter **Spatial relationalities as the core of participation** concentrates on various modes and levels of audience participation that revolve around some sense of spatial relationalities. The last chapter **The unique aspects of spatial sound performativity** aims to reveal certain aspects of spatial sound in performative contexts that are unique to the medium.

These specific themes were chosen for two reasons: First, I was searching for thematic focuses that aligned with contemporary trends and allowed me to contextualize my

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14   Most canonized scholars of spatiality in performing arts (such as Richard Schechner, Gay McAuley, Mike Pearson, Fiona Wilkie, and Dorita Hannah) stem from a field of performance that, from my perspective, remains closer to traditional theatre with its actors and directors. Nonetheless within the broader transdisciplinary context I aim to use, their analyses are often useful and relevant.

own work in the most meaningful and diverse way, while transcending simple comparisons of pieces that look similar from a distance, but differ significantly in their creation and experience (e.g., *Mandala* and *Drift*). Second, I was trying to form these themes in a way that could connect previously unconnected dots in practice and theory, and could make steps towards new perspectives in understanding this field of work.

It's important to note that these compositional focuses are non-exclusive, interrelated, and exist in parallel. A single piece of work often combines multiple elements from various categories interacting with each other, creating a complex interplay of spatial experiences. The weight or prominence of each category may vary depending on the specific work or context.

I am aware that most of these categories and even subcategories included could merit their own thesis or doctoral study. But within the limitations of this practice-based research, I'll explore each topic only to the extent necessary for understanding, solidifying concepts through examples and comparisons, sacrificing detail for scope.

Throughout the discussion, I will refer to a wide variety of theoretical concepts, which is less due to an overdone effort to prove extensive theoretical scope, but rather authentically demonstrates my generalist, transdisciplinary thinking process when working with such a complex topic as space. I tend to work with many small inspirations and ideas, trying to organize them into a coherent artistic language and set of outcomes. By contextualizing the research through relevant artistic works, theory from spatially-related art forms, and insights from fields like sociology, philosophy, architecture and human geography, among others, I aim to find common threads connecting these diverse elements.

In presenting examples, I focus primarily on artists working in the contemporary field I aim to outline and identify with[15], with a few early examples of artists who were pioneering in this approach (e.g., Max Neuhaus), while also incorporating a few examples of more traditional viewer-spectacle differentiation where spatiality is a dominant organizational force to show broader applicabilities of the concepts. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of spatial composition across contemporary practices. As audience experience is central to the discussion, I will heavily use the reviews of the analyzed pieces taken as subjective accounts, which is often the perspective of these writings.

15   One group I strongly relate to is the public space artist platform organization SOAP – 'Space Oriented Artistic Practices' from Maastricht, whose artists such as Johannes Bellinkx, Rita Hoofwijk, Salomé Mooij and Benjamin Vandewalle will often be mentioned in the discussion.

An inspiring aspect of this research has been engaging in conversations with quite a few of the referenced artists[16] about their spatial compositional approaches and my research direction. Their positive responses and eagerness to engage underscored the relevance of these directions and the necessity of exploring this topic in depth. While these conversations do not form the main methodological base, I will refer to these conversations throughout the discussion.

In each chapter, I analyze case studies of my work in detail, driven by my intimate knowledge of the intentions and details behind each piece and the fact that my research has been largely focused on developing and refining these works. This in-depth examinations provide thorough case studies for the application and evolution of the spatial compositional concepts discussed.

I will conclude this introduction with a practical note on reading the dissertation: While selecting the possible examples, it quickly became clear to me that most of them are hard to capture in photos, but they are quickly understandable to a great extent by watching short video excerpts. Hence, I'll refrain from illustrating the various examples with static images; instead, I have linked all of them to a video or, in cases of complex documentation, to the respective website, which I suggest the reader use as an accompaniment to the text.

16   Namely: David Heblich, Amber Meulenijzer, Máté Mészáros, Dimitri De Perrot, Davide Tidoni, Benjamin Vandewalle, and Franziska Windisch.

2. ORIENTATION

↓ Dávid Somló – Mandala
at the Hungarian Holy Land Church

Before proceeding, I will briefly discuss my perspective on some key terms and concepts to establish a comprehensive foundation for the main discussion.

2.1. Space / Spatial / Situation

> To be a creature that can have thoughts, then, and that can have experience of a world, is not merely to be a creature located in a physically extended space, but rather to be a creature that finds itself always located within a complex but unitary place that encompasses the creature itself, other creatures, and a multiplicity of objects and environmental features. (Malpas, 1999, 157)

Space can be defined and interpreted in many different ways according to one's chosen discipline and perspective. In line with the thought of Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas, in my creative and conceptual thinking, I use 'space' and 'spatial' as compressed terms, implying a complex set of relationships between the one who experiences and their social and physical surroundings. Connecting to this perspective, I find *situation* – an increasingly frequent term in the arts – effectively condenses this complexity, referring to the sum of the often constructed relationships existing within an event where people are present. Even in its dictionary definition, *situation* is "the way in which something is placed in relation to its surroundings" or a "relative position or combination of circumstances at a certain moment" (Merriam-Webster). I consider space as where we come together, interwoven within the realms of the physical and the social, experiencing the situation of that place in the present moment.

To highlight different perspectives, spaces can be placed on scales of various dichotomies, such as physical–social, environmental–built, private–public, each offering a different lens through which one can understand and compose the spatial relationships of a performance. However, these categorizations are most often non-exclusive and highly specific from space to space, therefore they are more useful as ways of communicating directions rather than thinking of them as terms with a precise meaning. During our conversation, Italian artist Davide Tidoni, many of whose works are playful participatory investigations of urban sonic architecture, said in this regard: "I don't really use this word, public space. Somehow space is just space. And then there are different degrees of public and private." From the discussed pieces that follow, numerous are typically envisioned and devised to be played outside the black box or white cube. In my view, however, this is not a necessary attribute of spatial arts, merely a consequence of artistic interests aimed at exploring various interactions and environments.

2.2. Attention / Experience / Reality

> Space is no longer (...) a network of relations between objects such as would
> be seen by a witness (...) It is, rather, a space reckoned starting from me as
> the zero point or degree zero of spatiality. I do not see it according to its ex-
> terior envelope, I live in it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all the
> world is all around me, not in front of me. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 73)

Resonating with the reflection of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, one of the pioneers of pheno-
menology, when discussing attention, I primarily refer to the attention of the audience
members in relation to what surrounds them, whose focus is central in the discussed cre-
ative approaches. In relation to my practice, I often think of Peter Brook's famous state-
ment, that "A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him,
and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre" (Brook, 1968/1996, p.7). I can connect
to this statement not just because of how little (spatial) action he considers is necessary to
make theatre, but because of the idea that *attention itself is creating theatre*. I consider the
guidance of this attention, is essentially my main tool in making broadly understood theatre.

I argue that it is possible to gradually learn and acknowledge the various processes of
how attention and perception work, which understanding forms the basis for compos-
ing with these elements. By developing an accumulated knowledge of these aspects,
one can become increasingly efficient in *imagining experiences* created for the audi-
ence, which is, in my perspective, potentially one of the most important skills in work-
ing within this field of interest. There is often a debate about the possible extent of this
aspect, arguing that subjective experience is unique. As sound installation pioneer Max
Neuhaus, who was extremely meticulous about the spatial situations he created with
sound, described his intention regarding this dimension:

> "I am not interested in knowing what they are experiencing. In a way it is none
> of my business. I am concerned with the catalyst, the initiator; their individual
> pathways are very private, their own. I think that it is this, the individual's pro-
> cess of experience in a work of art, that artists try to initiate." (1994)

While I acknowledge the uniqueness of subjective individual interpretations, in my prac-
tice the starting point of a new piece is almost always a specific envisioned experience
I would like to share with the audience, and I build my work around this vision. The key
might be that there exist more universal modes of perceiving and relating to our sur-
roundings, which are imaginable and guidable, and there is the accumulated personal
knowledge and identity that then shapes the process of subjective experience.

But attention itself is not a simple, singular cognitive process. It constantly moves between the external and the internal, being voluntary or involuntary, shifting among various levels of focality and intensity. Conceptual artist and theoretician Robert Morris vividly describes this complexity regarding the experience of space:

> Real space is not experienced except in real time. The body is in motion, the eyes make endless movements at varying focal distances fixing on innumerable static or moving images. (…) Language, memory, reflection and fantasy may or may not accompany the experience. Shift to recall the spatial experience: objects and static views flash into the mind's eye. (…) Shift the focus from the exterior environment to that of the self in a spatial situation, and a parallel, qualitative break in experience between the real time 'I' and the reconstituting 'me' prevails. (1978, p. 70)

Attention can also have various qualities, ranging from a heightened, sharp, and focused state of awareness to a broader, softer, and more contemplative mode. Influential thinker Jacques Rancière discusses Guy Debord's negative connotations of contemplation in relation to spectacles, which for him is the "contemplation of the appearance separated from its truth; it is the spectacle of the suffering produced by that separation. (…) What human beings contemplate in the spectacle is the activity they have been robbed of; it is their own essence become alien" (2011, p. 7). Rancière's answer to this separation "is a theatre without spectators, where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs" (2011, p.4). I argue that now, when most people are suffering from a degree of screen and stimulus dependence, one important aspect of this active participation is the rediscovery of dedicated, deep attention, and our ability to contemplate in the present space and time. David Helbich, one of the most referenced artists in this dissertation, paraphrases this aspect of his interactive works as *'intro-active'*.

Finally, it might be useful to clarify what the word "reality" means in this context, without being overly philosophical. When I refer to our surrounding reality, I mean a subjective experience – whatever each individual interprets it to be at that moment, with their overlapping and separate fields of perception. I see it as a dynamic, constantly changing experience, which profoundly transforms with one's deepening attention – as it unfolds into deeper layers of perception and reflection, previously unknown details of reality[17] are uncovered moment after moment. As Benjamin Vanderwalle articulates

17	Carlos Castaneda, whose vivid account of his apprenticeship with a Mexican Yaqui Indian shaman Don Juan deeply inspired me, describes his mind-altering experiences that unveiled previously unimaginable layers of perception as "non-ordinary reality". (1968)

this process, "you have that responsibility or that potential to change that by just changing the way you position yourself towards that reality" (2019). This possible shift is also highlighted in relation to listening by Pauline Oliveros: "Quantum listening is (...) listening for the least differences possible to perceive (...) One focuses to a point and changes that point by listening." (2022, p. 30)

2.3. Phenomenology of the spatial experience

"First, phenomenology is a philosophy of presence." (Ihde, 2007, p. 45)

Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy that focuses on the study of consciousness and the structures of experience. It seeks to understand how individuals perceive and make sense of the world around them by exploring the direct, first-person experiences of phenomena. Rather than relying on abstract theories, phenomenology emphasizes describing and analyzing these experiences as they are lived, aiming to uncover the underlying essences of various aspects of reality. Hence, using the phenomenological perspective in the analysis of works that is centered around the audience's attention and subjective experience is an obvious choice.

I believe that most artists in this field are working with phenomenology without knowing or using it as a reference. As Pierre Schaeffer, one of the founders of sound art, noted, "For years, we have time and again been doing phenomenology without realizing it, which is better, all things considered, than talking about phenomenology without doing it." (2017, p.206) In my opinion, artists who aim to effectively create works exploring attention and presence need the skill of phenomenological reduction or 'epoché' – a process that involves systematically setting aside all preconceived beliefs and assumptions to reveal the essence of a particular experience. If one can break down the phenomenon into essential components, that can form the foundation for creatively reorganizing these elements in a way that connects with their audience. As this practice of phenomenological reflection closely aligns with the processes of meditation,[18] it is not surprising that many artists working in this direction cite their meditative practices, most often Buddhism,[19] as an inspiration.

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[18]   Hence, the comparison or merging of the two practices is an existing field of study. For example, see Lusthaus, D. (2003). Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogacara Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-shih Lun. Routledge.

[19]   Examples range from classic figures such as John Cage and Eliane Radigue, to contemporary practitioners like Benjamin Vandewalle and myself. Cage studied Zen, Radigue Tibetan Buddhism, Vandewalle mentioned his Vipassana practice as an important inspiration, and I attribute many of my approaches to my Soto Zen practice.

Performative situations that encourage and give space to a highly focused attention or contemplation to unfold are able to turn this attention not only towards our surroundings, but towards the *proccesses of attention itself* [20]. As (sound) phenomenologist Don Ihde describes this aspect of the highly conscious attention, "Reflection is, in a sense, an experience of experience" (2007, p. 57). With the enhanced ability of detailed perception of phenomena often also comes the revelation of the revelation: *I've noticed things that I haven't noticed before*. I have realized that by creating space for such mental processes, artists are essentially able to facilitate experiences that invoke phenomenological work from their audience as well. The subsequent effect of these processes can be the altered relation to one's everyday experiences. As Ihde phrases, "Breaking with the easy familiarity of experience, deliberately putting it at a distance, leads to a return of enriched significance again "familiar", but also subtly changed. Phenomenology allows us to belong to our experience again but hopefully in a more profound way"[21] (2007, p. 18). This aspect can be traced in many of the subjective accounts of the discussed pieces. For instance, a review of Dimitri De Perrot's sound performance *Niemendsland* (2021) states: "The more one engages with the sounds, it seems, the greater the gain in insight. Even a toilet flush can be fascinating when viewed from a new perspective." (Walpen, 2021)

2.4. Spatial – Relational composition / Site-specific; Site-generic

> The main spatial questions for site-specific performance are: How does it disperse itself within and in relation to a particular architecture or environment? How is the space delineated and formalized and how does this affect the type, nature and quality of the activity and its reception? Where is the audience positioned, and what viewpoints or modes of apprehension are thus conspired? (Pearson, 2004, p.156)

> The point of departure for all site-specific artistic practices is a knowledge based on an investigative approach of precisely those pre-conditions (visible and nonvisible) that transform, shape and establish the identity of a place, as well as on the elaboration of artistic strategies that relate to the specificities of the place. (Stjerna, 2011)

20   This is also an important meditational focus in Eastern practices.
21   Again a similarity with Buddhist teachings: *"Before a man studies Zen, to him mountains are mountains and waters are waters; after he gets an insight into the truth of Zen through the instruction of a good master, mountains to him are not mountains and waters are not waters; but after this when he really attains to the abode of rest, mountains are once more mountains and waters are waters."* in D. T. Suzuki, Essays in Zen Buddhism (1926)

As evident from the quotes of theatre maker and theoretician Mike Pearson and sound artist and researcher Åsa Helena Stjerna, the primary creative and compositional task for artists with a spatial focus is to understand, reveal, and relate to the specificities of the space they are working with – a process I term *'cracking the space'*. The creative approach of the modes of relationality can vary in form and level of interaction. It may involve giving space to certain specific phenomena through focusing the mode of observation; guiding perception by 'pointing' at elements in a choreographed manner; or reacting to occurrences within a space through adaptation or confrontation.

The degree to which a space's aspects and specificities are revealed and effectively translated into an experience for the audience can directly influence their sense of presence and spatial awareness. When artists skillfully unveil the nuances of a space, it deepens the audience's connection to their surroundings. In contrast, if obvious and impactful aspects of the space remain unaddressed or are not handled with enough sensitivity, it can cause the feeling of disharmony and lead to dissatisfaction, potentially disrupting the audience's immersion in the experience.

One important decision in the creation of these works is the level of *specificity* they are related to a given site. Fiona Wilkie introduced the terms "site-specific" and "site-generic" to describe how movable site-specific works are (2002), with this scale indicating how much a piece uses elements unique to a particular location. If the specific elements are highly dominant in the composition, moving the piece to a different site would essentially dismantle its core, making such relocation impossible. On the site-generic side, there are pieces that are more responsive to a certain type of space (foot tunnels, shopping malls, empty factories etc.), but when moved, site-specific elements are introduced. There are also 'multi-site-specific' pieces which, besides their basic premises and recurring performative material, intentionally leave space to be highly connected to the architectural and environmental specificities when restaged. An exciting example of this approach is Doris Uhlich's *Habitat* (2017), which is a mass performance of naked bodies, always performed in a highly site-specific way, often in public spaces such as a shopping center, an industrial building or a post-industrial brownfield.

2.5. Frameworks of engagement / Trust

Although it can be argued that every reception of art requires an active audience, I believe that a markedly different level of engaged attention is necessary to fully experience an episode of *Columbo* versus an extremely subtle sound installation. A common thread among the discussed works is that they demand highly active attention and

engagement – as one might anticipate from what preceded. In my view, it is predominantly the artist's responsibility to invoke this level of engagement, as most audiences do want to be taken on a journey towards something new. Thus, the effectiveness of the experience depends on the framework the artist creates for their piece to be experienced. The guidance – either explicit or implicit – that the audience receives on how to experience a piece in the most ideal way must be consciously conceived and constructed. In the best cases, this serves as a shortcut to engage with the work. As Dimitri De Perrot put in our conversation,

> This leads me to consider how to bring the audience into the moment, enabling them to listen attentively. What does this require? What steps are necessary? From my own experience, I know that my ability to be present at a concert or show depends on how relaxed and well I feel. Usually, we are preoccupied with various thoughts. (De Perrot)

Max Neuhaus calls this guidance towards the ideal state of reception the *entrance* to a work:

> I often make a sound which is almost plausible within its context when you first encounter it. The point where a person realizes that it is not plausible is when he jumps into the piece; he's swimming on his own from then on. It is a way of working which I use often in the place pieces; It is usually the way I build the entrance to the work. I call it the entrance, because if you do not go through this refocusing you do not get through to the work. (1994)

I often create this 'entrance' with written or spoken instructions (such as the house rules of the sound performance series *Listening Club*[22] or the listening suggestions of the sound installation *Slow Steps Have Ears*), inspirational texts (such as the inspiration cards for *Listening Club*, or the visual poem placed at the entrance of the tunnel of *Length of a Distance*[23]) as well as with the careful set-up of a space, which can often be suggestive in itself. The atmosphere and arrangement of the space that welcomed audiences at *Listening Club* was described by reviewer Viktoria Beličáková:

22   *Listening Club* (2018-2023) was a sound performance series that explored the boundaries of listening in the plain, empty space of Trafó House's studio stage. It served as a research playground to experiment with ideas of both spatiality and performativity, many of which later appeared in *Overheard*, which I see as a 'feature-length' version of *Listening Club*. Many of the techniques and elements were developed during the series, with a very similar approach, setup of sound sources, and audience organization. Therefore, I didn't discuss the series separately and also used some of its reviews in the discussion of *Overheard*.
23   All these examples are in the appendix.

People enter the room in silence. All of them barefoot, they carefully navigate through the labyrinth of chairs which are spread all over the space. No conversation, no single voice can be heard, only light steps on black rubber floor. The room is immersed in darkness, merely lit by few arranged lamps. (...) The whole place is designated for the audience. People are finding their seats and after a little thought they almost unanimously close their eyes, let their hands rest, and their whole body become still and quiet. (2018)

Finally, an important question in the engagement of experience-based pieces is that of trust: trust in the artist, that they have something to offer, that there is an experience to be had if one immerses oneself in the work. Sander Janssens emphasizes this aspect regarding Johannes Bellinkx's *Reverse*, where one experiences their surroundings by walking backwards for more than an hour. "In addition to perspective, Reverse is largely about trust. (...) Trusting in new patterns, daring to distinguish yourself from the whole, surrendering to the unknown." (2018) The depth of this surrender, which largely influences the depth of the experience, is often directly proportional to the trust the artist can gain. This reveals the direct connection in the relationship between artists and their audiences that is often characteristic of this field of work.

Here the introduction and the overview of my theoretical perspective finish, and I move on to the discussion of the four main compositional-creative themes.

3. PERFORMING WHAT IS ALREADY THERE

↓ Graeme Miller: Track

In *The Dematerialization of Art* (1968), Lucy Lippard and John Chandler concluded: "We still do not know how much less "nothing" can be. Has an ultimate zero point been arrived at with black paintings, white paintings, light beams, transparent film, silent concerts, invisible sculpture, or any of the other projects mentioned above?" (p. 36). One direction in today's artistic practices might not be doing "nothing," but letting the always immensely complex surroundings do a big part of the job of performing. The emphasis in the artist's task is to point around in this surrounding in a highly specific way, thus choreographing the attention of the audience.

As architect Bernard Tschumi defines, one function of performance art is to foreground "the mechanics of perception of a distinct space." (Tschumi, 1994, p. 6) Performance theoretician Richard Schechner phrases this often esoteric process as "Articulating a space means letting the space have its say. Looking at a space and exploring it not as a means of doing what you want to do in it, but of uncovering what the space is, how it is constructed, what its various rhythms are. Maybe staying still in it, as in the spaces of some cathedrals" (Schechner, 1973, p.12). The reintroduction of this experience is more urgent than ever, leading more artists to adopt a relational approach to *what is already there* as their starting point for creation. Belgian artist Benjamin Vandewalle emphasizes this approach regarding working in public space: "It's very interesting to not create a new reality in the theater, but to (…) create a new world, a new piece just by simply changing the way we look at that" (2019).

Often, the mere tension of possible interaction, yet unknown in its form, can spark a hyper-sensitivity in people towards their surroundings. I will never forget the experience at the beginning of Hello Earth!'s one-to-one, site-specific promenade performance *Tomorrow everything will be different* (2010) in Budapest, where I was sent to one of the city's most hectic transitional squares until further instructions. Within seconds, the entire Blaha Lujza square felt like a hyper-real movie set, with anyone potentially being a performer. The next five minutes – before the actual performer arrived – was a fundamental, core moment in my journey towards working with perception and experience-based work. A similarly heightened experience can be traced in Maxine Proctor's account of Tino Sehgal's three-piece exhibition at the Remai Modern Museum, Canada: "As I entered the Remai Modern, I was hyper-aware of the other bodies moving around the space, unsure of the distinction between audience members and players in the exhibition. It surprised me how different I felt in the museum space, anxiously wondering if or when I would be invited into a situation." (2023) Another example is Anh Vo's observation of Maria Hassabi's minimalist

exhibition performance *PLASTIC*[24] (2016) at MoMA, New York: "Forcing the spectators to re-think the way they interact with the Museum's architecture and its living environment, this uncanny interaction made them hyper-aware of the surroundings and of their own presence within the here and now." (2017)

In the following, I will propose three creative focuses of this relational direction: First, I will discuss the possibilities of somatic relationalities to architecture. Then, I will explore various ways of choreographing visual perspective. Finally, I will examine approaches that aim to reveal sound-related attributes of a given space.

3.1. Body vs. Architecture

As architect Bernard Tschumi famously stated, "There is no architecture without event, without program, without violence" (1994, p. xx). To bring forth these aspects of architecture, one creative approach is through creating relationalities between one's body and the architecture. A recent philosophical perspective that is rooted in this relationality is *somaesthetics*[25], which is an interdisciplinary field developed by Richard Shusterman that focuses on the study of bodily perception, performance, and experience. This approach considers how our physical presence and movement within a space shape our understanding and appreciation of architecture. It goes beyond visual aesthetics to include tactile sensations, proprioception (awareness of body position), and kinesthetic experiences. As Shusterman describes the function of this bodily awareness, "If architecture is the articulation of space for the purposes of enhancing our living, dwelling, and experience, then the soma provides the most basic tool for all spatial articulation by constituting the point from which space can be seen and articulated." (2009, p. 288)

3.1.1. Tactile

To begin, I will discuss the high-proximity or tactile dimension, which involves more static interactions and sensory engagements with architectural elements. An early precursor of this approach is Valie Export's **Body Configurations** series, a collection of performance art and photographic works with a strong feminist implication, created in the early 1970s. In this series, Export explores the relationship between the female body and architectural spaces by positioning herself in various urban and natural environments, often contorting her body to conform to or contrast with the surrounding

24   More at the subchapter *Zones of performative presence.*
25   Coined by Shusterman in the late 1990's by combining 'soma', meaning 'body' and aesthetics.

structures. "In this way, her body questioned not only quotidian relations between stone and flesh, but the ways our spaces script us and become us as mutual constructions" (Schneider, 2017, p. 38)

Partly inspired from Export's work, David Helbich's participatory *Scores for the Body, the Building and the Soul* (2013) features a series of instructional scores designed for self-performance in and around architectural landmarks. Each score is specifically adapted to its location, inviting participants to explore their connection with the environment through bodily engagement and sensations. The scores vary in complexity and scope, from simple movements and gestures to more elaborate interactions, all aimed at enhancing the participant's awareness of their surroundings and their own physical presence within it. Although the experience of this participation is rather 'intro-active' – in Helbich's phrasing –, for the observer these gestures can be seen as performative and can effectively question the accustomed relationship between body and architecture. Performance theorist Rebecca Schneider notes this aspect: "Whether public or private, the insertion of the body into the space suggests the making of public space, and possibly the theatrical making of public space, by virtue of performance." (2017, p. 39)

A formally similar, but more virtuosic and spectacular version of this approach is Willi Dorner's site-specific, public space performance hit *Bodies In Urban Spaces* (2007). During this visually catchy piece, a set of a dozen local performers in colorful clothes position themselves in abstract and absurd bodily compositions in reaction to specific urban architectural spots. The performers run from spot to spot, while the audience catches up with them and has a minute of contemplation of the configuration before the performers break the composition and move on. While – in my experience – the piece does not go beyond light entertainment, it effectively demonstrates how differently architecture can be experienced through the body, which indeed results in a shift of perception in the observer.

In the approach of dance duo *Aguyoshi* on the same topic, the sheer quantity of creative variations is what can be seen as virtuosic. The duo creates playful site-specific microperformance videos that highlight the overlooked formal attributes of public space objects and architectures. This series of their impromptu outdoor sessions can be viewed as satisfying miniatures of spatial-relational compositional studies. In an interview, Aguyoshi expressed their intention to point towards the liberation of the habits and principles governing the use of public space.

"In everyday life we're dominated by the logic of targets, in a constant race. Most people don't care about the roads they regularly walk on, about the shape formed by a growing tree, about the angle of a slope. Approaching "city shapes" through our bodies frees us from an "entrenched perspective", packed with goals and meanings. We think life could be slightly easier and lighter if we could establish a balance with spaces and cities in a flexible way." (2022)

Finally in the case of David Helbich's *Square Waves & Round Hits* (2021), tactility serves to reveal what is hidden from sight: the sounds of various urban objects. The piece is an audio-guided self-performance devised for the streets of Bratislava, Slovakia. It involves three compositions for headphones and a soft-headed drumstick. During the piece, audiences are guided by Helbich's voice through a series of well-defined instructions delivered with deadpan humor. The tasks invite participants to strike architectural elements while simultaneously listening to Helbich performing the same actions, effectively creating a duet with him. This piece can be seen as the participatory version of renowned conceptual artist Francis Alÿs's video work *Railings* (2004)[26]. In his hypnotic minimalist piece, Alÿs walks around the circular park of Fitzroy Square, London, dragging a drumstick along its railings to produce sound and make music out of the site.

3.1.2. Positional

Beyond the tactile or close proximity sensation of architecture, there exists a much more common, yet elusive experience: the profound impact of built environments on our psychological state and overall being. To study this highly important, yet intangible dimension of urban spatial experience is central to the concept of 'psychogeography', originated by the Situationist International in the 1950's. A psychogeographical exploration involves wandering through a cityscape while paying close attention to one's sensory experiences and emotional responses. Explorers may notice subtle changes in atmosphere, architectural details, or social dynamics that affect their mood or perception. This method aims to uncover hidden layers of meaning within familiar spaces, encouraging a deeper, more intimate connection with the urban fabric beyond its functional aspects.

Moving back to somaesthetics, Richard Shusterman describes his perspective on the non-tactile, relational bodily experience:

26   Which might be intentional as many of Helbich's pieces include references of other artist's work.

> Our lived experience of space essentially involves distance, and it is through
> the soma's powers of locomotion that we get us to our sense of distance and
> space. The soma is thus what enables us to appreciate not only the visual ef-
> fects and structural design features that rely on perceiving distance and depth,
> but also the multisensorial feelings of moving through space (…) that are cru-
> cial to the experience of living with, in, and through architecture. (Shusterman,
> 2009, pp. 288-289)

Connected to this process, public space performances that move their audience often aim to create a state of flux, in which audiences are encouraged to connect with and experience the moving cityscape or landscape around them. Boróka Lipka highlights this relationality in her essay about walking performances:

> The public art practice that moves the spectator is a new playing field, the ef-
> fect of which lies in the immediacy of contact with reality. The spectator of the
> public space theatre, in a waking state of performance consciousness, enters
> into an intimate relationship with the 'stage', which is the urban space in which
> they themselves move. (2021)

In the first example, David Helbich's *Walk 4 – One Hour, One Metro Station, Two Groups* (2007), participants engage in a 45-minute walk through the Art-Loi metro station in Brussels, experiencing the absurd, maze-like qualities of such places. During the piece, the audience members are divided into two smaller groups, each led by a guide, and enact a meticulously organized and choreographed walk through the station's complex environment, including platforms, escalators, stairs, and tunnels. The journey is carefully synchronized, with each group following a specific route, often crossing paths with the other group at various points. Throughout the walk, the participants are guided through a series of movements that involve pausing, regrouping, and interacting with the flow of other passengers, creating a controlled and deliberate experience of the space.

In Johannes Bellinkx's walking performance *Reverse* (2018), the usual perception of one's surroundings is literally twisted: audience members follow a carefully marked pathway in various cities by walking backwards. This unusual direction of move- ment strongly limits the choice of perspective, and combined with the precisely given direction, creates the experience of an automated movement, as if one were being pulled backwards. This results in a feeling of detachment from the dynamics of the busy public space and creates a cinematic feeling[27], as if the perspective of a camera

27   Which is one of the articulated artistic intentions behind his works: "Although I design live
      experiences, there is always an important cinematic element in my work." (Bellinkx, 2022)

is moving, not the person. The altered perception of everyday spaces is recounted in the reviews of the piece:

> Not just your direction but your perception of spaces becomes reversed. Outdoor spaces, objectively more exposed and threating, feel carefree whereas interiors provoke more nervousness, with their narrow circulation strips and immovable barriers. Somehow the texture of surfaces become more tangible: moving from stone, to wood, to grass, is distinct in a way that normally is barely perceived. (Goffin, 2019)

> By walking backwards, you literally zoom out. Observation takes place to a greater extent in vistas, the direct environment becomes of secondary importance. (...) But gradually Reverse turns out to be not only pleasing (...) but it does provide a fresh look at the streetscape and the crowds, precisely because you do not become part of it. (Janssens, 2018)

The unique usage of reversed perspective leads us to the next compositional focus, while more examples of positional emphasis can be found in the case studies at the end of this chapter.

3.2. Choreographed perspectives

One simple yet effective technique to challenge the *ways of seeing*[28] our everyday surroundings is to (re)frame and guide the gaze, an approach explored with growing interest. The effect of framing, familiar from visual representations in paintings, photography, and film, can instantly transform our perception. By altering or limiting our natural vision through simple means, it can evoke an elevated sense of visual composition and turn the mundane into something unique. The guided direction of this reframed vision creates the recently mentioned cinematic effect of a panning camera.

As a first example, in D. Chase Angier's *Framing Series* (2012) a large white frame is installed in places that offer a broad vista, such as overlooking New York or a hilly farm field. The audience members are seated behind the frame, watching the immense view through this cutout, and are invited to contemplate the "found choreography" and constant change of the familiar scenes.

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28   Italicized to reference John Berger's renowned television series of the same title (1972), which challenged the often problematic ways we view art.

Johannes Bellinkx's *Framing* (2016), utilizes a binocular installation that reduces audience members' vision to a narrow rectangle, and viewers are guided to see specific parts of the view in front of them. Using elaborate machinery, the performers can precisely move these frames around the audience, following a tight dramaturgy. This method creates an experience that plays with scale, perspective, and distance, while the audience witnesses directed scenes mixed within the realm of reality. In her review, Evelyne Coussens raises thought-provoking questions about *Framing*'s use of additional materials, contrasting it with the seemingly more minimalist approach of its predecessor, *Natureluren* (2014).

> "[In *Natureluren*] reality presented itself as an innocent locus amoenus, that imaginary place appeared as a sultry source of unknown natural forces, of mystery (...) It was precisely the loose, somewhat undirected sequence of images that left room for stimulating interpretations. (...) *Framing*, much more strongly than Natureluren, not only directs the gaze, but also the narrative line that the imagination can or must follow. Somewhere there is a contradiction in what Bellinkx (...) says he wants to achieve – to have his spectators look differently, with renewed attention at what is 'just' nature – and the strict way in which he imposes the compelling storyline. Does the artist want to let the imagination of the spectator speak or does he want to tell the spectator something himself? (2015)

There are cases when audience members with fixed seatings are moved around in one way or another, creating a cinematic experience of the moving perspective — analogous to the movement of a camera. A subtle and minimalist example of this approach is Graeme Miller's *Track*. In the piece audience members are pushed along a 100 meters long dolly track, experiencing the world around them in an otherwise unachievable way.

Quite similar, but more abstract and 'action-packed' is Benjamin Vandewalle's *Perisphere* (2017). In this piece, audience members are laid down in a custom-built, 3.5 meters tall periscope cart wearing soundproof earpieces, and then carefully pushed around in the cityscape following a pre-composed route. In this piece, the experience doesn't stop at only seeing the environment in an unusual perspective. The pushers are also playfully navigating the audience towards possible interactions with the passersby – who also have the chance to look at the looker. Antony Colclough describes this experience in his review: "You swing over a group of tourists gathered around a guide toward whom all heads are angled, you swoop elliptically along their outer edge. One turns, taps another's shoulder, and the crowd peels back. You watch them from above looking at your own prostrate body, you look down on them looking down on you." (2017)

Vandewalle's fascination with manipulating audience perspective appeared even in one of his earliest works, *Birdwatching* (2009). In this piece, the audience was seated on a wheeled platform that moved around the stage, amidst a set of walls that were also moving along, while the dancers performed simple spatial gestures. The performance constantly altered perspectives and orientation by moving both the audience and the set walls, creating a confusing experience of who or what was moving. The constantly shifting environment and disorienting soundscape aimed to make the audience lose their sense of direction, creating an immersive and unsettling experience. Vandewalle explained his concept in our conversation:

> "So you had three elements that would move. Space is defined by the observer, what you see in it, and what contains it – the edges. But in this case, none of these ingredients were fixed. They were all moving. The relativity of space and movement became very apparent. Movement only exists in relationship to the space I'm in, in relation to the fixed space around me. It's like being on a train – if the train next to me moves, I think I'm moving."

Developing this concept further, Vandewalle transferred the experience to public spaces. *Birdwatching 4x4* (2012) centers around a mobile observation box that meanders through urban spaces, carrying the audience along. This box, where audience members are sealed from the outside with glass and a minimalist soundscape, acts as a moving camera, while the reflective surface of its structure mirrors back the streets it passes by. As the audience is transported, four dancers intervene in the passing streetscape, blurring the lines between performance and daily life. The piece ends with a unique, disorienting effect of the audience finding themselves in front of a large mirror, slowly rotated in the multiplication of reflections, questioning their comfortable observing position. In her review of the Budapest iteration, Virág Vida highlights the cinematic quality of observing the interplay between city and performers from within the glass-enclosed box, and reflects on how this experience reshaped her perception of her familiar urban landscape:

> One of the questions is how we perceive our own place through a glass wall, observing from a hidden vantage point, a reality of which we are also a part. (…) The scenery (the ever-changing images of the streets) and the characters create the effect of a movie unfolding before us; the whole experience is like live cinema happening in real-time. (…) I thought I was attentive to details when walking the streets of Budapest, but now an extraordinary view has opened up before me, revealing many exciting, new perspectives. (2014)

3.3. Making spaces heard

Activating and highlighting acoustic characteristics of a space or the specificities of its soundscape can also enhance one's spatial presence and connection with their environment. The impact of the acoustic characteristics of space on consciousness has been noticed and used since prehistoric times, as evidenced by the predominance of cave halls with specific resonant frequency ranges used for rituals (Martinho, 2017). As a result of a profound experience during the recording of *Nexus 1* (1976) his scored improvisation for three trumpets in the grand Canyon[29], David Dunn arrived at the conclusion "that humans had likely made music outdoors for much of human history, and that through such practices humans developed a sophisticated ability to interact sonically with their environment, a skill that humans seem to have lost." (Heying & Kant)

In my experience there are three main ways to point to the sonic environment: short sounds are able to bring to surface the reflective qualities of a space in the forms of reverberation and echo. Continuous, resonant sounds are creating a sense of a material that fills the space and creating a connection between the people present and their surroundings. Then last, the use and modulation of site-specific sounds can point towards existing sounds of a space.

3.3.1. Reflections

The acoustic property that is most widely known and intuitively understood is the reflective quality of a space[30]. The intensity and length of reverberation in a space hugely influence the intelligibility of speech, experienced loudness and density of sound, and the overall sensation of a space[31]. In daily life, the reverberation (or echo) of the spaces we inhabit largely differs and can have a profound effect on our state of mind,

29   The piece was performed and recorded at Hermit's Gorge, located two miles into the Grand Canyon. The score features graphically notated 'sound gestures,' which were played by three trumpeters. These musicians were instructed to acoustically interact with the gorge's physical properties. Dunn highlighted that the performers could activate and resonate with "the extended reverberation and extraordinary spatial acoustics of the rock formations" at the performance site.

30   Reverberation and echo are both sound reflections, but differ in timing and perception. Reverberation is a blend of many quick reflections that creates a sense of space with an immediate, smooth decay. Echo is a distinct repetition of sound, clearly separated from the original, with a longer delay (50ms).

31   Space qualities affecting both include size, shape, materials, and objects. Larger spaces produce longer reverb and more echoes. Irregular shapes diffuse sound, while parallel surfaces create flutter echoes. Hard surfaces increase reflections, soft materials absorb sound. Objects in a space break up and diffuse sound waves. Reverb is common indoors, while echo is more noticeable in large open spaces or outdoors with distant reflective surfaces.

though it often goes unacknowledged consciously. Unfortunately, from the 19th century onwards, acoustic considerations were increasingly relegated from everyday architecture, while increasing acoustic knowledge was primarily used in the specialized design of musical environments.

Many works of Brussels-based Italian artist Davide Tidoni aim to offer direct and profound encounters with these acoustic phenomena, through intriguing and playful forms. In his *Balloon & Needle* series, e.g., *A Balloon for Linz* (2011), Tidoni demonstrates the acoustic properties of urban spaces through a series of balloon-popping actions presented via video and sound recordings or sound walks. In the series, the artist walks through various preselected locations with a wide variety of acoustic properties and bursts balloons, recording the resulting sounds with a microphone strapped to his head. Through this method of shooting high sound impulses in such a familiar and funny way, he effectively reveals the unique impulse responses of different architectural environments while creating a memorable image, which is often a challenge of sound related works.

In his video piece, *Exaggerated Footsteps* (2015), Tidoni explored the acoustic properties of an unoccupied building by attaching metal plates to his footwear, transforming his steps into a tool for sonic investigation. As he moved through the space, each footfall became a strong acoustic impulse, revealing and amplifying the unique resonances and reverberations of the various areas within the empty structure. This approach allowed Tidoni to create a dynamic, embodied mapping of the building's acoustic character, turning the act of walking into a form of site-specific sound performance.

In his workshop *Attack/Decay*, Tidoni invited participants on a two-hour nocturnal journey through a string of carefully selected locations. The workshop centered around a custom-built impulse generator device, which participants used to investigate and reveal the acoustic properties of each site, as an immersive introduction to fundamental acoustic principles and spatial listening techniques. By engaging directly with these acoustic phenomena, participants were developing a heightened awareness of how sound interacts with and is shaped by physical space. As Tidoni explained in our conversation, he often schedules his urban soundwalks during nighttime or early morning hours to minimize ambient noise and reduce encounters with passersby, both of which could potentially disrupt the delicate listening experience.

In Franziska Windisch's *Echo Walk* (2010), participant-performers wore a custom-designed headband that functioned as both a blindfold and sensory device. The headband incorporated ultrasonic sensors to detect the surrounding surfaces and miniature

speakers positioned near the ears. The distances in various directions were translated into sound pulses, which allowed participants to navigate unfamiliar environments solely through sonic feedback – similar to the echolocation of bats[32]. In the perception of the participant, the imagined spatial relationships based on the speed of the clicks and sounds of their reflections merged into one abstract space. Windisch has conducted the piece in diverse locations like harbors and museums, pushing participants outside their comfort zones, both with the unusual orientation and the experienced vulnerability.

3.3.2. Continuous sounds

The experience of hearing continuous sounds in an enclosed space can create the sensation of being immersed in a material, allowing us to sense the boundaries of a site, approaching the feeling of tactility[33]. Being present with others in this shared vibrational space can create an experience of attunement, both to others and to the environment itself. As researcher and sound artist Claudia Martinho describes this process, "The human body becomes a natural mediator between consciousness and the physical environment, and has the possibility to experience space and time as a single resonant space" (2017).

In *A.P.R.i.a.A.F.L.*, (A Plate Reverb in an Acoustic Feedback Loop) Irish sound artist and musician Michael Speers created an analog feedback system that directly interacted with the resonant frequencies of the large brick room where it was installed. During the piece, a microphone suspended from the ceiling captured the room's sounds and fed them into a large custom-built metal plate reverb unit[34]. The reverberated sound was then played back into the room through loudspeakers and re-captured by the microphone, creating a constantly evolving feedback loop. As the sound circulated through this system, the interplay between the resonant frequencies of the physical space and

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32   *Echo Walk* drew inspiration from Alvin Lucier's **_Vespers_** (1968), whos poetic echolocation piece is created *"for any number of players who would like to pay their respects to all living creatures who inhabit dark places and who, over the years, have developed acuity in the art of echolocation, i.e., sounds used as messengers which, when sent out into the environment, return as echoes carrying information as to the shape, size, and substance of that environment and the objects in it."* (Lucier & Simon, 1980, p. 16)

33   Especially if they are played in relation to the room's resonant frequency. The resonant frequency of a room is the specific tone that naturally gets amplified within that space. When sound waves match the room's dimensions, they bounce back and forth, building upon each other. This causes certain frequencies to become noticeably louder or more pronounced than others, creating a natural amplification effect. It's like the room itself becomes a speaker for these particular tones.

34   Plate reverb is an analog effect that simulates reverberation using a thin metal plate. Sound vibrations are transmitted to the plate by a transducer, causing it to resonate. These vibrations are then picked up by contact microphones, producing a dense, smooth reverb effect with a distinctive metallic character.

the plate reverb gave rise to rich, low-frequency drones. These sonic textures slowly shifted and evolved, enveloping the audience in a dynamic, ever-changing soundscape that amplified the room's innate acoustics, while its deeply vibrating sound made the process somatically felt by those who were present.

Another important perceptual attribute of continuous sound is that it is much more difficult to localize than short sounds[35], and depending on the acoustics of a space, it can create a feeling of omnipresent sound. Max Neuhaus's *Untitled* permanent sound installation (1979-1989) at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art featured a 30-channel speaker system built into a dedicated stairway, spanning from the ground to the top floor. "The work occupies the two extremes of sound spectrum. The lows are composed of resonances of the space and, though low, are hidden in their resemblance to the sounds of flowing air. [...] Together they form a sonic structure both delicate and massive, but which nevertheless remains more of a presence than a sound" (Neuhaus). Despite its powerful audio capabilities, many visitors could walk through the space without noticing the sound. The museum's board initially criticized the seemingly invisible $75,000 installation, questioning its value. To demonstrate its impact, museum director John Neff arranged for the board to experience the space with the sound on, then turned it off for 30 seconds. The sudden absence of sound caused a dramatic shift in spatial perception, leaving the board in what felt like a "sterile void".

More examples of the use of continuous sounds in relation to architecture will be discussed in the two case studies at the end of the chapter.

3.3.3. Site-specific sounds

There are sound compositions that connect to the places where they are played by emphasizing specific local sounds, interacting with them through either live or recorded sonic materials.

In David Helbich's sound piece, *Echo-Ovations for Slammed Doors* (2016), 14 performers slammed the numerous doors of Amsterdam's oldest church, the Oude Kerk, while the audience engaged in a guided walking choreography. This movement offered various sonic perspectives of the high-impulse, long-reverb sounds, while enhanced the somatic experience of the magnificent architecture. Beyond its intense sonic effect, the

35   This phenomena can be seen in a scene from the third season of *Twin Peaks*, when Ben Horne, the owner of a local hotel, with the help of his secretary, searches for the source of an eerie ringing sound for long minutes without success. (Lynch, 2017)

piece carried profound symbolism. The church floor, composed entirely of gravestones, covers 2,500 graves housing over 10,000 Amsterdam citizens. A slamming door without a visible cause aimed to symbolize souls in transition or echo centuries of human movement through this space.

FOREST (for a thousand years...) (2012) by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller was an audio installation created for dOCUMENTA (13). The piece, set in a forest clearing, created an immersive listening experience with several dozen speakers installed around the area. From this setup – beside a spatialized version of a choir piece by Arvo Pärt – a composition was played that centered around sounds closely related to the forest environment. As Gregory Volk describes, the interplay between the composed and the already existing sounds was one of the main features of the work.

> A remarkable thing about Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's utterly captivating sound installation is how it blurs distinctions between site and art. You enter a clearing in the forest, sit down on a wooden stump, and simply listen. Cardiff and Bures Miller's work incorporates the actual forest into an audio composition emitted from more than thirty speakers. Sometimes there is a near synchronicity of natural and mediated sounds, and it's tough to discern what is live and what is recorded. (2012)

Own Work →

Birds, not Birds? (2019) was an interactive sound installation of mine in which I set up 12 speakers along a forest pathway, from which various synthesized bird songs were played. Audience members were asked to follow the sounds of the artificial birds, creating a path going into the forest from the edge of a music festival[36] – the title refers to this process. This approach aligns with what Max Neuhaus calls *Passage pieces*: "The Passage works are situated in spaces where the physical movement of the listener through the space to reach a destination is inherent. They imply an active role on the part of listeners, who set a static sound structure into motion for themselves by passing through it." In essence, this simple framework offered an invitation to experience a very ancient form of spatial listening – the ability to be guided by sounds in a natural environment. For the audience, this setup was pointing towards two listening aims that they could relate to: first, to be able to recognize the fake birds' sounds, which requires heightened, attentive listening, and second, to focus their attention on the directionality of the sound, which is the task of spatial listening. While Don Ihde poetically notes that "The hunter intent on bagging his game misses the musical sonority of the birdsong, not because it isn't there, but because it is the direction and location

36   Kolorádó Festival is held yearly at a forest scout park, at Nagykovácsi, Hungary

of his prey which motivates him" (Ihde, 2004, p. 99), **in *Birds, not Birds?* maybe both experiences happened simultaneously.**

A similar compositional concept to *Birds, not Birds?* can be traced in the piece *Mimus Polyglottos* (1976), by sound art pioneer David Dunn, who created many precursors to my works. This work used electronically generated sounds designed to mimic the frequency range and morphology of the Northern mockingbird's song. Dunn played these sounds in the presence of a mockingbird and recorded the bird's responses, which included imitations and pitch matches. This interaction created a feedback loop between the synthetic sounds and the bird's natural song, exemplifying a form of acoustic conversation between species.

3.5. Case Study 1.: Walking sound choreography in a foot tunnel – *Length of a Distance*

My first solo piece *Length of a Distance* (2015) was a sound choreography, conceived for the 440-meter-long Greenwich Foot Tunnel in London, aiming to reveal its extraordinary visual and acoustic qualities. It was performed by eight performers walking at various tempos and carrying portable speakers, which played eight sustained notes of different pitches.

There were two interconnected layers I wanted to explore in relation to the tunnel. The first layer and initial inspirations were the compositional opportunities presented by the unique shape and acoustics of the space. While the strong reflection and oval form made the sound omnipresent from positions close to the sources, the length of the tunnel offered the possibility to create a uniquely organized performance that spread over great distances. These attributes inspired me to compose a sustained, fluctuating eight-note chord, in which each recorded note was carried by a different performer.[37] Each performer followed a unique metronome beat played through earphones, taking one step per beat. The tempos ranged from 20 bpm (very slow) to 76 bpm (brisk walk), set at 8 bpm intervals. This varying pace ensured that performers constantly changed positions relative to each other and to each audience member, resulting in an ever-shifting spatial arrangement of the eight-note harmony.[38→]

37   The starting idea was to work with 8 stationary speakers spread along the tunnel, while only the listener would move, controlling their position relative to the sounds. This is the exact same idea as one of the earliest sound installations by Max Neuhaus. In "Drive-In Music" (1967), using seven low-power radio transmitters, each broadcasting a different sound, Neuhaus formed a sonic topography that drivers could experience through their car radios. As people drove through the area, they would encounter different sounds depending on their location, speed, and direction, allowing each listener to create their own unique version of the piece by controlling how they moved through the space.

The second layer was my perceived tension in the experience of the space. Tschumi argued that the experience of architecture is in the gap "between 'ideal space (the product of mental processes) and real space (the product of social practice)" (1994, p. 31). In this case, I found that the real gap is not between these two categories, but between the 'real' and 'felt' space (1994, p. 40). While the tunnel has a strong effect on the senses and can be experienced as unique, breathtaking architecture, it also has an unstoppable flow of pedestrian movement – the constant travel in the vein of the metropolis easily pushes one through from one side to the other. As Lefebvre describes the power of urban architecture and the subordinate importance of its reading, "Space lays down the law because it implies a certain order [...] Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered [...] The 'reading' of space is thus merely a secondary and practically irrelevant upshot, a rather superfluous reward to the individual for blind, spontaneous and lived obedience" (1974/1991, p. 143).

As this 'law of space' of the tunnel demanded the action of getting from one end to the other, it was prohibiting and reducing a variety of other possible actions which could create other types of functionalities – such as giving space to aesthetic appreciation. To draw attention to the reduced use of this space, beside using the moving harmony, I decided to experiment with various tempos of walking[39]. From the first trials, the impactful image of the performers standing out from the crowd simply by walking slower became clear. This led me to emphasize this image in the performance. The combination of this simple performative technique and the moving soundscape created an unusual, even extraordinary experience of the tunnel for passersby and audiences alike, challenging its functionality and accentuating its potential effects on the senses.

3.6. Case Study 2.: Guided bike ride in the ruins of a factory complex – *Horizon*

In my bike tour-performance *Horizon* (2017), participants were led through the maze-like area of the historical Csepel Works[40] by a taciturn performer[41] – loosely based on

38	A similar approach can be found as early as the beginning of the 20th century when the father of American composer Charles Ives, George Ives, a town bandmaster, conducted acoustical "experiments." One notable event involved two separate bands playing different pieces in different keys and utilizing different rhythms as they marched toward and past each other, resulting in what Charles Ives later described as a "cacophonous conflict."

39	In my experience, the pace of walking seemed noticeably and unnaturally slow for the other people in the tunnel if it was under approximately 2 km/h – the ,normal' walking speed is between 4-6 km/h.

40	Csepel Works (Csepel Művek) was one of the largest machine factories in Hungary, located on Csepel island in the southern part of Budapest. It was founded in 1892.

41	Either I or a second performer, with whom we guided audiences in rotation.

the setup and situation of Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*[42]. Mirroring the film's narrative, the guide led two visitors through the desolate landscape of the partially abandoned complex. Throughout the journey, all of them carried portable speakers concealed in belly bags, from which a site-specific composition unfolded, creating a cinematic and immersive experience. The journey is described in the appendix from the perspective of the journalist-audience member Arve Rød.

The main compositional task of *Horizon* was to create a dramaturgical arch solely through the choices of pathways we biked through. The industrial complex, sized like a larger village and surrounded by walls, could be entered through its large gate. I began developing a route using the *psychogeographical* technique of *dérive*[43]*:* from the point of entry, I always chose to go in the direction which invited me most. When some of these routes led me to places that eventually lost the envisioned post-apocalyptic-nostalgic atmosphere (mostly sites that were too well-kept or freshly renovated), I backtracked to the previous crossroad and tried another direction. As the route developed bit by bit, I focused on composing it to vary different road types (from wider roads and perspectives to narrow alleys) and architecture (from actively functioning factories to completely abandoned ruins). To add dynamic variations, I choreographed various tempo changes in biking, from superslow to full throttle. Believing that a classical and familiar dramaturgical arch applied to works with less common forms helps the audience absorb the experience – I favor Aristotle's stance over Brecht's in this respect[44] –, I tried to apply some of these elements to this piece as well. I added an atmosphere-setting intro scene and decided to move the piece towards a cathartic peak, which I then concluded with a serene outro.

The piece

As an atmosphere setter (also paralleling the film's script), I met the two audience members in a low-class bar outside the industrial park. As a quite atypical, but fitting artistic choice I've changed my appearance for the piece: I've cut down my semi-long hair to military short hair and wore a long leather coat, resembling the stalker of the film. From this semi-performative character, I invited them for a drink (the standard offer was

42   In the movie, a guide (the 'stalker') leads two men through a mysterious restricted 'zone'. The 'writer' and the 'professor' are in search of existential answers. (Tarkovsky, 1979)

43   *"One of the basic situationist practices is the dérive, a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiences. Dérives involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll."* (Debord, 1956)

44   Aristotelian catharsis involves emotional purging through audience identification with characters, aiming to elicit strong feelings. In contrast, Bertold Brecht rejected emotional catharsis, favoring intellectual engagement and critical distance, aiming to provoke thought and social critique rather than emotional immersion and release.

a shot of Unicum, a classic Hungarian spirit). Once the group sat down, I laconically re-marked that we didn't need to chat, indirectly drawing attention to the daily life of the bar and its worn, working-class regulars, creating a fly-on-the-wall, anthropological and socio-cinematic scene. After 10 minutes, I announced it was time to go and asked the audience members to put on belly bags. Concealed within these bags were speak-ers with attached MP3 players, from which the music of the piece would later fade in. After leaving the bar, we all mounted our bikes, and the journey began.

Soon after entering the complex, we left the livelier entrance area and ventured onto smaller side roads, which felt like leaving behind the 'civilized outer world' and mov-ing into a post-industrial, apocalyptic territory. During the ride, I remained silent, guid-ing them solely through my biking in front. Occasionally, I directed their attention to points of interest with my gaze or by stopping, for instance when we could peer into the hellish environment of steel factories through their open doors – a spectacle particularly striking when the piece was performed in darkness[45]. At one point along the route, I led the group towards a courtyard with guard dogs, passing by at just the right distance to trigger their barking – close enough to have its effect, but not so sudden or near that the riders would lose balance. After a while, the drone-music composition of the piece began to fade in very gradually, but as many of the indus-trial buildings emitted their own humming sounds, it was initially (and intentionally) indistinguishable from them. As the volume of the composition increased, it created an uncanny sensation that some of the factory sounds had stuck to us, as if we were passing through a spider web of sounds. Then, with more and more harmonic layers emerging, the existence of the composition became apparent, transforming into an atmospheric accompaniment to the route.

The automation of the music was meticulously composed. I timed the entire journey, from the assistant's initial call to our final cycling out at the piece's conclusion, with the timing secretly monitored on a wristwatch throughout the performance. While the rath-er simple actions, such as drinking in a bar and then cycling around an area, might feel seemingly spontaneous and improvised, as the piece progressed and the participants realized that the music was precisely following the arch of the piece, it could create a magical sense of theatricality, as if reality itself were staged.

Towards the last section of the journey, with an already formed and loud steady harmony emanating from us, we arrived at a straight and well-paved back road. There, I looked onto the audience, then suddenly quickened my pace, inspiring audience members to

45   The runs started an hour before sunset and went on for a few hours in the night.

make a short sprint with me, which they most often joyfully did. The sprint led us to the back wall of the Csepel Power Plant, whose ventilator created a loud and deeply resonant sound – the very same sound that I had used for the composition. This sound, therefore, perfectly harmonized and vibrated together with our bodies and the power plant, offering an embodied connection with the heart of the industrial landscape and creating a sort of cathartic peak of the piece. After a few minutes of standing still and experiencing this shared resonance, I slowly started to cycle on. As we left the power plant, our resonant sound also faded out, giving way to the calm sounds of windchimes. We arrived at the opposite edge of the complex from where we had started – at the riverbank, which opened up the perspective to the undisturbed panorama of the Danube. We stood there for a moment and then cycled out of the complex.

Notes on site-specificity

Working with the ventilator sound of the power plant is a good example of a simple, yet effective compositional technique in relating to an existing environmental sound. First, I recorded the live sound that I wanted to use and relate to. As it was a long vibrating sound, it was fairly simple to find its most prominent frequency, which I was then able to enhance by strengthening its harmonics, transforming it into a more musically perceived pitch. I duplicated this processed sound into as many layers as I wanted to use, and transposed them until I got an easily relatable harmony[46]. This technique can make the sounds of objects musical and, with its harmony, can enhance emotional response, while at the same time keeping its original texture. The result is a musical, organically sounding harmony that vibrates and interacts recognizably and satisfyingly with its source material[47]. For me, this entire process embodies a performative quality reminiscent of David Lynch's use of sound, who takes a seemingly insignificant, mechanical noise and cultivates it into a living, breathing entity that ultimately envelops and overwhelms those present. This transformation from the banal to the extraordinary – although in contrast with Lynch, my intention is to point towards the possible harmony inherent in these sounds – is at the heart of my artistic approach to spatial sound composition.

I consider *Horizon* one of my most site-specific works, which was so tied to the actual state of the site that the next year, when I wanted to restage it, I had to realize that quite

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46   A sample of the composition can be listened to **here**.

47   A similar compositional concept is by Bruce Odland and Sam Auinger's ***Harmonic Bridge*** (1998). This installation transforms road noise from a highway overpass into a harmonic resonating sound intervention in the key of 'C'. Using two 16-foot 'tuning tubes' on the highway bridge, the installation generates a living overtone series in real-time, which is then fed into two cement cube speakers beneath the bridge, creating a 'harmonic cathedral'.

a few elements that I have worked with were no longer present: The original workers' pub had been bought by the supermarket ALDI and was built into their storage space. Several of the functioning factories that were on the road were closed, and some buildings that created the most apocalyptic atmosphere were renovated. Most disappointingly, the cathartic end scene was diminished by the fact that the power plant fan was not active at the time of those repetitions.

4. INTERVENING IN THE USUAL FLOW OF THINGS

↓ Dávid Somló: Drift

(photo: Attila Balogh)

Shifting to the next compositional theme, I will explore strategies that engage with the behavioral patterns of social spaces. In these approaches, the creative process can adopt a more interventionist stance while maintaining its relational foundation. By interacting with *what is already there* and using the social-spatial characteristics of a given site as a starting point, one maintains fidelity to the existing context. Highly relatable to this approach, Dimitri De Perrot describes the artistic aims behind his subtle public space sound installation *Unless* (2018): "Extracting an interventionist theatricality from a deadlocked randomness of the [passersby's] daily rituals and processes, thus opening up a widening view of the interstices of the supposed familiar" (De Perrot). In my view, the effectiveness of such interventions stems from the artist's insightfulness and precision in revealing the elements of the social sphere one wants to reveal or challenge. Therefore, they require both conceptual and practical examinations.

Human geographer David Seamon introduced the concept of "place ballet" (1980, pp.148-165) as a phenomenological perspective for describing the choreography of everyday life in specific locations. This notion refers to the regular, rhythmic patterns of movement and interaction that emerge over time in a given space. These patterns arise from individuals' routines, which collectively create a larger rhythm, observable in virtually any social environment. In *Tracking Traces* (2019), Benjamin Vandewalle physically revealed the movement of this often overlooked choreography of urban movement by using massive chalk to follow pedestrians, marking their paths on city streets. This process transformed transient journeys into visible patterns, creating a complex map of how people navigate and inhabit public spaces. Vandewalle recounts this process: "[During the research of Tracking Traces] for three days, I followed people with a large piece of chalk. The result was a beautiful sketch of how they move in the public space. (...) By 'underlining' this network of passers-by, passing by itself is no longer fleeting – and even stimulates the movement of others." (2016)

As Georg Klein phrases an important aspect of public space interventions in relation to sound art, which can be applied to most interventions: "Confusion is the most important element – to interrupt the everyday routine for a moment, to make people pause and assume a different perceptual attitude is the basis of every acoustic intervention." (2009, p.104-105) The possible long-term effect and the – broadly understood – political implications of these interruptions is an important question. Wrights & Sites performance collective member Cathy Turner speculates that "it depends on whether you trust that being 'woken up' to the world will be likely to produce a positive engagement with it, or not", while Lawrence Bradby agrees that "it might be the

first step towards politics" (Hancox, 2012), suggesting that such interventions could potentially catalyze broader social and political awareness.

Placing works and experiences in the social sphere is not just about intervening in life; life also intervenes in the work. This constant interplay and negotiation require careful strategies regarding elements outside the performance's control, unpredictable factors, and unintentional audiences. In well-conceived cases, non-intentional audience participation is included by design. However, the question remains: Is there too much interruption?

In my experience, yes, there often is, even in pieces designed around daily life. The key to understanding this lies in the signal-to-noise ratio[48]. When disrupting elements overpower or demand excessive attention, it can create a feeling that lack of attention or egoism has once again triumphed over sensitivity in the world. This sentiment is common among sensitive individuals in our times, and such overpowering, non-playful interactions often lead to unsatisfactory experiences[49]. Ultimately, it is the artist's responsibility to create a framework and choose an appropriate location that allows for a balanced interaction between the work and its environment. This thoughtful planning can help prevent outside distractions from overpowering the intended experience.

In the following, I will explore two possible approaches to intervening in public space dynamics. In the subchapter *Constructed zones*, I will propose that by creating specific fields of attention, artists can demarcate spaces that alter behaviour and perception within that field. This will be followed by a case study of my public park 'sound zone' *Slow Steps Have Ears*. Then, in *Modulated patterns of the everyday*, I will further examine the idea of subtle alteration of public space behavioural patterns as a creative approach, which will then lead to its case study, the public square sound choreography *Drift*.

4.1. Constructed zones

> The Zones are places that follow no human logic or any natural laws of this planet. For example, there are random spots of incredibly high gravity that will crush flat anything that crosses their threshold. (McGee, 2021) on Roadside Picnic50 by the Strugatsky brothers (Strugatsky & Strugatsky, 1972/2012)

48   A measure comparing the level of a desired signal to the level of background noise.
49   Some overpowering examples from my experiences: When during the public park sound installation *Slow Steps Have Ears*, cars with loud sound system passed by, or on the occasions, when groups of kids rode around on noisy plastic bikes. The sound choreography *Drift* performed at a street theatre festival was challenged when most attendees, nursing hangovers and eager to socialize, inadvertently took over the performance space.
50   This novel gave the starting point and was later reworked for *Stalker.*

Inspired by this idea from the sci-fi novel of the Strugatsky brothers, I named 'constructed zones' a set of artistic forms where one of the artists main intentions is to create perception and behavior-affecting spatial formations and rules. These 'zones' can manifest in various ways. Physical structures or objects might delineate areas, guiding performers or passersby alike. Lighting design can create invisible boundaries, focusing attention and influencing movement. Sound installations or interventions may establish auditory territories, affecting the emotional and psychological experience of a space. Even a strong consistent presence of a performer can create such a field of attentive energy around them, that is able to shape the experience of others. Creating these 'constructed zones' in well-selected circumstances can transform ordinary spaces into fields of heightened perception and altered behaviors for those who enter them.

4.1.1. Visual zones

To start with, extremely simple, yet remarkably effective examples of visually constructed zones are created by Colombian-American artist Felix Morelo. Since 2012, he has been drawing large chalk circles on sidewalks, labeling them with phrases like *'Good Luck Spot'* or *'Bad Luck Spot'*, among other suggestive titles. These minimalist interventions invite passersby to engage with the artwork, either by avoiding or stepping on the circles, depending on their personal superstitions or curiosity. "It's like sidewalk reiki, pressing on the city's energy points to see how people respond. And almost everyone responds. Many people walk straight through his spots, exasperated. A few destroy the work, spilling water or scuffing it out, or blame him for little disasters. On one recent day, some New Yorkers took care to sidestep the bad luck blooms. One woman yanked her small dog out of the way. A young man, staring into his phone, dodged the chalk circles with surprising agility." (Nierenberg, 2023)

A more sophisticated yet conceptually similar approach was employed in Ruggero and Alberto Franceschini's installation-performance *Crowd Control* (2018). The piece unfolded in a narrow pedestrian street of Treviso, where performers, wearing enigmatic monkey masks, continuously reorganised ankle-high posts and rope stanchions. These temporary barriers created a labyrinth of nonsensical routes that pedestrians could easily step over, but often complied with. By introducing these easily surmountable barriers, the artists prompted passersby to confront their ingrained responses to authority and spatial demarcation.

In his series of installations, Jakob Oredsson explores the concept of visual zones through the precise manipulation of light in public spaces. These works – such as

Lucid Projections (2016), *Gradual Exposure* (2017), or *Potential Park* (2017) – share a common thread of creating distinct boundaries between light and dark, fundamentally altering viewers' perception and interaction with familiar environments. *Potential Park* – which I have experienced firsthand – was a subtle intervention highlighting an abandoned plot in Csepel's industrial zone[51], by the light of ten slowly changing reflectors, that were placed around the perimeter. At night, the plot became increasingly visible, gradually morphing into a radiant green field in the shadowy industrial landscape, adding a cinematic beauty to the otherwise neglected and eerie 'non-place'.

4.1.2. Sound zones

Zones of sounds are artificially created sonic territories, either stationary or moving, which alter the soundscape of a site and question the elements of acoustic reality it comprises. However, as Georg Klein observes, "People's visual orientation in everyday life and acoustically effected stress of traffic noise make sound art interventions considerably more difficult than performative or visual interventions" (2009, p. 104). The reception, perception, and understanding of such acoustic interventions are highly dependent on the actual site in which they are situated. "Depending on where these subtle situational changes are installed – whether in trees in a park or in parking garages, on church facades or in the midst of crowds of shoppers – the intervention also acquires a political dimension. The choice of site is crucial to the statement." (2009, p. 105)

A prominent artist creating these zones is sound art pioneer Max Neuhaus, and a good example is his most famous work, the first permanent sound installation *Times Square* (1977). As indicated by its title, this installation is situated in Times Square, in the heart of New York, within a ventilation chamber connected to the city's subway system at the northern end of a pedestrian island. There, Neuhaus installed a giant speaker horn that plays a low-frequency sound, resonating within the chamber and audible from above through the metal grid covering it. The installation operates continuously, producing a drone-like, low-voiced, harmonically rich sound inspired by the chamber's natural resonant frequencies. As Neuhaus himself describes the achieved effect of the installation, it creates "an almost physical place with sound. (...) It's a large block of sound, which you walk into. Even though invisible and intangible, it is like a solid place in the middle of this open space." Sound artist and researcher Åsa Helena Stjerna describes the possible complexity of the experience:

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51   As a part of the same residency project, as the previously discussed Horizon.

Times Square becomes sonorous to a listener as one approaches the traffic island that it is embedded in. It sensitizes the perceptual faculties and activates the hearing of the flâneur who might happen to be curious and have an interest in passing through the work's sound, and thereby having the potential of reaching an understanding of not only the sound texture emanating from the gridded traffic island, but also to suddenly experience the whole (sonic) world around. (Stjerna, 2011)

On the fringes of the 'zones' category, but worthy of mention, are two 'amateur' sonic interventions: One of the most effective and terrifying sonic interventions I've ever experienced was in Budapest, created by two young men in their late teens. Standing in front of a small gallery in a narrow side street of a prestigious central area, a tense, aggressive male voice with an imperative tone crept into my attention. As it grew louder, it became more oppressive and unavoidable. I soon realized it was a speech by Viktor Orbán, Hungary's infamous authoritarian prime minister. Supposedly presented as a mockery, by simply taking it out of context and with the suffocating amplification of the narrow streets, the authoritarian tone was articulated and heightened, revealing its true nature.

Another hyper-effective moving sound zone I witnessed was in London and could also be understood as a strong political statement. Several times I encountered young, seemingly working-class individuals riding through peaceful areas on cheap scooters with modified exhaust pipes that created extraordinary noise. Observing their seemingly senseless route patterns, joyride expressions, and tendency to watch people's reactions as they passed by, I concluded that this action was related to violently taking power over the sonic space by people who otherwise feel mostly unheard and unable to have a voice in society, challenging those who typically have those privileges. Brandon LaBelle, referring to noise theorist Jacques Attali, frames this aspect: "Noise, in this regard, is the force of the marginal and the different; a strange sound from a strange body which threatens the social order. (…) A primary thrust of audible intensity through which marginalities are mobilized and the expressivity of new languages intervene." (Labelle, 2020, pp. 68-69) But "in response, (…) systems of law and control are at pains to monitor, capture, and manipulate the intrusiveness of noise" (2020, p. 68). These forces can be observed in David Tidoni's account of the impossibility of realizing his balloon-popping piece in London's Barbican area due to the interruption by police and other local authorities.[52]

52   Tidoni's extremely funny, dramatized account of the encounter can be **read** as a contribution of his to the essay collection book *On listening* (Angus Carlyle & Lane, 2013).

The experience of tension in negotiating the sonic realm also occurred during the previously discussed *Length Of a Distance* – which can be also understood as a sound and performative zone – when a group of male teenagers passed through the tunnel. They loudly expressed frustration at the unfamiliar sound event ("What is this?! It's freaking me out!") and upon reaching the middle of the tunnel where sound recordist Serin Kücük stood, they verbally abused him ("What is this?! What are you doing?! Fucking idiot.") and struck his microphone. The most interesting moment of this incident for me was when one of them, before confronting Serin, whistled very loudly for 5-10 seconds. This whistle was the sonified gesture of understanding and reacting to the situation, and in my interpretation it meant that: *The acoustic space has been taken over and is being dominated by people I cannot clearly identify. I don't understand what it means or what it requires of me. I will overcome this domination and reclaim the acoustic space.*

An elaborate description of one of my 'sound zones' will follow in the next case study, *Slow Steps Have Ears.*

4.1.3. Zones of performative presence

There can be many ways that performers alter the atmosphere of a public space, which is, of course, one of the main aims and approaches of street theatre. However, I consider a work a 'zone of performative presence' when the effect of the piece lies not so much in a variety of recognisable actions, but is created by the concentrated presence of one or more performers. This presence so remarkably differs from the everyday absent-minded, low-attention state of passersby that it can create a space by itself.

Maria Hassabi's *PLASTIC* (2017) was a "live installation" at MoMA featuring dancers moving or crawling slowly across the staircase and the atrium of the museum. During the piece, performers transitioned from one pose to another in near stillness, making visitors keenly aware of their movement through the space as they navigated around the nearly motionless bodies. Anh Vo described how these simple but powerful states challenged the behaviors of the museum-goers, as well as their relationship with the performers:

> "Clearly confused, some of the visitors pretended that there was nothing in their way and casually walked by while others seemed to just close their eyes and rush through the stairs, only to look back after they made it to the other side of the bodies. (...) PLASTIC interfered with the Museum's daily ecosystem not only by altering its architecture but also by explicitly challenging the conventional performer-spectator relationship – it is extremely

unusual that the performers laid in almost stillness while the museum-goers could freely roam around. Thus, this reversal of role upset the expectation of a performance, rendering the performers the quality of images, sculptures or art objects." (Vo, 2017)

Similarly, the mere act of walking slowly with a composed presence can transform the atmosphere of bustling streets as well. In the performance-documentary *Walker* (2012), directed by Tsai Ming-liang, a Buddhist monk, performed by Lee Kang-sheng, moves extremely slowly through the bustling streets of Hong Kong. Carrying a pineapple bun and a bag of milk tea, his deliberate pace contrasts sharply with the rapid flow of the urban environment around him. Writer Fabio Andrade notes the mesmerizing and behavior-altering effect of the performance on the passersby in the film's most memorable scene:

> Lee Kang-sheng walks towards the camera in an extremely busy street covered with signs and lights that blink in every direction. Little by little, a few groups of passersby gather on both sides of the closed street and stop to watch the performance. In that brief interim, the politics of the sacred act on the mundane, and Tsai Ming-liang reaffirms the political side of artistic fruition: while they watch the slow steps of Lee Kang-sheng, all those standing passersby learn, without even noticing, how to walk at an even slower pace than the monk himself. (2020)

In my most recent work, the durational performance-workshop *Delicate Balancing of a Twig* (2023), performed at three busy public squares of Budapest during rush hour, I was practicing and offering to teach others a minimalist balancing technique I've developed. In this super simple, but surprisingly mind-altering method, one is balancing a regular twig on the tiniest point of their knuckle, creating a highly delicate relation with the object. As an initiating exercise, I instructed participants to completely stop and focus on their twig motionless for 20-30 minutes, which created a gentle but tangible tension between the busy city and the extremely delicate and unfitting action. With its liminality, balancing can be seen as being between 'something' and 'nothing', but the unmovability of such a delicate state – in my experience – is able to truly change a busy, hasty public space. The surprising intensity of the situation and the profound shift in perception, both for participants and passersby, is described by dance critic Csaba Králl:

> "If I want, everything around me disappears, and I'm like a UFO in the middle of Örs vezér tér. If I want, I'm fully immersed in the crowd, and I feel like I'm navigating the entire world in balance. Is this magic? someone asks. Which sect do you belong to? another one throws in, but it's neither magic nor a sect, just us and the sticks,

a rather profane situation, and that state in which this seemingly insignificant nonsense, for some inexplicable reason, is still able to change dimensions." (2023)

4.2. Case Study 3.: Public park sound installation – *Slow Steps Have Ears*

> "As a site-specific artistic practice, sound installation arises in the intersection of sound and space, where socio-spatial properties in the broadest sense of the word are investigated through sound." (Stjerna, 2011)

Slow Steps Have Ears (2023), is a site-generic sound installation I've created for public parks spanning approximately 500-1000 square meters. The installation comprises 25 speakers with attached MP3 players, hidden from sight, each playing one layer of a 45-60 minute, 25-channel composition. Seamlessly blending with its surroundings, the installation enlivens the park with a distinctive, mesmerizing soundscape, offering visitors an immersive experience that hovers between sonic meditation and auditory treasure hunt.

The project was originally designed for public parks in various locations[53], but the specific site where I envisioned the piece was the Kerekerdő Park in Budapest, where it was played for an extended period of two weeks, three hours daily. This park is frequented by a diverse cross-section of local residents, encompassing various demographic groups ranging from drug users[54] to middle-class families, and is extensively utilized by Roma people as a social gathering space. Unlike my previous public space works, which were more ephemeral in their presentation and performed in more transitional locations, here the local residents – often unaware of the event – were just as important an audience as those who intentionally came to experience the piece. I aimed to be respectful to the chosen location and to stay true to its characteristics by creating an easily approachable and unobtrusive sonic environment, while also maintaining my artistic vision of crafting something that prompts people to question their everyday perception, thus indirectly inviting them to engage in deeper listening. As Georg Klein phrases the stake of this invitation, "Public spaces intensified by sound art are not only accommodated in so-called transitional spaces (arcades, underpasses, and so on), they cause transitional spaces to come into being, in a political and a psychoanalytic sense. (…) To be in transition signifies life as a transitional space in which one can continually get lost – and at the same time find oneself again." (Klein, 2009, p.108)

53 Under the European Festivals Fund for Emerging Artists creation residency program, it was performed in parks across Sofia, Budapest, Tbilisi, and Prague in 2023.
54 An account of a rather surprising encounter between two heroin users and the installation, among other encounters can be found in the end of this case study.

4.2.1. The piece

The task I encountered at the outset was one of the most challenging compositional endeavors I've faced. I needed to create a piece that would be accessible and enjoyable for a diverse range of people engaging in recreational activities[55], yet would also be compelling for a contemporary art audience and personally meaningful as an artist. It was not meant to be so intrusive as to feel inescapable or demand constant attention from those who wish to remain uninvolved[56], but it had to be pronounced and complex enough to be enjoyable for those who want to listen, while also offering the potential for playful intervention with everyday life. Solving this koan-like[57] compositional challenge necessitated a meticulous selection of sound materials and painstaking adjustment of volume[58].

The importance of volume in such an environment was also articulated by Dimitri De Perrot in relation to his similar public space sound installation *Unless*: "One aspect of the work that was repeatedly emphasised in the reactions and, it seems, touched the visitors, was the restrained design of the work. I was concerned to show the work compositionally and in volume as part of a whole, a more complex structure." (De Perrot), He also reflected on the difficulty of such subtlety in our conversation: "The result was a layered experience where sometimes the artwork would be clearly audible, while other times people might not hear what I intended, because the surroundings were too loud." The intention of blending into the surroundings, both sonically and visually, is also traceable in Åsa Stjerna's artistic vision of her sound installation *Ein Meer aus Herzschlag* (2017) that was created with 47 hidden speakers in a public cemetery – which site of course further explains the need for this gentle approach: "[The piece] can only be perceived sonically. Nothing indicates an installation, nothing irritates the site, which is still clearly visible as a cemetery, the work blends in and barely noticeably changes the tonal and atmospheric quality of the site." (Stjerna, 2023)

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55   In contrast with Cardiff and Miller's previously discussed *'Forest...'* sound installation, which has the almost same form, but it is played in a dedicated forest clearing.

56   This challenge was also noted in the study 'Interactive Public Sound Art': *"Public sound art, as an unusual element in the environment, must be particularly sensitive to both noise levels and qualities of sound to avoid becoming a source of distraction or annoyance for the public."* (Birchfield, Phillips, Kidané, & Lorig, 2006)

57   Koans are paradoxical riddles used in Zen Buddhist practice.

58   I could only test the composition by rendering all 25 layers of music, uploading them one by one onto the MP3 players, going into the park, installing them, and listening from various positions. Each set of changes required around 8-10 hours of work.

The concept guiding the choice of material was to use elements that could be, or almost could be, present in the environment. I chose a mix of domestic noises, human sounds, nature sounds, and minimalistic musical elements – for the latter, mostly drone music that resembled the sound of air conditioners or other machines. An interesting aspect to play with is what one can accept as possibly present in a regular city park – for instance, frogs and crickets might seem like fitting sounds in a bushy, green area, but without water and in spring, these sounds cannot be realistically present. Max Neuhaus describes his approach of the liminality of the presented sounds in his installation *A Bell for St. Cäcilien* (1989): "Walking through the small park beside Sankt Cäcilien you're struck with the contradiction that there seems to be a bell coming from there and it can't be there, so you go over. (…) The bell isn't the work; it's the announcement, the work's entrance." (1995)

With the selected sounds I created sections that lasted between 1-4 minutes and cross-faded between each other. This duration range felt like the natural lengths of events that occur in an urban environment, making the composition closer to reality. I believed that using longer durations would have stood out too much in the natural soundscape, causing more annoyance and becoming too obvious.

Although the sound setup was similar to that of *Every Sound is a Thin Blue Line*[59] early on I made the decision to make a synchronized 25-channel composition that goes on a loop, which allowed me to create more complex, multilayered, and spectacular sound scenes, rather than a generative piece with singular tracks. Within this compositional framework, I have applied different methods of dealing with spatiality:

When playing a single sound layer, I used two approaches. To emphasize directionality, I played sounds with pauses in different speakers. For example, wave-like sounds of varying pitch appeared and disappeared at random intervals across 8-10 speakers in the installation area. To create an immersive experience, I used all speakers for one layer, such as a slowly growing ethereal drone texture.

There were sections where complementary layers were spread out creating a coherent scene, eg. there was a section where Zen monks were chanting, playing horns, alongside of sounds of wind and chimes. Other sections had unrelated layers playing simultaneously, creating several sub-scenes. This was often created by adding singular sound events (music from a radio, young girls talking, someone singing, etc.) over a more consistent background (eg. frogs from 8-10 speakers), and could be only heard if one was close enough to that particular speaker. The last spatial variation was the ones

59   Discussed in Chapter 6.

that had a clear directional movement through a line of speakers, eg. when clanking sounds of pots and pans were moving past from two opposite points of the installation area, sounding like a hoarder person moving along with their findings.

The spatial organization of the material was a challenging aspect of the composition as I had to consider various scenarios simultaneously. In addition to having a number of potential seating areas to choose from in the park, it was also possible that people may wished to wander around and discover different corners or seek out the sources of sound, which made it difficult to establish a clear hierarchy of spatial locations[60]. Therefore, I chose to work on simple directionalities of the four sides of the park and in terms of central and periphery, for example, an event might take place on the lower left segment, or a wave of sound could be building from the lower side to the upper side of the park. The peripheral sounds (e.g. the sounds of a radio playing at an open window) were sometimes processed[61] to enhance the feeling of distance in addition to the actual physical distance so that it seems that these sounds are coming from even a greater distance than they actually are. In each site I was also using site-specific sounds responding to unique features of that place – for example, the statue of Ervin Lázár occasionally mumbled the iconic phrase "Döm-dö-döm" from the park's namesake tale, while the large megaphone sculpture at Park Zizkov in Prague played Tibetan horns, amplified by the sculpture's own acoustics.

Choosing to hide the sound sources was crucial not just for an egg hunt, but mainly for its effect on how the listener perceives it. I have noticed a distinct difference in how a person perceives a sound source when it is visible or unseen. If the source is visible, then it is apparent what is happening. But if someone doesn't see the source even if they are aware of it and the sound they hear seems to be part of the composition, they cannot be completely certain, leaving room for a small doubt in their mind. This undecidability, which focuses on what is real and what is not, heightens perception automatically since we are programmed to need to understand everything around us. The indeterminate nature of the situation became increasingly apparent in the reactions of the bystanders who were unaware of the event. Their facial expressions often revealed their inability to determine whether the sounds they were hearing were connected to something with an as-yet unexplained origin or purpose, or if they were just a random combination of sounds that resembled something familiar.[62→]

60   Maps of various setups can be found in the appendix.
61   Filtering the low end of the sounds and adding reverb creates a feeling of distance, while filtering the high end suggests diffusion through a material.

The most fulfilling communal experience took place during my second performance in Budapest, near the iconic Gellért Hill. By reducing the space to approximately 500 sqm and providing three distinct seating areas, I was able to create a more concentrated audience, leading to a stronger collective listening experience. While this decision took away from the enigmatic aspect of the piece, the collective effort of deep listening generated a palpable atmosphere, captivating attendees for an average of an hour and inspiring passersby to join in and discover the happenings. In this sense the listeners and their presence could become – quoting Max Neuhaus – the 'entrance' of the piece.

4.2.2. Diary entries of the experiences

19 May *HUH. Today, I had one of the most exciting interactions related to my public artworks so far. Around noon, a very agitated and suspicious-looking pair arrived at the park: a bald, tattooed man shouting loudly, and behind him, a tired, limping woman with a huge painted blonde hairdo. After passing by us, they headed towards a secluded area where several speakers were placed, so I followed them, just to be cautious. The pair settled down under a tree with a speaker – as it turned out, for the purpose of consuming heroin. I positioned myself about 10 meters away from them, and thanks to their shouting speech style, I could hear exactly what they were saying.*

While they were preparing, suddenly a recording made in the park started playing over their heads. In the recording, four little girls were asking each other what those strange sounds were. The pair was initially very surprised, but then the man began to tell the woman that he also has a daughter, whom he barely knows because he has spent so much time in prison. Once, when they met, the girl recognized him as her father, and it meant so much to him.

After they finished their business, they got up, and the man said, "Well, we've listened to the birds" (there were birds too) and hurried away. Audience spectrum expansion, check.

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62   Max Neuhaus accounts similar audience experiences regarding his similar sound installation: *"The untitled contribution for the 1977 Documenta 6 in Kassel was situated in a clearing, where stood a tree. Hidden in the tree were eight highly directional speakers emitting clicking sounds that seemed to spring from the grass by way of sound reflection. The clicks were reminiscent of the sounds of stepping on a twig, or a drop of water falling from a leaf. They might have gone unnoticed as part of the naturally occurring acoustic phenomena, but their persistent bouncing from one spot to another provided an adequate threshold to trigger attentiveness by the visitor."* – From Max Neuhaus's website.

31 May   *On Saturday, my installation in Kerekerdő Park, which lasted for over two weeks, came to an end. It was a tremendous experience to have such a diverse audience and to observe how they listened and engaged in a communal space for so many days and hours.*

There was a Roma woman who expressed her regret that it was ending because "it's so soothing; sometimes we don't even talk, we just listen." There was also a foreign student yelling "whatthefuckisthisshit," a guy carrying his shopping on his way home who threw himself into the bushes and stayed there for half an hour, an eight-year-old girl who said "I can't take it anymore" and took out one of the speakers and tossed it into the bushes (it wasn't found), an eight-year-old boy who kindly told me "you're skillful," numerous parents with small children who "finally made it to an event," an elderly couple around 80 who, following my suggestions of listening, separated and strolled and listened separately for an hour, and of course, many others who didn't react in any way, perhaps not even noticing that something was in the air.

4.3. Modulated patterns of the everyday

To conceptualise or observe the behavioural patterns of a social space from a specific perspective, one can employ various approaches. A particularly insightful concept from classical sociology is Emile Durkheim's notion of 'social fact', which I began utilizing during my work on *Drift* and continue to find valuable. Durkheim defines a 'social fact' as "any fixed or non-fixed course of action capable of exerting a coercive force on an individual, or which is generally characteristic of a society and has an existence independent of individual manifestations". As Durkheim observed, the nature of social facts is such that when one behaves in accordance with societal norms, their influence may go unnoticed. However, the moment one deviates even slightly from these norms, the force of social facts becomes immediately and powerfully felt (1895/1982). In my opinion, this deviation presents a great opportunity to be used as an artistic tool – both to reveal the mechanisms of everyday experience by slightly modulating its patterns and to create a fruitful tension for a performative situation. This aspect is evident in Simone Hancox's analysis of urban walking performances by the Wrights & Sites and Townley and Bradby artist groups. She notes that the simple change of the regular walking routine "revealed how acts of creativity within the city can expose and mitigate self-disciplining mechanisms and the ideological internalization of how to behave in public space" (Hancox, 2012).

In my perspective to effectively reveal these invisible – because taken so granted –
mechanisms and behaviour with artistic tools, the modulated pattern of behaviour
needs to stay on the threshold of the original and constructed. If it becomes overly ab-
stracted and apparent, it falls off from the texture of the everyday; if it assimilates too
much, it can lose its strength and become invisible. The effect, however, is also depend-
ent on the overall structure of the piece: through repetition or mass, the most ordinary
action can become perceived as intervention, creating the necessary contour around
the ordinary and potentially revealing its mechanism.

An example to this approach is the German performance collective Ligna's *Radio Ballet*
(2002), which was a radio-transmitted participatory performance premiered at Leipzig's
main train station. During the performance, approximately 500 participants were invited
to enter the station equipped with portable radios and earphones. Through these de-
vices, they listened to a radio broadcast consisting of choreographed suggestions for
both permitted (standing still, looking at the distance in an exaggerated manner) and
forbidden gestures (such as begging, sitting, or lying on the floor), which they performed
collectively and simultaneously. Zheng Wan observes the mechanism of the piece:

> During a radio ballet performance, participants both comply with public order
> through silence and create a new order through certain gestures and move-
> ments that manifest the visually contradictory parallel existence of the archi-
> tectural space and the acoustic space. (...) They simply use slow movements
> – movements unexpected in that place – to present differences, disrupting the
> rhythm and timing of the public setting and focusing attention on it. (2023)

In contrast with these silent gestures, the next two examples play with the use of in
shouting busy public spaces. Being vocally loud in a noisy, crowded environment can
often be perceived as normal, depending on the context (e.g., markets or train sta-
tions). Therefore, the displacement or constructed use of shouting can create confu-
sion about its origins and intentions, questioning the reality of the sonic events of the
place. David Helbich's *SHOUTING* is a series of acoustic interventions performed in
crowded public spaces explores this liminality[63]. In the version of the Aarhus premier,
performed in a busy shopping center, three spatially dispersed performers gradually
introduced shouts, whistles and other common sonic cues. These began as seemingly
incidental occurrences, developed into an acoustic intervention that was impossible

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63   Some keywords he names in the description of the piece: "emphasis of incidental sounds
      in a public noise field; unconscious differentiation of signals and random sounds; under-
      standing the public space as a performative space; the personal message versus a public
      communication"

to ignore, gaining more and more attention. In Dimitris Chimonas's durational public space performance *Pause* (2016), he repeatedly counted down from ten for eight hours while walking through public areas. The countdown inevitably evoked familiar scenarios, from New Year's Eve to a ticking bomb or the waiting for a traffic light to change. These associations heightened the impact of the pauses between each cycle, creating moments that were simultaneously anticlimactic and climactic, while remaining enigmatic about the intention behind the action. Nonetheless, passersby repeatedly joined the countdown.

As a next example of the modulated patterns approach, I will continue with my sound-choreography *Drift*.

4.4. Case Study 4.: Public square sound-choreography – *Drift*

> Architecture and events constantly transgress each other's rules. Bodies not only move in but also generate spaces, produced by and through their movements. (…) They violate the balance of precisely ordered geometry, their bodies rushing against established rules, carving new and unexpected spaces through fluid and errant motions. – Mike Pearson quoting architect Bernard Tschumi (2010, p.38)

> 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 percieve not with our eyes, but with our ears, bodies and self. – Dorottya Albert on *Drift* (2019)

Drift[64] (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.

64   Just a short trailer. The various parts of the longer documentation are linked in at the associated section.

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).

4.4.1. Works of reference

Using everyday walking as choreographic movement material originates from the post-modern dance movement of the 1960s. This approach is exemplified in the works of artists associated with the Judson Dance Theater[65]: In Steve Paxton's *Satisfying Lover* (1967), performers walk across the stage in simple, everyday patterns, highlighting the beauty and complexity of ordinary human movement. In Bruce Nauman's ***Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*** (1966) the artist walks along the perimeter of a defined space, turning a mundane activity into a choreographic material.

Two recent examples that engage with the movement patterns of busy transitional spaces and share similarities with the artistic interest behind *Drift* are Benjamin Vandewalle's improvisation-choreography for the Ostend train station, *Derailed* (2021), and Aya Bentur's *Still Walking* (2014), a walking choreography for a busy pedestrian street of Ljubljana. Both works employ simple choreographic material, but while Vandewalle moves his abstraction towards forms of contact and postmodern dance, Bentur uses more minimalist and synchronised spatial forms. Bentur's work shares a similar creative approach with *Drift* – "take the basic action of walking and fragment it, down to its most base elements" – and both pieces aim for a comparable effect: Bentur seeks to "make tangible what is seemingly invisible, the complex experience of bodies moving through public space", while Vandewalle's work aims to make "the often-unnoticed, daily choreographies more visible" as "streams of people getting in and out of trains and waiting travelers became part of an improvised choreography". A difference in their approach of abstracting everyday movement is that their outcomes are more clearly choreographic to the outside eye compared to *Drift*'s, potentially making them less enigmatic.

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65   Judson Dance Theatre was an influential avant-garde collective active in New York City from 1962 to 1964. It brought together dancers, visual artists, and musicians who challenged traditional notions of choreography and performance. The group embraced everyday movements, chance operations, and non-hierarchical structures in their work. Key figures included Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, and Lucinda Childs.

4.4.2. Concept and development

I developed *Drift* for its premiere in the Formations section of the 2019 Prague Quad-rennial. 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 and choreography during a two-month residency with my collaborator, anthropologist Dániel Makkai. We further explored the analysis of pedestrian movement in busy transitory public spaces, building on the work begun during the creation of *Length of a Distance*.

To create material for the minimalist choreographic direction with the application of Emile Durkheim's concept of 'social fact' on movement in public spaces, we focused on tracing and identifying the main dynamics of currents and patterns of behavior. From there, we were aiming to abstract and slightly alter these observed patterns. One of the key 'social facts' we worked with is that individuals need a clear purpose to justify their presence in public spaces. In transitory areas, the most common reason is moving from point A to B. People typically choose the most energy-efficient route, connecting various spatial points – such as entrances and passages – with straight lines. The 'normal' walking speed can also be intuitively assessed by considering factors such as age, gender, time of day, and energy consumption of the walk. Stopping in transitory spaces also follows certain patterns. Those waiting to meet someone often stand to the side, facing the center of the space. People awaiting public transport position themselves at the closest point to their expected arrival.

Another important organizational rule is connected to distance regulation and under-standing various rules in a space – a concept falling within the field of study known as 'proxemics'. Drawing on Edward T. Hall's concept described in his book *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), the most basic natural sense of this regulation is that in a spacious square, people tend to disperse at 'public distance' (3.7 meters or more). However, in other circumstances such as a small bus stop or during rain, it feels more normal to enter 'social' (1.2-3.7 meters) or even 'personal' (0.5-1.2 meters) distance. This regulation is, of course, more apparent when violated by closeness. If someone enters a non-justi-fiable proximity zone, one can feel either threatened or perceive it as a sign of inatten-tiveness, often resulting from the lowered kinetic awareness caused by constant use of mobile phones and noise-canceling headphones.

All these examples are more or less clearly readable and agreed upon by the gener-al public – hence they are 'social facts'. If we play around with the simplest diversions from these, which question the aim or effectiveness of actions, one can very quickly be

perceived as weird, mentally ill, or under the influence of drugs. Consider the following examples: someone walking in a sine-like path between two points; a young person moving through a transition space (e.g., from the top of an escalator to the exit of a metro stop) with the slowness of a 90-year-old without any sign of distraction; someone standing very close to a wall facing it; a person standing completely motionless in the middle of a staircase; an individual walking directly towards a stranger and standing a few meters away facing them; or someone walking in a large circle. All of these are simple deviations, but when we consider them, they all feel utterly odd.

The emerging artistic concept was that if these patterns are distorted (repeated, magnified, altered) by deliberate choreography, the dynamics of the space change, and the flow may become apparent to those present. Presenting a coherent form that is outside of the easily recognizable and accepted reasons for disruption (e.g., collecting signatures for a campaign, religious singing) creates interest, confusion, awe, and frustration depending on the perceiver. As an artistic challenge for myself, I aimed to create a piece that offers spectacular qualities. I decided that in the second half of the piece, I would not just concentrate the performers in a smaller area, but move the choreography from the mundane towards the transcendental and use the more ritualistic and religious form of 'circumambulation'[66] which proved to become a cathartic and memorable form.

In relation to this choreographic concept, the drone music enigmatically emanating from the speakers hidden under the clothes of the performers serves as a tool to organically encapsulate the square within a resonant sound bubble and creates moving sound zones around the performers. At the beginning, these moving zones of sound appear even before one can identify the performers, emphasizing their simple movement in the space. With time, audiences become accustomed to the rather unusual spatiality of sound sources and are able to listen to it as a composition that moves. These aspects are noted in several reviews: "The use of portable speakers makes walking a key element; it moves the sound." (Lipka, 2021) "In the everyday pulsation of the space, a pattern of sounds is barely perceptibly merged, sometimes coinciding, sometimes heard alone: they intensify, fade, disappear and then reappear." (Albert, 2020) And, "Sound, in addition to the aforementioned help to focus, reminds us of simple but long forgotten experiences such as that there are things behind us (understood on every possible plane). Or that if you listen long enough, sooner or later you will hear some harmonies." (Elefánti, 2019) With the gradual shrinking of the

66   Circumambulation refers to the act of walking around a sacred object, structure, or place in a ritualistic or religious context. This practice is found in various religious traditions and often symbolizes reverence, respect, or a form of meditation.

performance space, the performers and subsequently the speakers are concentrated in a smaller and smaller area, hence they are experienced as becoming more and more intensive, accompanying the overall arch just by their spatial organization.

In the following, I will present the detailed choreography along with experiences from the dozen repetitions, in conversation with the reviews and analyses of the piece. These were all written on the first occasion when the performance took place at Széll Kálmán tér, Budapest.[67]

4.4.3. The choreography

The piece is taught to the performers in a few hours of rehearsal through a set of detailed, written instructions accompanied by maps of each section to aid orientation. At the beginning, performers are introduced to the intended performing state. This state aims to find the threshold between a strong, noticeable presence and being overly performative, achieving a natural, focused, active state. As I see it, if the performer's state and movement become overly dramatic or exaggerated, they would diverge too easily from the movement landscape of pedestrians; if overly casual, they blend in too much and become invisible. I instructed the performers to keep their gaze at eye level and focus their movement solely on traveling through the space to support the focused presence. When facing audience members or passersby, I asked them to aim for a natural, acknowledging gaze, neither overly friendly nor overly cold. This proved particularly challenging to perform naturally[68], often resulting in strict, robotic facial expressions and movements. Consequently, reminding performers to relax their faces and move their arms naturally became a regular part of rehearsals. To avoid aestheticization, cheap imagery, and to blend in with the public, I asked performers to adopt a 'strictly everyday appearance'.

In the description of the event there is no other location is given then the name of the square, and as there is no one that welcomes audience members, there is a lingering uncertainty about the location and the start of the performance. Which is of course able to heighten the attention on the square.[69]

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67   Where I repeat it yearly, in 2024 it will be the 6th repetition.
68   It was often performed best by the most experienced and trained performers.
69   Thus I managed to recreate my experience of being sent on a square to see a start of a performance, and having no clue what it will be, the public space was transformed into a living theatre. (see: p. 28)

Upon arriving at the space, it becomes clear that it will not start with a spectacular tap (…) And after the recognition, our instinctive curiosity leads us to focus on who and where the performance will start. And in this attention, the whole space we are looking at is revealed in a different way. Suddenly, everything becomes meaningful, from the escalator, to the rhythm of the fountain, to the noise of the people walking through the square. It's as if our senses have been sharpened or a new one has been created through which we perceive the relationship between space and people. (Elefánti, 2019)

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 general walking pace[70]. 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

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

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 the previously mentioned A to B directionality of passersby, 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 eye[71] – 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 performers] blend in with the passers-by and cross the space again and again in an impenetrable structure, moving closer and further away, further away and closer. Some people are oblivious to the extraordinary sound that emerges in the square, some jump up, look around in alarm and then hurry on, and some have their feet in the ground in delight, motionless and with their eyes closed, following the flow of sound for a long time. (Albert, 2019)

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. 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

71   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.

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.
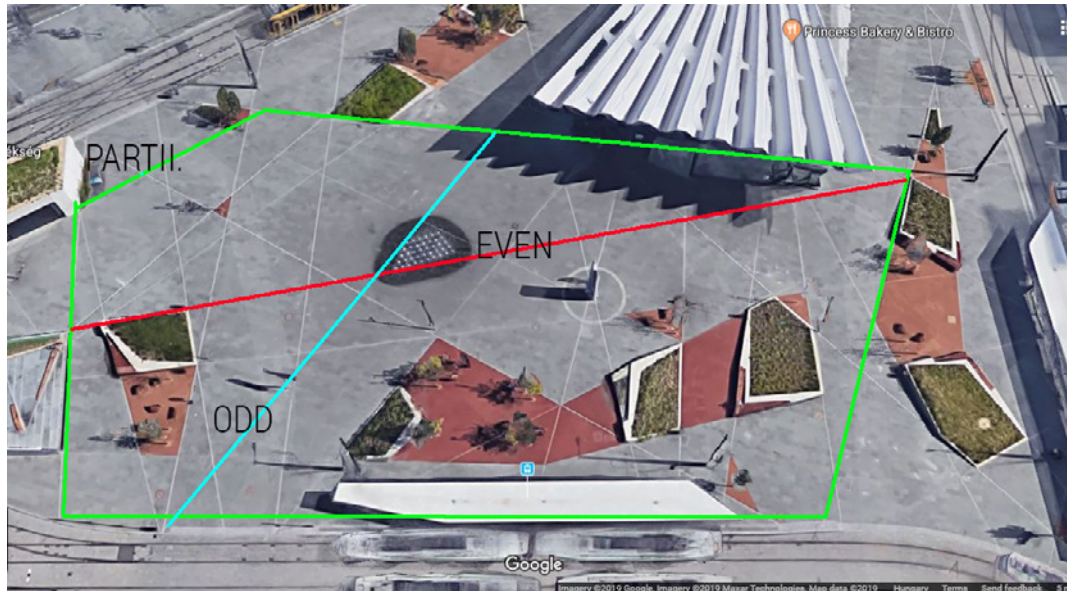
The key to the performance, guaranteed by an infinitely simple but pinpoint dramaturgy – the triggering, maintaining and intensifying of the spectator's sense of uncertainty and surprise. So that innocent bystanders, those hurrying through the square, and even those arriving consciously for this event, are only belatedly made aware of exactly what they have been involved in. Starting with the fact that some time passes before we realise where the meditative curtain of sound, which covers the space (not very strongly, but clearly audible), of varying intensity and in constant motion, comes from and how it is composed, up to the point where the game is played out, how it changes and transforms our environment and ourselves, our relationship to each other and to space. (Králl, 2019)

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.
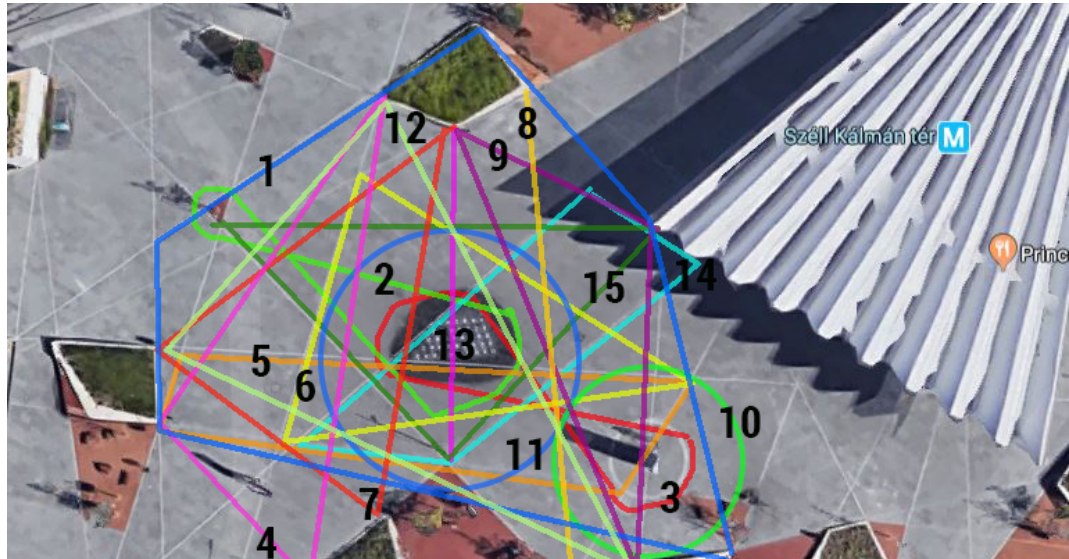
This creates a moving, clockwork-like obstacle for passersby that is impossible to avoid, thus inducing interactions. The loops are 'senseless' not only in terms of their repetitive nature but also because their shapes are atypical to public space movement. Consequently, they feel more unpredictable 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[72] 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[73]. 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.

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72   At a tempo of 'a very, very slow leisurely stroll,' which is around 1 km/h, one can still perceive it as walking, but it is completely unnatural in transitional squares.
73   Throughout the whole piece, I followed choreographer Jonathan Burrows's compositional rule of thumb relating to time: "The rate of change should change and be both predictable and unpredictable." (Burrows, 2010, p.144)

As the performers' initial move-obstacle-stop-stop-move-move varies with acceleration, running, slowing down (parallel to the urban noise that seeps into the sound), an abstracted model of typical urban movement slowly emerges. Same elements, same random factor. However, by placing this model in the space of the modeled urban existence, the two become comparable in a primary empirical way. In effect, they exchange values: performance gets the secure sense of existence, and existence gets the beauty of the movements of performance. The orderliness, the different tempos, the chance-managed junctions and encounters all become aesthetic in their own everydayness. (Elefánti, 2019)

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

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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.[74]

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.

> At the climax of the performance, (…) [the performers] walk in a circle around a small tree, and this spatial form, amidst an intense stream of sound, encourages the audience to step inside the circle. There are no guidelines, everyone is free to act, the circle narrows, people crowd in, the 'sound massage' becomes more intense, the characters wiggle along, slowly, like a long snake. (Králl, 2019)

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.[75] "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)

4.4.4. (Self-)Organization of audience and passersby

I find it important to conclude the analysis of the piece with some observations and remarks on how audiences and passersby react to it, as they informed me greatly about how spatial composition can influence the behaviours of the public. The enigmatic and gradually unfolding structure and presence require constantly

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74 This form can be related to the Sufi circular dance-prayer *'Dikhr' or 'Zikr'*, which was later paraphrased for the video of my band Dorota's song *Solar The Monk II*.

75 Strong similarities can be found with the performance exercise of 'The Performance Group,' as accounted by Richard Schechner: *"1. Performers move slowly toward each other until they are compressed into a living ball. They pack themselves together more and more tightly until there is no room. They collapse toward no space, toward infinite inward pressure. 2. Then, an explosion of the primal mass into the space; an explosion with sound (…) the explosion goes in all directions."* (1973, p.13)

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changing positioning from those present in the square, and – unlike most of my pieces – there isn't any guidance on this process of engagement.

One of the most interesting aspects of this performance situation is the relationality within the triangle of performers who challenge the space's behavioral rules but don't directly interact with anyone; the audience who curiously came to watch the performance; and the passersby who find themselves in the midst of an unpredictable movement of vibrating sounds. This setup naturally evokes a wide variety of reactions from the 'unintentional audiences', depending on their attention, curiosity, and ability to vaguely guess what is happening.

> Many don't even look at the piece, others are surprised and wide-eyed because they don't understand what is happening, others stop for a few moments, smiling and curious, and the more determined ones start to follow and decipher the events around them, becoming unwitting accomplices of the other spectators. (Králl, 2019)

Another aspect is the peculiarity of uneven knowledge and power positions between the intentional audience and the passersby. The audience watches a performance and observes surprised or ignorant passersby react to it, while passersby experience an event that is hard to comprehend initially and simultaneously notice a large group of people paying attention to this unrecognizable event, as well as experiencing this attention occasionally falling on them. Boróka Lipka recognizes this situation as a

> Possibility of great interpersonal tensions, as it distinguishes between the spectator who is initiated into the performance and the involuntary, outsider spectator who is just passing by. The outsider sees a small group of people behaving deviantly in a situation seen from the outside. On the other hand, the initiated spectator becomes an outsider for the duration of the performance, in relation to the usual course of the city and his own urban existence, hence his privileged position. (Lipka, 2021)[76]

76   A similar situation in a different setup can be observed in the recount of the Hungarian, New York-based Squat Theatre's (in)famous storefront piece *Andy Warhol's Last Love* (1978), *"(The piece) simultaneously allowed the audience in the theater to see a street reality taking place beyond the window and passers-by on the street to peer into the store thus, inadvertently, participating in the play and becoming an adjunct to the rehearsed reality of the performance. The audience would thus become part of the street observer's perception of the play while, at the same time, the street observer became part of the audience's perception (...) Eyes watching eyes."* (Kelly, 1985)

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But positioning themselves in the space is also not obvious for those who came to see the performance. Emma Elefánti accounts how the audience initially tried to find the well-known spectator positions: "It says a lot about our general habituation that viewers who have come to see it in the first place very quickly measure the boundaries of the most densely populated part of the space (roughly between the subway exit and the buffer of the four-six) and form a circle." (Elefánti, 2019) In order to challenge this automatism, moving the center of the performance is a crucial compositional tool that ensures the audience will need to mobilize themselves to follow the piece.

There were two occasions where omitting this step – as a result of not yet being conscious of this principle – directly lessened the immersion of the audience: In Szeged, Hungary, the piece was performed in a crossroad of a pedestrian area, which already provided a rather simple directionality for the performers. Moreover, as there was a really strong summer sun at the beginning of the piece, audience members positioned themselves in the shadow of a building, next to the wall – thus naturally creating a separation between audience and performance space. In addition to these partially foreseeable circumstances, my decision to shrink the piece into the geometric center of this crossroad resulted in the audience members staying at the sides, thus increasing the distance between audience and performers as the piece progressed.[77] A similar case occurred in Novi Sad where the piece was performed in a large square next to a long and wide staircase, and audience members automatically sat down and remained there. Since these experiences, for further repetitions I am very conscious about choosing transitional squares with diverse directionalities and moving around the gravitational center of the piece in a way that compels the audience to follow it.

Another interesting aspect is the question of when and how people join the circling and then the spiraling. As mentioned before, it is very common for people to join once the circling starts. This is likely due to the combined effect of the audience's interest in participation, and the first easily understandable form – walking in a circle. The circle is not just easy to recognize and follow; it is also a very traditional and inviting form in its smooth unbroken shape of continuous movement around a gravitational center. Of course,

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77   This repetition also resulted in the infamous 'U.F.O. Incident in Szeged', as one article framed it, when during the general rehearsal, the flabbergasted citizens of the city called the police on the performance. The officers arrived at the square at the perfect moment, just as the performers were leaving in all directions, the piece having just ended. Some agitated drunk people tried to explain what had just happened, but it only resulted in raised eyebrows. The incident was also recounted in the local paper, causing more than 200 comments on the Facebook post (now unavailable), with some people mentioning that the ‚zombies' had even followed them home.

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initiating this participation remains challenging, not only because it puts the spotlight on the first participants, but also because it is unsolicited. As a result, those who join cannot be certain if their actions align with the intention and progress of the piece. This process consistently flows smoothly in Budapest, for which there can be multiple reasons. Firstly, I use the documentation of the first performance in that square as a trailer, where masses of people joined. This video makes it clear that participation is allowed, and people not only anticipate it happening but also know where it will occur. Another possible reason behind this willingness is that the spiral forms around a tiny tree on the square, which provides enough solidity for people to position themselves next to it. Once the first few people take their place in the center, others become braver and start to join, creating a third layer of audience – those who are embraced by the performance.

In the next chapter, I will continue the discussion from this topic, exploring the spatial-relational aspects of audience participation.

5. SPATIAL RELATIONALITIES AS THE CORE OF PARTICIPATION

↓ Benjamin Vandewalle: Walking the Line
(photo: Dario Prinari)

The activation of the audience is a complex and highly current topic, with an increasing number of artists experimenting with various forms of participation. These endeavours often involve breaking the conventional organisation of the audience, making spatial relationalities a crucial aspect of the process. As Boróka Lipka puts this in context, "Control over space is achieved by controlling the bodies within it. Traditional theatre audiences are passive; they sit, watch and listen. (…) In the absence of a norm, control of the spectator's body and movement is a central problem" (2021). Furthermore, in works centred around the audience's attention and presence, the exploration of participation through the manipulation of various spatial aspects can become one of the main compositional focuses.

The level of audience participation can be understood as the degree to which audience members can influence or shape the development of a performance. This participation exists on a spectrum, ranging from the ability to choose one's position and perspective within the performance space to becoming an active performer in the piece. The extent of participation affects not only the individual audience member's experience but also the overall dynamics and outcomes of the performance. Therefore, within the frame that the artist has created, the piece becomes a somewhat shared responsibility. The more freedom and genuine responsibility audience members have over their experience and its impact on others, the higher the stakes become. Zsófi Pálffy described the experience of this responsibility in relation to my site-specific participatory piece *Kerengő*[78] (2017):

> What is happening to us in *Kerengő* compared to this? In this stalker space, we wander around in solitude, occasionally bumping into another participant, pausing, and then, driven by some inexplicable inner force, we start to hurry, turn back, go back and forth, return to a deserted room. There is no performer to entertain us, it is now our 'responsibility', we have to manage this experience. It is an unusual non-action to look inwards, which is what Dávid Somló's performance forces us to do. This "performance" has no spectators, this event has only participants. From the moment we cross the threshold, we assume the position of the active party. It is as if everyone doubles: they become both actor and observer. (Pálffy, 2017)

In the following, I will explore several influential aspects of audience organization that form the core of spatial participation in performance. I will then examine the primary artistic means employed in this process, focusing on the crucial role of audience instructions. Finally, I will conclude with an analysis of my most frequently performed participatory piece, *Mandala.*

78   'Roamer' in Hungarian. More details about the piece at the end of the discussion of *Mandala.*

5.   Spatial Relationalities   5.1.   Aspects of unconventional
        as the Core of Participation   audience organisations
                                              5.1.1.   Bodily positions

5.1. Aspects of unconventional audience organisations

The following aspects and attributes of audience organization in a performance setting can serve as compositional focuses that aim to affect the perception and state of mind of the audience and create a foundation for participation. These elements are often combined within a performance and can either support other compositional elements or serve as the main focus of a work.

5.1.1. Bodily positions

The various bodily positions themselves can greatly affect perception and experience. While sitting or standing are the most common ways to participate as a spectator, these positions can be reframed or moved out of context to offer more than just convenient choices and become a significant part of the experience.

Sitting is typically the safest and most inactive position, with limited possibilities for spatial shift. However, there are cases where this safety and inactivity are challenged. In Willi Dorner's *it does matter where* (2017) and my similar *Sitting and Walking in Public Space* (2019) participatory projects, participants are guided through a variety of seated compositions in public spaces while carrying their own chairs. Placed out of its usual context, sitting in the middle of sidewalks or squares might give some discomfort of standing out from the crowd at the beginning, but also significantly changes the participants' perception of public space. Besides the unordinary perspectives they can offer, these seated positions can create an unusual comfort through temporary placemaking and evoke a liberating feeling through the revelation of how simple it is to reappropriate the urban landscape.

Own Work →

Sitting within the performance space and the mobility of seated positions can also be a rather unique and liberating feature of an indoor performance. In the structured improvisation performance *DROHNE TANZ* (2018), a collaboration of mine with Imre Vass, 20 office chairs with wheels were set in a large, 200 sqm dance studio, ready to be taken by audience members. During the performance, the four performers were constantly moving among the audience, while the audience members were instructed to use the chairs as they wanted, offering the possibility of effortless turning as well as spatial shifts following the dynamics of the performance. This created a playful space for audience movement with the safety of sitting in a chair and also offered performers the possibility to improvise with rolling the audience members around the space.

Own Work →

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                                                    5.1.1.   Bodily positions

Exploring the standing position, David Helbich's **Drag & Drop** (2013) invites partici-
pants on a guided urban walk with a twist. During this journey, individuals are strategi-
cally 'dropped' one by one at specific locations, allowing them to experience intense
moments of contemplation in seemingly arbitrary urban spots, before they are picked
up again. The choreography of placements and the sequence of 'dropping' follows a
meticulously composed score. This arrangement ensures that each audience member
observes at least one other participant, thereby weaving invisible networks of attention
throughout the urban landscape.

The rarest position of spectating is lying down. This position is automatically the most
relaxed and inward-looking, but also intimate and vulnerable; therefore, it can open up
more sensitive and emotionally receptive states. Reacting to the requests of several
audience members to my sound performance series *Listening Club*, I created a varia-
tion called Half Asleep (2019) where audience members were invited to lie down and
explore being on the threshold of dreaming. I will recount the beginning scene of the
piece to illustrate the situational humor this setup offered. Once the audience settled
in their lying positions, a narrator welcomed them, then started counting back from 100
to help them towards falling (half-)asleep. For the last 30 numbers, I added a special
touch: The day before the performance, I'd gathered the first names from the reserva-
tion list and matched them with edits from an influencer's video where she whispers
good night to her supporters one by one. These names were played quietly through
speakers placed among the lying listeners. If you were lucky, you got the creepy yet
satisfying effect of someone whispering goodnight right into your ear.

Finally, a special case of altered bodily positions is Benjamin Vandewalle's installation
collection **Studio Cité** (from which *Peri-sphere* was mentioned earlier), where audi-
ences are invited to inhabit various constructs that, with the use of mirrors, can radical-
ly transform one's bodily perceptions. Vandewalle recounts one of these experiences:

> I choreograph the body of the spectator through these machines. One of those
> installations is called *Perimas*, using the principle of periscope so that your head
> gets transported to a higher level and all of a sudden you become a giant, you get
> a new body. What's interesting is that your eyes see the space from another place,
> but your body is still giving you information or your head is still on your shoul-
> ders. So it feels that you became a meter taller or your head sank into your bely-
> ly. There is this twist of perception where your senses are in conflict. (2019 and
> from our conversation)

5. Spatial Relationalities 5.1. Aspects of unconventional
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    5.1.2. The choosable position

5.1.2. The choosable position

The degree of choice that is offered to the audience in positioning themselves can greatly affect their experience and level of engagement. This ranges from fixed placement, where audience members have no choice of their location, to choosable fixed positions, where they can select from a set of predetermined spots. Unfixed positioning offers more freedom, allowing people to place themselves anywhere in the performance space.

Cases where audience members are offered various set positions to choose from provide the possibility of shifting between multiple perspectives and spatial experiences, while still retaining the artist's precalibrated positions. This can be important when specific positions have particular meanings that were composed beforehand, as well as when certain spatial configurations are dramaturgically significant and need to be maintained.

An example of this approach is the music and movement improvisation performance ***a dog may or may not have barked***, I created in collaboration with Alexandra Baybutt specifically for a former BBC office of London. The piece lasted for two hours, with audience members able to enter and leave the space at twenty-minute intervals and allowed to choose and change their seats at any time. As one of the primary characteristics of the piece, most of the dozen chairs in the room were positioned towards the highly reflective windows, which looked out over the facade of a nearby residential building. This created a very particular effect on the perception of the space and the performance.[79] Firstly, it gave observers a doubled spatial and bodily experience of looking forward while seeing something behind them. As a result, a peculiar sensation of seeing with one's back was created, which is a very strong somatic experience. Additionally, depending on one's position, there could be perspectives of double reflections, where one could see the reflection of the window behind them in the reflection in front of them. This enabled them to see things from both sides at different distances and focuses – an experience one can only have with mirrors facing each other – meaning they were also able to watch themselves watching themselves from behind. Furthermore, one could simply gaze out the window and observe the residents of the

79   A similar approach in the use of reflections can be found in the classic performance art piece, Joan Jonas's ***Mirror Piece I & II*** (1969, 1970) where she utilizes mirrors as central props to explore themes of perception, representation, and the fragmentation of space. As she recalls in a recent interview, *"I'm not just using it as a narcissistic reflection. (…) The mirror was the first device I used to alter the perception of an audience in relation to the performance space. (…) The mirrors fragmented the space, the audience, and the performers. On another level, I was interested in how an audience might feel uneasy as they were caught looking at themselves in the performance."* (Jonas, 2010)

5.   Spatial Relationalities   5.1.   Aspects of unconventional
          as the Core of Participation   audience organisations
                                                   5.1.2.   The choosable position

building as they came and went, living their lives. Hence, the piece could become a blend of reality and performance, just by the shift of focus with one's eyes. The experience of distance created by the reflections was periodically shifted as we performers moved around the room and within touching distance of audience members, thus the feeling of proximity created by another body diminished the feeling of distance created by the reflections.

The cases of freely chosen audience positions are becoming increasingly frequent, but it is not an obvious or easily manageable situation. Offering audience members the option to 'sit wherever they want' can easily become a counterproductive and underwhelming experience of liberation. In my experience, in cases where the audience can detect a 'center' of the performance, they tend to gravitate towards the sides – even if the artist's intention and offer was the opposite. This can be partly a result of classic conventions and habits, as well as the fact that for audience members, the feeling of vulnerability when moving within the field of attention can be stronger than the desire to watch the performance from a unique perspective. As Pearson observes this tendency, "In an unfamiliar space, where the arrangements of presentation are yet to be demonstrated, the audience will seek clues about where to situate itself. Invariably this involves a retreat, backs to the walls, out of the light" (2004, 158). This phenomenon could also be observed during Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker's exhibition-performance *Work/Travail/Arbeid* (2017) performed in an atrium of MoMA, New York:

> "Keersmaeker's effort feels like an interjection of a mini-theatre within the
> museum. It creates an inorganically ambiguous situation where in theory, the
> audience can walk through the performance but in reality, the theatrical codes
> still dominates the environment, forcing everyone to sit quietly on the edges
> of the Atrium" (Vo, 2017).

Moreover, in cases when the performance has a centralized focus, and one takes up the offer of exploring spatial positions other than the sides, their behavior can easily be perceived as exhibitionist or narcissistic by other audience members. This is something I have experienced myself anytime I tried to explore the artist's invitation by joining in from the peripheries. This ambivalence was also noted in relation to Keersmaeker's work:

> "Technically everyone is free to move around, but there were some audience
> members who took the invitation to take a closer look a bit too literally—ada-
> mantly rooting themselves at the centre of the action, presumably because they

5.   Spatial Relationalities   5.1.   Aspects of unconventional
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                                              5.1.3.   Proximities

saw something others didn't. Or perhaps there was some narcissism involved, a desire to be visible to others in the audience" (Akinci, 2017).

Own
Work →

The meaning and stakes of audience positioning shift significantly in a decentralized, non-hierarchical performance space without a specific focus. In these settings, the audience's role becomes more crucial as they impact not only their own experience but also that of others around them, creating a dynamic and unpredictable experience. An example of this approach, **_Animal City_** (Daoud, Kliment, Somló, Szabó, 2018) was an interactive performance that explored the dynamics of human behavior in a role-playing situation. The performance came alive through the animal mask-wearing audience's participation based on precise audio instructions and narratives. The experience of the performance space, built on the stage of the theatre resembling a monkey enclosure in a zoo, was intentionally decentralized from the beginning. We set various positions to lean or sit all around the room, and from the start, the audience was asked to change positions regularly, with no leading performers to follow or watch. We made this decision deliberately to break the feeling of the static, outside viewer position as often as possible and to make the audience enliven and familiarize themselves with the whole space. The result of the actions being completely decentralized was that even the question of center-periphery lost its meaning. The intensity of involvement largely depended on one's position in the room, which constantly changed according to the events and one's activeness, from hiding to being in the midst of a fight for food.[80]

5.1.3. Proximities

'Proximities' or 'proxemics'[81] is a crucial aspect in the spatial composition of audience members, referring to their density and arrangement in relation to each other, as well as the distance between the audience and their object of attention. By thoughtfully composing with proximities, one can create a sense of intimacy or elevate tension, connecting audience members to each other or their surroundings. Therefore, "[proximities] may become part of the expressive repertoire (...) and the dramaturgical fabric of performance" (Pearson, 2004, p.175). The categorization of spatial relationalities in the contemporary actor training method 'Viewpoints' adds the dynamic relationship to the pool of interactions regarding spatial composition. The organization of bodies (shapes)

80   This approach was noted by reviewer Anna Magda Fehér, _"The whole ceremony was just a way for the viewers to explore the space and get used to the idea of moving freely. At this point, one could decide whether to participate in this madness or sit quietly in the corner."_ (Fehér, 2018)
81   The study of proxemics originated with the previously mentioned Edward T. Hall in the 1960s. As a cultural anthropologist, Hall introduced the concept in his book _The Hidden Dimension_ (1966), where he explored how different cultures perceive and use physical space, and interpersonal distances in communication.

can be either "(1) stationary or (2) moving through space (...) in one of three forms: (1) the body in space; (2) the body in relationship to architecture making a shape; (3) the body in relationship to other bodies making a shape" (Bogart & Landau, 2005, p. 9). As this categorization suggests, more often than not, the various proximities change during a performance and can be combined within a static-dynamic scale.

Salomé Mooij's performance **_Proxemics_** (2023) explicitly explores the concept of personal space and the distances people maintain between each other, inspired by and directly referencing Hall's _The Hidden Dimension_. During the piece, the audience is spread throughout the theater, both on the seats and the stage, while Mooij illustrates varying proximities and distances. She shares anecdotes about social distances and the nuances of physical closeness, often engaging directly with the audience. Reviewer Gina Miroula observes how Mooij gets into close proximity to her audience as the piece progresses:

> "She jumps into the arms of an unknown gentleman, dives into the neck of a lady with long blond hair. Close to each other, Mooij names the visibility of her pores, how you hear and smell someone's breath, feel body heat. 'It is the distance of making love and fighting.' It results in an intimate scene that, strangely enough, does not feel uncomfortable. Mooij effortlessly stretches her exercise in proximity." (Miroula, 2023)

In Verity Standen's **_Hug_** (2016), the proximity between audience and performer is as close as it gets. The immersive, blindfolded a cappella choir performance is formed around the intimate situation where during the piece, each audience member is hugged and held by one of the singers. The act of being hugged while listening to the music not just by the ears, but through the vibration of another body can create a deeply visceral, sensorial, and emotional experience. As the noticeably touched reviewers recounted,

> There is more to it than just sensation. _Hug_ is also a strangely cathartic experience, unequivocally illustrating the power that music holds to move us. And in its unseen, anonymous act of intimacy, it contains a heartbreaking comment on the comfort yet impossibility of true closeness. (Love, 2014)

> It is difficult to say anything beyond this, such was the sensation of being held and sung to. It is incredibly rare to have such a long, intimate and non-sexualised embrace – for many it may be the first since infancy. The result is almost overwhelming, and left more than one audience member in tears afterwards. (Dougan, 2016)

5. Spatial Relationalities   5.1.   Aspects of unconventional
    as the Core of Participation   audience organisations
                                             5.1.3. Proximities

Another aspect of proximities is what I call the 'relative density of bodies', which refers to the concentration of people or objects within a given environment. For instance, the experiential difference between 20 people in a small room in comparison with 20 people in a large auditorium significantly impacts the perceived density and the resulting atmosphere or interaction possibilities. An example of this aspect as a compositional focus can be noticed in Doris Uhlich's *Habitat/Halle E* which is the largest version of her site-specific choreography of naked bodies, featuring 120 nude performers sharing the large performance stage with 600 audience members. As they move between the spatial formations of the various images, the performers shape the various spatial organizations and proximities of the audience both to the performers and to each other. As reviewer Theresa Luise Gindlstrasser recounts this process,

> The structured swarm behavior of the 120 contrasts with the initially panicked behavior of the 600. "Don't miss anything!" and "Don't get in the way!" But over time, these imperatives fade. The utopian moment of many bodies in the same space has an effect, creating relaxed encounters as the sound shakes us. (2019)

5.1.4. Vulnerability

The conventional organization of audience members is traditionally safe: they are seated in rows facing the performers or other kinds of things to experience, with their most interesting parts oriented towards the audience. Audience members are not looked at, neither by the spectacle nor by each other, and they are invited solely to observe the spectacle. It is a somewhat shared experience; audience members can feel affected and able to affect the collective atmosphere created by the performance, but not so much that it creates any strong feeling of responsibility. They feel allowed to not pay attention, doze off, or not clap at the end. Compared to this, the level of intensity and vulnerability of being one of six audience members of an interactive performance is much higher. Josephine Leask describes her experience during the later described interactive performance *The Space Is In Between Us* (Baybutt & Somló, 2014):

> "Being immersed in this experimental work is an intense experience and at times hard work. As members of an intimate audience, we observe and are observed, there's no place to hide or simply spectate. We feel the responsibility of charging the space along with the performers" (Leask, 2014).

The feeling of vulnerability during a performance is often closely tied to spatiality, such as proximity, visibility, and the direction of attention. Audience members may

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experience a range of states: feeling safe when unseen in a marginal position, be-coming self-aware when visible to others, or feeling vulnerable when high attention is focused on them. The previously discussed distance from performers or others also plays a role in this dynamic. These spatial factors combine to create a fluid landscape of comfort and exposure, significantly impacting the audience's alertness and tension during the performance.

In my sound-performance series *Listening Club*, I aimed to enhance the perception of shared attention by arranging chairs in decentralized and spread-out configurations. These spatial organizations placed audience members in rather vulnerable and open positions, heightening their awareness of each other and the collective listening experience. Zsuzsa Komjáthy comments on this aspect of the piece in her essay about the choreographic possibilities of sound:

> The concentric organization of audience seats is provoking an exciting and slightly tense situation for the audience and I also start to observe the others: the smiling girl, who slightly theatrically arrives into the situation, the tall young man who is swaying his head left-right in his concentration. (…) the experience of attention becomes central as the events kinetically spread through us in circles. (2018)

In Marina Abramovic's *Artist is present* (2010), the situation is far more tense. During her retrospective show at MoMA, audience members could participate in her new work by – after standing through a massive queue – sitting in front of Abramović herself and experiencing a face-to-face encounter with the artist. The stage for this meeting is a highly lit center of the museum's atrium, which creates a double spatiality – one is the intimate closeness of Abramović, the other is of the masses of audience members on the side spectating the encounter. As Marina herself describes the intensity and focus of this experience,

> And what is happening there? I'm looking at you. You're photographed. You're filmed. You're observed by everybody else in this art room. So there is nowhere to go but into yourself. At the moment when you really get into yourself, that moment bursts with emotions, with so much feelings. (…) We are not doing this in our own home, because we are doing everything to actually cut that relation to ourselves. But here I made a stage for the audience. (2013)

Another way of creating a vulnerable situation, is to strip audience members from one of their senses, which can have different effects depending on the artistic intentions. The more obvious one is that it sharpens the remaining senses, as recounted of the later discussed blindfolded sound performance *Hear:* "When blindfolded I could no longer fall back on my daily reliance of sight.(...) The vulnerability I experienced seemed to sharpen the intensity and focus of my listening." (Persyn, 2019, 207) But interestingly in the interpersonal connections, blindness can create the security of anonymity, as noted about the previously mentioned sound performance *Hug*: "Being blindfolded is key to the whole thing. It does not matter who is holding you, and being unable to see removes much of the potential awkwardness around hugging a stranger." (Dougan, 2016)

In Benjamin Vandewalle's ***Walking the Line***, participants move through public spaces wearing goggles that heavily reduce their field of vision, while holding each other in a line to be able to follow a guide as a group. The performance not only explores the peculiar perspective of the city but creates a vulnerable situation in a public space by making participants both observers and objects of observation. This vulnerability is balanced by the almost intimate bond formed among the similarly deprived group members. As Wendy Lubberding describes the experience,

> The questions you hear around you make it very clear that there are rules in that public space and that we deviate from them. (...) The fact that we are a group makes us stronger. We are in constant contact with each other by holding each other's hands or having our hands on each other's shoulders. We also need each other, because you don't want to fall over, bump into something or step into a hole. Those in front of you and next to you help you silently, by demonstrating. We are each other's compass. (2018)

5.2. Instructions and scores

Instructions and scores have become common tools in participatory art forms over the past few decades, evolving from their roots in the Fluxus movement and experimental music of the mid-20th century. In almost all cases of unconventional spatial organization of audiences and participatory situations, artists have to create some kind of instruction-based framework to orient the audience. These frameworks can range from simple guidance in spatial positioning or suggested modes of attention to instructions or scores that serve as the leading element of the performance. I will examine these instruction-driven approaches in two parts, categorized by their degree of flexibility in the outcome.

5.2.1. Tight frameworks

There are cases of participatory works where the instructions are formed in a way that the outcome of the participation is rather fixed. Although the individual experience and, to some degree, the execution can differ, these pieces are designed so that personal decisions or nuances do not create completely unique outcomes. This approach is independent of the complexity of the score or instructions and can range from singular tasks to continuous guidance. These precisely framed scenarios can be a very powerful experience for the audience, bringing to life something that was carefully envisioned by the artist and enlivened by their participation.

To start from a very restricted and simple framework, *223m* (Bellinkx, Hoofwijk, Horemans, Steur, & Vandewalle, 2019)[82] is a good example of how an extremely simple, but precise task can open up layers of experience. The performance is a 4-hour long repetitive walk of 223 meters in and out of the gallery space of the Brakke Grond theatre, Amsterdam, passing through nearby streets and then back to the theatre. Before joining, each participant needs to place a given white dot on their jacket collar and is asked to walk in sync with the group. Audience members can join in when the group is in the white cube and leave as they please. During the walk, they need to focus only on the white dot on the person ahead, which becomes the key to their immersion in the experience. The process of how this simple and strict framework is able to unfold through time is described by reviewer Fransien van der Putt:

> It's an excellent example of how a simple but carefully conceived action can have an enormous impact on everyone who perseveres with their engagement as a spectator. (…) The intense focus, energy and euphoria induced when a band of people moves at the same tempo. (…) And as the group's movements through doorways, up steps, sidestepping droves of dawdling tourists and other traffic become increasingly automatic, the mind stops its ceaseless chatter. Although the principle is simple (…) there's still plenty of room for creating gently choreographic experiences. Apart from the physical and mental group dynamic, little by little the spatial experience provokes a handful of choreographic proposals, such as when the group surges through a stream of passers-by, decelerates and accelerates en masse, and twists and loops to avoid sharp turns. This shifts attention from the physical act of moving at a rapid pace to the shape of the group as a whole. (2019)

82   A co-creation of five artists from the previously mentioned SOAP artistic platform.

There are cases where one needs to go through a precise set of instructions, with various degrees of choice in how they execute the tasks. The **score** of Seth Cluett's *Eccentricity* (2018) is very thorough, exploring most aspects that need to be taken into account in the realization of the piece, resulting in a light, but focused public space performance created by the participants. At the beginning of the piece, each participant needs to find a branch that has fallen from a tree by natural means. Then, participants are invited to walk in circles at their own pace, dragging their branch behind them and paying attention to the sound it creates. They can make ongoing decisions about their speed, number of rotations, and the sounds they produce. When encountering pedestrians, they pause briefly before resuming their paths. The participants are encouraged to maintain a casual, open demeanor throughout the piece, which concludes at a predetermined time agreed upon by the group.

David Helbich's, *Scores for the Church, the Building, the Body, and the Audience for the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam* (2016) comprised seven **scores** for "self-performing individuals". Upon entering the monumental Oude Kerk church[83], each audience member receives a smartly designed A3-sized print containing the scores, which is often part of the score itself. The scores offered various sensorial tasks that playfully invite audiences to connect with the building, such as tactile connection with the architecture, altered perspective, activating the acoustics of the space – many of these spatial tools were discussed in chapter 3. As the performance unfolded, the sheet gradually displayed more traces of the interventions until it is ultimately torn apart during the final piece, *Music in 64 Pieces*.

Franziska Windisch's *Orientation Dance* (2021) series offers a unique form of participation and experience. The performance centers around participants wearing custom-designed listening modules, constructed from lightweight, flexible wooden boards lined with acoustic foam. When closed around the head, these modules reduce external noise, creating a more focused auditory environment. Participants receive previously explained spoken instructions through built-in FM receivers, guiding them through a series of listening exercises. These tasks, performed simultaneously by up to ten participants, encourage close attention to individual listening habits as well as the acoustic properties and dynamics of the performance space, enhanced by a pre-recorded multi-channel sound composition. Through choreographed movements, the performance alternates between states of isolation and openness, individual and collective action, creating a dynamic interplay between the participants and their sonic environment, with a unique visual image.

83   Amsterdam's oldest (!) building, functioning as a culture center since 2012.

5.2.2. Flexible outcomes

I consider works in this second category, when the outcome of the participation is highly dependent on the participants' individual engagements and decisions. Consequently, in these cases, the different personalities of audience members become much more apparent, which is, of course, a very vulnerable position to be in among other people – strangers and acquaintances alike. I believe that in this regard, putting spatial-relational tasks at the center of participation can prove to be a liberating and engaging approach. In my perspective, this is linked to the fact that in our daily lives, everyone is constantly spatially organizing themselves in relation to their surroundings and to others. Besides their natural and practiced qualities, most spatial tasks do not have a right or wrong way of doing them, hence they are able to highlight the participants' personal ways of approaching them, without the pressure of performing tasks that openly reveal personal characteristics. This combination of accessibility and individuality creates a unique environment for expression. Hence, I call these situations 'performative Rorschach tests'[84, 85]. Reviewer Csaba Králl highlights this aspect of my participatory choreography *Mandala*, the case study of this chapter:

> It is the simple concept that makes the piece work, and the presence and ingenuity of the participants that gives it life, presence and vibrancy. There is no wrong answer, no wrong solution on the part of the audience – just a performance that keeps rewriting itself with different group dynamics, different individual choices. (Králl, 2017)

Own →
Work

The first example in this category is the experimental improvisation performance, *The Space Is In Between Us* (2014) created in collaboration with Alexandra Baybutt. This piece was a more elaborate and developed version of the previously discussed *a dog may or may not have barked*, performed in an empty office room of the former Guardian headquarters, in London. To further explore the participation and presence of audience members, we added a participatory part that preceded and created the foundation for our improvisation.

84   In the Rorschach test, participants are presented with ambiguous inkblot images and asked to describe what they see, without any indication of right or wrong answers. This open-ended approach allows individuals to project their own thoughts, feelings, and interpretations onto the images, potentially revealing aspects of their personality and psychological makeup in the process.

85   The first experience of what I call a performative Rorschach test was playing with the music collective Bélaműhely in their program called the *conductor game*. In this improvised participatory show, audience members are invited to conduct the group. After they have assigned the musicians to the barely known instruments (which are briefly introduced and played in an introductory ‚demo' part), they can, to the best of their knowledge, conduct the group to play music. As most people are not trained to conduct a percussion group, they can only express themselves as they are – thus, their personality (temper, decisiveness, humor, dedication, presence, etc.) is highlighted very quickly and intensely.

Audience members were invited to arrange a set of domestic objects within the approximately 120 sqm performance space over a period of 20-30 minutes. This improvised and silent activity served as a transition from mostly verbal everyday communication to nonverbal interaction. It also provided an active experience with spatiality, aiming to assist in the reception of abstract music and movement, especially for audiences unfamiliar with the language of somatic movement practice and free improvisation music. The nature of the task implied that it could only be accomplished in a way that revealed the characteristics of both individuals and the group. With no known structures to follow or specific aims to achieve, the process of arrangement necessarily became a representation of one's creativity, concept of space, behavior in groups, and state of mind – all of which provided a rich texture of information to improvise with. Once the group agreed on the composition, we placed seats in response to it and performed a 35-45 minute long sound and movement improvisation, exploring and connecting with the spatiality of the newly organized room-landscape.

Luca Borsos and Márk Bartha *Dance the District* (2022) is a participatory dance performance designed to transform public spaces into an inspiring dance floor, which I experienced twice in Budapest. This piece is a prime example for me of how easily a well-crafted simple framework can create an ecstatic experience, while truly liberating and questioning the functions and behaviors of city streets. The performance originated from Borsos's personal experience during the COVID lockdown periods, when she started dancing in public spaces while listening to music on headphones. She later wanted to transform this personal practice into a communal experience.

Before the piece began, participants gathered in a small community space in a slightly gritty neighborhood of Budapest. There, they were asked to form small groups of four-five people, and each group had to choose a meeting point within a 5-6 street area. Then, Luca animatedly explained the simple structure: At the beginning, everyone starts to listen on headphones to an audio live stream – performed from the community center by musician Márk Bartha. In the first 20 minutes, a mix of local soundscapes is played, during which time everyone is encouraged to explore the surrounding streets alone. Once they hear a transition from soundscape to music, each participant has to go to the previously agreed meeting point of the group and can start to dance. From then on, they are free to collectively dance along the streets and merge with other groups. After 50 minutes, a call back is heard in the stream, which signals the groups to return to the gathering spot, where the stream is played from speakers in front of the community space. In the following, I will recount my personal experience.

As the piece began and I started to wander around the streets while listening to the subtle, barely modified soundscape of the same place, I almost immediately felt an altered state of perception come over me. The sound isolated me from the surroundings, placing me in a protective bubble, while the knowledge that I had 20 minutes to simply explore the urban landscape, brought me a sense of ease, playfulness, and curiosity. I looked at details, stood in shady archways, touched the surfaces of the walls, and generally felt like I was on a secret mission.

I was already in a heightened mood when the music started, and I moved towards the meeting point half-dancing. Upon arrival, I found someone there dancing lightly, which made it even more inviting, and we started to dance together. One by one, the others from the group arrived, each arrival elevating the mood further. After a while, we began dancing along the streets until we encountered another group, causing massive cheers and joy from both sides. This linear dramaturgy of growing numbers of dancers proved to be a highly effective compositional tool, creating a continuous elevation of atmosphere and energy. It is notable how effortlessly it made people dancing, and how the ecstasy of liberating the public space far overpowered any self-consciousness that might have arisen – which could have been an issue if the piece had been less skillfully conducted. But it not only liberated the participants; the vibrant use of public space was greeted enthusiastically by locals and passersby and ultimately led to a carnival-like atmosphere when all groups merged in front of the starting place.

Beyond being a great party, the piece also evoked the previously discussed heightened sense of somatic relationality to one's surroundings. The atmosphere of the streets, the objects, the cars, the people passing by all became information that could influence the dance. It not only made the experience of dancing more inspired but also constantly stimulated spontaneous interactions with the cityscape and their inhabitants. This process worked as a feedback loop: as participants experienced the power of spontaneity – which is essentially the instantaneous act of relating to the here and now without hesitation – it made the atmosphere even more vibrant, resulting in more and more interactions.

To explore the topic of participation with flexible outcomes in greater detail, I will discuss my participatory performance *Mandala.*

5.3. Case Study 5. – Participatory sound-choreography – *Mandala*

The unity of the micro and the macrocosmos is also symbolized by energy circles, mandalas. The entrance to these energy circles creates a connection with all the powers and skills belonging to that circle. – Commentary of the Lotus Sutra[86]

A microcosm would be the easiest one-word review. – From the review of Mandala by Alexandra Baybutt

Actually it's a life experience, it's not only performance. Like you meet someone on the street or you fall in love. – Participant

Mandala (2016) has been my most-played piece for over eight years with over 100 repetitions of different variations. The participatory sound-choreography is performed solely by 10-20 audience members, following their given demarcated pathway, carrying around portable speakers in a 120+ sqm performance space, sometimes with, mostly without the presence of external audience members. The music of the piece which is played through the portable speakers, creates a resonant space that evokes bodily sensations. A wide range of adaptations of the piece were performed, including versions for forests, public squares, an empty factory building, and an accessible and integrated version for differently-abled individuals. The piece was premiered as a joint commission by the contemporary music festival 'Audiograft', Oxford and the contemporary theatre festival 'NOW' by Yard Theatre, London.

5.3.1. Concept and development

Originally, the piece was conceived by combining three artistic ideas. I had the interest to explore further the directions of my two recent works: the non-verbal interaction, and group-dynamic based generative situation of *The Space Is In Between Us* and the form of the moving sound sources carried by people of *Length of a Distance.* These ideas were merged with the form of a movement workshop that I've only heard of from a former participant, but nonetheless captured my imagination deeply: in David Zambrano's *Passing Through* a large number of participants cross among each other endlessly, creating a hypnotic mass movement, in which – as I imagined – one can

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86   The Lotus Sutra is one of the most influential texts in the Mahayana branch of Buddhism. Mandalas are complex geometric designs that hold deep spiritual significance in various Eastern traditions, particularly in Hinduism and Buddhism. Typically circular in form, these intricate patterns often feature symmetrical arrangements of shapes and symbols radiating from a central point. In Buddhist practice, mandalas serve as aids for meditation and spiritual growth, representing the cosmos and one's journey towards enlightenment.

lose oneself. The conception of the vision was instantaneous[87]: at once I saw a piece entirely performed by audience members, carrying portable speakers, following intersecting pathways drawn on the floor.

I found this image of the ant farm–like, moving soundscape captivating and corresponded with my interest to create something *spectacular*[88], as well as bringing together the connotations of both the ordinary and the transcendent. The openness of the interactions and the personal way of walking echoed the everyday, while the formal restrictions and contemplative repetitiveness was pointing towards a more spiritual and performative quality[89]. This original conceptual framework remained largely intact, although it underwent several variations before reaching its current, more or less final form. However, I see *Mandala* as an endlessly ongoing project, and I can imagine further variations emerging.

The most frequently performed variation of the piece involves 20 participants in a closed group, without external audiences. It takes place in a relatively secluded space of at least 120 square meters, either indoors or outdoors. The performance lasts 30 minutes, followed by approximately 30 minutes of post-show discussion.

Before the performance, I provide the following instructions, both printed and verbally:

During the performance you will need to move on a specific demarcated path, carrying around a small speaker. Following your pathway feel free to explore different directions, tempos, ways of walking or anything else. Bring your attention to the space and to the others around you. Feel free to play![90]

Once the instructions and practicalities are clear, I distribute speakers and assign pathways to participants one by one at the entrance of the performance space. The piece begins as they receive their speakers with the music already playing on the attached

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87   As a result of a mix-up at my part-time social work job, I had to spend a night shift in a completely empty social flat on three layers of yoga mattresses. The 'eureka' moment happened in this sterile and empty environment.

88   This desire also came with the disappointment in the marketing value of *The Space Is In Between Us*, with its rather underwhelming premise—a guitarist and a dancer improvising after some object organization. Hence, I aimed to create something that also sounds 'sexy'.

89   Such as the earlier mentioned circumambulation or Buddhist walking meditation practices.

90   In the initial tryouts, the audience was instructed to walk slowly throughout the performance in a given direction. These restrictions proved overly controlling and hindered the potential for playfulness, so they were soon removed. To encourage exploration, I eventually added an invitation to play after a few shows.

MP3 players[91]. The performance space consists of 20 demarcated intersecting pathways, each a unique combination of 4 shapes (circle, rectangle, triangle, straight line) and 5 colors (red, yellow, green, blue, white). The music gradually fades in at the start and fades out after 30 minutes, signaling the end of the performance. After all speakers fall silent, I say "Thank you," and collect the devices. Immediately following, we form a circle with chairs for a simply structured discussion. I invite participants to share their subjective experiences and reserve time at the end for any questions about the piece.

This form evolved through a step-by-step process, refined by observations, experiences from each iteration, and constant participant feedback. I view this as a natural and necessary process for creating such a participatory piece. In the following sections, I will discuss the development of various elements, the experiences with the audiences and the different variations. This exploration will focus on the participatory spatial composition techniques employed throughout the work's evolution, outlining both effective strategies and challenges faced to provide a well-rounded view of how the piece's spatial dynamics came to be shaped.

5.3.2. Formal comparisons

Before I move onto the details of the piece, I will introduce some comparable pieces[92] to contextualize various aspects of *Mandala's* minimalist form.

Visually, the closest reference is Samuel Beckett's experimental television play *Quad* (1981). The piece features four hooded figures walking in repetitive variations of a precise geometric pattern around a stage, accompanied by four percussionists (one for each performer) marking their steps. In this enigmatic and hypnotic piece, the figures never meet, avoiding the center of the stage, creating a sense of tension and unfulfilled connection. The piece is staged following an extremely tight two-page score, which includes every necessary detail from the variations of the movement patterns, through light, music, and costume, to the preferred training of the performers (ballet).

Moving towards interactivity, David Helbich's *Keine-Spiele* (2005, in collaboration with Shila Anaraki) is a participatory walking-performance which is devised for large,

91   The method of starting the tracks one by one while maintaining synchronization involves shortening each consecutive track of the same composition by 10 seconds, cutting from their start. With an approximate 10-second difference between the start of the MP3 players and giving them to participants, the composition synchronizes within a margin of 1-5 seconds. This method is used in all of my pieces that require the same start for separate devices. If more precise synchronization is needed, the MP3 players can be started on the countdowns of a workout timer.

92   I knew non of them before the creation of the piece.

empty theatre spaces. In this piece, two performers guide participants through various spatial variations of group walking—sometimes referred to as 'flocking' in contemporary dance. Although the variations and details of the spatial composition are impressive, Helbich mentioned during our discussion that there were occasions when some audience members felt a bit bossed around by the dictates of such an elaborate and complex score. This led to disengagement from the participation, creating tension and uncertainty in the piece's development.

The complexity of scores in Noémie Lafrance's interactive social choreography experiment *Choreography for Audience* (2012) far exceeded that of *Mandala*. The project involved around 300 participants who engaged in a series of choreographic games that generated evolving patterns and formations, creating a 'human kaleidoscope'. To enact this partly competitive mass movement – which slightly resembles the uniform-colored teams and upbeat atmosphere of the *Jeux sans frontières*[93] international game show – participants had to memorize a highly elaborate set of rules as a several hours long homework. (Boguszewski, 2012) .

In Helbich's two more recent, similar participatory walking pieces *Be There, Do This* (2014) and *Figures of Walking Together* (2018), participants were invited to enact a 'social choreography' by following meticulously marked pathways in large-scale outdoor spaces. Each pathway was composed for three participants, and it incorporated various choreographic ideas and tasks for interactions. The walking modes were inspired by military formations, as the piece's first performance site was the courtyard of a former barrack. In our conversation, Helbich mentioned the challenge that emerged because these walks were presented in an exhibition format, which did not allow for a precise performative framework. As a result, visitors were often observed performing the piece imprecisely (e.g., not in groups of three, talking through the piece).

It is noteworthy that none of these participatory examples have truly flexible or personal outcomes. A more formally distant, yet intriguing example is the concept of 'morphogenetic field' in relation to the therapeutic technique of 'Family Constellation'. The 'morphogenetic field', a concept introduced by British biologist Rupert Sheldrake, refers to a field or a set of invisible structures that guide the development and organization of biological forms. This field is thought to contain information that influences the shape, form, and behavior of living organisms, acting as a non-physical blueprint that directs the formation and pattern of life. In relation to Family Constellation therapy, the morphogenetic field is often interpreted as a collective family energy or consciousness

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93   Which was extremely popular in 90's Hungary.

that influences the behavior and fate of its members. During a Family Constellation session, practitioners work within this field, where spatial organization based on participants' somatic experiences helps reveal hidden dynamics and provide insight into familial patterns.

While not entirely novel, the other characteristic element of *Mandala* – the use of portable sound sources moved by participants or performers – remains uncommon. The more well-known pieces employing this technique date back to the 'boombox' era, when artists created works using cassette players. A notable example that aligns closely with my approaches is Phil Kline's ***Unsilent Night*** (1992), an annual participatory sound event that transforms traditional caroling into a public space sound intervention. During the piece, participants carry boomboxes playing one of four pre-recorded tracks. These tracks, composed to be played in unison, create a unique and harmonious soundscape as participants walk through city streets. The piece has been performed in nearly 150 cities since its premiere.

In composer José Maceda's ***Cassettes 100*** (1971), 100 people with cassette players assembled in the Cultural Center of the Philippines and played individually recorded tapes featuring recordings of indigenous Filipino instruments and voices. Throughout the event, participants were instructed to press the "play" button simultaneously as they wandered through the crowds gathered in the CCP's lobby, moving up and down stairwells and through interconnected corridors.

5.3.3. Pathways and spatial setup

Discussing the development of the pathways, it's worth to note that I never intended to assign direct symbolic meaning to the patterns – a question I'm often asked in post-performance discussions – nor did I study the traditional connotations of various mandala forms and colors. This decision was partly due to my conscious effort to avoid crossing a threshold into an overtly spiritual atmosphere, which might create resistance in some participants[94]. Instead, the composition of the pathways was developed solely to enhance the participatory experience. I established the basic principles of pathway composition based on the experiences of the first three work-in-progress shows in late 2015.

For the first tryout of the piece, I drew an elaborate black and red floor pattern consisting of highly interconnected combinations of circles and squares. This design was

94   I think the title could already feel too 'pop-esoteric' for many, but I just cannot think of any
        other title for this piece.

inspired by artist Ferenc Lantos' geometric variation studies[95], while also subtly resembling traditional mandalas. At each side of the pattern, I placed a color code (red, yellow, green, blue) to help participants locate their pathways using a provided map. However, this complex design proved challenging. The pathways were not easily distinguishable, causing participants to struggle with memorizing them. As a result, people often found themselves looking at their feet while walking, rather than engaging with the space and each other as intended. The intersecting and shared lines of the pathways further complicated navigation. I marked the pathways with chalk so they were dismantling slowly, which was a reference to the original sand mandalas that are swept up once finished[96]. This attribute was kept when the piece is performed on concrete floors, but as I see this as a minor contextual detail, when possible I use the much more practical electric tape.
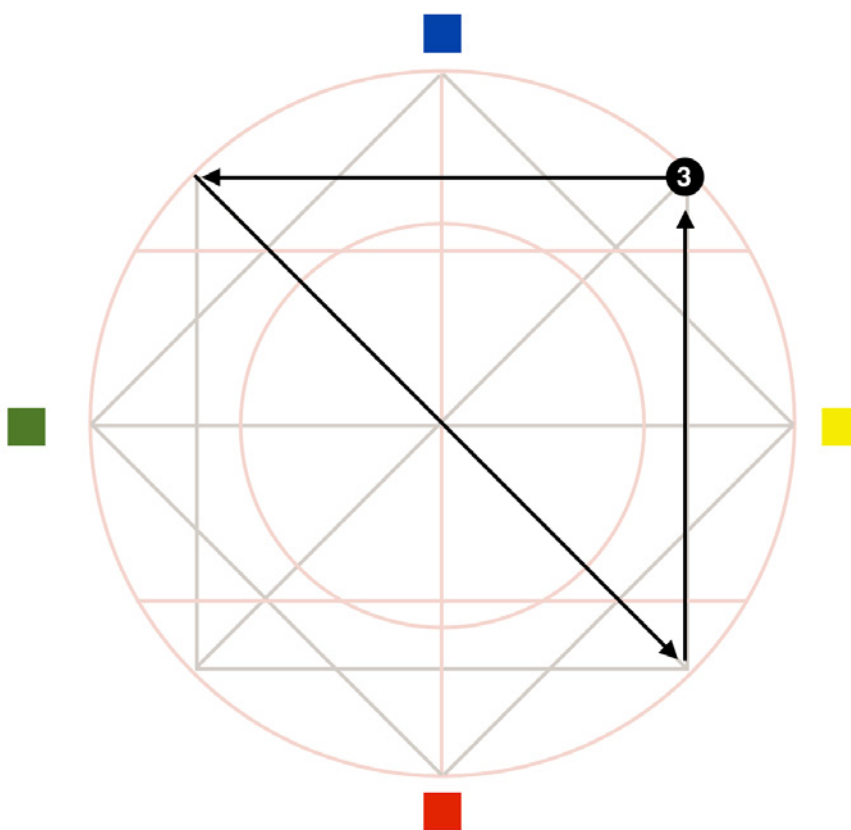
Following the initial, less successful tryout, I simplified the floor patterns to basic shapes: circles, rectangles, triangles, and later, straight lines. For the second work-in-progress show, I designed the pathways to intersect without sharing common lines, which proved to be an effective solution, as they were easily readable and followable.

95   Lantos, F. (2010). *Természet – Rend – Variációk (Vázlat).* Pécsi Galéria.
96   At one 3-day run in Helsingør, Denmark, the frequent rainfalls washed away the pathways each night, creating an authentic experience of their namesake.
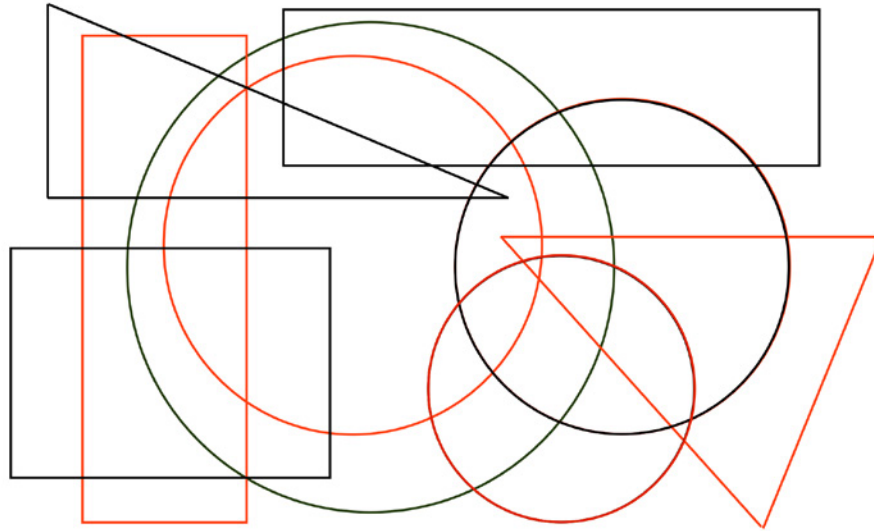
In the third iteration, I experimented with a hierarchical setup of pathways, varying in size and connections. For instance, one participant was assigned a tiny square within a circle, intersected by only one other path. However, this approach resulted in an unsatisfying experience for some participants and felt overly puppetmaster-like on my part. Recognizing this, I abandoned the hierarchical concept in favor of more balanced floor plans.

Initially, people had starting points on their pathway marked with placed speakers, which they found using provided maps. Later, by using more colors, I created unique combinations of shapes and colors, eliminating the need for printed maps. I could simply assign a specific pathway (for example "the red circle"), allowing participants to find them upon entering the performance space.
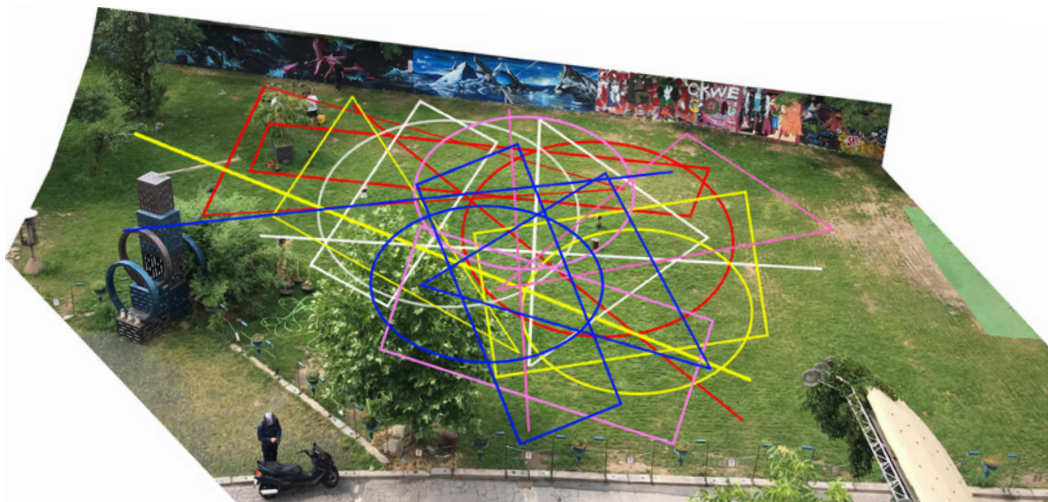
In the first few years, each pattern was meticulously planned and demarcated. With experience, I began drawing patterns by sight, following these main rules:

- Shapes are more or less equally distributed for a balanced space.
- Intersections occur between 60-90° angles, avoiding close parallels, so people can pass by each other without shouldering.
- All pathways have parts away from intersections, preferably at the margins, for standing out, resting, or observing.
- Each pathway crosses at least half of the others, but not all, creating the biggest intersections in central areas.

The organization of the pathways in combination with the repetitive movement – as is often mentioned in the post-show discussions – can be easily connected with analogies of urban life movement. Highlighting the geometric aspects of the movement of individual lives in the modern urban landscape appears within several influential theories, such as those of the Situationist International[97] or French anthropologist and spatial theorist Marc Augé, as Mike Pearson concludes:

> A famous Situationist map of Paris demonstrated that most Parisians only ever moved regularly between three points in the city, their entire life circumscribed by a triangle — home, work, shop. (Pearson, 2010, p.98)

> Augé identifies three simple spatial forms to map social space: line, the intersection of lines, and the point of intersection. In the city, these correspond respectively to paths that lead from one place to another, to crossroads and open spaces where people pass, meet, and gather. (…) Augé's notion of itinerary, intersection, centre, and monument begins to describe the urban space, highlighting how individual itineraries are constantly drawn towards centres, where they intersect and mingle, creating a polyphony of interlaced destinies, actions, thoughts, and reminiscences. (Pearson, 2010, p. 97)

97   The Situationist International (SI) was a group of social theorists, artists, and activists founded in 1957, known for critiquing modern capitalist society. They introduced the concept of the "spectacle," highlighting how mass media and consumer culture shape social relations. The SI sought to disrupt passive consumption through creative subversion, influencing the 1968 uprisings in France and leaving a lasting impact on contemporary resistance movements.

5.3.4. Music and sound

Upon receiving the commission to create the piece, I decided to rework the composition under the guidance of Jeremy Peyton Jones.[98] My goal was to create a more complex and purposeful composition then the William Basinski-style[99], loop-based piece I had initially composed for the work-in-progress variations. The new compositional concept aimed to create a piece that sounded neutral and natural in its texture and movement, while also incorporating an elevated ethereal feel and strong vibrational qualities. I decided creating a neutral atmosphere as I did not want to influence too much the emotional state of the audience members, nor creating a sound world that is overly prominent, and can be experienced as a music that one needs to stop and listen. The usage of vibratory sounds was a deliberate decision in order to offer another possibility of non-verbal connection and communication. When vibrating sounds surround us it can feel as an almost tactile experience.[100] The connecting and even healing qualities of vibratory sounds is noted in fictional stories[101], in relation to sound therapy, urban music[102] and **purring cats**.

Jeremy suggested that I listen to the work of Eliane Radigue[103], a French composer and pioneer of electronic drone music, to inform this new direction. After listening to her

98   At the time, composition teacher at Goldsmiths College. Jeremy sadly passed away in 2021.

99   William Basinski is known for his experimental and ambient music, characterized by the use of tape loops and minimalistic compositions. His most famous work, ***The Disintegration Loops*** (2002-2003), captures the gradual decay of magnetic tape recordings, creating haunting and meditative soundscapes.

100   This tactile nature of sound is described by one of the most famous hearing-impaired musicians, percussionist Evelyn Glennie: *"If you are standing by the road and a large truck goes by, do you hear or feel the vibration? The answer is both. With very low frequency vibration the ear starts becoming inefficient and the rest of the body's sense of touch starts to take over. For some reason we tend to make a distinction between hearing a sound and feeling a vibration, in reality they are the same thing."* (Glennie, 2015)

101   In Kurt Vonnegut's science fiction novel *The Sirens of Titan* (Vonnegut, 1959), Martian ex-soldier Boaz, shipwrecked on Mercury, is trapped in an underground cave system where he discovers the only living creatures in the area, called ‚harmoniums'. These creatures feed on vibrations and are interlocked in complex patterns. Boaz then spends the rest of his life 'feeding' the harmoniums from a gramophone with carefully selected music, experiencing total interconnectedness and bliss.

102   This kind of physicality, the effect of sound systems on the body and its spiritual implications, is also a defining element of the Jamaican-originated dub music genre. As British musician Nabibah Iqbal puts it: *"As you approach (an outdoor sound system) you start to hear the bass frequencies vibrating through your chest (...), you can get a little bit closer to understanding how music affects you spiritually."* Quoted in Quirk, J. (2020). *The Picassos of modern music*, BBC.

103   Who also had a strong base in Buddhist practice. After exploring Tibetan Buddhism, she swiftly converted and dedicated the following three years to its practice under the guidance of her guru, Tsuglak Mawe Wangchuk, who eventually encouraged her to return to her musical pursuits.

piece *Jetsun Mila* (1987), her sound world and compositional approach, characterized by constantly microchanging minimalism, became an almost singular reference point in my process. Some of her approach that I aimed to follow is vividly described by Louise Gray in her essay about Radigue:

> Often, because of the gradual transitions between one section and another, we do not hear them as such (…) A visual analogy might be of "listening" to the shades of color on a Mark Rothko painting or of watching how changes of light act on our perception of an object. (…) She asks us to listen to the sound before sound, and then to the harmonics – the sounds within sounds – that come into play as the notes interact and decay. This is why sound sources [loudspeakers] (…) are so important: the listener is bathed in a vibratory mass of sonic material. (2024)

When the direction and sound world of the piece decided, I composed five constantly changing, slowly moving parts that seamlessly crossfade into each other. Each part consisted of ten layers of continuous tones, harmonizing with various complexities, and included textures of tape loops and minimalist soundscapes. These layers were doubled with small variations in pitch to create a total of twenty layers. This composition has changed only slightly since its premiere.[104]

5.3.5. The emerging piece and its experiences

I will refer to three sources in describing the emerging choreography-experience. The first source is myself, as I always remain in the performance space – most often on the sidelines as a holding presence, occasionally joining as a participant[105] when extra people are needed. This has allowed me to observe all performances from both internal and external perspectives, providing a significant breadth of experience to oversee the range of possible outcomes. An important observation is that the piece's framework creates quite similar repetitions in their progression, while always being slightly different due to the nature of participation. It is extremely rare for something truly unique to occur – even an easily imaginable event, such as someone using their voice to sing over the composition, has only happened once across all performances.

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104   A short **excerpt** of the composition from the beginning of the piece.
105   As I am always careful not to initiate any new ways of interaction, I quickly blend into the groups of regular audience members. I've never received feedback that my participation had any additional effect on the piece.

Secondly I will refer to the experiences of the audience from the equally large amount of post-show conversations, also including quotes from the conversation[106]. This conversation, first started as a feedback session to develop the piece, soon became an inseparable and integral part of the piece[107], where the non-verbal interactions could truly land in the participants, through the liberating acknowledgments of the similarities and differences of their experiences. Analogous with the similarities of the group dynamics that have emerged from the framework, the sharings also bear similarities to each other, and the topics revolve around a few well-defined themes. Finally I will add the outside viewpoint of the reviewers of the piece.

Unfolding actions and mimesis

One of the important aspects of the piece is that while the instructions can be immediately understood by the audience, they do not reveal the outcome right away. The piece unfolds in parallel within the minds and actions of the audience as they explore the possibilities of the framework—driven by curiosity or sometimes boredom—and through their interactions with and imitation of others. Crossing paths with others often becomes the focal point of emerging interactions: participants can choose to be polite, dominant, or obstructive; they can create a shared history and abstract relationships with others; or connect through the sounds. These interactions also often evoke self-reflections about how one is dealing with their social lives. This process was observed from outside by the reviewers and vividly accounted from inside by the participants:

> The people are patient. They set off at a fairly functional pace, get to know each other, settle into their task and relax to testing the edges of it. Tempo, pause, direction changes – the simple restrictions/instructions open up an indulgence of complexity. (Baybutt, 2016)

> As the paths cross or run close to each other, the participants become acquainted with each other, and depending on their temperament, they begin to open up to each other, (also) play with each other, "hypnotize" their partners with their "music", form group séances at certain intersections – in the most extreme cases, swap speakers and "roles" and paths. (Králl, 2017)

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106   Quoted in brown and anonymously, from various shows.
107   After experiencing the animated and liberating atmosphere of the feedback session at one of the work-in-progress shows at the Brighton Dome, my mentor Ben Ash – of the company Dog Kennel Hill Project – suggested that I should keep it as a part of the piece. The challenge and importance of sharing one's experience after these non-verbal, experiential pieces, as well as the complexity of gathering feedback and facilitating meaningful discussions about them, emerged as common themes in my conversations with several artists.

And from the perspective of the participants:

> "In the first 5-8 minutes, I was just doing the path and kind of experimenting with different movements. I really didn't pay any attention to the people, maybe just to the sound—like how it changed depending on which part of the circle I was in. Then, at one point, I had an encounter that opened my eyes. I looked around, and everyone was doing the same thing, this kind of scanning with the speaker. That's when I realized that information spreads."

> "So when you come into it, you think, 'OK, I am following the shape.' But it's not about you at all; it's about everyone else around you. That is fascinating. It's a surprise."

> "I made up games. One of them was that I wasn't allowed to move until someone crossed my path."

> "I was also very conscious that when everyone seemed to stop, I didn't want to copy you, so I kept walking. You know, I would have really liked just to sit down."

> "I was actually really enjoying just watching everyone else in the group. Like I was being influenced by other people more than by the sound or the path."

> "I just really wanted to have a fight with somebody. But everyone was too polite, always making space. I don't want to allow others to get in the way."

> "I feel that I have revealed a lot about myself."

Shapes and their connotations

The repetitive walking on the shapes not only alters the participants' state of mind and their relational dynamics but also triggers metaphorical contemplation of their everyday lives, embodying the previously mentioned theories of the Situationists and Marc Augé:

> "It reminds me of when I lived in Manchester, a very specific daily walk to work and back home, which was probably the same pattern every day, just like how we had to follow these shapes on the floor."

For many participants, this metaphor broadens to life and relationships in general: Everyone has a pathway; some stick to it, while others try to leave it, facing the consequences; we meet certain people on our paths, while others remain distant.

> "Is it painful now that I can never reach you on the other side? And I can never cross roads with you, but still, we are like sharing one bigger space. And it's also beautiful to see you there, far on your own axis, meeting with other people. And this is also like life. Certain people meet with each other and they do something. And other people over there create their own village. And still, we are like one composition."

'Owning' only a single shape that was given, and not being able to try another one – if one sticks to their path – can result in frustration and 'shape-jealousy' for some.

> "I felt like I had quite harsh angles to navigate. I wanted the circle."

> "I was jealous of the triangle. I think it was nice over there. Why am I on this circle?"

> "I was very protective of my shape. Yeah, I thought mine was great. The only person I was jealous of, was the one with the big square."

Although the shapes are simple, participants often realize that the number of ways one can approach them is inexhaustible.

> "It felt like even though they are walking the exact same shape over and over, it somehow felt, as it went on, like you were taking some kind of different path."

And, of course, repetitively walking on a shape can create a meditative experience.

> "It was similar to just walking meditation, because you just don't have anything else to do but walk on your circle. You know, there was not too much thinking."

Following rules

As was briefly mentioned in relation to David Heblich's *Keine-Spiele*, the implications and problems of following a set of instructions, especially if one does not fully understand their implications, is a recurring topic in the aftertalks.

"It's funny how even in a space like this, you start thinking about what is appropriate behavior and what isn't. What are the rules? Can I step out? Am I disturbing or not disturbing? What can I do? Can I break the rules? Should I conform, or should I just stay here and not disturb anyone? Will this person be offended if I start jumping over her? Maybe I should be more polite or something like that. Wow, it's amazing how all these social constructions are embedded in us."

"The question of how far I can stray from the rules? Or do I create these rules? Or the extent of them—how much I dare, or allow myself, or simply decide that this is still the line I'm on. So, in a way, I'm a composer of life."

"When I saw people walking backwards and changing directions, I was flabbergasted. I was really shocked. Maybe I just follow the rules too easily."

Following precise instructions can result in resistance from participants sensitive to such situations. They may feel their freedom is restricted and it frustrates them that they need to 'obey' the artist, who places himself in an authoritative position. In some cases, this causes them to leave their pathway and either join others or wander around in the performance area. As I observed from outside and heard from their accounts, loosening the restrictions this way almost always led to a boring, aimless stroll within a few minutes. For me, this proves the importance of the precise, but interpretable task and the formal restrictions, which are not just creating guidance one can follow, but also establishing a novel situation of non-verbal co-existence with its own stakes. As dance critique Csaba Králl put this in context,

> The initially individualized, introverted, meditative state soon turns into a community performance, which tries to enjoy the game from all sides, but still takes place within a strict framework, where we can not only witness the fulfilment of homo ludens, but also touch upon complex filosophical questions, from following rules and fitting into the system to the problem of opening up and living with freedom. (Králl, 2017)

Sounds

During the performance, many audience members quickly recognize the resonant nature of the sounds and begin to engage with it, giving each other sound massages or creating highly resonant concentrations of sound.

"The sound composition formed itself through the relationship of the speaker. If it was sending the wsound into the body, then the body amplified the sound. And it felt like, well, I'm the speaker myself. I'm just one part of the sound creation. The first moment someone gave it on my body, the sound was such a strong experience."

Surprisingly, the interactions with the sounds were the only notably different element across the various cultures of 14 countries on three continents. In the extremely crowded and cacophonous metropolises of Istanbul and Cairo, individuals were almost never inclined to share their sound – a behavior common in groups elsewhere – but rather kept it to themselves. My intuition is that in these environments, hearing one's own voice takes on greater importance, as it can easily be lost in the symphony of countless other voices.

The importance of the connective quality of the composition also became evident at the only time the piece was terminated before its intended end. At a public space festival in Santa Maria de Feira, due to uncareful programming, a loud show featuring rhythmic electronic music started just 100 meters away, dominating the sonic atmosphere. Within 15 minutes, people began returning the speakers, and the audience gradually dispersed until no one was left.

5.3.6. Different variations and sites

As the original idea was to develop the piece into a variety of iterations, during the first few years I enthusiastically experimented with different variations.

The second most common version of the piece is performed with a slightly longer 40-minute performance time, during which the audience can swap between roles by occupying or passing on one of the 20 pathways and the delegated speakers. In this variation, it works best for the passive audience if they can watch it from above, when it can really become a **bird's-eye view** of the patterns of social interactions.

For summer festivals held in natural environments, a **forest version** was developed. As a substitution for the pathways drawn on the ground, I chose to create combinable routes by color-coding trees with ribbons in an approximately 200 sqm area. Each audience member received one of the five colors along with their speaker, while the instruction was to connect the trees of their respective colors. The less restricted pathways and the natural environment created a more contemplative state in the participants

and a stronger connection to their surroundings – the forest. The connecting vibrating sound and the heightened focus on their senses helped people immerse themselves in the endless details and variations of such an environment. As one audience member recounted, "I am not sure what happened to me. I got into an altered state; I felt that I was becoming one with a tree."

In one version titled *Kerengő*, the piece was transformed to focus more on a spatial experience in relation to the architecture in which it was played. A meticulously designed set of pathways was drawn with chalk in an abandoned and emptied factory building with half a dozen spaces of various sizes. This version created a contemplative urbex-like[108] atmosphere and an opportunity to reflect on the somatic sensations of the various rooms and architectural features – moving the piece closer to the relational approaches that connects the audience to their surroundings.

After several years of observing participants' engagement and reactions, I became confident in the piece's strong inclusive qualities. As people of all ages and backgrounds in contemporary performance were able to participate with comparable levels of engagement, I realized it might be an ideal format for people with disabilities, or even for integrated sessions with both disabled and non-disabled participants. Supported by a research grant, I collaborated with specialists in the field through a series of workshops to develop subtle modifications, making the piece accessible to a wide range of disabilities. This effort resulted in the facilitation of several joyful **integrated sessions**. A detailed description of this process can be found in the appendix.

Finally, I would like to mention the effect of various spaces on the experience. I had the luck to present the piece in some truly magnificent spaces, including a 3000-year-old **Egyptian sacral space**, the 'Red Basilica' at Bergama, Turkey; the impressive half-finished Bauhaus-style **Hungarian Holy Land Church** at the edge of Budapest; and the massive **atrium** of the cultural center Praça das Artes in São Paulo. Performing in such places noticeably added to the ceremonial atmosphere of the experience. At other locations where there was a larger vista, as in Sardinia where it was played against the backdrop of some beautiful **mountains**, or in Helsingør where it was performed at the seaside in front of "Hamlet's castle" or in forests, the connection to the environment becomes more prominent. The few times the piece was performed in a frequented

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108   Urbex, short for urban exploration, is the exploration of man-made structures, often abandoned buildings, tunnels, and ruins. It involves navigating and documenting places that are usually off-limits or hidden from the general public. Urbex enthusiasts seek to discover and photograph these locations, capturing their decay and history, while adhering to the principles of "take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints."

public square with no seclusion, the less extroverted participants reported feeling more self-conscious. Therefore, I decided to omit this possibility when choosing sites for subsequent performances.

6. THE UNIUQE ASPECTS OF SPATIAL SOUND PERFORMATIVITY

↓ Dávid Somló: Overheard
(photo: Imre Vass, Dávid Somló)

In this final thematic chapter, I explore three distinctive aspects of sound that offer unique creative and experiential potentials: the heightened imagination and perception evoked by focused listening; the ability to project multiple realms onto a single acoustic space; and the paradoxical coexistence of mysterious and hyper-realistic qualities in sound. I argue that these specific approaches can elevate the medium beyond its conventional supportive role in performative contexts, revealing fresh territories for creation.

Before delving into this discussion, I'll introduce two works that I will reference frequently, and when mixed together, nearly sum up the final case study: my blindfolded sound-performance *Overheard*.

In [Hear](#) (2016), Benjamin Vandewalle collaborated with composer and musician Yoann Durant to devise an immersive experience where the audience, blindfolded and dispersed throughout the space, was enveloped in a dynamic soundscape, created solely by a choir of 25-30 performers. As the voices moved around and between the audience members, the performance explored the visual potential of sound, aiming to transform the auditory into a tangible, physical experience. Vandewalle and Durant incorporated a choir of performers from each city they performed in, resulting in every version having a distinct, local voice.

Dimitri de Perrot's [Niemandsland](#) (2021) was an immersive sound installation-performance that invited the audience into a sensory experience without a conventional stage or visible performers. At the beginning of the piece, participants were led into a vast, darkened space, where they encountered a series of uniquely designed platforms with built-in speakers. Situating themselves in this environment, they could delve into a deep listening experience focusing on the continuously evolving sound composition, which challenged their perception and stimulated their imagination.

6.1. Heightened imagination and perception

Zsuzsanna Komjáthy in her essay on sound's performativity, suggests that sound discovers its potential for a leading role in performance through the activation of the audience's attention, perception, and imagination.

> If we accept that sound is also movement in a certain sense, should we also automatically accept that choreographies and performances can be created from/sound? (...) It is all the more suited to becoming 'active theatre' in the

post-dramatic sense (…). For sound can focus the attention and activate its audience. On the one hand, it is always accompanied by a kind of emotional process, it evokes associations, imaginative images, and on the other hand, since the listener is dependent on their own body, they are in a sense listening to themselves while perceiving the sound. Listening thus in fact draws attention to the appearance and simultaneous reception of sound, that is, to performativity itself; more precisely, to the performativity of observation/perception. (Komjáthy, 2018)

Sound, due to its inherent lack of creating a shared visual experience, inevitably activates the imagination, that is often more specific to each person than seeing a concrete image. Legendary film sound designer and editor Walter Murch[109] articulated this aspect:

> This metaphoric use of sound is one of the most flexible and productive means of opening up a conceptual gap into which the fertile imagination of the audience will reflexively rush, eager (even if unconsciously so) to complete circles that are only suggested, to answer questions that are only half-posed. What each person perceives (…) will have entangled within it fragments of their own personal history, creating that paradoxical state of mass intimacy. (Murch, 2005)

Using this attribute as a creative tool appears in the artistic intentions of Dimitri De Perrot: "Sounds appear only for a short period and their echoes are often in the interior, since every sound creates individual associations. Which can be its strongest asset in creating artistic work" as "The ambivalence or insight that one and the same thing can mean something completely dissimilar for different people." (De Perrot) The experience of this approach can be detected in the reviewer's recounts of *Niemensland* and *Hear*. First about Niemendsland: "The acoustic fragments, sometimes locatable as individual events, sometimes occupying the entire space in symphonic density, transcend reality. (…) As an open artwork, it demands the involvement of one's own thinking." (Bernays, 2021) And: "As an audience, as listeners, we repeatedly find ourselves in our own imagination. The sound artist lets visitors wander between the worlds of the unconscious and the conscious." (Walpen 2021) Finally: "Dimitri de Perrot achieves the feat of creating a collective experience while

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109   He is known for his contributions to iconic films such as *Apocalypse Now*, *The Godfather* series, and *The English Patient*. Murch has won multiple Academy Awards and is recognized for his innovative techniques in film editing and sound design, as well as for his influence on the theory and practice of both disciplines in modern filmmaking.

mobilizing our most personal interpretations. It is our own listening that transports us from one ambiance to another, from one place to another, until we lose our sense of reality." (Chevillard, 2022) **Then about** *Hear:* "It became clear how I, as a listener, did not only add an imaginative layer to the performance space but also the choreographed reality. Imagination became a creative action within auditory choreography." (Persyn, 2019, p. 209)

By shifting the focus to the auditory, it not only directs attention to listening, but by the reduction of the overpowering visual perception the whole somatic experience can shift. This is evident in several reviews of the aforementioned sound-performances. Viktoria Beličáková described her experience during *Listening Club*:

> The sound is expanding in the space, is becoming omnipresent, resonating from all places. Then, behind my closed eyes, the sound slowly materializes, gains its own matter, substance, volume. It's physical now, made of delicate material, smooth fabric that can easily slip through my fingers. It feels like muslin or silk, tangible and fluid at the same time. But also it seems to be solid and sharp with razor-edged tones. (…) Our sensation of space is changing, there are no walls or roof, we are floating in emptiness, far away from our everyday realities. (2018)

Krisztina Orbán emphasized her bodily sensations during *Overheard*:

> I make noises myself because I move my clothes or scratch. And I have to scratch: in the dark I am fully aware of my body, and here and there the itch is getting stronger. I feel warm, my sense of space and body changes: my head is sitting on a much longer torso, and from there I look down into the darkness and into my lap. (2021)

While Leonie Persyn recounts her shift of perception during Vandewalle's *Hear* with a phenomenologist's reductive precision:

> "My listening sharpens. My attention increases and shifts. I no longer focus on what is happening in front of me, but rather listen sideways and to the activities behind my back." (2020, p. 64) **and** "It compels me (…) to tacitly sense the motives and organisation of 'Hear' as a (choreographed) situation for my listening body." (2020, p. 70)

6.2. Heterotopias – Listening to different realms

With its transparent qualities, sound is easily capable of projecting several realms into a space simultaneously. To listen to these – either constructed or serendipitously appearing – parallel realities together is an important task of deep listening. As Pauline Oliveros explains, *"Deep Listening is listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing. Such intense listening includes the sounds of daily life, of nature, or one's own thoughts as well as musical sounds. (...) Quantum listening is listening to more than one reality simultaneously."* (Oliveros, 1999/2022)

As discussed in the previous subchapter, sounds can function as surfaces for inner projections, triggered by emotions, images, and memories of various times and spaces. These layers of projections can appear simultaneously and intertwine with the various sound layers of a given space. Michel Foucault refers to these simultaneous multi-realms as heterotopias and heterochronies, naming them as important aspects of the mechanism of theatre.

> The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theatre brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another. (...) Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry heterochronies. (1984, p.46)

A first example of this aspect is Georg Klein's *Site-Sound Marl Midtown* (2002). The work is a highly site-specific and performative sound installation situated in the non-functioning concrete hall of Marl Centre train station. The installation's main material comprises recordings of local graffiti texts read by Marl youth, musically complemented by resonant tones from the hall's metal bars. These graffiti texts, reflecting social tensions and personal expressions, were composed into a voice choir played through speakers hanging from the ceiling. The installation transformed overlooked written messages into an immediate acoustic presence, provoking strong public reactions and sparking local discussions about social issues. This work demonstrates how sound can recontextualize a space, creating a heterotopia that juxtaposes different social realities and timeframes within a single location.

Another rather grave, but fitting example of heterotopias and heterochronies is the Covid-19 memorial piece *Every Day* (2022), a collaboration of mine with artist and composer Ábris Gryllus. Emanating from three-meter-high columns, the sound piece

transposed the Hungarian daily data of the coronavirus epidemic into musical parameters to create a musical and community experience surrounding the listener. Two years of epidemiological data per county – March 4, 2020 – March 4, 2022 – was translated into a 45-minute electronic music composition, rendering the dry daily statistics physically and emotionally tangible. The installation-composition was played at three public squares of Budapest, next to historical memorial column's of the victims of plague epidemics.

The musical texture and intensity of the piece followed the waves of the epidemic – the numerical changes of the daily infections changed the pitch, volume, rhythm etc., creating musical 'movements'. The musical material was played by 20 speakers placed on 20 poles representing the 19 countries and the capital, creating a map of Hungary. The data of each county was played from a separate speaker and placed in an approximate position in the country, while the calendar days were projected on a small LED screen in sync with the sound of that day. As the number of cases increased, the intensity of the sounds was escalating, and the harmonies produced by the different speakers were becoming increasingly complex with each passing wave.

The concept of the composition and the organisation of the installation was allowing the audience to be in three realms simultaneously: First, in their own mental image and memory of the actual days that the composition accompanied with its ceremonial atmosphere. Second, the spatial representation of the country and their sonified amount of Covid cases. Finally, the shared public space, as a part of a collective remembrance.

To conclude this section, I would like to quote the poetic thoughts of Peter Sellars on the connotations of the multi-layered nature of sound:

> Every sound of the world is telling you history, feeling and a cosmic atmosphere that is in fact both a repository of an echo that has not ended, a sound that is continuous and a resonance that belongs to a particular occasion, a particular time, a particular place, and the lives in this place are still resonating. You're actually piercing time through sound. You're reaching across the horizon of time, through sound, through that which continues to speak and echo. (2018, pp. 177-178)

6.3. Sound as a mystery and hologram

Everyone has experienced instances where they had no idea what they were hearing,

or what produced that sound; or conversely, they thought they precisely understood what they heard and its source, but were mistaken. Rocchesso, Bresin, and Fernstrom concluded in their phenomenological sound perception study (2003) that in the auditory domain, we often encounter the issue of perceiving a sound without the representation of its source, leading to the complex challenge of recognition – both of the source and of the sound itself. Recognition changes with the knowledge of the perceiver (one can better identify familiar sounds); there is often false recognition (one hears rain, but it was just the radiator); we easily confuse the relation of volume and distance (it may seem to be the loud bell of the church from far away, when it's actually coming from the phone close by); recognition changes and refines over time with repetition, but relies on the trace in the memory if heard once.

From my perspective, these ambiguities of sound and source recognition open up creative possibilities that are unique to the medium of sound. This gives rise to two distinct yet interconnected compositional effects, which are, in a sense, two sides of the same coin: the mystery of the unknown source and the 'holographic'[110] sound image. The mystery emerges when one is unable to identify either the source or the sound itself, evoking an intriguing sense of uncertainty. On the other hand, one can perceive a 'holographic' sound image when sounds create the experience of a realistic spatial presence, even when the audience is aware that they are listening to a composed soundscape – an effect difficult to achieve in other media.

In my experience, creating a true sonic mystery primarily relies on concealing the sound source – I believe that there is a crucial difference between visible and hidden sound sources. The idea of hidden speakers – which was briefly discussed regarding *Slow Steps Have Ears* – emerged during the rehearsals of *Length of a Distance*[111], proving to be a revelation, creating an undecidable origin and presence for the sounds carried by the performers. As Don Ihde notes, "Sounds are frequently thought of as anticipatory clues for ultimate visual fulfillments" (2007, p. 54). Hence, if one perceives the source of the sound, even if the sound itself is unrecognizable and its origin uncertain, the anticipation is fulfilled and the mystery diminished. The speaker's presence provides a tangible connection to someone responsible for both the sound and its placement, suggesting a traceable reason for its existence.

110   A hologram, in its original sense, is a three-dimensional image created by the interference pattern of laser light. When illuminated properly, a hologram creates a realistic, three-dimensional image of the original object, viewable from different angles.
111   This idea originated from a suggestion by Nicholas Stücklin, my former classmate and a performer in the piece.

In contrast, even within the context of a sound performance that is clearly designed to challenge the perception of the audience, not *seeing* the source creates a lingering uncertainty and confusion. An experience of *Niemandsland* illustrates this effect: "De Perrot plays with sounds that remind us of everyday life, that are familiar and yet hard to locate. (…) Is it cattle? A cow entering a stable? Although the sound is almost always perceived as synthetic, it remains ambiguous." (Walpen, 2021) This is also true for acoustic sounds, as Leonie Persyn, the dramaturg of *Hear*, recounts that the revealing sounds of walking were one of the challenges of the creative process. "If Vandewalle and Durant did not find a way to silence the footsteps of their performers, the audience (…) would be able to locate and identify the sound almost immediately." (2019, p. 201)

Own Work →

Uncovering sonic mysteries can be a source of satisfying release and humor. The flat performance *IITTHHOONN* (a collaboration of mine with Imre Vass, 2019) began as audience members entered a room filled with the buzz of a dozen hidden domestic objects (such as a massage gun, electric toothbrush, or radio static). Once the audience had found their seats and we had lingered for a while in this complex noise-scape, we started to turn these objects off one by one, beginning with the loudest and moving to the quietest, often revealing unexpected placements. As each object was silenced, it revealed previously unnoticed quieter sounds, repeatedly surprising the audience with their existence and location, highlighting how little they understood of this peculiar soundscape's composition. When all objects were finally turned off, the resulting silence became palpable.

Max Neuhaus accounts the hidden mystery of *Times Square*[112] as one of the main element of its reception:

> Its sonority, a rich harmonic sound texture resembling the after ring of large bells, is an impossibility within its context. Many who pass through it, however, can dismiss it as an unusual machinery sound from below ground. For those who find and accept the sound's impossibility though, the island becomes a different place, separate, but including its surroundings. These people, having no way of knowing that it has been deliberately made, usually claim the work as a place of their own discovering. (2002)

Moving to the hyper-realistic qualities of sounds, while visual holograms create 3D images viewable from different angles, sound can generate equally convincing spatial

112   Discussed at the subchapter *Sound Zones*.

experiences, often surpassing visual possibilities. This 'holographic' quality of sound leverages our auditory perception's capacity to accept a broader range of spatial cues as real. As composer and researcher Natasha Barrett concludes, in her study about spatial sound composition,

> A spatial illusion does not need to satisfy all of the real spatial laws. In fact it is interesting how much one can get away with before the perception of a spatial illusion breaks down. A primitive reverberation effect can provide the illusion of a spatial enclosure (…). We know the illusion does not exactly resemble a real-world image, but nevertheless accept the information as a good enough approximation. (Barrett, 2002)

With strategic speaker placement, sound can move so realistically that – especially with eyes closed – the created auditory scene becomes virtually indistinguishable from reality. If a sound event is recorded in a space acoustically similar to the listening environment, such as footsteps across a room, it can be played back and spatially manipulated through speakers in a remarkably convincing way. This technique can produce an auditory experience so realistic that listeners may genuinely believe the event is occurring in real-time within their immediate surroundings. As my final case study *Overheard* extensively explores and employs this technique, the detailed examples and applications of this sonic holography will be discussed in depth in its analysis.

6.4. Case study 6.: Hyper-quiet sound installation – *Every sound is a thin blue line*

> In these imaginary places that I build, often the moment the listener first walks into the space, it is not clear that a sound is there. But as you begin to focus, a shift of scale happens. At first you hear what could almost be a room sound, which then suddenly becomes huge. As you enter into it, you move into another perception of space because of the change of scale. (Neuhaus, 1994)

The site-specific sound installation *Every Sound is a Thin Blue Line* (2017) featured 19 concealed sound sources located throughout the rooms, furniture, and objects of the K28 flat gallery[113]. The majority of the sounds were played at the threshold of audibility, establishing an extremely delicate listening environment for visitors. Each of the 19 speakers played one of the 19 tracks, containing a 1-3 minute sound followed by 2-6 minutes of silence, with each track having a unique duration compared to the

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113   The gallery focuses on showing minimalist 'pure form' artworks. https://www.instagram.
         com/k28artgallery/.

others. When played together, the 19 tracks created a generative, polymetric composition[114], resulting in a continuously changing spatial and musical coexistence of sounds.

Attendees were encouraged to explore the sound composition from various locations in the interconnected rooms of the gallery. Upon entry, they were given simple instructions on navigating the space and were asked to maintain a quiet atmosphere. Once someone entered the space, it soon became clear that the sounds were so faint that the only way to hear them and to allow others to hear, was to become motionless and sit quietly in one of the chairs, sofas, or beds. If they wanted to experience the sounds from a different perspective, they had to quietly tiptoe to the next room. This common effort to be able to listen and let others listen created a strong communal feeling.

The concept of working with such a low volume emerged during the composition process. As I listened to early versions of the piece, something just didn't feel right – it didn't evoke a strong response from my senses or imagination. Then at one point, I started to decrease the volume of the sounds, and this change began to open up space in the soundscape, as if the sounds were objects that were being reduced in size. This led to a profound realization: lowering the volume to the *edge of audibility* can create a deeper state of listening, as it can change the *spatial relation of attention* between the listener and what they listen to. The experience can be described, that while listening to sounds at easily audible, or loud volumes, listeners are in the comfort that *the sound is coming to them*, whereas at lower volumes, the listener needs to *move their attention towards the sounds* in order to be able to perceive them[115]. Using this revelation in the composition I created a sonic environment that was close to being a busy and detailed silence*,* in which listeners had to follow the sounds less by moving their bodies, but by moving their attention.

Max Neuhaus's sound installation *Three to One* (1992) for Documenta 9 also dealt with this effect: In a historic stairwell of Kassel, Neuhaus installed a set of hidden speakers that were playing sounds whose "level is only slightly above the background noise of the outside world, it requires a sharpening of perception and sensitivity for the acoustic offer. If you listen carefully, the traffic areas expand into a meditative spatial experience in a sphere removed from time." Neuhaus phrases the necessary

114   A common composition technique from the 20th century involves multiple musical layers of different lengths played simultaneously, creating variations through repetition and constantly changing relationships. This technique can also be found in African and Indian music. While it typically employs closely related layers, in this case, the layers are unrelated.

115   Peter Sellars mentioned this task as a form of Sufi listening practice given to him by his friend Said. The exercise was to try to hear to the conversation in the most distant corner of a crowded Berlin café.

perceptual process as "The 'almost plausibility' of the sounds are things that draw you in, in a different way than if the sound were overt either in its character or in its loudness – the quality that it is both there and not there. You change the scale of how you hear." (1994) The necessary listening mode of *Every Sound...* is in contrast with how Zsuzsanna Komjáthy describes Hans Peter Kuhn's similarly quiet sound installation *Aquarium* (2000):

> Here, 32 loudspeakers were placed in the exhibition space, sounding so quietly that you had to get very close to them to hear anything. Kuhn's installation also mobilized the audience, using the dynamics of their attention distribution and then randomly assembling to create his actual work. For the spectators in the gallery, they seemed like fish in water, darting back and forth, up and down: unwittingly, but choreographically. (2018)

Back to my installation, the airy, sensitive sound environment was periodically interrupted by more spatially defined or dynamic sounds that created contrast: Periodically, a synchronized trio of speakers, hidden in 3 different cabinets of a room played percussive sounds, offering a satisfyingly clear triangular spatiality; in another room a speaker in a wooden shelve was playing a crescendo note, composed for the sympathetic resonance of the furniture, thus progressively shaking it in every 20 minutes or so; on the other side of the gallery, a metal sculpture was shaken in a similar manner. Also, there were sound-gags that could only be experienced from small proximity. In the bathroom, I have hidden a speaker in the washing machine, that periodically played the muffled sound of a solo female opera singer[116]. In the kitchen, there was a piece of typical socialist furniture, a plastic hourglass-shaped chair with a removable lid hosting another speaker. From this object, a resonant sound faded in from time to time, giving a lower-body massage, if one was sitting on it and shaking the chair if not.

The last layer of the sonic landscape was the sounds of the city blending in. The permeating sounds from the busy Kazinczy street, as well as the coming and goings of the building and the neighboring flats, offered an unpredictable, but perfectly fitting additional layer. But besides this diffusion being a satisfactory addition to the composed sounds, it also created constant confusion about what was recorded and what was coming from the surrounding urban life – this confusion I enhanced further by placing one speaker outside of the street-front window. Creating doubt in the listener about the source of the sounds is not just for the sake of confusion – by stripping them of the

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116   Anitra Opera Diva sings a capella from Camille Saint-Saëns's opera ***Samson et Delila***. This
       same song later appeared heavily processed in the composition finale of *Drift*.

stable knowledge of what is part of the piece and what is not, can subsequently result in the liberation from the dualistic division between 'wanted' or 'unwanted' sounds, and every sound become equally experienced, pointing towards the Buddhist philosophy of diminishing the idea of one's likes and dislikes.

Through the constant change of distance, mass, and clarity of sounds, the composition could invoke in engaged listeners a highly elaborate perception of auditory spatiality and an almost spiritual state of deep listening, which I could experience myself as well. At one point during the 4-day long run of the installation, I let myself be immersed in a state of deep listening. After an hour, I arrived at a thought-experiment which led to a philosophical realization about sounds: Each resonance of air – in other words, sounds – is in connection with other resonances, creating an endless network of vibrations and connecting every living or non-living entity. In this sense, the collision of the various sounds in life can be seen as a symbolic image of the inevitable and involuntary interconnectedness.

6.5. Case study 7.: Blindfolded sound-performance – *Overheard*

> 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[117] (2021) was a 70-minute sound performance for blindfolded audience members. 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 Vass[118] and Slovenian composer-performer Ivan Mijacevic.

117   The documentation of the piece will be presented along the discussion.
118   Vass also performs in the piece.

6.5.1. Concept

I've started the creation of the piece with the intention of creating a feature-length post-dramatic theatre piece just with sounds – showcasing all my tools of the performativity spatial sound I have developed in the previous years, mainly through the experiments of the sound performance series *'Listening Club'*. The ambitious artistic aim was to create a piece, that is although without a narrative and almost only expressed with sounds, is able to profoundly affect the senses, thought-provoking, entertaining, easy to follow, cathartic, and creates a complex, interwoven world of its own.[119]

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."*[120] As this concept is quite nuanced, with subtle social implications, I find it valuable to explore its context further.

The interest in exploring social relationalities through the medium and connotations of sounds, can be traced in Dimitri De Perrot's statement as well: "My work is an invitation to perceive situations of daily life from a different perspective. (…) What are encounters? What and where is our togetherness? (…) Where and how is commonality created among all differences, privileges and disparities?" (De Perrot). Sound philosopher Brandon LaBelle writes about this aspect of sound in his characteristic sophisticated tone. "As I see it, sound works by creating communion, folding together bodies that are not necessarily seeking each other, forming a proximity between them for a moment or longer (…) an energy that gives rise to a sense of space and of

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119   Which aims are very close to the artistic intentions of Dimitri De Perrot: "I aim to create works that are not overly demanding, making them approachable and capable of easily generating a positive experience. However, precision is crucial: how do I guide the audience to that state? What cues do I provide within the dramaturgy to ensure that, at a certain moment, they are fully present, listening attentively, and completely immersed in the experience, open to a profound and meaningful engagement?" and "My goal in composing the work is to lead the audience to an experience that surprises them, transcending their previous knowledge. I aim to create a special moment where they can receive something meaningful, gain new insights, discover something within themselves, or even spark a discussion." (De Perrot)
120   Remark by Ivan Mijacevic

each other." (LaBelle, 2010, p. 3) In his short book *How to Disappear* (2013), Egyptian writer Haytham El-Wardany describes with bitter irony the privileged's attempt to seal themselves off from this togetherness in their insulated 'Paradise' homes: "The guardian angel of this Paradise is the air-conditioner. (…) Its role is not confined to isolating the inner space (…) but goes further, utterly abolishing the Outside by separating it off sonically." (p.51) Resonating with this observation, the sounds of the ventilation will appear at a crucial point in *Overheard* as well.

But of course, most people won't be able to seal themselves off, and the sound of others will always filter through. And while the visible horizon in a built space is defined by its surrounding walls, the horizon of sound extends beyond these walls. As Labelle writes, "Interruption and the invasiveness of the outside is a condition of life in general. At the same time, borders and boundaries are also important, as they provide a filter to all that may come rushing in: I must limit this force of the outside, monitor and shape its passage" (2020, p. 68). One can try to defend themselves from the unavoidable and overwhelming qualities of sounds, but also could consider a different listening attitude, "to find meaning in the incoherent fragments and noises that interrupt and that trouble and excite the borders between oneself and another. (…) The overheard surprises by reminding us of those who are always around or nearby, behind or to the side, next door (…) to turn us toward the other" (Labelle, 2020, pp. 66-67).

Hearing through walls or other means leads to the problem that most often we not only unaware of the source of sounds, but can't even identify what they are. Which experience resonates with one of the central questions of the public sphere in the age of fake news: *Where does a sound/voice come from, what is real, and what is constructed?* On the other hand, we also don't know how far the sounds of our lives reach, who hears our activity. "What I say is never only for whom I face within a zone of proximity. Rather, (..) in extending myself as a vibratile figure (…) necessarily places me within territories and relations I may never understand let alone glimpse." (Labelle, 2020, p. 65)

For me, the question remains, "What might the overheard teach us? (…) Is there another form of listening to be considered, one tuned to intrusion, to the intruder itself?" (Labelle, 2020, p. 65)

6.5.2. Creative decisions

In service of establishing this rather abstract concept as something that is experienceable, I have laid down a set of compositional/dramaturgical ideas that I wanted

to follow. To be able to completely focus on the mystery of the sounds that connect us without visual trickery, as well as to challenge the audience's understanding of reality and heighten their senses and imagination, I've decided to blindfold them before they enter. This then enabled me to play with the tension of between the recorded and live sounds, the feeling of the fictive and the actual space. As they had no reference of the actual space they have entered, they existed in the space of their imagination[121], only being able to orient themselves by their auditory perception, and experience their heightened somatic senses.

I connect the complete separation of everyday sounds from their sources – achieved through recording and playing them back in a black box – with the emancipation of sound pioneered by *'musique concrète'*[122]. However, unlike musique concrète's tendency towards complete abstraction, this approach aims to rediscover the inherent musicality and connotations of these sounds. As Viktoria Beličáková observed this approach during 'Listening Club':

> A faint cadence of the falling rain, hurried steps on a wet sidewalk, monotonous drone of an airplane, distant calling in an unknown language. It's the music of our everyday life that we never pay attention to. (...) But only now we notice them in new perspective, as independent entities, with their uniqueness and beauty, with their rhythm and musicality. In this somber room they can finally be themselves, they become melodies. They are separated from the overwhelming everydayness, they are placed in different context and acquire new structure, new body. (Beličáková, 2018)

121   The effect of this can be traced in the reviews of the piece: *"The image of a huge, hangar-like room made of iron pipes appears in my mind due to the murmurs and fragments flowing back and forth. When we can finally remove the blindfold and look around, I realize I couldn't have been more wrong about the room."* (Németh, 2024) and *"I don't know if I imagine it as a waterfront because of what's playing on stage, or because I hear the person sitting across from me drinking, but I distinctly feel that if I were to lift my eye mask, I would be greeted by a bright rectangle through which I would see straight to Lake Balaton."* (Orbán, 2021)

122   'Musique concrète' is a compositional approach that radically decontextualizes sounds from their original sources. Developed by Pierre Schaeffer in the late 1940s, this technique involves extracting sounds from their natural environments or contexts and treating them as abstract sonic objects. Through various processing techniques such as looping, pitch-shifting, or reversing, these sounds are transformed into purely musical elements, divorced from their original identities. This liberation of sound from its source allows listeners to experience familiar sounds in entirely new ways.

Similar remarks could be read in regards *Niemandsland:*

> It is hard to distinguish a wind from a wave or the roar of a lion, as the associations
> are primarily individual. The everyday is played in music, but is mine the same
> as the other's? (...) Dimitri de Perrot confronts us with the unique situation of ta-
> king the time to listen to sounds that are ordinarily just heard. (Chevillard, 2022)

As a compositional principle, I aimed for the spatiality, movement, direction, and loca-
lity of the sounds to be the elements that shape the reality and rules of the piece. To
keep the listening attention of the audience in constant motion, I avoided spatially sta-
tic elements; every sound object or event needed to move understandably and per-
ceptibly in a direction.

The conceptual decision to work with the phenomena of permeating sounds on an ex-
periential level pointed towards a common mode of perception of everyday sounds. As
most of us spend a large amount of time in built environments, we experience a cons-
tant bombardment of sounds from around us in the city. Don Ihde observes this aspect
of listening, noting that *"silence is the horizon of sound, while invisibility is the horizon of
objects, (...) but listening makes the invisible present"* (1976, p. 51). To recreate this expe-
rience, I decided to play some sounds from beyond walls[123], while other sounds played
in the performance space were recorded through walls.

An interesting question arose in the compositional decisions: would the use of musi-
cal material fit in the exploration of the performativity of sound, or would it fall back to
a mode of simple musical listening? Ihde observes the process of shifting between mu-
sical and everyday listening:

> The contrast of the musical experience with everyday listening points to two
> such variations of focal attention. Quite ordinarily, sounds are taken directi-
> onally. (...) But if I put myself in the "musical attitude" and listen to the sound

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123   The first time I discovered the possibility to work with permeating sounds was through
      a sound gag that I created for Vass Imre's performance *Taking Place* (2016): At a certain
      point in the piece, a long sequence of minimalist movement and drone music came to a
      long-lasting end, where the dancers stopped in fixed statue-like poses. While the floodlight
      turned pink, slowly but surely, the audience begins to hear a muffled, rather cheesy-sound-
      ing music that seems to be coming from the side street from an oncoming car (a not-so-ra-
      re experience in the weakly sound-insulated theater it was played). But as the music stran-
      gely fitted the visual image and changes the scene's atmosphere, it created a satisfactory
      feeling that even though life speaks into the piece, it enriches it serendipitously, creating
      a sense of a unique, unrepeatable moment. Then, just before this feeling was consolida-
      ted, the music slowly arrived at the PA inside the performance space, and the pun landed:
      there was a speaker hidden outside the window and mixed as if it was coming from a car.

as if it were music, I may suddenly find that its ordinary and strong sense of directionality, while not disappearing, recedes to such a degree that I can concentrate on its surrounding presence. (Ihde, 1976, p. 97)

Reversely, by the spatial movement of the musical material, I aimed to create a directional listening mode and place it in the larger context of sounds. Within this conceptual framework, I considered musical elements as just another set of sounds that appear

in life: the sounds of emotion. I argue that by playing them in a highly spatialized way that immerses the listener and puts music in the realm of reality, it is possible to create a situative, therefore performative layer to listening to musical elements.

I see this approach as somewhat similar to the use of music in the Dogme 95 films[124], where the audience listened to the music together with the characters, rather than it being a separate layer within the spaceless, transcendent sphere of music. The performative experience of spatialized music in this context can be traced again in the description of musical elements in *Listening Club*:

> The music is coming like a gentle wave. First, its melody is almost inaudible, almost as if it was hiding in the corner, too shy to be heard. It's far distant, like a very old, nearly forgotten memory from childhood, a dusty, faded moment from our remote past. It's a very soft sound, a faint murmur that is vibrating in the air with growing intensity. It's a wave that is slowly rising and getting closer – every time more concrete and tangible. (Beličáková, 2018)

In terms of dramaturgy, I considered several layers. On a structural scope, I set up a three-part dramaturgy, which can be compared to the most classical arch: the introduction-discussion-conclusion or opening-development-finale divisions. I tried to translate these into spatial experiences: The opening symbolized the arrival to a place, but also raised the question of '*Where are we?*'. The second 'discussion' part of the piece questioned the different realms of spaces: the real, the artificial, and the imaginary space. The conclusion aimed to bring the audience into the emotional and embodied space.

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124   *"Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot."* (Vinterberg & von Trier, 1995)

On the layer of rhythm and organization of the different scenes, I used an 'associative-dream' dramaturgy[125] here elements follow each other in a non-linear way in terms of meaning, but in a musical rhythm and variety of intensity and theme. I aimed to create a broad range of dynamic intensity and sound material to prevent the listener from settling into any mode of reception or relaxation other than continuously curious, even tense deep listening.

Without a narrative, I attempted to form a coherent world by repeating elements in variations, connecting them to the context of the space in which they are performed, and mixing them with intertextual references. And finally, as in my other linear performances, I wanted to create a cathartic peak towards the end.

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.

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.

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125   In connecting associative elements, I drew significant inspiration from David Lynch and the new wave cinema of the 1960s and 70s. This approach was also noted for the organizational approach of the fairly similar 98 (!) speaker sound-installation performance ***The Murder of Crows*** (2008) by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller: *"The structure of the piece tries to mirror that of the illogical but connected juxtapositions that we experience in the dream world. One soundscape moves into another with an electronic dreamscape composition shifting into sound effects such as factory noises, crashing waves or birds wings and then into a guitar and strings composition."* (2024)

It's important to note that a common issue with surround sound systems is that they are only truly balanced from the central point, which typically aligns with the composer's perspective. While ideal for the creator, this central perspective may not provide the optimal listening experience for audience members positioned throughout the space. Sound distribution can be uneven or less immersive for listeners not situated at the central point, potentially diminishing the intended spatial effect of the composition.

During the process of 'Overheard', after a work-in-progress showing, I received feedback from people who were closer to the side of the stage about this spatial imbalance. As a result, I made a significant decision to turn the speakers towards the wall and customized two stands to turn the central-diagonal speakers towards the ceiling. For the aims of the performance, I chose to prioritize a more enjoyable spatiality over precise sound definition. This decision resonates with similar choices made by Éliane Radigue who often chose to point speakers towards the walls in the live presentations of her work.

6.5.3. 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 lyrics[126]. 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 voice[127], which we played while audience members were queuing for their blindfolds prior to entering the performance space[128]. 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.

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)[129]. 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

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126   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.
127   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.
128   **Sample** of the announcement.
129   **Sample** of the entrance soundscape.

heating, a periodic rumble from upstairs[130] an enigmatic pattern of wooden knocks[131]. 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.[132]

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 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

130   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.
131   A recording of the Soto Zen meditation (zazen) preparation signal which starts 15 minutes before zazen. This was recorded in my sangha (community).
132   Krisztina Orbán on the arrival: *"There is a regular knocking, then it speeds up and stops, like a heavy object rolling down a flight of stairs. It can't be here, it must be a machine sound. It means nothing to me except that I am trying to count how many minutes have passed since eight, have we started or is it still the arrival of the audience? Without a blackout, without a rising curtain, the silence of the auditorium would remain as a sign, but that's not what we're going to have here, because we're already on stage, at a sound performance."* (2021)

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.[133]

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 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. [134] After 5 minutes, the scene slowly faded out, causing the audience to strain

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133   **Recording** of the full intro. The full text can be read in the appendix.
134   **Sample** of the dreamy soundscape. *"As the sounds merge into something whole, something not cacophonous but distinctly harmonious, the overhearing playfully gains two meanings. It is as if a conversation is creeping in from the next room, just below the threshold of being discernible. On the other hand, these captured sounds clearly invite the audience to free interpretation."* (Orbán, 2021)

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.[135]

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[136]. 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 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'[137].

To this cue, the recorded sounds of intense and urgent chair organization by several people immediately started, highly spatialized around and among the audience.[138] Once the intensity of the recorded organization began to lower, Imre and I joined in, organizing

135   **Sample** recording of a Hungarian folk dance class, made from outside the room through the door.

136   Leonie Persyn on this perceptual/dramaturgical effect of *Hear: "The obstruction of my sight and the suddenness of the sound 'offer my ears with an [increased] anticipation of sensation' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 2019). It is exactly this anticipation that my raised attention takes root. It makes me cautious for what is happening behind me and underwrites my inability to respond to the suddenness of thesounds approaching me."* (Persyn, 2019)

137   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.

138   **Sample** of the organization. It was 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.

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.[139] 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 rain[140], 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,[141] and everyone listened for others moving. As Krisztina Orbán described this tension:

> The leading Voice is not omniscient, it announces "This is the End", yet it's not over. This feels unsettling because, with the eye mask on, a new kind of anxiety takes hold of me: the fear that I'm the only one with the mask on while everyone else takes theirs off and goes home. That I'm the only one sitting there, believing that the performance is still ongoing. (2021)

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*[142] –, 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.

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139   A very similar scene and compositional approach can be traced in the recount of the blindfolded opera *In the Darkness, Everything Went All Black* (Dahlqvist & Olofsson, 2018): *"It is pitch black (...) The singers have a blind stick each, tapping on the floor as they walk. At the same time, a pre-recorded multichannel sound file is heard. (...) The blending of the real sticks tapping in the performance space together with the pre-recorded soundtrack blur the borders between the real and the imagined. The audience sense the singers walking close behind them, without knowing who is moving in the darkness. The singers occasionally touch some in the audience members lightly, which creates an uncanny feeling."* (Olofsson, 2022)
140   **Sample**
141   At least, in the 9 repetitions of the piece, no one ever walked out at this point.
142   ***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.[143] 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, as Orbán recounts:

> It raises the question of the importance we give to seeing and hearing in the acquisition of information with the details that are "meant to be recognized". Someone knocks, there is the sound of keys grinding, then I enter the apartment and there is an online gym class in progress, all of which I can see immediately. (2021)

This scene cross-faded into an eerie, dense harmony of modulated sounds of my microwave making popcorn[144]. Although it was quite a simple composition, many people noted that it was either very soothing or nerve-stimulating[145]. 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 Trafó[146], 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[147]. 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.

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143   **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.
144   Also can be seen as hidden reference to the **trailer** of the piece.
145   *"This segment brings into play the mental and physical dimensions of listening (…).The chair spins with me, and I feel the duration is ten minutes. I survive by concentrating on the breathing technique I learned from meditation."* (Orbán, 2021)
146   **Sample**
147   *"Another variation of this is when a female voice, invoking official announcements, apologizes for not informing in advance that the performance may contain disturbing and loud parts, and thanks for the audience's understanding. After the announcement, she sneakily counts down from ten to avoid any accusations of jumpscares."* (Orbán, 2021)

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[148] with a dozen various kitchenware sewn onto it, as if the fallen objects came alive. Then the 'Tinman'[149] opened the door, and slowly moved around and among the lines of the audience, creating an extremely high-fidelity and detailed moving sound[150]. While he was moving around, I opened the side door of the theatre as an exit to him, while opening the 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 directed[151]. 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 excitement[152].

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

148   Photo in the appendix. After the show, the jacket is hanging in the lobby of the theater, showcasing the source of the sound – if one can connect them.
149   The official nickname of the metalware being.
150   From the feedback of the audience it turns out that it was not obvious for everyone that this scene was live.
151   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.
152   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.

6.   The Unique Aspects of Spatial   6.5.   Overheard
      Sound Performativity   6.5.3.   Part III. – The embodied –
                                                       emotional listening

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.[153]

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 melody[154], 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.[155]

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

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153   A subjective account of the scene: *"Then, at different points in the audience, people start coughing, and more and more join in – there can't be that many people undercover – while others start laughing more and more, and our nice communal experience, our coughing concert, is brought to a close by the recorded beeps of sheep. At COVID time, a particular frisson is the mask thrown over our eyes and the coughs that leave our mouths free."* (Orbán, 2021)

154   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.

155   **Recording** of the whole ventilator composition.

of the shaft[156]. 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 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 minutes[157] for everyone to take off their blindfolds and leave in the Lynchian red wash of lights.

Final notes

Although many parts were recorded site-specifically and in reference to each other, woven into a very detailed and interconnected fabric of sound material, I had the impression that many of these intricacies were not consciously recognized by the audience. Nevertheless, I believe this layered complexity contributes to the overall richness of the piece, even if it remains subconsciously perceived. When the piece was performed in other venues in Budapest, most site-specific features were easily translatable, but

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156   **Recording** of the song.
157   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.

they created different connotations. The playing with infiltrating dog sounds at Trafó had a direct and recognizable site-specific quality, due to the kennel across the street. In other places, this scene became more of an imaginary possibility. Meanwhile, the sounds of folk music blending in became more realistic when played at Artus Studió, where a well-known folk music venue was situated next door, and shouting and folk music are very much part of the local soundscape. At the cultural center Nyolcésfél, the piece was played in a 7th floor open space, a huge old office canteen with a small curtained stage and a full view of the city's roofs. When the audience took off their blindfolds, they could see this atmospheric vision, which was a perfectly fitting image for both the theme of the urban experience of *overhearing* and the Lynchian end.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1. Summary

In this dissertation, I have attempted to outline and explore an emerging field of transdisciplinary performance practices, focusing on works built around the audience's experience and suggesting that spatial composition can be one of the leading organizational elements of these pieces. Through the analysis of my own artistic practice and that of contemporaries, I have proposed four overarching creative-compositional themes or focuses, which can offer new perspectives in understanding their various aspects. These themes, while distinct, often intersect and complement one another in practice, and offer a multifaceted approach in interpreting spatially focused performances.

The first theme, *Performing what is already there*, examined approaches that accentuate existing spatial-social qualities, revealing overlooked characteristics of place. These works offer new relationalities to one's surroundings by manipulating the visual, somatic, and auditory senses in specific and unusual ways. *Intervening in the usual flow of things* analyzed works that intervene in the dynamics of social spaces, bringing attention to and subtly altering their characteristic behaviors and patterns. *Spatial relationalities as the core of participation* delved into various participatory modes centered on spatial relationships, exploring how audience engagement can be shaped by spatial configurations and the aspects of creating situations through instructions and scores. In the exploration of the organization of audience members, I have not just moved away from forms of traditional audience organization, but claimed it as a compositional aspect in its own right, one that supports and evokes participation. Finally, in *The unique aspects of spatial sound performativity* I have suggested distinctive qualities of spatial sound in performative contexts, highlighting the medium's unique conceptual and experiential aspects. These included enhanced perception and imagination; the ability to project multiple realities onto a single acoustic space; and sound's unique capacity to be simultaneously enigmatic and hyper-realistic, allowing for the creation of immersive sonic environments that blur the lines between the real and the constructed.

In order to effectively outline this field of work, I decided to use a relatively large pool of 75 pieces, even if some of them were discussed rather briefly. On the other hand, with the sometimes painstakingly in-depth analyses of my own work (namely Drift, Mandala, and Overheard), I wanted to reveal the precise compositional decisions and processes, with the purpose of demonstrating the various working methods in creating such pieces. The articulation of these approaches aimed to bridge gaps between existing compositional methodologies, conceptual perspectives, and the evolving landscape of immersive, audience-centered works. It attempted to offer new viewpoints for those

shaping contemporary performance theory, while providing practical insights for use in creative processes of spatially related transdisciplinary arts.

7.2. Possible future applications/project concepts

In short, the most likely continuation of this research would be another PhD. Feeling no personal deficit in the amount of work invested in my process that is concluded with this dissertation, I consider it half done, in both the directions of practice and theory, while my belief in its importance and my enthusiasm have not decreased. As I see it, if I were to move it towards a theoretical direction, it would require more consolidation of terminology and concepts connected to existing theories, but this direction might need full dedication to theory. The other direction - which I am inclined to follow - would delve into another practice-based research aiming to articulate specific compositional principles and techniques. I see this process standing on three pillars: teaching as researching, through continuously testing and experimenting with various ideas in a university educational setting[158]; researching in depth specific compositional techniques developed by other artists in collaboration with them in the research process; and finally, continuing to create new works, using them as a playground for testing ideas and variations instead of trying to create productions – I see the practice of David Helbich as a good example of this approach.

While I was thinking about the possible thematic direction of this future research, two options appeared: first, to continue keeping a larger scope of generalist approach on spatial composition; second, to focus with a more specialist approach on the performative aspects of sound. I believe that both directions would be a relevant addition to existing methodologies, but considering my broad range of interest in form and applicability, I will most likely proceed with researching further the aspects of transdisciplinary spatial composition.

Either way, the outcome I envision is clear. I would like to assemble a pedagogical methodology and an accompanying book in order to strengthen the development of the creative approaches of the field that I have outlined in this dissertation. For the form of the book, I envision a mix of the lightness and inspirational quality of Jonathan Burrows' *A Choreographer's Handbook* and the thoroughness of Mike Pearson's *Site-specific Performance*.

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158   Which practice had already started during my PhD years. In the last three years, I had the fortune to become involved first as a workshop leader, then as a co-course leader in the newly established interdisciplinary Performance Studies course at the Free Theatre and Film University (FreeSZFE) in Budapest.

Although this research mainly focused on performance and installation examples and contexts, spatiality is an important aspect of many situations where people are present. Hence, the concepts and techniques explored here may find applications in fields such as architecture, urban planning, or other disciplines where the organization of space and attention is crucial.

To conclude, I'd like to share some ideas for future pieces I'm developing: With *In the Horizon*, I aim to bring audiences to vast plains, orchestrating a large-scale, participatory choreography that embraces the endless vista. In *Mass*, I envision creating a choreography involving 150-200 audience members, moving in geometric patterns inspired by sacred and religious forms. Through *Sitting in a Room*, I seek to further explore permeating sounds by creating a piece where most speakers are positioned outside the room in which it's played. And finally, with *Glissando*, I propose to craft a participatory sound choreography for ice-skating audience members carrying portable speakers.

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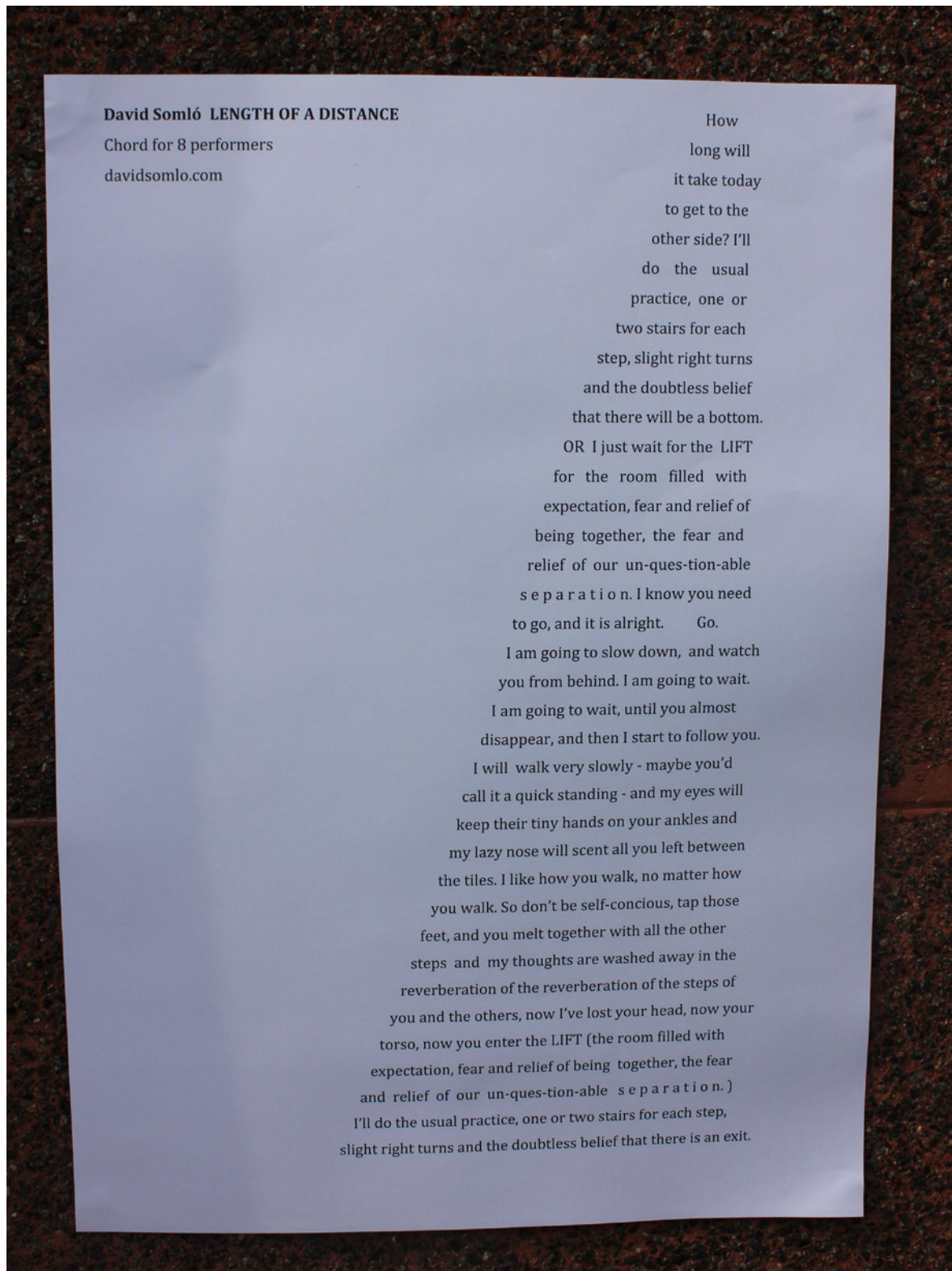
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9. APPENDIX

LENGTH OF A DISTANCE (2015)

David Somló LENGTH OF A DISTANCE

Chord for 8 performers

davidsomlo.com

How
long will
it take today
to get to the
other side? I'll
do the usual
practice, one or
two stairs for each
step, slight right turns
and the doubtless belief
that there will be a bottom.
OR I just wait for the LIFT
for the room filled with
expectation, fear and relief of
being together, the fear and
relief of our un-ques-tion-able
s e p a r a t i o n. I know you need
to go, and it is alright.   Go.
I am going to slow down, and watch
you from behind. I am going to wait.
I am going to wait, until you almost
disappear, and then I start to follow you.
I will walk very slowly - maybe you'd
call it a quick standing - and my eyes will
keep their tiny hands on your ankles and
my lazy nose will scent all you left between
the tiles. I like how you walk, no matter how
you walk. So don't be self-concious, tap those
feet, and you melt together with all the other
steps and my thoughts are washed away in the
reverberation of the reverberation of the steps of
you and the others, now I've lost your head, now your
torso, now you enter the LIFT (the room filled with
expectation, fear and relief of being together, the fear
and relief of our un-ques-tion-able s e p a r a t i o n.)
I'll do the usual practice, one or two stairs for each step,
slight right turns and the doubtless belief that there is an exit.

MANDALA (2016)
Process and experiences of the integrated version (2020)

Starting Point

The starting point for the sound performance and research was my earlier, internationally recognized piece *Mandala* from 2016, for which I have long planned an accessible version that includes people with disabilities. The original participant performance invites the audience to create a collective movement and sound choreography through simple instructions while carrying portable speakers around the space. The resulting community choreography experience is concluded with a guided discussion. One key takeaway from the piece was the strong non-verbal communication that developed among participants, with the shared play with speakers and sounds being central. I wanted to reimagine the framework of the piece to be as accessible as possible, thus enabling a shared experience of connection and resonance between people with and without disabilities.

For the first time in my artistic work, I collaborated with people with disabilities, and the process was greatly assisted by Eszter Papp, a special education teacher who is herself hearing impaired, and Renáta Járóka, a special education teacher and music therapist. Additionally, I involved final-year drama instructor students from the University of Theatre and Film Arts interested in the method, who helped develop the introduction and conclusion of the piece. Due to the project's inclusivity potential, we decided to include not only hearing-impaired individuals but also others with different disabilities. The collaborative work centered on accessibility, but feedback on the impact of sounds and the review of the literature also greatly helped lay the foundations for future work in this direction.

Modification and Accessibility of the Performance

The reworking process had several steps: after initial preparation, we fine-tuned the event's flow repeatedly during three sessions held between December and February, approximately every three weeks.

The first session was held in the accessible gymnasium of the Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Education. Participants included individuals with hearing, visual, and mobility impairments, the latter using a wheelchair. Several assistants and sign language

interpreters also participated. Although we didn't change the framework of the game for the first session, several technical modifications were necessary for accessibility. For the visually impaired participant, we laid down a rough guide tape, creating a straight path they could try out before the game. This simple accessibility measure was so effective that the participant played the game relying solely on the line and their hearing, without any collisions. Another technical modification was purchasing a portable bass speaker for one musically trained hearing-impaired participant, for which I tuned one track of the composition several octaves lower, creating a much stronger resonant space. We also expanded the playing area to allow more maneuvering room for the wheelchair user.

This first session had mixed results. The positive aspect was that the small adjustments made the game genuinely accessible, allowing both disabled and non-disabled participants to share a common experience. However, the game did not reach the level of engagement needed to provide a truly liberating and reflective experience for the entire group. This highlighted the need to develop a warm-up phase and a guiding section for the post-game discussion.

The video summarizing the first session can be viewed **here**.

Before the next session, we conducted several research workshops with the mentioned drama instructor students to develop numerous variations of instructions and introductions and conclusions. Though only a fraction of these were eventually incorporated into the next sessions, the work provided significant progress for future variations.

The second and third sessions were held at the SÍN Arts Center in Angyalföld, in a dance/theater rehearsal room. This space, with theater lighting and curtainable walls, provided a more focused and intimate atmosphere from the start. In these sessions, participants with hearing, mobility, and visual impairments, along with their assistants, participated together. Compared to the original conclusion, we added playful movement exercises to introduce the elements of the piece and individual reflection exercises to lead into the group discussion. By the third session, we had refined these 10-15 minute additions to create a particularly relaxed and liberating atmosphere throughout the entire session. This is evident in the **video** from the third session, which includes audio commentary and feedback from the second and third sessions.

Sound Experiences of the Hearing-Impaired

Since much of the sound material used in *Mandala* is based on deep resonant sounds, and the physical contact with the speaker creates a connection with the sounding object, a sound space and experience are formed that minimize the perceptual differences between hearing-impaired and non-hearing-impaired individuals. In the following, I present the experiences observed from the post-game group discussions.

Several hearing-impaired participants highlighted the novelty of the experience with sounds. Some emphasized the physical sound experience, others the quasi-stereo hearing experience, and others the speaker as a communication tool:

> "I really liked that the speaker vibrated, it was good to try it on my head, neck, and back, it was really cool." – Hearing-impaired participant

> "We did something where there were speakers on both sides, and the whole thing resonated very interestingly; it was very strange to experience the music this way. I would never have thought that the vibration is better from two sides than just placing it here." – Hearing-impaired participant

> "I really liked that speech was prohibited. I noticed that we found a common way of communicating, either through sign language or by moving the speaker around." – Hearing-impaired participant

> "I didn't think the speaker would play such an important role. Everyone was touching each other with the speaker, feeling how much it vibrates. It's interesting that with a speaker, if we can't talk, we try to do something with each other through it. We looked at each other, but there were times when we didn't look at each other in that way and still did something with our speakers. It's cool to have a tool in our hands, and then we use it." – Hearing and visually impaired participant.

However, not all sound experiences were positive. The low, buzzing sound evoked negative, hospital-related associations for the visually impaired participant.

> "At first, it was pleasant, but then the beeping became quite annoying; it became uncomfortable for me. So... but the beginning was nice, when a large, unified song was formed, I liked that, it was very atmospheric, relaxing. Towards the end, it started to irritate me a bit, and I tried to move the sound away from me

> so that it wouldn't be close. The bad experience for me is that since childhood, I've had to go to CT scans, and this sound file was the same, I swear, as in the CT when lying inside. Not every part, because there's no church bell sound there, but the same sound – and it brought back such bad experiences for me, I hate this sound."

Several mentioned that due to their weaker hearing, they could only hear the individual, close speakers, not the harmony of the sounds or the complete soundscape. This raises the possibility that in this version, it might be worth abandoning the compositional principle of each speaker emitting a different sound and instead have all speakers play the entire sound material.

> "I felt that I didn't hear the combination of sounds very clearly, I tried to get closer to the crowd, but it was still hard to discern the combination. I don't know how it could be solved to hear the more distant speakers better. I am hearing-impaired, so it wasn't very audible for me." – Hearing-impaired participant.

Feedback from the hearing-impaired participant who received the bass speaker indicated that the enjoyment of such sounds and music is often more a matter of aesthetics and that louder, stronger vibrations do not necessarily make the experience more enjoyable.

> "I didn't care much about the music. This vibrating tube I got in my hand didn't make a sound, just some vibrating mass. I didn't get much out of it and stopped caring about it after a while. At first, I tried to figure out what I was holding in my hand, testing whether the vibration went better to my palm, chin, or shoulder, but I got bored of it after a while and started playing with the crowd."
> – Hearing-impaired participant.

Lessons Learned

After conducting the three sessions, it became clear to me that during *Mandala*, the deeply resonant, all-encompassing music and the easily followable spatial movements create an interactive space. This space offers a unique, shared experience that is rarely encountered in everyday life for both hearing-impaired and physically able individuals. As revealed during discussions with special education teachers, such integrated experiences are scarce. Mandala has the potential to sensitize those without disabilities while providing a liberating and empowering experience for those with disabilities, who often lack confidence.

Although I consider the research outcome successful, I must acknowledge the challenges posed by the labor-intensive and cumbersome organization, making it difficult to see the project's sustainable continuation in this direction. The limited infrastructure and support system for art projects aimed at people with disabilities, along with the difficulty in mobilizing the target group, present significant obstacles to realistic implementation. These challenges can only be overcome by the change of the conditions and improvement of the support system for people with disabilities and artists interested in working with them.

HORIZON (2017)

Arve Rod's account of the journey

I am on a bike ride through cobblestone streets in Csepel Müvek, the partly abandoned industrial park just south of central Budapest. It is a late afternoon in April, the sun is about to set, making the old brick buildings and tall chimneys glow in reddish brown. I follow closely behind David Somló as part of his bicycle-soundtour Horizon. It is just the two of us. I have two small portable loudspeakers attached to my body, one on my belly and one on my back, but there is no sound coming from them yet. We ride in silence through narrow passageways and along some dirt roads, past warehouses and old foundries, rusty iron gates and factories with broken glass windows, worn down residential buildings, and here and there some piles of rubbish.

I remember from David's presentation in Moss a few weeks earlier that one is not supposed to initiate any conversation or make any kind of unauthorized noise while attending his sound tours. After a while I start to notice the sounds around us, the wind through the trees, birdsong, and the distant thump of heavy machinery. We make a short stop beside a big industrial fan, just listening to its loud mechanical noise. Further down the road I get a bit upset by two dogs coming at us, barking aggressively from behind a fence. I start to think that the loudspeakers are just a trick to make me become more aware of the sounds from the surroundings, which may be a nice enough idea. Though after a while I start to notice another sound that doesn't seem like it's coming from the wind or the trees or the factories; a slowly rising, ambient tune that appear to be following us. I have by now forgotten all about the loudspeakers, it's been maybe 20 minutes, or half an hour, and I've fallen into the slow, dreamlike rhythm of the shifting sounds and the soothing movements of the bike. The new sonic element intensifies the intimacy and subtle drama of the situation.

I feel nostalgic, almost romantic, as if I'm in a movie from the 1960s, La Nouvelle Vague-style (I'm later informed that the "cinematic" feeling wasn't all that wrong, but that the inspiration for the work came from Andrei Tarkovsky's sci-fi classic Stalker, with Csepel, probably, as the mysterious and ambiguous "Zone", something which of course makes a lot more sense). David makes a careful gesture with his arm, pointing left, and we turn toward an open plain and stops in front of the Danube. A panoramic view of one of the biggest waterways in Europe is all of a sudden in front of me. The movie goes into widescreen for a grand finale, as the last sunrays glimmer in the slow waters of the river."

LISTENING CLUB (2018)

Important information

- The performance will last approx. 60 minutes.

- During the performance it will be almost completely dark in the space.

- Please turn off your mobile phone.

- Before you enter the space, you'll need to take off your shoes.

- There are some cables on the floor at the entrance and in the middle of the room.

- Once you enter the space, please don't talk.

- At the end of the performance, you can stay in the space as long as you want.

Inspiration text

(Read before or after)

What is pretty interesting is that the name of every surviving Greek play is the name of a woman, a child, a slave or a foreigner. The Greek Theatre was a listening device that enabled you to hear a set of voices that were otherwise not acknowledged and otherwise had no power. A space that were shaped on the side of a mountain, next to the sea with this vista of sky, placing that invisible human being in front of you and saying: please listen, please listen to this invisible person.

The beauty of the listening device is also that the amplification was worn on the face of the performer, as you know the Greek masks were actually sound projection devices and so we have the word for the Greek mask Per-sona – Sound-through. Which is of course this incredible image, that none of us are what we look like. What we look like is a temporary mask, this body, this face is a temporary mask allowing are

real selves to speak through it. The word person is about sound. All of us are something trying to sound through the limitations of our current circumstances, our current existence, the things that came together at this moment. But in fact who we actually are, is something is trying to sound through that and beyond it. This sense of what a person is, is sound. What a person is, is a voice. A secret voice. What a person is, is exist not in the seen but in the unseen."

OVERHEARD (2021)

Introduction text

Hi, I am glad that you came, and that you have taken your place. I hope that it is ok, that we have blindfolded you. Maybe it's a bit more magical like this. My name is David and I am also here with you, in this nice, big, almost empty space.

My voice that you hear – maybe you've already realised – 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.

I am talking to you, to help in establishing the connection between you and the resonance of air. Because sound is the resonance of 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.

When I make recordings sometimes I also record my steps, so it's audible that someone is there. Not that someone is not always there.

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. Some sound is coming in now as well. Listen! Do you hear it? Not that repeating melody, but that weird singing.

Sometimes it is difficult to decide what is that you hear. Sometimes I think that I hear my cat meowing from the street, while it is just a baby crying in the house. Other times I hear a church organ, while it is just an air conditioner turned on.

Have you noticed that you can't hide from the sounds? You ears don't have eyelashes, you can't close them. Whatever you do, wherever you go they are always going to be there.

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?

Photo of the 'Tinman' jacket

Photo of the 'Tinman' jacket

SLOW STEPS HAVE EARS (2023)

Listening Suggestions

Since deep listening is difficult and requires practice, here are some suggestions to help you get started.

Spend at least 30 minutes for the focused listening to the piece.

During this time, silence your phone – don't let it distract you. Listening is best done alone. It is not possible to listen while talking.

Try shifting your focus from vision to hearing. One way to do this is by not looking around, but rather gazing softly ahead and perceiving the space solely through your ears.

Try to hear the entire soundscape at once. From all directions, without discrimination, perceive all the sounds simultaneously.

Then, you can also select individual sounds and observe them in great detail.

You can also play with distances. You can focus only on very close or very distant sounds.

If your mind wanders, always bring your attention back to the sounds.

Map of the speakers at Kerekerdő park, Budapest

Map of the speakers at Vitkov-Hill, Prague