



TELE-ENCOUNTERS

Telepresence and Migration

UNATC Press

Tele-Encounters:

Telepresence and Migration

Edited by Marina Hanganu

Artistic Director of *Tele-Encounters*

UNATC Press 2019

Bucharest

"The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein."

Authors:

Marina Hanganu, *Editor*

Mircea Kivu

Ion Mircioagă

Javier Galindo

Alexandra Constantin

Andreea Darie

Ruxandra Oancea

Radu Solcanu

Tony Blaya

Cristian Iordache

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication or part of it may be made without written permission. Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages. The authors have asserted their rights to be identified as the authors of this work.

First published 2019 by UNATC Press, Bucharest.

UNATC Press is the leading academic publisher for performing arts and film research in Romania. UNATC Press is the imprint of The National University of Theatre and Film *I.L. Caragiale* (UNATC) Bucharest.

Original cover by Daniela Dughiană.

Tele-Encounters: Telepresence and Migration

U.N.A.T.C. Press, București, 2019.

Print-ISBN 978-606-8757-51-3

PDF-ISBN 978-606-8757-52-0

Dissemination partner:



This publication is distributed free of charge under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). (CC BY-NC-ND)



Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union

Tele-Encounters is an artistic and sociological research project exploring telepresence and family relationships in the context of migration. Based on interviews with Romanian migrants in Spain and left-behind families in Romania, we have created *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, a telematic theatre performance about a Romanian family separated by migration. The performance takes place simultaneously in Romania and Spain, with physically present audiences in both countries. The actors in the two studios interact in real-time using video-conferencing and Kinect-controlled animations. Inspired by interviews with left-behind families of Portuguese migrants, we have commissioned five 360° short films to be watched on VR headsets in each country as part of the *Ellipses VR exhibition*. This book presents the findings of our research under the form of essays and interviews with the project team.

Tele-Encounters is led by The *George Ciprian* Theatre in Buzău (Romania), in partnership with UCAM Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia (Spain) and Município de Lousada (Portugal).

***Tele-Encounters* is co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.**

This project has also been co-funded by:



CONSILIUL
JUDEȚEAN
BUZĂU

TEATRUL
GEORGE
CIPRIAN



UCAM
UNIVERSIDAD
CATÓLICA DE MURCIA



município de
lousada

CONTENTS

Editor's Note.....	5
PART I: MIGRATION.....	6
Temporary Emigration of Romanians and Portuguese to Spain - A Case Study <i>by Mircea Kivu</i>	7
PART II: THE PLANET OF LOST DREAMS	54
Dramaturgy and Telepresence <i>by Marina Hanganu</i>	56
Notes on Working with Actors <i>by Ion Mircioagă</i>	127
Space, Time and Consciousness <i>by Javier Galindo</i>	153
Notes on Scenography <i>by Alexandra Constantin</i>	162
Interviews with the Actors <i>by Marina Hanganu</i>	165
Interview with Interaction Designer Cristian Iordache <i>by Marina Hanganu</i>	186
PART III: 360° FILM EXHIBITION	189
The Sense of Presence in Cinematic Virtual Reality <i>by Marina Hanganu</i>	190
Notes on the Contributors.....	230

Editor's Note

As mentioned in the project objectives, *Tele-Encounters* set out to explore Internet relationships between family members brought apart by distance and to contribute to the development of **telepresence** as an artistic idiom. The research was, therefore, both sociological and artistic, the two dimensions complementing one another. The sociological inquiry provided the content and larger scope of the artworks created, while the artworks themselves questioned the social impact of technology. In its turn, the artistic research had two strands, telematic theatre and 360° film, which were linked by the concept of “telepresence.” For ease of understanding in our communication with the general public, we have often referred to telepresence as simply “technologically mediated presence”. It is now time to delve deeper into the various definitions of telepresence encountered across the specialist literature, examining the way it functions in our project and trying to (re)draw its conceptual boundaries. I would like to highlight that “telepresence” is, in the end, just a term that can help us make conceptual distinctions between the various forms of “being in the world” that telecommunication technologies and New Media have enabled. As long as this facilitates our understanding, the term can be adapted.

This book is divided into three sections: 1) Mircea Kivu's sociological research based on the interviews with migrants and left-behind families in Romania, Spain and Portugal, 2) the artistic team's essays about *The Planet of Lost Dreams* telematic performance and interviews with part of the actors involved in the telematic performance and with the interaction designer, and 3) an analysis of the 360° films.

PART I: MIGRATION



*Photo from **The Planet of Lost Dreams** telematic performance. Andreea Darie and Radu Solcanu physically present in Romania. Ruxandra Oancea (video-projection) in Spain. Photo: Costin Fetic.*

Temporary Emigration of Romanians and Portuguese to Spain

- A Case Study -

Mircea Kivu

It looks like migrations have been a characteristic of populations all since Homo Sapiens, if not even before that (Bae et al. 2017: 2). In a sociological sense, we will talk about the contemporary phenomenon of migration as comprising “all those forms of territorial mobility which are likely to be directly influenced by the quality of life and communication relationships between social groups located in various local settlements which, in addition, contain a change of residence or job outside the community of origin” (Sandu 1984: 24).

One can identify individual migrations, generally linked to economic causes (not exclusively, however, as the causes could also be political or of other types), or collective migrations - caused by war, change of pedoclimatic conditions, etc. Individual migrations can be permanent or transitory (seasonal, but not exclusively). Especially by speeding up the movement of people (and of goods and services as well), the post-modern era has amplified the phenomenon of transitory migrations. This has happened because moving along what used to be perceived as long distances in the past is no longer an issue nowadays (in terms of duration or costs), but also because communication means have changed radically.

Permanent migrations usually include the entire family core (when they do not coincide with the dismantling of it). On the other hand, transitory migrations often imply the departure of one family member only. The implications of separation on family

relationships are extremely complex, and they have been analysed in numerous case studies.

Modern migrations are seen as those migrations which, starting in the 19th and 20th century, occurred hand in hand with the revolution in farming, the expansion of capitalism, and the subsequent industrialisation process:

With the formation of nation-states in Europe during the 19th century, diasporas – as they are known today – were increasing the number of cultural minorities. Population exchange, expulsion, forced and voluntary assimilation and remigration were part of this process. In this sense, the European nation-states were not merely products of national unification processes alone, but also oftentimes of violent mass movements of uprooted peoples. (EC 2012: 7)

Further below we will tackle on economic migration mainly, as it is the type of migration which, alongside migration caused by wars¹, has caused the main migratory flows that Europe has seen in the past hundred of years. We will focus on the implications of external migration (especially transitory migration) upon family relationships.

Three countries, three histories of emigration

Further on we will give a brief presentation of the contexts that characterise emigration from the three countries where the Tele-Encounters project was deployed: Spain on one hand, as an immigration country, and Portugal and Romania on the other hand, as emigration countries.

¹ We mean both wars that have caused populations to leave their countries of origin during and right after the second world war, and conflicts and post-conflict circumstances that are causing the current migratory flows from Africa and the Middle East towards Europe.

Spain

The beginnings of the Spanish emigration coincide with the beginnings of the Spanish empire in the 15th century (colonisation of the Canary Islands); the phenomenon continues with the discovery and conquest of the Americas. This phase extended into the early 19th century. The Spanish diaspora² is currently evaluated³ to count almost 300 million people, which is almost five times more than the population residing within the current borders of the country.

After World War Two, between the 50s and the 60s, Spain witnessed a massive wave of emigration towards richer countries (especially France), which was caused by poverty: “The 1950s and 1960s images of workers leaving for other European countries with their cardboard suitcases epitomised a history of emigration induced by poverty which Spanish society had not expected to have to experience again” (González-Ferrer & Moreno-Fuentes 2017: 448). Then another period followed, when Spain was especially known as a country of destination for immigrants.

A new massive emigration period followed after the recession starting in 2007. The Spanish emigration wave seems to have started later than in the other countries affected by the recession, which led González Enríquez & Martínez Romera (2018) to note that Spanish emigrants were disadvantaged in the receiving countries, compared to other workers coming from Southern Europe.

Nowadays, Spain is again a country that has a positive migratory balance. It may be that the long emigration experience of the Spaniards is one of the factors that make Spain one of the

² *Diaspora* is the totality of people with origins in one country, who live outside that country.

³ Cf. *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_diaspora, accessed on January 3, 2019.

most immigrant-permissive countries in Europe - which was outlined by the majority of the participants in the interviews that we will tackle further on.

Portugal

Portugal is another country that has a history of an empire. Emigration played such an important role in the history of Portugal, that David Justino characterises it as “a nation defined by the language and culture of its diaspora” (Justino, 2016: 14). Justino identifies three phases of the history of emigration in Portugal:

- the trans-Atlantic phase (XIX century), when approximately 2 million Portuguese people have emigrated to Brazil, especially from the poor regions in the north of the country;
- the European phase (between the 50s and the end of the 80s) has seen the departure - in a much shorter period of time - of a mass of population equivalent to the previous phase, emigrating especially to France;
- the mixed immigration-emigration phase started in the late 80s and is defined by a balanced inflow and outflow of population.

According to *Observatório da Emigração* (2018: 9), the peak in the last phase was year 2013, with approximately 120,000 departures. The recent years have witnessed a decrease in emigration; Portugal has seen its first positive migratory balance in 2017 (acc. to AFP, 2018), and it is one of the few western countries that does not attempt to reduce the inflow of migrants. Prime minister Antonio Costa stated in 2018 that, in order to maintain a steady active population, Portugal needs 75,000 new residents every year (idem).

Romania

Especially compared to the cases of Spain and Portugal analysed above, Romanian emigration was not significant before World War Two.

The communist regime closed the borders of the country. However, numerous Romanians managed to emigrate to the western countries, exclusively out of political reasons (initially) or a mix of political and economic reasons (in recent years). Most of the population of the German and Jewish ethnic groups has left the country within this time, on grounds of secret protocols between the authorities of the communist state and those of the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel. Out of 343,913 German ethnic population and 428,312 Jewish population living in Romania in 1948, the 1992 census only recorded 11,788 Germans and 9,033 Jews.

The fall of the communist regime brought about the opening of the borders and the possibility for all Romanians to choose the country they want to live in. The much higher standards of living in the western countries, as well as the opportunities to find better paid jobs caused many Romanians to choose to emigrate. While emigration during the communist period was exclusively definitive and involved the entire family, the phenomenon we witness after 1990 is a combination between temporary and definitive emigration, with only some of the members of a family leaving in most of the cases.

According to the periods proposed by Dumitru Sandu (2018a: 247-248), post-communist emigration has five distinct phases:

- I. 1990-1995: the period when the new process of temporary migration to other countries and labour markets emerged, dominated by an exodus of the German ethnic population;

- II. 1996-2001: greater intensity of temporary emigration (mostly illegal - our observation), disappearance of the ethnic driving factor;
- III. 2002-2006: growing intensity of temporary emigration as a result of decreasing costs of migration (after removal of visas for the Schengen space);
- IV. 2007-2009: the growing trend of emigration volumes continued after Romania's EU accession;
- V. starting in 2010, the global recession led to a decrease in the pace of emigration.

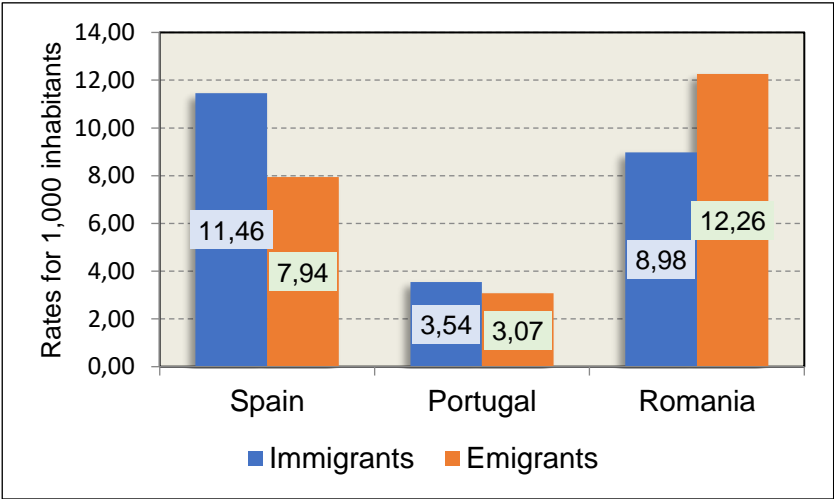
The massive emigration after 1990, in combination with a dramatic decrease of fertility, has had dramatic effects on Romania: the resident population decreased from 23.2 million (January 1, 1990) to 19.5 million (January 1, 2018). It was not only a decrease in volume, but also a dramatic decrease in the share of active population, which resulted in negative economic implications. Emigrants are especially young people: according to the estimations of the *Monitorul social*⁴ website, one out of five people in the 25-39 age group is abroad for work. The intent to leave among youngsters is at least worrying: "Specifically, if you ask young Romanians what their intent is for the next year, 23% will tell you that they intend to leave. If you ask them what their plans are for the next 5 years, almost one half (47%) will tell you that they intend to leave. That is huge!" (Sandu 2018a). This phenomenon generates a workforce crisis and causes related disruptions on the domestic market.

The emigration history and the current situation in the three Latin countries that were briefly presented here are different. However, they are united through those who migrate. Portugal and Romania rank on the first two places in the European Union in terms of the number of emigrants out of the total

⁴ <https://monitorsocial.ro/indicator/situatia-populatiei-plecate-din-romania/>

population, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2018:82). Up to a certain point, the two countries share some characteristics: in the late 20th and early 21st century, both countries witnessed a significant emigration period, with Spain as one of the preferred destinations. While Portugal has overcome this phase and has become a country with a positive migratory balance, Romania continues to face the effects of the population loss.

Figure 1: Immigration and emigration rates, 2017



Source: own calculations from *Eurostat* [demo_pjan], [migr_imm8], [migr_emi2] extracted on 15.03.2019

Effects of migration on families

With the removal, in 2004, of visas for entering Schengen (and EU accession in 2007), it was much easier for Romanian citizens to go and look for work in the Western European countries. The main appeal was (and continues to be) the much higher salaries.

During the first years, the most accessible jobs were seasonal jobs in farming (which generated the name of “căpșunari” - strawberry pickers - for those leaving abroad to do this unskilled work). Nowadays, the main occupations of unskilled or averagely skilled Romanian migrants are in farming, constructions, and home-making (Sandu 2018: 266).

Temporary migration usually involves one member of a family leaving. This generates at least two negative effects on family life: higher divorce rates⁵ and temporary child abandonment. According to a CURS survey (2008: 43) conducted in 2013, 67% of Romanian emigrants to the metropolitan area of Madrid and 81% of those in the metropolitan area of Rome initially emigrated alone. When there are minor children in the family, they are usually left at home, either under the care of the other member of the family, or with the extended family. According to the same CURS survey (2008: 28), in 33% of cases the children were left with the spouse of the departed member, while in 37% of cases the children were under the care of an extended family member. The phenomenon is extremely wide, and the Romanian social literature describes it as “home alone”.

The “home alone” syndrome has negative, sometimes dramatic implications on the evolution of children and teenagers who live through the absence of one or both parents. There have been some interesting sociological surveys on this subject, especially in the period of 2006-2008. The first surveys came about in 2006; initially, they were conducted regionally, namely in Moldova, which is one of the areas most severely affected by migration (Irimescu & Lupu 2006).

⁵ Statistically speaking, the divorce rates are higher in families where one of the spouses is (or has recently been) abroad. The causality between the two phenomena is not a one-way route: in some cases, the degradation of the relationship between the members of the couple might have been a favouring factor for the decision to emigrate.

A research commissioned by the Soros Romania Foundation in 2007 was stating, based on a national survey among fifth-to-eighth-graders, that “16%-18% of the junior high pupils had at least one parent working abroad (Toth et al 2007: 13). The same survey shows a link between divorce and migration, besides the negative consequences on children: “the share of children whose parents are divorced is higher among those whose both parents are abroad, or whose mother is abroad, compared to those whose parents are not migrants, or whose parents are former migrants, or in cases when only the father is away” (idem: 15).

A comprehensive qualitative study on the issue of the rights of children whose parents are away for work was conducted in 2007 by *Save the Children*. According to this research (Munteanu & Tudor 2007: 17), the most serious effects on children left home alone are:

- school dropping (a trend that is mostly apparent among boys);
- low school participation; absenteeism is frequent among minor teenagers who are home alone and under no constant adult supervision;
- isolation and poor communication, both with other children and with teachers;
- tendency to join deviant, sometimes even criminal groups (mainly among boys);
- risk of drug use.

In 2008, a study commissioned by UNESCO, conducted on a national representative sample of households, assessed that “Nationally, the phenomenon is estimated to be characteristic for approximately **350,000 children**, affected at the time when the research was conducted. More than one third of them, meaning approximately **126,000 children are affected by the migration of both parents.**” (Toth et al 2008: III)

After 2006-2008, which was the period when the “home alone” phenomenon made the topic of numerous sociological studies (the ones mentioned here are not the only ones), the issue seems to have drifted away from the researchers’ focus. However, this does not mean that it is less present in the day-to-day reality, as the data in *Table 1* show.

Table 1. Report on children whose parents are away for work - ANPDCA (Child Protection and Adoption Authority) monitoring

Year	Total	With one parent away	With both parents away	Sole caregiver away	No parental care at all	Under the special protection system
2008	92,328	53,125	28,795	10,408	39,203	3,684
2009	85,605	48,665	26,472	10,468	36,940	3,623
2010	84,084	48,037	25,567	10,480	36,047	3,544
2011	83,658	49,470	23,924	10,264	34,188	3,654
2012	79,901	46,917	22,993	9,991	32,984	3,346
2013	80,036	47,394	22,329	10,313	32,642	3,674
2014	82,339	49,855	22,050	10,434	32,484	3,753
2015	85,194	53,507	21,610	10,077	31,687	4,227
2016	95,308	62,978	18,646	13,684	32,330	3,870
2017	94,896	64,701	17,425	12,770	30,195	3,730
2018	94,991	63,891	18,012	13,088	31,100	3,881

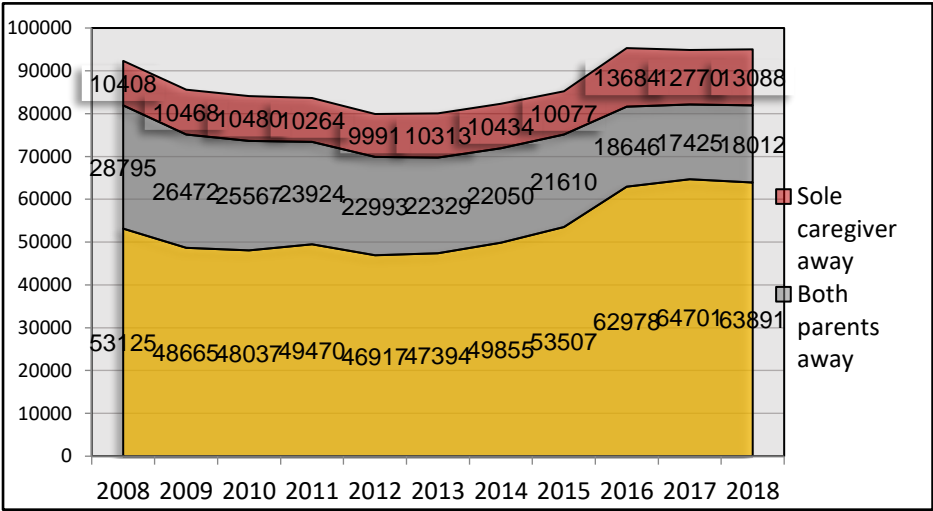
Source: ANPDCA, <http://www.copii.ro/statistici/>

The phenomenon we are discussing has become a concern for the state authorities as well. The State Secretary of the National Child Protection Authority has issued *Order no. 219/2006 on identification, intervention and monitoring of children who are not under parental care while parents are abroad for work*. This order was the basis for a methodology to identify children in the respective situation, and for the methods of intervention in cases at risk. The same order sets forth that the service plan for the child must include modalities of maintaining the child’s personal relationship with the parents and the type of psychological counselling that the child would receive.

Unfortunately, the number of identified cases (in the past few years ranging around 90,000) is much lower than the number indicated by the above-mentioned sociological evaluations. This

means that monitoring is still deficient, which generates doubts regarding the possibility of any efficient intervention.

Figure 2. Trends of the number of children whose parents are away for work - ANPDCA (Child Protection and Adoption Authority) monitoring



Source: ANPDCA, <http://www.copii.ro/statistici/>

Note: We used 67 sociological in-depth interviews conducted with members of families of Romanian and Portuguese emigrants under the Tele-Encounters project to document the following chapters. The interviews were conducted based on interview guides, by Ion Mircioagă and Marina Hanganu in Romania, by Juan Francisco Hernández Pérez, Sergio Albaladejo Ortega and Miguel Ángel Martínez Díaz in Spain, and by Adelaide Pacheco in Portugal. Full transcripts of these interviews can be found on <http://www.tele-encounters.com>, under the “Interviews” section.

Appendix A includes a full list of these interviews.

The justification for leaving

People leave abroad in order to earn more. Even if there is a varied range of situations that leads to emigration, a precarious material circumstance is always present as a cause.

Most of the times, those who leave do it (or think they do it) in order to solve a stringent problem: a debt (bank loan) that can no longer be paid; unexpected loss; unanticipated expenses caused by various events. They frequently go into debt in order to support the migration (get the visa, pay for transportation, etc.), which debt then becomes an additional reason to extend their stay abroad.

If mum wasn't there, I don't know how we would have managed, because my grandmother got retired in 2007 due to illness. Ten years ago. I was six years old at the time. My grandfather is a III degree hypertension patient. My parents got divorced anyway. She... how much could she work in Romania to provide for us all?
[RC1]

Well, my parents got divorced because he made some mistake that got him to prison. (Voice is shaking.) So my parents had to get a divorce, and further on she had to go to Spain and work. [...] She couldn't have stayed because she had some issues, I can't talk about those.
[RC15]

This happened when we bought our house. Interest rates went up a lot and, automatically, with our salaries, it was very difficult to comply with the bank. Either we lost our house or he had to emigrate. [P6]

The company where I have worked for 20 years broke and I have been unemployed for two years. My three

children were still at school, so I had to emigrate to have enough money to pay for all the expenses. [P11]

My older brother was 10 years old, my little brother was 3 years old and my sister was a baby. My mother was alone with 4 children. She stopped working to take care of us and my father had to emigrate. [P20]

There is also “gradual” emigration: one of the spouses goes away for work; after a while, he/she manages to get a place to live, finds some work for the other spouse; he/she brings the other spouse over; eventually, they manage to put together a steady situation, which is when they bring their child over [SR04, SR17, SR19]. The initial goal of the emigration was rather narrow (building a home was a frequent one), and other goals kept adding to it. It’s a quite frequent pattern in Romania, by which temporary emigration turns into a definitive one.

I came here because of my ex husband. He came here before us, I stayed with my daughter in Romania, and he had a job so he did the family reunification and helped us come here for us to be together. So my daughter and I came here to Spain and stayed here with him. [SR04]

It is a project of the Education Ministries from Romania and Spain. They sent 67 teachers to Spain to teach these classes of Romanian. So I knew what I would do here.[...] I had another motive, because my husband worked here. I was in Romania and he was here, it was hard, so I decided to come to be with him. It was better if we could live here. [SR15]

When I was born my father had already emigrated, so I’ve lived with that all my life. When I was seventeen or eighteen years old, my mother decided to emigrate too.

My father is a driver and my mother took a special drivers' licence to be able to help my father in his job. So, at only eighteen years old I stayed with my eight-year-old sister alone in Portugal. [P5]

We wanted to become independent, live better, buy a house ... and it was impossible. Then, we decided that I had to leave Romania to look for a job for a few months and earn money to buy an apartment.[...] I was alone one year. I came in December of 2003, in August of 2004 my family came on holidays because I couldn't get back to Romania. We decided to move here and in November of 2004, my husband came. Finally, in May of 2005, my child came too. [...]

Q: When you arrived, did you have an idea of how long you were going to be here?

A: Yes, one year. When my husband came, we realized that we had very little money saved. Finally, my husband and I decided to move here definitely.

[SR19]

When you have a child and see how many things you need to buy and money is not enough, you get desperate. And you listen to other people that left and say they have a good job and live fine, and so I thought "then I can do that, I'm young and I will do it". My husband said to me "I'll go first to see how it's like and then you come with the child", so he came first in 1999.

Q: How long was he on his own here?

A: From October to March 2000. It wasn't long, because he said to me "if you don't come I go back. It is not like everyone says it is. There are jobs but you don't earn that much. We need to be together. I can't keep on by myself". I was also pregnant with Marco. So I came

here with an eleven-month-old baby and eight months pregnant almost. [...] We decided to stay here to pay all of that and then to make money to go back. But we couldn't. With two kids you can't save enough money to decide and go back. When they started studying here and making friends, we decided to stay, so that they could have a good future. [SR05]

Many times, the stated justification for the temporary emigration is the very desire to ensure better circumstances for the children. Of course, the calculation leaves out the implications that the separation has on the child's evolution.

When they see me happy, they are willing to stay there and not think about how long they will have to be there or what to do. [...] I know that they put all this effort in for me, so that I can be well and everything, because jobs were really scarce around here. [RC6]

Q: Did you understand why he (she) had to leave?

A: Yes, so that things can be good for me.

Q: How did you feel, how do you feel about that? What are your feelings? If you can put those in words.

A: Besides sadness, I don't know. (Put his head down, waves his hands as if trying to get away from what he is feeling.) [RC16]

Situations when the justification for the emigration is a positive one must not be neglected, however: a career advancement (in which case *emigration* is replaced with *expatriation*); the influence of some models of success, or simply the desire to know. It is interesting that this type of justification is more frequent in the discourse of Romanians who already live in a different country (Spain) than in the discourse of the relatives at home.

One of the reasons he went away was to gain knowledge. It's his passion. It was his chance for

development, but also our chance for development - of course, from a different point of view. A financial one. [RC2]

My husband's salary has been much better since he went to Spain, but it was also important that he was promoted. It was very good for his career. [P15]

I came to Spain to leave Romania and find a life. [...] I could have been a teacher or anything. But the salaries there are very low and I didn't want that. [...] I always knew that when I'm old enough I'm going to leave this place in search of a better one and that's what I did. [SR11]

I didn't come here for necessity. I came here because everyone was talking about Spain, not for need, and I'm still here. 15 years ago, Spain was better economically, so those who were here said you earned more. [SR16]

Seeing other people who had left Romania and came back to visit, telling all the things they had achieved abroad. I thought to myself I can do that too. [SR11]

I felt I needed a change, a very radical change indeed with no possibility of going back. [...] Then I thought in my children who already were 16 and 18 years old. My daughter had the chance to travel to Chile for two years with my parents who, because of their jobs, had to go there and took her to show her other realities. Then I felt that it was a very long distance for them, so I had to look for something nearer. There appeared the possibility of a job in Alicante in 2008... I submitted my CV without much enthusiasm, because Spain was

not one of my choices. I did it almost against my will, without trusting I would get it. And I got the job. After I got the job, I got a map to see where it was located and when I saw it was next to the sea, I thought it was a poetical site. [SR18]

In some cases, emigration was initially a necessity, which afterwards seemed to become a way of living that the one who was away had become so used to, that he/she no longer wanted to discontinue it.

Now he no longer needs to be where he is, but he wants to. [P18]

My father is always postponing his return. He's always saying he paid for my studies, and when he's done the same for my sister, he will come back. But I honestly do not think he's coming back. He likes his job and that's the main reason why he doesn't want to leave it. [P5]

Perceived advantages and disadvantages of emigration

The short answer is, the effects of emigration were beneficial in terms of the financial circumstances of those left behind, but emigration was a source of emotional frustration that affected the relationships within the family.

Positive effects

There are no doubts regarding the children: after their parent left, their material circumstances are better. They have everything that many children desire and cannot have: clothes, sweets, toys (even a drone [RC5], ATV [RC15] or a blond puppet that is larger than the child [RC2], Iphone X [P1], motor bike

[P21]). It's not that there's a lot of those, but - most importantly - they are different. However, the advantages are always expressed alongside the frustration generated by the separation. When asked "What is your-wish?", the children at home have an almost standard answer: "I don't need anything, I have everything I need, I just want him/her to come back home".

I think I was young and I was happy with the sweets and the toys. That's all. Now if I think of it, that was no advantage. [RC3]

Because he was bringing us gifts - the good thing; and the bad thing was that he was leaving. He would be away for a long time. [RC5]

There would be some advantages, because next year, in the seventh grade, it's more difficult, with chemistry; and I could be asked to bring something that is important for chemistry, and I might not have the money for it. Then I would call, and I would tell her, "mum, send me at least sixty - seventy euro, so that I can buy what I need." [RC7]

I don't want to get anything, (agitated), I just wish he could finish the house here and move into the city; so that we can be in contact much more often, and always. [RC15]

The children at home, especially teenagers, understand that the parent's emigration was a sacrifice for them (the children) to have a better life. They understand, but they don't always accept that. If you put them on the scales, material advantages and emotional frustration are often out of balance.

I did not ask to be born! But I know that my father was forced to emigrate to create [a better life for?] me and my brother. [...] Now I understand the reasons that led

my father to emigrate, I know that I will have other opportunities that my father didn't have, and I respect my father very much for this. However, I don't have a relationship with my father as some of my classmates have. [P19]

Sometimes, separation comes as a solution to some tensed situations between the family members.

My father has problems with alcoholism and I grew up with fear of seeing what damage he would cause, the next time he was drunk. He was never violent to me, he never hit me or my mother, but especially on weekends, it was not uncommon for him to come home drunk. So when he started working in Spain, honestly, it was a relief. [P13]

For some of them (teenagers), there is also the advantage of additional independence.

I believe I have more freedom, because honestly, I don't know how I would manage to have them (here) all the time, 24 hours a day, and stuff like, you can't go out, look at the time, or things like that, you know how it happens sometimes. [RC13]

Q Do you feel you are more independent since he left?

A: Yes. [RC4]

(but also, the disadvantages of having to take some responsibilities)

Yes, that's true, but that also comes with some responsibility, because I have to do everything by myself. I want some certificate. I can't send her, "mum, go get that from the doctor"; I have to go myself, ask, or go and look for clothes. [RC14]

Negative effects

All interviews contain a shade of regret. The thing mentioned most frequently is physical absence. Even if it's very frequent, communication by phone/internet does not replace contact ("the hug"). The closer the relationship was before the departure, the more painful the absence seems to be felt.

She came home. She left when I was one year and a half, and she came back when I was five years and a half, five years... And I didn't know who she was, I didn't recognise her. She came home, and I got shy, and I went to my grandmother and I was telling her, "who is the woman?", and she told me, it's your mother.
[RC1]

There have been many moments in my life when you would hug me and give me your time, in order to make me happy. As she was away, these things no longer happened when I wanted them to happen. They did happen, but there were periods of time in-between. That's where I felt a difference. [RC2]

You tell him on the phone that you miss him, that you love him, but you need physical contact too. A hug.
[RC2]

There are many things that you can only talk about face to face. "I love you, daddy" - you can't hug him over the computer (she makes the gesture). You can't hug the computer; you would break it. [RC3]

He got me a teddy bear for my birthday. A big one. Really big. And they said, whenever I would miss them, I should hug the teddy bear and I was going to be ok.
[RC6]

[It is] worse. Because I have a very close relationship with my father and when he is not here and I miss him a lot. [P3]

In cases when the parent left when the child was young, physical absence is not that harsh.

Maybe I would have seen some disadvantages if she left after I was four-five years old, but now... I don't really know what things would have looked like if she was here. I got used to things being this way. [RC1]

In the case of children who remained with their grandparents, additional frustrations come in, smaller or bigger, generated by the difference between generations.

There is a huge gap between our ages, and they don't understand me, and I don't understand what they want. [RC6]

There is no one I can be with, most of the times, because grandma and grandpa are... they don't have that younger thinking. They remained... [...] My grandparents think that the uniform in school (laughing) is like it used to be in their times: it was mandatory, and if you don't wear it... but it's not really like that. And my parents understood that. [RC11]

It's because of the age. She has a point of view, I have a different point of view... I don't believe everybody shares the same point of view. [...] It's about little things; "eat", "I don't want to, I am not hungry", "but why don't you eat?" or "wear that thing", "don't wear that thing", and so on. [RC14]

From the point of view of the parent who is away, the costs come mostly in terms of being excluded from the child's stages of development.

There are a lot more disadvantages: the disadvantage of not following closely the growth of his daughter, the disadvantage of recently, for example, having spent his birthday alone, on the festive dates of the people he loves he is always away. [P5]

I lost the strong bonds I had with my children. I have been absent from their lives at such important times as adolescence. Even the relationship with my wife was different. I think things are more balanced now and we will be able to recover some lost time. But there are things that have been lost forever. [P11]

During my adolescence, I always lived alone with my mother and the relationship with my father became more distant. It does not mean I do not like my father, but I do not feel as close to him as to my mother. [P12]

Especially in the families of the Portuguese subjects interviewed, often the idea of a balance between the advantages and the costs of emigration, accepted in advance, comes up. The decision is made based on assuming some kind of loss, and the condition for it is to limit such loss. Most of the times, all the mature members of the family participate in the decision (including some of the teenagers); with this process, the costs - once they are accepted - are easier to bear.

We reached an agreement. We were going to sacrifice to make our future a little better, but we also agreed that it would be for a short time, because the situation is not good for us. [P5]

This is not the life I wanted or the life I have dreamed of. But we must face the difficulties life brings us and do the best we can to survive and raise our children. [P7]

I made the decision to emigrate because I had no other choice. I do not feel guilty about anything and I know I did what was best for everyone. However, I do not think it was good. It was necessary to do it and I had to do it. I worked hard, I suffered a lot, but I managed to give my family a better life. At that point, I fulfilled the goals I set. [P11]

Emigrants' relationship with the family at home

Remote communication

Those who are away sought to keep in close contact with their family at home, as much as possible. Stories about older episodes mention conversations over the phone - expensive at the beginning, therefore shorter and less frequent, and then daily.

We spoke for about ten minutes, because it was cheap. If we talked for more than ten minutes it was extremely expensive, so this was the way we kept in touch during the time they were together. [P05]

He went to a colleague's house, he had nowhere to stay, no internet, and the calls were very expensive. We talked a little bit and it cost a lot of money. So the early times were more complicated. [P23]

Contact with those at home, even if only by phone or accompanied by video, is part of the daily life, and sometimes saves the day in dramatic situations.

He sometimes calls me when I am in class. When it's some easy subject matter, I answer. I put my headsets on and I speak with him. [RC15]

Before I go out, I speak with mum; I tell her, look, I will go there - so that she knows where I am. As for my grandparents, I only tell them what time I leave, where

I will be and when I will be back. They [grandparents] know that I speak with mum. [RC6]

There was only one situation where I got sick and had to go to the hospital. I knew he was awake and was talking to him on the phone. Suddenly I felt bad. He was desperate, because he thought I was having a stroke. He called my neighbor immediately to see what was going on. I have back problems and I was feeling my arm numb. But I did not want to go to the hospital at dawn. He was very worried. [P6]

The closer we get to our times, phone conversations are replaced by video-calls (Skype, WhatsApp) and social media (Facebook). The advantages of internet communication are sometimes exploited in rather sophisticated ways (WhatsApp group with the entire family [SP08]).

We share songs, photos. [P2]

I take a photo of my daughter every day and send him. [P5]

The preference for the internet over the phone (or for video over audio) is a matter of a particular phase in history, but also a matter of generations: youngsters feel at ease with modern technologies, while for the elders it is more difficult to harness them.

I prefer to use the phone, but my children use Facebook and video call. [P7]

Seven years ago, only my older sister had a cell phone. We had a phone at home and it was on this phone that my father called. In the last two or three years, everything began to be different. Already all have mobile phones, calls are much cheaper and can even make Skype calls or WhatsApp. My father is not very

modern, nor does he use technology very much, but we like to use it and everything is easier. [P12]

- Does your mother have one [Facebook account]?

- No, she doesn't. I actually wanted to make one for her, but she didn't... she didn't really agree to it, I mean, she doesn't really know how to use these things for the moment. And I am still working on showing her; there's just a little bit left, and then... especially now, with Facebook, she could post something or... I don't know.

- Then how do you communicate with her?

- Well over the phone, and I also set up a WhatsApp account for her, so that we could see each other as well. But we only tried that once, and since then, no... we just call each other. [RC16]

With video communication, it's usually easier to convey emotions, and it seems to become an acceptable replacement when direct contact is missing.

It's easier like that, because if I look in her eyes, like that, and it's something more personal, or something bad, or if I am asking for something, then she gives me this look. (Showing.) As for the more serious things, I write to her about those. And then she gives me a video call: "what did you do?" And that's it, everything is gone. But if I say, "mum do you want me to tell you something?" "yes, I am listening". [RC1]

Sometimes when it is a serious matter, I try to tell him only when he comes home, but if he senses that something is happening, he insists with me and I eventually tell him [P6].

We talk every day by video call. I'm always with my daughter when I talk to him, because she already says some words, makes gestures and knows him very well! She is very happy when she sees him and this is very important in the relationship between father and daughter. Nowadays everything is easier in terms of communication which helps to bring people together. [P15]

For a long time, my father was a stranger to me. He emigrated when I was very young and I did not talk to him on the phone. Since I only saw him 3 times a year for a short time, he was someone who came to visit us, who brought me gifts and took us for a walk when he was here. Then I grew up, we started to communicate more, then the technology evolved a lot, we started to make Skype calls and my father became a more present figure. [P19]

Q: What would have happened if you didn't have internet access or a phone?

A: It would be harder because you don't see the other's face, I would have worried and wondered more how they are. As you can see each other's faces it seems that you can see them grow. It is not like before. [SR17]

Sometimes, using video communications, the group manages to create and share daily activities: they dine together, they go shopping together...

Sometimes mum calls me when I eat and she eats at the same time, and I put the phone over there so that she can see me, and we talk, we eat... "What are you eating, there?" [RC6]

My Italian roommates said that they cooked pasta and I had to cook a Portuguese food that I didn't know how to do. So I called my mother and she helped me with the kitchen. [SP1]

The objection that a family member (especially young children) have concerning the absence of the loved one may result in them rejecting mediated communication, other than direct presence:

- The youngest doesn't want to talk to him. She just can't do it. When he's here with us, she is always near him, but she says she doesn't want to talk to him, because he's not around her.*
- So, your daughter, who is 5 years old, only talks to him in person?*
- Yes, she doesn't talk to him on the phone. She simply cries. [...]. Sometimes she even covers her face. My son speaks but little. He says "Hi, dad", talks about basic things and for a short time. [P18]*

In some cases, visual contact is avoided, especially when there is a desire to hide an emotion:

- Did it ever happen to you that you didn't want them to see you?*
- When I was crying. I am the kind of person who doesn't show what they feel. I only cry if, God forbid, something happens. That's when I can't control myself. She knows me, [she knows] if I am upset, if I had cried, and if my eyes were red and I didn't want her to see me, and she called me on a video call, I turned her off and I gave her a normal call and I told her there was no light in the room... like, poetry. [RC1]*

Usually, the entire family participates in the calls or video calls. Sometimes special tactics are implemented to approach sensitive issues, only between the spouses.

When I need to talk to him alone, on some more private matter, which I do not think I should mention when my children are present, I send him a message on his cell phone and he calls me as soon as he can. [P24]

Q: Does it happen sometimes that you want to tell something to your wife alone, something that the children shouldn't find out about?

A: Yes, and it wasn't just once, when we were talking just the two of us. We could communicate; she wouldn't talk when she was in the house; she would talk when she would finish work at the office, and she would tell me, look, this and that... She could talk on the street, in Buzau... [RP2]

Letters have become an out-of-the-ordinary, exotic means to communicate. They are no longer an actual means to communicate, but rather a manner of expressing special, out-of-the-ordinary states.

I told my mother that I wanted to send her a letter, just like that; we could speak on the phone, and I wanted to write a letter to her, to write to my father, because he was sending me letters too, when he couldn't call me. With photos of us, when I was little - photos that not even my mum had. [RC15]

- *Do you write letters to him?*
- *Rarely.*
- *Have you ever written him a letter? When?*
- *Yes, I did. On his birthday. [P01]*

I usually send him a letter or a postcard on his birthday. [P3]

Q: Did you ever write any letters by hand?

A: No. I wanted to, once, but my grandfather... „[...] now that's stupid, you call her! No need to spend your money on the writing, on the postal service!“. [RC9]

We were making... how do you call those? Postcards, in school. Most of the times it was the Eighth of March (Women's Day) and they were asking for... we'd make postcards in school, or things like that. And first I would make one for my father, and then I would make one for her too. [RC17]

Visits

Most frequently, it's the ones away who visit home. But for the Romanians in Spain, even those visits were quite rare (until not long ago, the plane ticket was relatively expensive, and a bus trip would last for a few days). Usually twice a year at the most, on holidays or during the summer vacations. There are also cases when those who are away for work cannot afford the cost of visiting home, not even once a year [SR02].

The time spent together is shared between visiting relatives and quality time with the close family.

We spent time together, we slept together. [RC8]

The first time, I told him that I definitely want us to play, and we went to the fields, we played, and then I remember that, on the next day, he took us - me and mum - and he said we'd go somewhere. But he didn't tell us where. It was like a surprise. We went to the mountains; it was not planned; just like that, and we spent two or three days in the mountains; like a mini-holiday, something like that. [RC10]

We visited some relatives and we went to a football match [P4]

It is a contagious joy. When she [the daughter] realizes that her father is at home, it is as if her mother is a little put aside and feels that she has to pay attention to her father and grandfather. The other grandparents and the mother are left out and we understand that her intention is to give affection only to those two. [P5]

It was great! Sometimes he came later, and I was already at school. When he hadn't seen me in the morning before I went to school, he would pick me up, because school ended at 5 p.m. It was really nice. [P22]

A: She came with dad too. And they ate like crazy, they ate a lot.

Q: Meaning? They ate?

A: Yes. A lot. Two plates of food. (Laughing.)

Q: For each meal?

A: Yes. And after that, I went with dad to light up some fireworks. On New Year's Eve.[...] I went with my cousin, with dad, we bought one of those big rockets - do you know them? We put it into a pile of snow, so to say, and we lit it up. And it was quite nice. Quite big fireworks... [RC9]

Visiting home sometimes involves considerable efforts and even risks:

He came home every 15 days, in a van with other workers. I asked my husband many times not to go, because there have been many accidents with workers on the way home or on the way to work, because they went to fast or drove too tired and that situation scared me very much. [P16]

We do not know who drives and even if my husband is driving, I'm afraid he'll fall asleep, because they travel almost overnight. It's complicated, with the accidents they show on television, I'm always worried. [P18]

With the exception of the cases when relationships with the family are seriously damaged.

Well... he didn't spend too much time at home anyway, I mean he was coming, he was being here for a short while, he would come, he would go back, he would leave in the morning and come back in the evening, so there wasn't really... [...] Yes, he'd go to see other people, be with someone else, and... [RC4]

The evenings spent together are frequently filled with discussions that extend long into the night.

Q: And you had a longer chat in the evening, when no one bothered you?

A: Until two o'clock in the morning.

Q: And they wouldn't send you to bed, would they?

A: No. [RC11]

We'd sometimes be up until three in the morning, talking, especially in that time; my sister was home too, and... It was quite long discussions. [RC13]

Visits are sometimes required for special situations.

Well, he came to see his father - my granddad, that is, because he has some problems. He has cirrhosis and, well, some internal haemorrhage. And anyway, they talked about... he was feeling that he had not much to live, my grandfather, because that's what the doctor had told him... he told him, "you have three more months to live", and well, he lived for three more years, after those three months. Now he got worse and dad

came to see him; I mean, he thought he was going to die, so he came to see him for the last time, as it were. And well, he spent time with him, he saw that he was living well, I mean (laughing on the side of his mouth) he didn't die, he is still living, he is super-ok. Anyway, he got some oxygen tubes for him and... he visited me too, to have a chat, and then he left back to Spain. [RC12]

Less frequently, especially in the case of long-term emigration, the ones at home - mainly children - go to visit those who are away. Such visits are subject to the conditions in which the one who is away lives: when their home is a truck cab (which is the case of many Portuguese drivers) or a room shared with several workmates, such visits are out of discussion. Sometimes it's difficult to visit because of the legal requirements connected to being a minor child (a mandate signed by both parents is needed). These visits always remain in the form of beautiful memories.

It was very nice. My father lives near the city of Valencia. I liked the place where my father lives very much.

If he could send me some seafood now, in the winter, that would be something, because I can't really find those little animals that I want to eat, here. And I will tell him in the winter, to send me a parcel, because I still have that longing, from the summer. That taste. That taste of theirs. [C12]

The joy of being reunited is sometimes cancelled by the shock of the separation.

On the day before the last day, when she told me her boss had called her to come back, that was kind of a sad day, I started crying in the house. Then when I

went to school, in the morning, she said, I will come to school to say good bye, and she couldn't make it, and it was the last class in school and I said, could I get some time off school so that I can say good bye to my mother, and my grandmother didn't come to pick me up, and when she did come... I grabbed my school bag, and my drawings, and I went really-really fast until I reached kilometre zero, and I saw she had left. [C7]

An opportunity to talk about essential things in private.

- It was on that day, and we talked about everything, because last summer, it was the first time when I went to him and I spent this much time with him, because he would always come for two months and then be away for two years.

-And you felt, that discussion put your lives in order?

- Yes. I feel much better now, that I told him all these things. [...] I feel much better because I told him what bothered me, and he told me everything that happened between mum and himself, and... it was great. [C15]

A kind of holiday.

I got there and it was night. She came and she picked me up by car, she lived about two hundred kilometres away, and... [...] I went to her house. We went to sleep right away, because we got there in the morning, we unpacked our bags, we put our things in order... I was there for about a month, I believe. It was ok. Her house was really great, near the beach. We would go to the beach every day. I would go with my grandmother. She was at work. In the evening we would go strolling on the beach, "paseu". We'd go strolling, we'd go shopping. I was there in the summer and then school was starting; I bought everything for school in there -

clothes, school supplies, everything. We sent that to Romania by post, my grandfather went to pick it up, and we only carried some handbags with us, because we came by plane, and we unpacked it, and that was all. [C1]

Emigration, separation, divorce

The link between emigration and divorce is a complex one. Temporary separation of the couples, with the departure of one of them going to work, sometimes weakened the bonds and resulted in divorce.

Dad left since I was a baby, three months old. When I was five, we left too.[...] Dad was working in Spain since we were in Spain. Then Spain went into recession and dad went to Germany to work there. And when we came back to Romania again, they divorced. Dad had found someone else. [RC8]

When he came home, he was not so attentive and caring to me as he used to be. He started sending less money than usual. So I started to think he might have another woman. I gained courage and asked him directly if he had another woman. He told me that not only did he have another woman, but he had a child with her. [...] My husband had two families: one in Portugal and another one in Spain and that changed everything. There was no turning back. [P16]

I needed to go back to Spain. And meanwhile, trying to convince my ex-husband that the children should be with me, that it would be better for them, but he did not accept to sign the authorization. One year later I got divorced. It wasn't because I needed the divorce but

because I wanted to be with the children and was not ready to give them up. I took them on holidays with me while I got the divorce in Romania, during one year it was a very complicated situation, I was in Spain. [SP18]

Things get as far as to a total disappearance from the life of those at home, including children.

First, I was told that he had a car accident; my mum told me he had a car accident. I learned the truth from my grandmother; he had been with someone else before he was with mum; mum married him. He left the car near some lake, with the keys inside, and he left, and we don't know where he is. [RC7]

She came on holidays until my age of six, she was visiting, sending us money, because that's why she went there - the purpose was of material nature. Then after I turned six, her visits became less and less frequent. She took my brother there when he turned eighteen. And then they came back together, everything was ok, and at some point she needed some paper from my father and that's why she came into the country, and after that she never showed up again. [RC17]

We can't talk about a clear causal link between emigration and divorce. Sometimes the couple was already damaged, and that had favoured the decision to emigrate. Emigration can also be like some sort of escape, temporary or not, from a relationship where something does not work well.

From what she told me, they were not getting along well anymore, so they both left for Spain initially, but they separated. Dad went to Italy, I believe, to forget about mum, not to see her anymore, and that's when it was over. [RC1]

He's having some family problems right now and he says he wants to clear his head, you know? He's very nervous and takes little things seriously, you know. So he says he wants to go around the world, work somewhere else, for at least another year, to see if when he's back those problems are already solved. [P21]

I was asking them, "Why did you leave?", and they were all telling me, "my husband doesn't have a job, my husband drinks, my husband does this, my husband does that". And I was, like, "well it looks like this is happening to everyone...?!" [RP2]

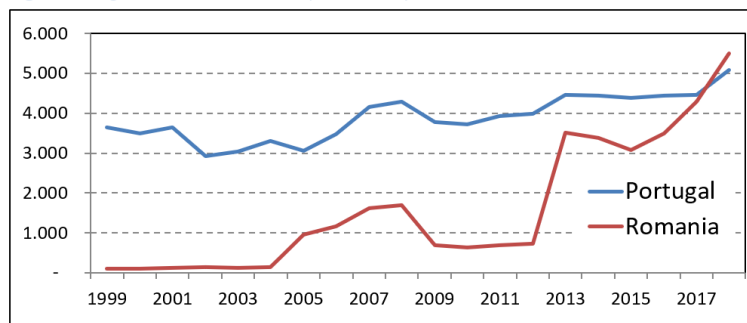
In some cases, the divorce, in combination with the precarious material circumstances, was a driving factor for the decision to emigrate. These are those circumstances where "migration appears as a survival strategy after divorce" (Vîlcu, 2015:15).

I broke up with my daughter's father, it did not end well, I had a sister working here and a cousin too, so I decided to come to Spain. [SR10]

Characteristics of Portuguese emigration. Differences from Romanian emigration

The differences mostly come from the fact that the modern history of emigration in Portugal started some decades earlier than in Romania. In general, the Portuguese have longer emigration experience than Romanians (up to 23 years [P10]), frequently with successive episodes.

Figure 3: Migrant remittance inflows (US\$ million)



Source: World Bank, Migration and Remittances Data,

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>

The justifications of the emigrating Portuguese families seem to be somewhat less dramatic - it is rather about a new job, a better economic opportunity (sometimes within the same company). In most interviews, emigration happened after the company where the person worked went bankrupt, during the economic recession. In some cases, expatriation happened in the form of career advancement [P15].

There are numerous cases where several members of a family emigrated, at various stages of life, in various countries [P5, P9], or successive generations of the family emigrated, each in their own turn [P10]. In such cases, the parents perceive the children's emigration as their personal failure:

I feel deep pain, and especially my husband, because we have done everything for them to stay with us. We came here when they were children, so they did not have to go back there, and truly that was what happened, one of them had to emigrate again because of work. [P10]

For them (interviewed Portuguese), emigration seems to be a way of being that they got used to, and some of them lived their entire life in separation.

There are a lot more disadvantages: the disadvantage of not following closely the growth of his daughter, the disadvantage of recently, for example, having spent his birthday alone, on the festive dates of the people he loves he is always away. Being always alone is very difficult. I know what his life is like. [P5]

I lost the strong bonds I had with my children. I have been absent from their lives at such important times as adolescence. [P11]

There are situations that lead to extreme decisions in there as well, such as both adults leaving, and younger children being left under the care of the older ones.

It was a very complicated phase in my father's life. He was fed up with that life and either he had my mother's support, or he would have left. But, back then my parents' didn't have financial conditions for that, so, always with my agreement, my mother decided to join him for four years. They lived together on the truck. [P5]

It is possible that, for the Portuguese, the stress of the absence is mitigated by the fact that physical distances are shorter, and therefore visiting home happens more frequently. In most cases, the interviewed Portuguese emigrants visit their family at home every month or more frequently, while Romanians do it twice a year at the most.

Some kind of conclusions

With globalisation, the territoriality of the labour market becomes fuzzy. At least in the European Union, someone leaving to another country for work is commonplace. The very notion of *migration* becomes vague and merges into that of *commuting*.

In some countries, the modern phenomenon of migration has a longer history - two generations already in Portugal. Meanwhile, the Portuguese have developed life strategies that are adapted to this way of living, and a culture of emigration has emerged. Thus, for them, going to another country to work is nowadays less dramatic than it used to be fifty years ago.

Romania, on the other hand, was under a regime of total isolation until 1990. Emigration for work was only allowed for the few “chosen” ones, under the strict control of the state. When the borders opened from inside, external barriers appeared; these barriers disappeared slowly, one by one, until the beginning of 2000, when freedom of movement seemed to take Romanians by surprise.

For a long time, going abroad for work was an extreme decision, made in extreme conditions. This is where some of the wrong judgements regarding the related costs (material and emotional) for the emigrant and the family at home are coming from. That is the explanation for the fact that, while the children of Portuguese emigrants see future emigration as a plausible option, people in Romania strongly reject the possibility to leave the country.

Bibliography

AFP (2018), 'Portugal, the European country that wants more migrants', *The Straits Times*, 22.07.2018,

<https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/portugal-the-european-country-that-wants-more-migrants> (accessed at December 22, 2018).

Bae, C.J., Douka K., Petraglia M.D. (2017) 'On the origin of modern humans: Asian perspectives', *Science*, Vol. 358, Issue 6368, eaa9067, Downloaded from <http://science.sciencemag.org/> on December 25, 2018.

CURS (2008) *Studiu privind "Afirmarea identității și integrarea socio-culturală a emigranților conaționali pentru muncă în zonele metropolitane din Spania și Italia"*, Sociologia Azi, downloaded at <http://sociologia-azi.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Raport-final-studiu-Migratie-Spania-si-Italia.pdf>, on January 5, 2019

European Commission (EC), Directorate-General Justice, Freedom and Security (2012), Impact of Immigration on Europe's Societies, downloaded from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/policies/legal-migration/pdf/general/emn_immigration_2006_en.pdf on January 10, 2019.

González Enríquez, C. & Martínez Romera, J.P. (2018), *The weaknesses of Spanish emigration*, Elcano Royal Institute, ARI 7/2017, Madrid, Downloaded from http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/riecano_en/contenidos?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ari7-2018-gonzalez-enriquez-martinezromera-weaknesses-spain-emigration on January 2, 2019

González-Ferrer, A. & Moreno-Fuentes, F.J. (2017) 'Back to the Suitcase? Emigration during the Great Recession in Spain', *South European Society and Politics*, 22:4, 447-471, downloaded from

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2017.1413051> on January 3, 2019

International Organization for Migration (2018), *World Migration Report 2018*, www.iom.int

Irimescu, G. & Lupu, A.L. (2006), *Singur acasă ! [Home alone!]* Research conducted in Iași area with children separated from one or both parents by parents leaving abroad for work, Asociația Alternative Sociale, Iași

Justino, D. (2016) *Emigration from Portugal. Old Wine in New Bottles?*, Transatlantic Council of Migration, Lisbon.

Munteanu, M. & Tudor, E. (2007), Impactul migrației părinților asupra copiilor rămași acasă, Salvați Copiii, București, downloaded from https://copiisinguriacasa.ro/wp-content/themes/csa/doc/Impactul%20migrației%20parinților%20a%20supra%20copiilor%20ramasi%20acasa_Salvati%20Copiii.pdf on December 25, 2018

Observatório da Emigração (2018), *Factbook 2017*, downloaded from http://observatorioemigracao.pt/np4/file/5999/OEm_Factbook_20171.pdf on January 10, 2019

Sandu, D. (1984) *Fluxurile de migrație în România*. București, Editura Academiei.

Sandu, D. (2018a), 'Migrația temporară în străinătate', în Ghețău, Vasile (coord.), *Demografia României*, București, Editura Academiei Române.

Sandu, D. (2018b) *Half of the Romanian youngsters want to leave the country. Destinations and average age change, Euro-commuting is growing Interview (I)*. Interview in Ziare.com, May 9, 2018. <http://www.ziare.com/social/romani/jumatate-dintre-tinerii-romani-vor-sa-plece-din-tara-se-schimba-destinatiile-media-de-varsta-euronavetismul-este-in-crestere-interviu-i-1512827>

Toth, A., Munteanu, D., Bleahu, A. (2008), *Analiză la nivel național asupra copiilor rămași acasă prin plecarea părinților la muncă în străinătate*, Reprezentanta UNICEF România, Buzău

Toth, G., Toth, A., Voicu, O., Ștefănescu, M. (2007), *Efectele migrației: copiii rămași acasă*, Fundația Soros România, București.

Vilcu, C. M. (2015), rezumatul tezei de doctorat *Migrația părinților la muncă în străinătate și efectele ei asupra copiilor rămași în țară*, Universitatea din Craiova, Facultatea de drept și științe sociale, downloaded on December 21, 2018 from http://mecanica.ucv.ro/ScoalaDoctorala/Temp/Rezumate/vilcu%20claudia_REZRO.pdf

Appendix A. List of performed interviews

Romania (21 interviews)

RA1 F, 2 children, husband was in Spain, TIR truck driver

RA2 F, Husband away in England.

RC1 F, 15 years old, parents divorced, mother in Spain, remarried with a Bulgarian, father in Germany. Hobby - photography

RC2 F, 19 years old, father was away in Spain, tour operator. Extremely intense emotional bond with the father.

RC3 F, 12 years old, father was in Spain. Sent her a lollipop for the Christmas tree.

RC4 F, 17 years old, daughter of A2. Father away in Spain. After he left, she spread his photos everywhere in the house. Distant relationship with the father who is away.

RC5 M, 10 years old. Father was away. On the day before he left, he spent all his time with him, he was holding him. Does not communicate with the father via internet.

RC6 F, 17 years old. Both parents in Spain, where she also lived from 2 to 9 years of age. When she goes out she asks her mother in Spain for permission. Big teddy bear that she holds when she longs for them.

RC7 M, 12 years old. Mother away in Spain, father deceased/missing.

RC8 F, 17 years old. Both parents in Spain, then in Germany; divorced. Lives with her sister (21 years old). Very strong bond with the mother (they sleep together!)

RC9 F, 13 years old. Both parents in Greece. Somehow abandoned, grandparents take care of her.

RC10 M, 12 years old. Father away in Spain. Son of A1? When the father comes visiting, they play soccer.

RC11 M, 14 years old. Both parents in Spain. Lives with grandparents, who have an old way of thinking.

RC12 M, 18 years old. Father away in Spain. Father calls dozens of times a day.

RC13 F, 16 years old. Father away in Spain. She believes she has more freedom than if he was around all the time.

RC14 M, 17 years old. Both parents in Spain. Mother was a dressmaker at the hospital, then retired due to disease, she preferred to leave and take care of the husband, she left the child. Necessity-based communication

RC15 M, 17 years old. Father away in Spain, divorced from mother. His greatest desire is that his father comes back. Things that he discusses with the father rather than the mother.

RC16 M, 16 years old. Mother away in Spain. Communication by phone only

RC17 F, 18 years old. Mother away in Spain for 15 years. She has no news about her.

RP1 M, 45 years old. Was away in Spain. He went to a “friend”, when he got there he learned it was about stealing.

RP2 M, 54 years old, father of RC2 and RC5. Communication by phone only.

Portugal (25 interviews)

PR1 F, 33 years old. Romanian; 5 years in Portugal. No family in Romania (only the mother).

P1 F, 13 years old. Father away in Spain, for 9 years. He lives in a truck (driver). Her wish is to have an Iphone X.

P2 F, 41 years old. Husband driver in Spain for 3 years. Had a (pre)heart attack while talking to her husband on the phone, he alerted the neighbours.

P3 F, 17 years old. Father is a builder, in Spain, for 3 years.

P4 F, 21 years old. Father is a builder, in Spain, for 3 years. She lives with her mother and brother.

P5 F, 25 years old. Father had emigrated to Spain when she got born, mother followed him when the daughter was 18, she left her with her 8-years-old sister. She got married, husband emigrated as well. Sends a photo of the daughter every day.

P6 F, 41 years old. Husband migrated twice, for 2-3 years every time. Has two daughters.

P7 F, 51 years old. Husband in Spain for 10 years. They have a girl and a boy.

P8 F, 33 years old. Spaniard, she married a Portuguese, lives in Portugal.

P9 F, 52 years old. She has a girl and a boy who are now adults. The daughter is a nurse, she emigrated to Spain because she couldn't find work in Portugal. Husband in Switzerland.

P10 F, 51 years old. She has three daughters, out of which one (a nurse) emigrated in Spain. She and her husband were emigrants in France for 23 years.

P11 M, 55 years old. Worked in Spain for 7 years.

P12 F, 22 years old. Father worked in Spain for 7 years.

P13 F, 28 years old. Father alcoholic; emigrated in Spain several times.

P14 F, 51 years old. Husband in Spain, several times within the past 10 years.

P15 F, 28 years old. Husband in Spain for one year and a half. Was promoted to the Spanish branch of the bank he works with. They intend to move to Spain with the entire family.

P16 F, 46 years old. Husband left for Spain 12 years ago. She found out he has a child with another woman in Spain.

P17 F, 25 years old. One sister (nurse) emigrated to Spain after not finding work in Portugal.

P18 F, 39 years old. Husband, 11 years in Belgium, in Spain for one year now. He emigrated (also) to get away from some personal problems.

P19 M, 17 years old. Father emigrated 12 years ago. I did not ask to be born.

P20 M, 14 years old. Father, TIR truck driver, emigrated 8 years ago.

P21 M, 15 years old. Father emigrated in France for one year, came back 3 years ago. He wants to leave again because of some problems in the family. He would like, at some point, to give back to his parents what he received from them.

P22 F, 16 years old. Father, lived in France until 25 years of age, then emigrated to France 6 years ago.

P23 F, 16 years old. Father emigrated to Switzerland 5 years ago.

P24 F, 51 years old. Husband 3 years in Spain and 7 years in France.

Spain (21 interviews)

Romanians:

SR01 F, 26 years old, lives in Spain for 6 years now. Came to study, got married, stayed there.

SR02 F, 45 years old, in Spain for 15 years now, cleaning lady. Parents and a son are in Romania.

SR03 F, 45 years old, in Spain for 22 years now. Actress, former journalist.

SR04 F, 50 years old, in Spain for 14 years now. First the husband came, then she joined with their daughter.

SR05 F, 46 years old, in Spain for 17 years now. She left with a small baby and pregnant.

SR06 M, 48 years old, in Spain for 18 years now. Husband of SR05.

SR07 F, 18 years old, in Spain for 17 years now.
Daughter of SR05 and SR06.

SR08 M, 17 years old, born in Spain. Son of SR05 and SR06.

SR09 M, 23 years old, in Spain for 3 years now, studying, supported by aunt.

SR10 F, 36 years old, in Spain for 13 years now. Decided to leave after divorce. She is a waitress here.

SR11 F, 42 years old, in Spain for 17 years now. No close relatives in Romania.

SR12 F, in Spain for 16 years now. Teacher. Owns a business.

SR15 F, 41 years old, in Spain for 5 years now. Romanian language teacher.

SR16 F, 39 years old, in Spain for 15 years. Came by herself for one year, then the husband, then the son joined, they stayed.

SR17 F, 56 years old, in Spain for 14 years now.

SR18 F, 47 years now, in Spain for 10 years. University teacher.

SR19 F, 49 years old, in Spain for 15 years now.

Portuguese

SP1 M, 21 years old. Student in Murcia.

SP2 F, 33 years old. Spent some years in Spain with a master studies programme. Now lives in Belgium.

PART II:
THE PLANET OF LOST DREAMS
Telematic Theatre Performance



Audience participants playing with the Kinect-controlled animation during open technology tests (February 2018).

The Planet of Lost Dreams

Text by Ion Mircioagă and Marina Hanganu

With: Andreea Darie, Radu Solcanu, Ruxandra Oancea,

Tony Blaya, Ana Polo

Directed by: Marina Hanganu, Ion Mircioagă (RO), Javier Galindo (ES)

Scenography: Alexandra Constantin

Multimedia design by Mindscape Studio:

head interaction designer: Cristian Iordache

interaction designer: Dragoș Vasiloaia

sound setup: Florin Ciocan

light design: Alexandros Raptis

Soundtrack: Marina Hanganu

music: Magna Ingress - "Soul Connection" (album "The Final Circle")

A co-production between Teatrul Dramatic *George Ciprian* Buzău (Romania) and UCAM Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia (Spain).

Dramaturgy and Telepresence

Marina Hanganu

CONTENTS

- I. Introduction
- II. Methodology
- III. Telepresence in the Theatre
- IV. The Dramaturgy of Technology
- V. Narrative Dramaturgy
- VI. Spacetime Dramaturgy
- VII. The Audience's Dramaturgy
- VIII. Conclusion
- Bibliography

I would like to thank sociologist Mircea Kivu for verifying the calculations and for making useful comments on the questionnaire analysis.

*Special thanks to Professor Dr. Johannes Birringer, whose detailed and insightful email feedback on **The Planet of Lost Dreams** live-streamed telematic performance has been very stimulating for the writing of this essay!*

*Last, but not least, thank you, **Tele-Encounters** team!*

I. Introduction

Telepresence has long permeated our everyday lives, shrinking distances once insurmountable between bodies, spaces and objects and reinterpreting what it means to be human. This is, of course, part of the larger story of how technology has changed and will continue to change us. Artists like Roy Ascott, theorists like Marshall McLuhan and N. Katherine Hayles or thinkers like Harari, to name but a few of the key figures, have already painted in shades both dark and bright what has come to be known as “the posthuman”.⁶ Telematic theatre, an offspring of telepresence, is called out to explore the posthuman condition in which boundaries of all sorts are increasingly being dismantled – or are they? The link between telepresence and migration and their conjoined effects on family relationships may serve as a timely reminder to put the flesh “back into the picture” (Hayles 1999: 5), acknowledging the emotional barriers that can arise in the wake of physical absence.

I conceived the *Tele-Encounters* project and ensured its artistic management throughout. In collaboration with Ion Mircioagă, I co-wrote the play and co-directed it based on the real-life stories shared with us by Romanian migrants in Spain and left-behind children. Javier Galindo joined us as theatre director in Spain. During rehearsals, apart from more traditional theatre directing, I had to bring together the two performances coagulating at a distance, one in Buzău and the other in Murcia, while also ensuring the overall technical coordination and real-time video montage in Romania. It was a difficult yet rewarding process.

⁶ Ascott’s utopian vision of the interconnected human mind fits into the paradigm of posthumanism. The same comment applies to Marshall McLuhan’s technological “extensions of man”.

My fascination with the telematic form and its potential to connect people across different countries predates *The Planet of Lost Dreams*. I chose the theme for *Tele-Encounters* as a result of going abroad to study. Being separated from my family made me think of the wider context of migration and the way human relationships develop over the Internet. The situation in Romania is dramatic, considering that 3.6 million people live outside the country (Migration Data Portal 2017) and the number of children with at least one parent abroad is estimated at 350,000 (Administrația Prezidențială 2018: 10). Spain is one of the top destination countries, hosting at least 652,300 Romanian immigrants (Migration Data Portal 2017). However, as the audience feedback confirms, the performance was not only about people separated by migration - it spoke more largely about family life and Internet relationships.

Contrary to most explorations in the field of telematic performance (e.g., Station House Opera, KÒNIC THTR, Blast Theory), we have taken a *dramatic*, not a postdramatic approach. That is, we have created a story with plot, conflict and psychologically driven characters, inspired by interviews with Romanian migrants in Spain and left-behind families in Romania. Carmen has gone to work in Murcia (Spain), while George, her physically impaired husband, and Betty, their little daughter, have stayed in Buzău (Romania). The play follows the characters throughout eleven years – we witness a family life supported only by the fragile thread of the Internet.

By transposing on stage the condition of being together while staying apart, we have **theatricalised telepresence**. The core research question was: **how can we articulate a dramaturgy based on telepresence?** This further led me to ask how telepresence changes our understanding of dramatic theatre and how theatre changes our understanding of telepresence. This

essay explores the dramaturgy of *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, adapting Eugenio Barba's conceptualisation of the compositional layers of performance: narrative dramaturgy, space dramaturgy, the actor's dramaturgy and the spectator's dramaturgy (Barba 2010). Since my analysis will mostly deal with the structuring mechanisms at work in the performance, I will focus on narrative, space, time and the audience's perception, showing their tight interrelation with the *dramaturgy of technology* inherent in telematic theatre. The actors' dramaturgy percolates all the other levels, animating and redrafting them, while at the same time being comprised within each.

II. Methodology

Practice as Research (PaR) generally applies to projects in a university context⁷, yet it has provided a useful methodological framework for our investigation. A PaR inquiry often benefits from a longer development time than the one allotted to *The Planet of Lost Dreams*: we spent three months collecting interviews, two months writing the play, four months developing the applications and three months rehearsing the performance (but only around 50 days were dedicated to rehearsals). The research was thereby condensed, and so was the process of reflection and reiteration of the various stages of the work. The Creative Europe grant awarded to *Tele-Encounters* is not by definition research-oriented, yet the project application detailed the research process to be undertaken.

⁷ Indeed, I am currently a PhD candidate at The National University of Theatre and Film "I.L.Caragiale" Bucharest, while Ion Mircioagă is an established Professor at the National University of Arts "George Enescu" Iași, with a PhD in theatre.

PaR involves a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/ performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry. (Nelson 2013: 8-9)

Professor Robin Nelson describes PaR as a “multi-mode inquiry” which rests on the triangulation of “know how,” “know that” and “know what.” The “know how” is the practical knowledge practitioner-researchers put into play and gain from the research process: the team’s⁸ prior training and experience in dramatic theatre, multimedia and, in my case, also experimental performance-making. The “know-that” refers to the theoretical context of the research and awareness of developments in the field (e.g., by reading books, articles, or seeing performances). While writing the application, I was aware of the work of companies and artists involved in telematic performance, such as Station House Opera or Dries Verhoeven, which allowed me to propose an alternative approach – re-mapping dramatic theatre on the coordinates of telematics and telepresence. The “know-what” stands for reflexivity, for the ability to step back from your research to see what works and what does not.

Eugenio Barba’s understanding of dramaturgy as a process of composition⁹, the theory of New Media Dramaturgy, New Media studies and migration studies offered the theoretical lenses of this

⁸ Ion Mircioagă, Javier Galindo and I are theatre directors, Andreea Darie, Radu Solcanu, Ruxandra Oancea, Tony Blaya and Ana Polo are actors, Alexandra Constantin is an architect and scenographer, while Cristian Iordache trained as a video artist and later specialised in multimedia interaction design.

⁹ Indeed, dramaturgy does not refer only to the writing of a text (playwriting), but to the orchestration of the whole performance (space, sound, acting, narrative, etc.).

exploration. The methods we employed were both qualitative and quantitative. During rehearsals, we relied on personal observation, and the audience's feedback received after work-in-progress presentations. To assess the impact the performance had on the spectators, we used written questionnaires, monitored the Q&A sessions and interpreted the YouTube Analytics report, as explained in detail in the final section of this essay.

III. Telepresence in the Theatre

Telematics is the merge between telecommunications and computers (informatics).¹⁰ **Telematic performance** takes place in at least two spaces simultaneously, which are technologically connected in real-time, in our case via the Internet. **Telepresence** is enabled by telematics. The term was coined in 1980 by cognitive scientist Marvin Minsky¹¹ to designate the remote control of robots (telerobotics) coupled with quantifiable sensory feedback for the teleoperator¹². Minsky's original definition has two dimensions: (1) the ability to do physical actions, and (2) the ability to feel present in the remote physical environment.¹³ Indeed, for Minsky, the

¹⁰ "Telematic was first coined by Simon Nora and Ala[i]n Minc (1978) and now broadly describes digitally-mediated communications among the range of mediated network access through devices such as the telephone, computers, the Internet, and other data-processing systems." (Bay-Cheng in Bay-Cheng et al. 2010: 99)

¹¹ Marvin Minsky is founder of MIT's Artificial Intelligence laboratory.

¹² the person operating the robot from a distance

¹³ At present, the sense of "being there" might more readily be achieved in a virtual reality experience than with telerobots. Apart from that, telepresence as Minsky describes it does not offer an accurate sense of the remote environment even in its ideal functioning, since it is meant to attenuate the experience of harsh environments and adjust it to fit the human sensorium.

sense of presence in the remote environment seems to be the ultimate goal of telepresence technologies:

The biggest challenge to developing telepresence is achieving that sense of "being there." Can telepresence be a true substitute for the real thing? Will we be able to couple our artificial devices naturally and comfortably to work together with the sensory mechanisms of human organisms? (Minsky 1980)

Nevertheless, telepresence has come to have derived meanings, depending on the context of use. We can group the existing definitions into three broad and partly conflicting categories, all referring to technology-mediated experiences:

- 1) Telepresence as real-time teleaction in a remote physical environment (Marvin Minsky, Ken Goldberg, Eduardo Kac). Associated field: telerobotics.
- 2) Telepresence as "remote reconstruction of ourselves"¹⁴ (Ascott 2003: 351) in a physical or virtual environment, whether synchronous (real-time) or asynchronous (Roy Ascott). Associated field: broad telematics.¹⁵

¹⁴ "Through telematic networks, our presence is distributed. We are both present and absent, here and elsewhere, all at the same time. It seems that embodied representation is giving way to disembodied reconstruction of ourselves." (Ascott 2003: 351)

¹⁵ Roy Ascott is one of the pioneers of telematic art. His definition of "a state of distributed telepresence" is at the opposite side of the spectrum from Minsky's: "To be both here and there (...) whether mediated by computer networks, interactive video, slow-scan television, fax, digital image transfer, videotex, teleconference, videophone or online communications by means of telephone (...)" (Ascott 1991: 116). Any use of telematic technology is for Ascott (and for other theorists as well) an instance of telepresence, which can be synchronous (as in real-time communication) or **asynchronous** (as in accessing an online database at any time you wish).

- 3) Telepresence as the sensation of “being there” during a mediated experience, accompanied by the illusion of non-mediation. Associated fields: VR, television, popular media (Bracken & Botta in Bracken & Skalski: 42).¹⁶

Our experience with *The Planet of Lost Dreams* leads me to propose an encompassing definition of telepresence that draws on all three categories. **In a theatre context, I will define telepresence as a real-time relationship enabled by telematic technologies between remote bodies, objects and spaces, which can take the form of visual action (any visual information transmitted from one space to another, such as video, text, emoticons and still images), auditory action (not only the actor’s words, but all auditory information transmitted between spaces) and physical action (robot-enabled).**

A rather contentious matter is the distinction between two-way and one-way communication via technology (e.g., live-streaming and television). Live-streaming is an integral part of contemporary theatre experience, making it possible for audiences to be remotely present at the site of the performance. Unless it allows for live comments from online spectators, it usually implies one-way communication. However, since **two-way communication** is a structural element in telematic theatre that differentiates it from televised shows, can live-streaming enter the definition of telepresence?

Artists like Roy Ascott and Eduardo Kac consider the “dialogical” quality of telepresence to be the most significant one (Kac 2008: 103). In their writings, they show how its aesthetic of exchange can critique monodirectional modes of artistic production

¹⁶ Telepresence in VR is discussed in the second part of this book.

and reception. Nevertheless, as we will discuss in the “Spacetime Dramaturgy” section of this essay, live-streaming does offer a collective experience for the remote audience akin to physical presence in the performance venue. Also, as Andy Lavender makes evident in the case of live comments, it can foster a relationship between audience members aware of each other’s (tele)presence (not the case in our performance, though) (Lavender 2016: 175). So, I will take the risk and refer to the online spectators as *telepresent*.

My definition of telepresence is closely related to Kris Paulsen’s, although the illusionistic sensation of “being there” is not its sole manifestation, in my view:

“Telepresence” is the feeling of being present at a remote location by means of real-time telecommunications devices. One can be visually, aurally, and even tactilely present to distant, mediated environments through networked devices, such as video cameras and telerobots. (Paulsen 2017: 2)

I trust this definition of “telepresence” better suits the theatre. Firstly, the actors’ exchange during a performance can take multiple forms (verbal, nonverbal, gestural) – e.g., a blink of the eye on camera can convey more information than a robotic handshake. Indeed, we speak frequently of “verbal actions” on stage. Why should we favour physical (haptic) actions and thus telerobotics over audio-visual communication as a way of affecting a remote environment and the people in it?¹⁷

¹⁷ Dries Verhoeven’s “Guilty Landscapes” (2016-present) is the perfect example of a remote interaction via an audio-visual link in which one audience participant at a time interacts non-verbally with a remote performer. The two affect each other

Secondly, is remote action in a *physical* environment different from action in a *virtual* environment? Maybe not when it comes to the *sensation* of “*being there*”: “[...] since both telepresence and virtual presence are expected to be similar in their psychological underpinnings, a distinction between the two types of enabling media technologies is unnecessary [...]” (Haans & IJsselsteijn 2012: 211). However, some artists and theorists draw *structural* distinctions. Sheridan (1992) distinguishes between *telepresence* (employing Minsky’s definition) and *virtual presence*, which is the “sense of being physically present with visual, auditory or force displays generated by a computer” (Sheridan 1992). Similarly, but departing from the pure technicality of the term, Ken Goldberg differentiates between VR (Virtual Reality) and TR (telerobotics, Tele-Reality): “VR is simulacral, while TR is distal” (Goldberg 2000: 5). He explicitly states that his concern is not with “the physiological and psychological issues of immersion, but with perceptions of fiction and reality” (Goldberg 1998: 33). Following Goldberg’s lead, I will maintain that in *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, immersion is not the defining trait of telepresence. However, neither is the distinction between fiction and reality. Dramatic theatre, unlike the performative installations of Ken Goldberg, features actors playing characters different from themselves in fictional circumstances. Dramatic theatre *is* to a great extent simulacral, hence telepresence in this context is perhaps as fictional as virtual presence.

Eduardo Kac also departs from the idea of telepresence as a “technological feat” that can enable “the amazing sensation of “being there””, and instead focuses on its ability to interrogate the “teleological nature of technology” by inviting participants “to experience invented remote worlds from perspectives and scales

only via the gestures they perform silently in real time (except for some moments when they sing).

other than the human". Despite recognising the existence of immersive virtual reality on the Internet, where people can meet and interact online "through their graphic projections," to qualify as telepresence, the telecommunications systems would still need to be "coupled to telerobots" (Kac 2008: 138-139).

What I will retain from Kac is the dimension of *connectivity between living organisms*. Linking physical bodies offers the main distinction between telepresence in a virtual environment and pure VR immersion. To qualify as telepresence, the VR experience should eventually link *physical spaces* and *physical organisms*. This echoes Oliver Grau's assertion about telepresence:

(...) it enables the user to be present in three places at the same time: (a) in the spatiotemporal location determined by the position of the user's body; (b) by means of teleperception in the simulated, virtual image space (the point to which attempts in art history have led thus far to achieve virtual reality); and (c) by means of teleaction in the place where, for example, a robot is situated, directed by one's own movements and providing orientation through its sensors. (Grau 2000: 239)

The Kinect-controlled animation scenes in *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, which we will discuss later in this essay, are an example of telepresence in a virtual environment connecting two distinct physical spaces (Romania and Spain). It is worth noting that point (b) applies not only to the Kinect sequences, in which the screen morphed into a virtual meeting space for the characters, but also to the video-call scenes. By striving to frame the image clearly, the actors were aware that they were inhabiting the screen throughout the performance.

As shown above, thinking of telepresence in the theatre can complicate the conceptual distinctions made by Minsky, Kac, and Goldberg. I will further refer to the dimensions of telepresence as being determinant of the dramaturgical layers of telematic performance.

IV. The Dramaturgy of Technology

Extending New Media Dramaturgy

In *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, the actors' telepresence was achieved via video-conferencing (linking two physical spaces) and Kinect-controlled animations (bringing the actresses together in a virtual space, on screen). The action took place simultaneously in two theatre studios: The *George Ciprian* Theatre in Buzău, Romania, and Centro Parraga in Murcia, Spain, with physically present actors and audiences in both spaces. The audience in Romania could see the physical action on stage and, (rear-)projected live on a big screen, the action happening in Spain. Identically, the audience in Spain could see the physical action on stage and, (rear-)projected live on a big screen, the action in Romania. The narrative, space and the actors themselves are contained by the technological matrix and, as far as the remote action is concerned, all exist through it. The affordances of the technological matrix determine up to a point the actors' degree of freedom.

I agree with Lev Manovich that no interface is neutral: "far from being a transparent window into the data inside a computer, the interface brings with it strong messages of its own" (Manovich 2001: 76). This idea relates to New Media Dramaturgy (NMD), also

called “new materialist dramaturgy,” which foregrounds the importance of the materiality of technology in performance. In works included under the NMD umbrella, the machine is considered autonomous, since the artists have started to listen to it and to liberate it from the constraints of narrative. The use of video projection follows the same rules: “projection in the context of NMD is something that has its own agenda and agency and is not simply at the service of a story or a characterisation” (Eckersall, Scheer & Grehan 2017: 16). Eckersall, Scheer and Grehan place their analysis exclusively in the realm of postdramatic theatre, without claiming to offer “a global mapping of trends in new media performance” (Eckersall, Scheer & Grehan 2017: 15). Even so, I find the postdramatic sphere limiting for the understanding of the impact of technology on contemporary performance. As I will show next, technology *does* speak in performance whenever it is a *structural* element, irrespective of it being dramatic or postdramatic. Telematic theatre as a genre is inconceivable outside of technology, while the technological matrix itself (the material) is shaped by theatre’s “immaterial” content. Even postdramatic performance has content, albeit not a narrative one. Thus, in a way, the “machine” and the content are always interlaced:

There is another way to think about the difference between new media design and new media art in relation to the content — interface dichotomy. In contrast to design, in art the connection between content and form (or, in the case of new media, content and interface) is motivated. That is, the choice of a particular interface is motivated by work’s content to such degree that it can no longer be thought of as a separate level. Content and

interface merge into one entity, and no longer can be taken apart. (Manovich 2001: 78).

That is not to say there is no difference between dramatic theatre incorporating technology to serve a pre-determined story (e.g., staging *Peer Gynt* with new technologies) and dramatic theatre that is being created from scratch in permanent dialogue with the technological form. Telematic theatre belongs to the latter category and should be considered a part of NMD.

Technological Development – An Ongoing Process

The complex technological development process can be divided into the following phases: **1) planning, 2) building, 3) testing, 4) adjusting, 5) monitoring.**

1) The planning phase started when deciding to apply for Creative Europe since we had to think of the technical architecture to be able to compile the budget and to describe the performance to be. We knew the performance would connect two theatre studios, one in Buzău and the other one in Murcia, via video-conferencing and Kinect-controlled animations. In the pre-rehearsal period, after obtaining the funding, we had to sharpen this vision in dialogue with Mindscape Studio, the multimedia team. How many cameras will we use and what type of cameras? What will the animation look like? What specific functions does the application need to have (e.g., subtitles, video switching, blackout function, Kinect function, video glitch effect, remote control)?

2) Building. The applications were developed by interaction designers Cristian Iordache (head designer) and Dragoş Vasiloaia, who also recommended the equipment to be bought and assembled the technological setup in Buzău and Murcia. Sound designer Florin Ciocan created the audio diagram for live transmission between the two performance spaces.

3) Testing. The first tests on location lasted around five days and took place at The “George Ciprian” Theatre in Buzău in February 2018. The devices were installed in two different rooms inside the theatre. Then we opened the door for the Buzău audience to play with the Kinect-controlled avatars.

4) Adjustments had to be made during rehearsals since we decided to use the smartphone, which changed the configuration of the applications. **The rehearsal phase will always bring about alterations to the technological setup, which is why the artistic and technological processes need to take place in permanent dialogue.**

Unfortunately, often, when a theatre production has a strong technological component, the artistic design process and technical development follow their own parallel design iterations. This could in the worst case lead to badly implemented technology, or limited artistic depth in the final result. When a theatrical MR¹⁸ experience is designed, it is for this reason advisable that artistic and technological development go hand in hand – preferably right from the start of the process, sharing design iterations as much as possible. (Weijdom 2017: 17).

Inspired by Weijdom’s diagram of shared design iterations (Weijdom 2017: 18), I have created a Gantt chart to highlight the temporal connection between working on the performance and the technological progress (*Fig.1* below). I must say that the adjustment phase took much time which would ideally have been dedicated to theatrical creation. Luckily enough, the changes

¹⁸ MR = Mixed Reality

requested were not extensive, and the team from Mindscape Studio were very flexible and responsive. Furthermore, the rehearsal period was just long enough to cover for the unexpected changes. In any case, for future projects, **the adjustment phase will be more deftly incorporated in the rehearsal period, with alternating periods for testing the applications with the actors and then modifying them separately**, without having the whole team wait frustratedly on the sides for bugs to be fixed. What is more, especially in telematic performance, which relies on telematic rehearsals, artistic progress is hard to achieve unless the technology is working properly. **Therefore, while the apps are still being modified, there should be a fast and stable Internet connection between the remote spaces right from the start, supported by the essential hardware: microphones, speakers, cameras, powerful routers.**¹⁹

5) Monitoring. While informing decisions throughout the whole process, the **monitoring phase** should extend into the performance period, as one never knows when technology fails. During the first performances, Cristian Iordache often entered our computers via TeamViewer to make sure everything worked, or to fix any unexpected problems, such as a dynamic IP that prevented remote control. All in all, one of the challenges of this project was to maintain the balance between the technological and the artistic components.

¹⁹ In our case, as pointed out elsewhere in this essay, sound was essential. Until the microphones were bought in Spain, it was extremely difficult to work, especially for the actors in Spain, who had to use the incorporated microphone and speaker of the smartphone for the most part of rehearsals.

Fig. 1 Technological Development Gantt Chart (timeline)

Tech Development Phase	1. Project application	2. Pre-rehearsal period	3. Rehearsal period	4. Performance period
1. planning				
2. building				
3. testing				
4. adjusting			Critical point!	
5. monitoring				

Communication Protocols

The **communication protocols** were the first we had to establish in rehearsals, and the final choice of hardware was a result of tests conducted with the actors. It was essential to answer three questions: 1) How do the actors in one space see and hear the actors in the other space? (related to output devices) 2) How do the actors in one space make themselves seen / heard by the actors and audience in the other space? (related to input devices) 3) Do the actors (while in character) and the audience have the same visual perspective on the remote space?

The studios were uninterruptedly linked via video-conferencing on the Internet, using a high-speed network. In Romania, we had a 300 Mb/s guaranteed symmetrical connection (which usually reached over 600 Mb/s download and 900 Mb/s upload), part of a business contract which included non-stop technical assistance on the phone. In Spain, the network was initially similar but later had to be replaced with a 50 Mb/s connection which still worked very well. Fortunately, the Internet

connection never interrupted during the performances. In Romania, we also had a backup network that usually functioned at around 130 Mb/s and an ethernet cable switcher that could shift seamlessly between connections in case of emergency. Communication was ensured by two powerful laptops controlled by the tech team in each country. Three omnidirectional/cardioid condenser microphones in Romania captured all sound in the playing area and transmitted it to Spain via a mixer connected to the laptop. In Spain, because of a slightly different technical setup, the actors wore lavalieres.

The video setup required extensive testing. An HD webcam in each space showed a fixed general view of the play area²⁰, being extraneous to it and to the objects used by the characters. Letting the actors communicate via the huge projection screen with a small webcam at its centre would have diminished their ability to look at each other unless they kept a certain distance from the camera. To counter this and to preserve a realistic aesthetic, a high-end smartphone with deactivated sound²¹ served as the actors' communication device in both countries. They thus ignored the projection screen and treated it as a wall in their space, except for the Kinect animation scenes, when the mother and daughter met onscreen.

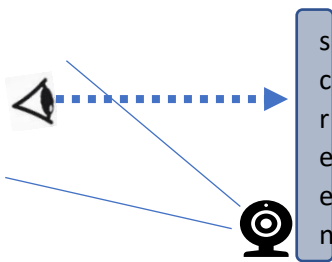


Fig. 2 When the screen is too big and the person in space 1 too close to it, it is impossible for the gaze to focus on both the webcam and the projection screen. To the people in space 2, the person will appear to look in a different direction is she looks at the projection instead of the webcam.

²⁰ We took care to avoid filming the projection screen as much as possible.

²¹ to avoid audio feedback

The **video conventions** were the following (in Romania²²):

- wide shot from Spain: 1) used to give context during realistic dialogue (establishing shot), 2) functioning as back-up video feed if the Spain smartphone dropped, 3) used alone (no mixing with smartphone feed) during soliloquies, when the characters don't see each other, but the audience does²³.
- wide shot from Romania: used when the characters ended their conversation and in-between scenes, when they were unaware of each other – to this, I applied intermittently a video glitch effect.
- the smartphone from Romania/Spain: used in realistic dialogue between the characters – the actors filmed in real-time with the smartphone.
- Kinect-controlled animation: mother-daughter fantasy world (non-realistic).

Even though the actors' smartphone screen mirrored the video montage options on the main laptop, we can say they often saw less of the other space than the audience did. Firstly, they were often away from the smartphone, which they placed conveniently in supports spread throughout the set so they could do actions freely. As they soon discovered in rehearsal, the primary communication channel they could rely on in the realistic sequences was sound, not video – without the audio link, the performance would have stopped. The video on the smartphone was more likely to drop. Also, during the interlocked soliloquies, when the characters spoke directly to the audience, they could not see each other and did not talk to each other by convention. The audience, again, could see

²² These were the conventions we recommended for Spain as well. However, Javier Galindo was the one who chose his own conventions depending on his montage.

²³ When one character spoke, the other fell silent, then spoke again and vice versa. The characters in the two spaces did not see each other by convention.

more than the actors, who mostly spoke with their back to the screen in soliloquies.

Live Video Montage

Google Hangouts was the communication backbone, integrated into a set of applications designed by Mindscape Studio (head interaction designer: Cristian Iordache, assistant interaction designer: Dragoș Vasiloaia). The resulting application was similar to a video mixer, allowing the montage director (myself in Romania and Javier Galindo in Spain) to switch live between the video input from the four sources (the webcam and smartphone in each space), the Kinect animation, screen blackout, and a filter which added intentional glitches to the video. The live montage and glitch effects were created independently in Romania and Spain. The only sequences which had to be synchronised were the blackouts and Kinect-controlled animation, which I would bring onscreen at the same time in the two countries using a “master-slave” control in the application. On the big projection screen, the audience in each country could see a live film, comprised of varying shots from both spaces, including their own – editing by jumping between spaces made it a **parallel montage** in the technical sense.

The main reason for choosing to project images from our own space, too was the expressive quality of smartphone close-ups and shot-reverse-shot. A relevant example is in the final scene when the mother’s questions and attempts at regaining her daughter meet with total silence from Betty. The audience in Romania does not see Betty’s face except on screen, in close-ups that act as visual replies to her mother. The mother’s face

alternates with Betty's in shot-reverse-shot²⁴. The montage not only augmented the stage action by showing other perspectives of the same space and by highlighting significant actions (e.g., George takes out the bottle of wine²⁵) but also added dynamism.

Because of its live character, the framing of the smartphone image by the actors differed from one performance to another, although they had fixed points of reference on what to film in each scene. They often struggled with the smartphone, since they had to pay constant attention to the framing – they could only see themselves in a small thumbnail on the smartphone, which was somewhat misleading, considering that the projected image was cropped via the application. I had a loose montage structure – for instance, I knew that in *Scene 7 – The Make-up Scene*, I would use shot-reverse-shot, showing the mother and daughter in alternating close-ups. However, considering that accidents happened (the smartphone camera in Spain switched from front to rear, the image sometimes disappeared because of the Internet connection, the image was not well framed, and the cameras defocused because of light and movement), I would always adapt to the live conditions. On top of that, I tried to synchronize as much as possible with the actors' lines and physical actions (e.g., when Carmen sits down at the table in *Scene 3 – Christmas*, I switch from a wide shot to a medium close-up²⁶).

Apart from the dramaturgical necessity of showing actions happening in Spain or highlighting aspects of the action taking place in our physical space, **I instinctively tried to orchestrate the rhythm of the montage and the rhythm of the stage action in a way that would underline the specific emotional**

²⁴ You can watch the filmed scene: 1:17:42-1:19:10 (English version of the performance).

²⁵ Filmed scene: 15:51

²⁶ The scene can be watched between 18:40-18:44 (EN version).

tone of each scene. For instance, in a scene of joy or crisis, I would create a faster montage. In scenes in which the characters were calm (*Scene 9 – Studying*), or tired (final scene), I would employ a slower montage. My switching between videos also depended on the speed and rhythm of physical actions in both spaces. In hindsight, I think the characters’ speech/dialogue rhythm (also a mark of their emotions) influenced the rhythm of my live montage. On a rough level, in Eisenstein’s terms, we might call it **“rhythmic montage”** (Eisenstein 2010: 236).

However, since the screen functioned as a site for performance, predominantly identified with the other country, the creation of a live film with shots from both spaces might have caused confusion at times, complicating the distinctions between conventions:

Sometimes the telematics confused me, as I expected screen to be Murcia, and stage (AR) in Romania to be stage/here. But you mix this up, I assume deliberately, so we see also close-ups of father and daughter on the screen (of remote location). This could be confusing to audiences. (Johannes Birringer 2018, email communication)

The Interface – Visible or Invisible

According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, an interface is “a point where two systems ... meet and interact”, „a surface forming a common boundary between two portions of matter or space” (physics) or „a device or program enabling a user to communicate with a computer” (computing), as in “graphical user interface.” We will further refer to the interface in its capacity to act as a boundary and point of contact. In *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, several interfaces were in operation: the smartphone

screen was an interface between the actors in the two spaces, while the projection screen was an interface between the audience in one space and the remote action performed by telepresent actors. The sound system was the audio interface between the spaces for both the actors and the audience.

In her book, *Here/There: Telepresence, Touch and Art at the Interface*, Kris Paulsen analyses the techniques video artists like Vito Acconci and Joan Jonas used for “unworking” the interface, for denaturalising and destabilising it, “rendering it problematic and therefore visible.” She contends that this happens because “In the process we see how video actually works. It is not a window or a mirror.” (Paulsen 2017: 61). Bringing into discussion Alexander Galloway’s book, *The Interface Effect*, Paulsen further argues that “The more seamless the interface, the more virtuosic its usability and connectivity, the less visible the interface becomes. Mediation seems to disappear when the interface is working correctly and felicitously. [...] Visibility is synonymous with dysfunction.” (Paulsen 2017: 61).

Whether the artists acknowledge or try to hide **the mediated nature of communication** is a fundamental question to be addressed in telematic performance. Do you expose the interface, or make it invisible, trying to create the illusion of non-mediation? Here, the materiality and affordances of technology come into play to define the particular relationship between the mediated reality and the physical one. Drawing on Kris Paulsen’s argument above, I will maintain that the illusion of co-spatiality cannot be sustained in telematic performance when the actor creates a close-up projected big on the screen, revealing the cinematic character of the experience. Reality is inevitably distorted through the camera lens since proportions are different depending on one’s position relative to the camera. Moreover, the 3D reality is rendered 2D, while the voice relayed over the Internet

always sounds metallic and distant. From my point of view, a telematic theatre performance relying on video needs to take into account the conventions of film and mediation, either by fully embracing or by carefully counteracting them, although I think this can hardly be accomplished with the current state of technology.

In *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, we played with the quality of the interface, rendering it visible or invisible depending on the scene. Internet communication was realistically integrated into the narrative, so in the dialogue parts we did not try to hide the communication interface, but to highlight it, thus emphasizing the impossibility of the characters' physically being together. Internet delay was a natural component of the conversation, while the video glitch effect and the DIY aesthetic of the cameras²⁷ **drew attention to the mediated nature of communication.** Still, the technical factors were not the only ones to foreground the interface. Following Lev Manovich, montage creates a discontinuity of experience, while at the same time it can serve as a means for spatiotemporal illusion (Manovich 2001: 134-143). In our case, the live montage was anti-illusionistic and contributed to the exposure of the interface by standing in sharp contrast to the experiential continuity of the physical action on stage. However, we did play from time to time with the illusion of a shared space in the video-conferencing scenes whenever we showed a wide shot of Spain in which proportions were close to life-size. The contrast between the (partly) illusionistic wide shots²⁸ and the cropped

²⁷ The smartphone and the webcam, although Full HD, easily defocused because of light conditions or the actors' movement.

²⁸ I say these moments were partly illusionistic because one could also see the projection screen in Spain that was showing the image from Romania (a projection within the projection). Moreover, the light on stage did not always allow for enough screen brightness to make the projection as realistic as the physical bodies. After

images taken by the smartphone reinforced the visibility of the interface, again by contrast.

The Kinect-controlled animation scenes were the only ones in which the interface was meant to fully dissolve into the darkness that shrouded the actresses and the audiences alike. The mother and daughter were absorbed by the screen, which they shared under the form of stardust silhouettes. In these scenes, Internet delay was slightly cumbersome, as Andreea Darie and Ruxandra Oancea had to synchronize their movements to perform actions together (stroking each other, touching hands, rotating, etc.). The actresses themselves found the solution in rehearsal: one of them would initiate a slow and continuous movement, while the other one would join in later. The processual nature of the action enabled them to interact with each other's silhouette eschewing the lag. For example, Ruxandra (the mother) turned away and started to slowly depart from Andreea (the daughter), while still holding hands. Mid-point through the action, Andreea pulled her back, also with prolonged movements. **In the fantasy mother-daughter world, actions dilated compared to their normal duration, and this was directly influenced by the technology used.** Working with the Kinect was a difficult task, from positioning it identically in the two countries to acting with it. The drawing function was difficult to control – it depended on the processing power of the laptops, the Internet speed and the actresses' position relative to the Kinect. Being an invisible interface (here understood as *device*), the Kinect was hidden in the corner of the set, so the actresses were not oriented perpendicularly to it. This sometimes made the scanning of their silhouettes difficult. Fortunately, being a fantasy-like

all, we were seeing a 2D video feed, which also dismantled the illusion. Notwithstanding this, the sensation of being in the same space was at times strong.

environment with its own rules, in which the audience did not know what to expect, glitches went mostly unnoticed.

We have thus employed an aesthetic of contrasts, playing with and through the interface, whose existence we allowed or denied in much the same way as the interface itself both stood between and enabled the characters' being together. This characteristic of the interface is insightfully summed up by Kris Paulsen: "It acts as the "slash" that both holds apart and joins together a series of binary, shifting terms - here/there, now/then, self/other, subject/object, human/machine, physicality/virtuality - and blurs the distinctions between them." (Paulsen 2017: 185).



*Fig.3 Illusionistic interface – proportions are similar (Andreea Darie physically present in RO and Ruxandra Oancea in ES, projected)
Photo: Costin Fetic*



Fig.4 Anti-illusionistic interface – real-life proportions are not kept (Ana Polo and Ruxandra Oacea physically present in ES and Andreea Darie and Radu Solcanu projected from RO). Photo: UCAM



Fig.5 Kinect animation (same space illusion). Andreea Darie in RO and Ruxandra Oancea in ES interacted via their avatars. Photo: Costin Fetic

V. Narrative Dramaturgy

According to Eugenio Barba, narrative dramaturgy is “the intertwining of events which orientate the spectators about the meaning, or the various meanings, of the performance” (Barba 2010: 10). At this level, the director works with “characters, stories, texts, events and iconographic references” (Barba 2010: 10). I will add that the narrative material is structured following a series of *conventions*, understood as the rules of the play that orient the actors and the audience alike in the world of the performance.

Narrative Conventions

As shown in the previous section, the communication protocols, the devices used, the live montage and the Internet have imposed their own aesthetic on the performance, while still being related to its central concept: the exploration of transnational family relationships via the Internet. Although Ion Mircioagă and I wrote the play before the start of rehearsals, the technological conventions and the narrative ones were devised in close connection to one another (the technological conventions being fully established only in rehearsals), as we have discussed in the previous section.²⁹

The play is fragmented, almost film-like, and spans eleven years. While the characters’ metamorphosis in time fascinated me, this fragmented structure has posed some problems from a staging point of view. The numerous scene transitions (ten in total), combined with the realistic aesthetic, which implied frequent changes of objects and costumes, threatened to dilute the action.

²⁹ See *Table 1* below.

The actors were doing the transitions while staying in character, yet the overall rhythm was broken during the first two performances. A recommendation came from one of the audience members³⁰ to give more visibility to the remote space during transitions. For this, the light intensity had to be increased in Spain. Moreover, I resolved to add only intermittent glitches to the video during transitions. The situation improved substantially. Audience members who had attended the first performance and came back to see it a second time later in the run told us the transitions went unnoticed, like natural scenes suggesting the flow of time.

Table 1

Narrative conventions	Communication protocols
Realistic dialogue scenes	Video-conferencing (live montage of shots); devices: smartphone (as a communication tool used by characters), webcam
Interlocked soliloquies (the characters speak alternatively, but they do not see each other)	Video-conferencing (fixed general shot of the remote space); device: webcam
Animation scenes	stardust silhouettes; device: Kinect
Transitions between scenes	Video-conferencing (general shots from each space with glitch effects); device: webcam

³⁰ Mrs. Carmen Bărbulescu, Ion Mircioagă's wife, who is a journalist and TV producer.

Realism and Fantasy

The main reason we opted for a predominantly realistic aesthetic is the robust source material we gathered from interviews - we felt the realities of migration would be more strongly felt if embodied in a naturalistic way. That is not to say other approaches would not have been possible or even more pertinent. In any case, we intuited that the audience would more easily identify with a performance that makes use of technology in almost the same way as they do in their daily life.³¹ **In either case, the link between the justified use of technology in the performance and the real-life situations familiar to audience members might have made this type of theatre easier to grasp, considering that it was arguably a new experience for all those who attended the performance³². Everyday telepresence was thus dramatized and raised to a new level of significance.**

Nevertheless, I felt the need to counterbalance the realism of down-to-earth video communication with a type of *immersive telepresence*, bringing the characters together in the virtual space of the screen via Kinect-controlled avatars. The Kinect was used four times throughout the performance:

- 1) At the end of *Scene 2 – The Strawberry Picker*, when the mother (Carmen) appeases her little daughter (Betty) by telling her the story of “The Planet of Lost

³¹ See analysis of audience questionnaires in the last part of this essay.

³² A distinction should be made between audiences who have not been exposed to digital performance before (which is arguably the case for Buzău and also for a large part of the Murcian audience) and audiences who are familiar with innovative performance. As creators, we also need to take care to address our real audience, not an imagined one.

Dreams” before going to bed. The Kinect convention is introduced.³³

- 2) In *Scene 4 – The Spanish Lesson*, when Carmen teaches Betty how to speak Spanish. It is the only scene in which the drawing function is used. The two of them play a game, drawing various shapes on the screen (the sea, the sun, a seagull, an umbrella) – they each have to guess the word in Spanish.³⁴
- 3) At the end of *Scene 7 – The Make-up Lesson*, when Carmen teaches Betty how to put make-up on. Betty’s enlarged silhouette engulfs Carmen’s, who then departs, leaving an empty hole in her daughter’s chest.³⁵
- 4) At the end of the play, when Carmen’s silhouette begs for Betty to come next to her, but Betty turns her back and leaves the screen.³⁶

Since the mother-daughter relationship is at the forefront of the play, creating a shared mother-daughter virtual space seemed appropriate. We could have done that by merging the live videos in one image (in the style of *Station House Opera*), and this was at one point an option. Nonetheless, the daughter is a child, and thereby a fairy tale aesthetic seemed richer. I thought of the film *La Vita e Bella* - the way the father presents the ugly reality to his son under the form of a game. Similarly, the mother presents the sad reality of migration to her daughter in the guise of a story. The multimedia designers from Mindscape Studio showed us different ways of bringing the characters together onscreen, among which Kinect-controlled avatars. Since these always have a Sci-Fi

³³ The scene can be watched between 11:00-13:15 (EN version).

³⁴ The scene can be watched between 26:50-27:55 (EN version).

³⁵ The scene can be watched between 1:01:11-1:02:25 (EN version).

³⁶ The scene can be watched between 1:20:30-1:22:09 (EN version).

aesthetic, they suggested a Sci-Fi story. So here the narrative and the technological strands came together - planets, "intergalactic" migration, and avatars of stardust.

The narrative integration of the Kinect was my conception. The allegorical tale of "The Planet of Lost Dreams" was also part of the sound score of the performance: a recording of Betty's voice at different ages was mixed with distorted sound calls and was played during scene transitions to suggest the passing of time. In both the Kinect and the sound sequences, the tale was meant to function as a technique of *mise en abîme*. In hindsight, this story within a story might have been to some extent melodramatic, but I still believe that, beyond their visual appeal, the Kinect scenes added an extra layer to the characters' communication. With technology, there is often the danger of succumbing to the purely spectacular, while betraying the content. It is up to the audience to say whether the Kinect scenes avoided this trap or not.

Soliloquies and Degrees of Separation

We wrote three pairs of interlocked soliloquies: 1) Carmen and George; 2) Betty and Pilar; 3) Betty and Juan. As the play spans eleven years, we feared the characters' evolution throughout scenes happening at different points in time would be shallow and unconvincing because of multiple ellipses. We wanted to give the characters space and time to express themselves other than in dialogued scenes; thus, we decided to include what Michael Wright calls "problem-solving monologues" (Wright 1997: 39-40). Soliloquy is a particular type of monologue, in which the characters speak directly to the audience who, by convention, are hearing their thoughts. Hence, they are breaking the "fourth wall" – like in Shakespeare.

Audience participation, understood as the audience's ability to influence what is happening on stage structurally, was not a feature of *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, which operated within rather traditional notions of the "fourth wall."³⁷ For the audience, the digital interface of the projection screen acted as another wall in relation to the action in the remote space. The "fourth wall" was therefore two-fold – it comprised a material wall (the screen) and an immaterial one, based on the conventions separating the spatially co-present audience and actors (despite its "immateriality," it was suggested visually by the clear delineation of the play area from the audience's seats). **The physically present audience in each space was at one degree of separation from the action on stage in their country and two degrees of separation from the action happening remotely.** A third wall was in place when, on the press night, the performance was live-streamed on YouTube. Since the event was live-streamed from Romania, **the online audience were at two degrees of separation from the action in Romania and three degrees of separation from the action in Spain.**

Although in soliloquies the characters were addressing their immediate audience, looking them in the eye (in Romania), they were indirectly speaking to the remote audience as well. I advised all actors in rehearsal to turn towards the hidden webcam from time to time to give the impression of addressing the remote audience, too. Nonetheless, the position of the webcam made this difficult for the actors in Romania, who resolved to look only at the physical audience. It is up for debate whether their soliloquies "broke" the screen in Spain or not. Quite the opposite, the actors in Spain often gave me the impression that they were speaking to

³⁷ It is interesting to think of the theatrical "fourth wall" as another kind of interface which is based on immaterial conventions and, unless the piece is immersive, on material play area delineations (the set forms a separate reality from the audience).

us, the audience in Romania. Despite this, watching the video recording from Spain, I wonder whether they gave the impression of talking to their *own* audience since some of them were looking at the side webcam most of the time. Overall, it is questionable whether breaking both walls was possible under the technical configuration we created. Even so, at least in Romania, the audience could infer that the remote soliloquy of the Spanish actors was addressed to the audience on the other side, just like the actors in their space were talking directly to them. In their turn, the online audience could see the characters in Romania addressing the physical audience directly, but it is hard to establish whether they also felt directly addressed or not. As remote viewers, they could only have done that by identification with the physically present audience - the actors' "looking in the eye" effect was made impossible by the camera angles.

Narrative-wise, the three pairs of soliloquies contained important information about the action in-between scenes – e.g., the trip to Spain did not happen, Carmen is thinking of getting a divorce, Carmen got attacked, Betty took care of her father while in hospital. Also, they revealed the characters' hidden feelings – e.g., George's sensitivity and regret, Pilar's care for Carmen, Juan's desire to have children with Carmen. Thirdly, they foreshadowed certain events, such as Carmen's gradual emancipation and divorce. The interlocked format was intended to dynamize the action and, most importantly, to create a "rhyme" and synchronicity between the characters' thoughts, whose lives go on in parallel in the two countries but are still connected in myriad ways.

VI. Spacetime Dramaturgy

On one level, space and time are contained within the narrative dimension – they are the fictional spaces and times of the represented action. The staging concretizes them into the actual space and time of the performance (e.g., the stage of The “George Ciprian” Theatre, the set representing the characters’ house, *the place where the audience sits*; the real time of the performance: Saturday, 29th September, 20:00 Romanian time / 19:00 Spanish time).

Architect-scenographer Alexandra Constantin designed the set and costumes in both countries. Ion Mircioagă and I wished to create the impression that the characters were inhabiting the same house, although, as shown in the *Interface – Visible or Invisible* section of this essay, the illusion of co-spatiality entered into force only at times. Consequently, Alexandra proposed a mirrored, structurally identical set in both countries that differed only in colour. Each space was particularized by the objects the characters used and by small ornaments (such as knitwork typical for old Romanian houses). The set was easily convertible to allow the creation of different spaces – the table could be folded, the door could become a bed, while in Spain the door could also be lowered horizontally to create a bar (Javier Galindo’s design intervention). As we have already seen, the projection screen functioned as a third space which was not a window to the remote country, but an interface that imposed its own materiality.

The press night (29th September 2018) was live-streamed on YouTube from the Romanian side, using three cameras that were mixed in real time by the multimedia team led by Cristian Iordache. The live-stream brought into play several other sites,

allowing individual audience members to be telepresent in the Romanian studio *at the same time*³⁸.

In his 2017 article, *The Internet, Theatre, and Time: Transmediating the Theatron*, Andy Lavender explores the concept of *time* that links the various forms of performance happening on and through the Internet. Lavender shows how the *theatron*³⁹ is transmediated or reshaped by the Internet according to the latter's rules, which also echoes our previous discussion of the influence on performance of the medium or interface used⁴⁰. The Internet has its own temporality since it can extend presence beyond the live moment (like in video on demand), connecting virtual and physical spaces (Lavender 2017: 345-346). Drawing on Alice Rayner's insights, Lavender contends that 'theatrical "presence"' (and, by extension, telepresence) is "both a mode of being there – that is, inhabiting a particular place – and a mode of being now – that is, transacting in the present moment." (Lavender 2017: 346).

I wonder whether we can still invoke a single *theatron*, taking into account that telematic performance "operates through discrete layerings of time (due to the mapping of time zones, the effects of latency, and in some instances the interface between live and pre-recorded materials) and space" (Lavender 2017: 348). **I will add that the telematic *theatron* is made of a**

³⁸ According to the YouTube Analytics report, there were 84 live views of the stream, which means the performance was purportedly linked with up to 84 other physical spaces in real time. The view count increases when one refreshes the page, so the actual number of viewers might not correspond to the number of views.

³⁹ Theatron = the place where the audience were seated in Ancient Greek theatre; a place for *seeing*.

⁴⁰ In Lavender's view, the Internet has features that make it suitable for theatrical (re)presentation, such as its multimedial nature, "its invitation to absorption and a form of immersion", "its disposition to information and personal presentation" and, above all, the communality of experience in the "now" it offers by bringing together individual viewers/participants. In this way, we can conceive of the Internet as "an extended theatre" with "*theatron*-like qualities" (Lavender 2017: 344-345).

multiplicity of points of view pertaining to each mode of engagement with the work (physically in Romania and Spain or online on YouTube) since “I cannot see what others see elsewhere” (Birringer 2008: 251). Consequently, the *theatron* of our performance was multifaceted, *prismatic*, allowing for different configurations of “being there” remotely (e.g., physically in Spain, but virtually in Romania and online; physically in my house, but virtually in the studio in Romania). The same can be said of the actors’ playing space – we can only speak of degrees of their visually sharing the various *screens*. Rather, they were sharing **an audio space**⁴¹.

So, the telematic visual space cannot unite the audience, nor the actors of such a performance. It appears that *time* is the only fabric that ties together the multiple bodies and spaces of telematic performance. However, time is also layered, as Lavender points out – and Internet latency is a key factor: “since the telematic image has a variable delay, our telepresent bodies will always try to catch up with us” (Birringer 2007: 254). The YouTube audience also watch the live-streamed performance with latency – in the end, everyone gets to see and hear *traces* of past actions that become presences (Lavender 2017: 347). This proves that physically speaking, time is not fully shared either between the spaces of telematic performance. Notwithstanding, the awareness of the event taking place in the present moment does succeed in bringing together the dispersed audiences and actors.

⁴¹ For a further discussion of the audio space, see Ion Mircioagă’s essay in this book, *Notes on Working with Actors*.

VII. The Audience's Dramaturgy

We tried to determine the audience's experience of the performance using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods: 1) questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions), 2) post-show discussions (qualitative), 3) "on field" personal observation (qualitative), 4) Internet comments (qualitative) and 5) YouTube Analytics (quantitative). As we have already seen, our *theatron* was three-fold: a) the audience located physically in Buzău, Romania, b) the audience located physically in Murcia, Spain, c) the online audience, watching the event on YouTube, live or on demand. The first three research methods apply only to the audiences physically present in Romania and Spain, the YouTube Analytics only gage the online audience's involvement, while the Internet comments refer to both the online and the physically present audiences.

The research questions were:

- How does the audience's perception function in a telematic context?
- How does the audience's personal relationship to migration affect their perception?
- How does the audience's personal relationship to Internet communication affect their perception?
- Did the performance change the audience's opinion about migration and Internet communication?

By "audience perception" I mean a construct made of different layers: attention, empathy towards the characters, reactions (emotional reactions during and after the performance and willingness to comment/discuss post-show, on-site or online) and personal relation to migration and Internet communication

(alongside the potential transformation of opinion). Let us further analyse the results yielded by each research method.

Audience Questionnaires

The study populations in Romania and Spain were formed by the audience who came to see the performance (approximately 1020 people in each country). However, a relatively small number of people completed the printed questionnaire, which was also available online on Google Forms. Moreover, some respondents did not fill it in full, which is why the final number of questionnaires we analysed was 306 in Romania and 86 in Spain. This makes the margin of error in Romania much smaller than in Spain, as can be seen in the table below. The low degree of response might be due to the length (12 questions, 3 of them optional) and relative sophistication of the questionnaire (especially the rating scale for factors influencing attention) which might have caused respondent burden.

Table 2

Population size	Sample	Confidence level	Margin of Error ⁴²
1020 (audience in Romania)	306	95%	±4%
1020 (audience in Spain)	86	95%	±10%

The questionnaire was almost identical in Romania and Spain, with a variation for question 3, which accounted for the different status of the two countries with regards to migration –

⁴² I calculated the margin of error using online instruments - Margin of Error Calculator (see website link in bibliography).

Romania is a departure country, while Spain a destination one. In Romania, the question read “Are you informed about the situation of Romanians living in the diaspora (and if you are an emigrant yourself, about the situation of other Romanians in the diaspora)?”. In Spain, it read “Are you informed about the situation of immigrants in Spain (and if you are an immigrant yourself, about the situation of other immigrants, from Spain or elsewhere)?”. Nine questions were closed-ended and three were open-ended and optional, requiring a free answer.

I have pondered whether to integrate the answers from Romania and those from Spain in common graphs and charts. **Since the point of view of the audience is a structural feature of our telematic performance, I have chosen instead to look at the results by comparison.**

Relation to Migration

For the purpose of this study, migration was defined as the condition of living in a country different from one’s own for more than one year. 84% of the Romanian audience had never lived outside their country of origin, compared to 71% in Spain. One person in Romania and seven persons in Spain identified as currently living abroad, while 15.7% of people in Romania and 21% in Spain as ex-migrants. In Romania, 75% of the audience were affected by migration within their close or extended family or as a result of having undertaken migration themselves. In Spain, 79% of the respondents reported having family members abroad, while in total 81% were affected by migration (also as a result of undertaking migration themselves). The following table shows the audience’s connection to migration. For the purpose of a precise calculation, I have used exclusive categories, separating the people who are affected by migration only through their families (they

themselves have not undertaken migration) from those who have been or are still migrants themselves (in fact, there are overlaps between the categories – for example, some ex-migrants also have family members living abroad).

Table 3

Country	Romania	Spain
People with close family abroad who are not themselves migrants or ex-migrants	72	14
People with distant relatives abroad who are not themselves migrants or ex-migrants	108	31
Ex-migrants	48	18
Current migrants	1	7
People with no connection to migration	77	16
Percentage of audience affected by migration	75%	81%

One problem with our questionnaire is that it did not include questions on the nationality and age of the audience, although we can infer the former. There is no doubt that the Buzău respondents were close to 100% Romanian nationals (except for one Spanish national). Since only seven people from Spain said that they are currently living abroad (so Spain is not their country of origin), we can deduce that the rest of 89 respondents (92% of the audience) were Spanish nationals. However, we cannot know whether they were of Spanish descent or children of immigrants (for instance, children of Romanian immigrants who moved with their whole family to Spain). In Romania, a large part of the audience was formed by general school and high school students, as shown by our reservation catalogue, yet, in the absence of statistical data on the age of the audience, we cannot make any assumptions about how it influenced the results.

Even with the considerable margin of error and extraneous variables corresponding to the questionnaires, the results show that migration is a topic familiar to both Romanian and Spanish nationals, with the latter also having family members living abroad or having lived themselves outside their country of origin. **This goes contrary to our initial assumption that the Spanish audience would have little direct connection to the topic of emigration.** Furthermore, the degree of interest for and knowledge about the subject of immigration was higher in Spain (92%) than the interest reported by the Romanian audience concerning emigration (70%).

Asked if the performance had influenced their opinion of migration in any way and to justify their answers, only 68 people replied in each country (in Romania - 22% of respondents; in Spain - 79% of respondents). Not all replies were justified or suited to the question, which is why I will divide them into the following categories, which collate the answers from both countries:

a) new insights gained:

- raised awareness of the hardships of migration (RO, ES)
- seeing a different perspective about migration (also through the characters' eyes) (RO, ES)
- the performance suggested solutions to difficult problems (RO)
- a warning sign (RO): one should not give up on one's family, one should not leave the country, etc.
- increased empathy with migrants and their families (ES)
- bringing closer and concretizing the experience of migration (RO, ES)
- raised awareness of the causes of migration – migration as a necessity (ES)

- understanding the influence of distance on family ties (RO, ES)
- stating a positive influence as a result of identification with the characters or other (unmentioned) factors (RO, ES)
- stating a negative influence (RO)
- the topic of migration is important (ES)
- *yes* replies (unjustified)

b) no new insights gained:

- prior opinion on the negative aspects of migration (RO)
- prior personal knowledge of the question of migration (RO, ES)
- *no* replies (unjustified)

c) comments on the topic of migration:

- it is unjust for children not to have their parents close (RO)
- things should change in Romania so that no one is forced to leave (RO)
- the whole society is to blame (RO)
- migration has both positive and negative sides (RO)
- migration destroys families (RO)
- Romanians abroad always long for home, as financial advantages are not enough (RO)
- Romanian migrants are worthy of respect (RO)
- the life of Romanian migrants is hard and full of compromises (RO)
- if one person does a bad thing, one should not generalize about the whole nation (RO)

- we are all equal, and we should all be treated with respect (ES)⁴³

d) comments on the performance:

- a different experience (RO, ES)
- a brilliant way of showing the life of families separated by distance (RO, ES)
- empathy or identification with one of the characters⁴⁴ (RO, ES)

22 respondents in Romania and 30 respondents in Spain categorically stated that their opinion had not changed as a result of the performance. Nevertheless, the variety of topics identifiable in the replies indicates that the content of the performance has stirred emotion and thought in the audience. It is difficult to correlate the impact of the respondents' prior individual experience of migration with their opinion of the phenomenon since the answers coming from people with close family living abroad are mixed. **However, we can discern some patterns that can account for wider attitudes at play in the two audiences, attitudes which may belong to each country's collective experience of migration. There is an abundance of negative insights and comments about migration in Romania, against more positive or balanced remarks in Spain. This could be a result of the Romanians mostly seeing themselves as potential emigrants and hence**

⁴³ "Si viendo que la hisoria entre familiares puede ser muy dura pero viendo que en otros paises te pueden acoger muy bien y con mucho cariño", "siempre he pensado que todos somos iguales y hay tratarnos o todos con el mismo respeto" (questionnaire response)

⁴⁴ One person in Romania wrote: "My father is away and I feel what Betty feels." ("Tatăl meu este plecat și simt ceea ce simte Betty"). (questionnaire response)

victims of family disruption, while the Spanish may have a dual image of their role as both potential migrants and hosts. The statistical fact that Romania is a country of massive emigration, while Spain is one of massive immigration backs up this argument. The positive insights gained by the Spanish audience could well be a positive view of Spain's immigrant population (the host's point of view), while the empathy claims could foster the migrant's perspective.

Relation to Internet Communication

The use of Internet communication tools (WhatsApp, Facebook, Skype, Hangouts, email, etc.) is frequent in both Romania (85.6% of respondents use it daily, 8.5% weekly, 2% monthly) and Spain (87.2% use it daily, 5.8% weekly, 2.3% monthly). Only 12 persons in Romania and 7 in Spain reported that they never or almost never use Internet communication.

One question read "Does the use of distance communication technology in your family differ from the use of it by the family in the play? Please explain your answer." There were 194 answers in Romania (63% rate of response) and 54 in Spain (63% rate of response). 124 persons in Romania and 28 in Spain mentioned that they employ it in the same way. In both countries, the similarities stem from using technology to keep in touch with one's remote family and friends, or simply because of daily use and the ubiquity of Internet communication. On the other hand, 71 people in Romania and 21 in Spain distinguished between their use of Internet communication and the characters', invoking:

- a different purpose of communication, since the situation is different (RO, ES)
- less frequent communication (RO, ES)

- different content of communication (better family relationships than in the play, which leads to better quality communication) (RO)
- technical differences (video quality, different apps, no video calls, only telephone calls or messages) (RO, ES)
- avoidance or no use of Internet communication (RO, ES)

Unsurprisingly, most people who identified themselves as having close family abroad said their use of technology does not differ from that in the play. However, some of them did mention differences in content (better family relationships) and technical quality (better or worse than in the play).

Asked whether their opinion on Internet communication had changed in any way as a result of attending the performance, the audience's replies were divided, ranging from the quasi-technophobic in Romania⁴⁵ to the quasi-techno-utopian⁴⁶ in Spain. **Overall, in Spain, the people who expressed positive feelings towards the Internet outnumbered those with mixed and negative feelings combined, while in Romania, the positive feelings were slightly under the sum of mixed and negative remarks.** It is again hard to draw a link between the audience's personal relation to migration and their opinion on Internet communication, as the answers are mixed. The number of respondents for this question was 199 (65% rate of response) in Romania and 70 (81% rate of response) in Spain. Again, I will group the answers into four categories:

⁴⁵ "It is ineffectual. It can't replace direct communication" – RO (questionnaire response)

⁴⁶ "It has reinforced the idea that actually, thanks to Internet communication, everything is possible" ("ha reforzado la idea de que actualmente gracias a la comunicación por internet todo es posible") – ES (questionnaire response)

a) new insights gained:

- the Internet is vital, as it is the only means of bringing separated families closer (RO, ES)
- the Internet can alleviate the longing for the other (RO, ES)
- the Internet is good, but not enough, it has limitations (RO, ES)
- the Internet is a privilege, and we only realise it in such cases (RO)
- the Internet is more useful and effective than I thought (RO, ES)
- the Internet is ineffectual (a surrogate of real communication) (RO)
- the Internet might be the only excuse for migration (RO)
- feelings change over the Internet (RO)
- people don't always say how they feel over the Internet, but their faces betray them (RO)
- Internet communication lacks emotion and clarity – it is cold (RO, ES)
- touch cannot be compared with anything (RO)
- there are people whose lives confound with the Internet (even having dinner) (RO, ES)
- on the Internet, one can take the same decision as in person (ES)
- with the Internet, everything becomes possible (RO, ES)
- I wouldn't have thought the Internet can be used so creatively (RO)
- *yes* (unjustified)

b) no new insights gained:

- I already knew the power/utility/necessity/ubiquity of the Internet (RO, ES)

- I use the Internet in the same way as the characters (either because of similarity with the situation in the play, or just for daily use) (RO, ES)
- I already knew the Internet is good, but not enough (RO)
- I already knew the Internet is ineffectual (RO)
- *no* (unjustified)

c) comments on Internet communication:

- the Internet is inevitably part of everyday life in a globalised world (RO, ES)
- without the Internet, we can't communicate or get informed (RO)

d) comments on the performance:

- new insight: the Internet as a tool for artistic expression (RO)
- a new experience (RO)
- an innovative way of seeing a performance (RO)
- a very interesting idea (ES)
- a very good performance (RO)

I will single out the comment “Internet communication is beneficial and perhaps the only excuse for migration,” which came from a person with a close family member living abroad (a child with a migrant parent, maybe?). The cited opinion evidences the connection between the decision to migrate and the spread of the Internet. The link is backed up by a study carried out on Filipina mothers and their children, whose findings show that “New media are playing an increasingly significant role in reconciling the marked ambivalence of migrant motherhood and in justifying decisions to prolong migration.” (Madianou & Miller 2012: 51). The

above comment also expresses perfectly the ambivalence of many audience opinions – the Internet is good, *but...*

Taking Sides with the Characters

Empathy, defined as “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another” (Oxford English Dictionary 2019), is supposed to be part and parcel of the experience enabled by dramatic theatre. Indeed, we presumed it to be integral to the audience’s experience. For this reason, the questionnaire did not offer the possibility of choosing “I did not empathise with any of the characters,” although there was an “other” option where the respondents could add their view on the factors influencing empathy.

In fact, we avoided the word “empathy” in the questionnaire for fear of not being understood by all audience members (especially by younger people). The differences in languages also made one of the questions slightly different – in Romanian, we asked: “What character did you feel closer to?” (“De care personaj v-ați simțit cel mai apropiat(ă)?”), while the literal translation of the Spanish version would be “What character did you sympathise with more?” (“¿Con qué personaje simpatizaste más?”). The Romanian and Spanish translations of the second question were similar: “What influenced your attachment to some of the characters?” (“Ce a influențat simpatia dvs pentru unele personaje?”), “¿Que influenció tu simpatía con algún personaje?”).

Because of the imprecise multi-language terminology and the way the questions were framed (which also depended on what the audience understood by “closeness,” “sympathy” and “attachment”), it is debatable whether we can infer much about proper empathy from the responses. Rather, we delved into the audience’s feeling of closeness and attachment to the characters.

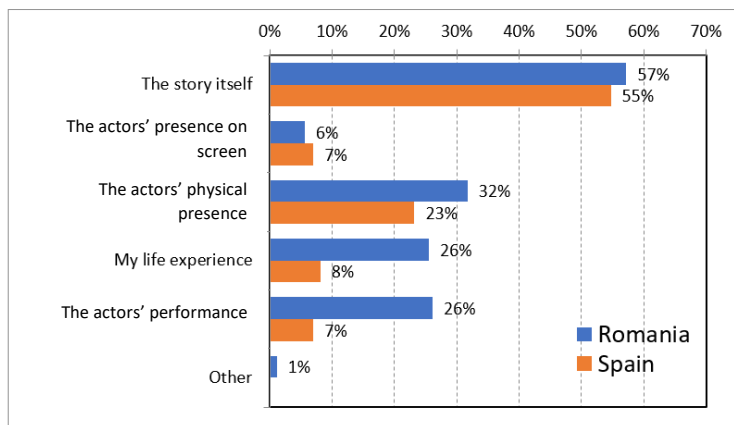
Our analysis below is not intended as an in-depth study of the meaning and mechanisms of empathy, yet it could offer a starting point for explorations into the audience-character relationship in telematic theatre, including the creation of empathy.

Through the questionnaire, we tried to determine which of the following factors influenced the audience's attachment to the characters (multiple choice question):

- the actors' physical presence
- the actors' presence on screen (telepresence)
- the story itself - some characters are more in the right than the others
- one's life experience
- the quality of the actors' performance

In both countries, the main factor of influence was “the story itself,” followed by “the actors’ physical presence.” The actor’s screen presence (telepresence) generated a sense of attachment to the character for the least number of people in both countries (5.6% in Romania and 7% in Spain). The actors’ performance and one’s life experience were situated in the middle, having almost the same influence over the audience in both spaces. Only part of the spectators who chose “my life experience” and “the story itself” as aspects influencing their feelings towards the characters were strongly affected by migration (by having close family abroad or by having been migrants themselves) – 39 out of 79 people in Romania and 15 out of 54 people in Spain. This may prove that the performance was relevant for the broader themes of family and Internet communication, touching persons with no immediate connection to the subject.

Fig. 6 *Graph by Mircea Kivu*



In a single choice question, the audience were asked to choose the character to whom they felt the closest – in Romania, it was Betty, while in Spain, it was Carmen. The least favourite character with both audiences was George (4.6% in Romania and 3.5% in Spain), which is explainable by the negative traits he embodied (such as alcoholism). **The results imply that, depending on the space of reference of the telematic performance, the audience may be prone to take sides with (and potentially feel more empathy towards) the physically present characters and less with the telepresent characters, provided that the story supports it.** Hence a dislikeable character (not supported by the story) will purportedly not generate much attachment irrespective of the space of reference – a case in point is George. This observation correlates with the high ranking of the story and physical presence as factors influencing the audience's bond with the characters. Let us call this potential tendency to favour the physically present characters

„**site-specific bias**” or “**taking sides**”⁴⁷. The explanation could lie in the distinction made by Albert Borgmann between the *repleteness* of physical reality and the *brittleness* of digital information⁴⁸:

[...] we may call the inexhaustible richness of reality *repleteness*. If we think of repleteness as the vertical dimension of richness, we can use *continuity* to designate the endless width of richness. In comparison the presentation of reality in cyberspace is shallow and discontinuous. (Borgmann in Goldberg 2000: 95)

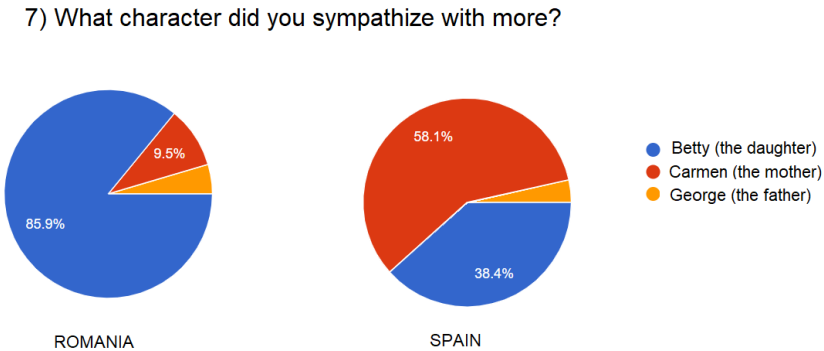
I do not entirely agree with Borgmann’s statement, considering that the Internet and telepresence can facilitate experiences otherwise impossible, such as offering a different embodiment (e.g., *Rara Avis* by Eduardo Kac) or giving one access to hostile environments (e.g., the outer space). The use of the Internet to create new relations between humans, animals, and objects (the works of Eduardo Kac and Ken Goldberg) escapes the dichotomy brought forth by Borgmann. However, when it comes to human-to-human interaction via the webcam, one only has access to a small part of the remote reality - the world on the other side is always truncated by technology, which can lead to less understanding of the remote person’s condition. Perhaps this is what caused the audience to take sides with (and maybe empathise more) with the characters in their space: they were more *replete* with information than the remote ones.

⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Carmen surpassed Betty by only 17 votes in Spain (19.7%), while in Romania the difference was much bigger (234 votes, meaning 76.4%). A similarly sized sample is needed in both spaces to test the above hypothesis.

⁴⁸ Albert Borgmann mentions that he is borrowing Nelson Goodman’s terminology.

Alternatively, it might have been the audience’s age that was determinant of their attachment, and not site-specific bias – this was suggested by the project sociologist, Mr. Mircea Kivu, who pointed out that empathy and attachment may be more naturally granted to characters with whom one can identify. Based on personal observation, I can say that in Romania we had a larger population of school children attending the performance compared to Spain, where the spectators were more mature. The young age of the Romanian audience might have led them to care for Betty, but in the absence of objective data on the spectators’ age, we cannot draw a conclusion. Surely, the site-specific bias hypothesis needs further testing, but it is still a clue on how the audience’s feelings towards the characters might function in telematic theatre.

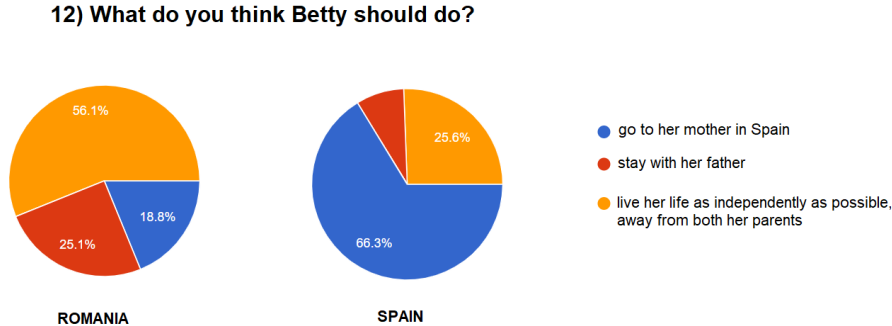
Fig. 7: own collated chart using Google Forms



The same **bias** seems to be reflected in the answers to the last question of the survey (single choice). Since the performance has an open ending, we asked the audience what they think Betty should do. The most popular option in Romania was “live her life

as independently as possible, away from both her parents” (56%), followed by “stay with her father” (25%) and “go to her mother in Spain” (19%) on the last place. On the contrary, the Spanish audience’s first choice was “go to her mother in Spain” (66%), followed by “live her life as independently as possible, away from both her parents” (26%) and “stay with her father” (8%). **Apart from the physical presence factor discussed before, the site-specific bias may also be related to wider issues at play in the communities in which the performance takes place – attitudes prevalent in society, as well as national and cultural factors. The attitude to migration we explored previously may also be a case of site-specific bias.**

Fig. 8: own collated chart using Google Forms



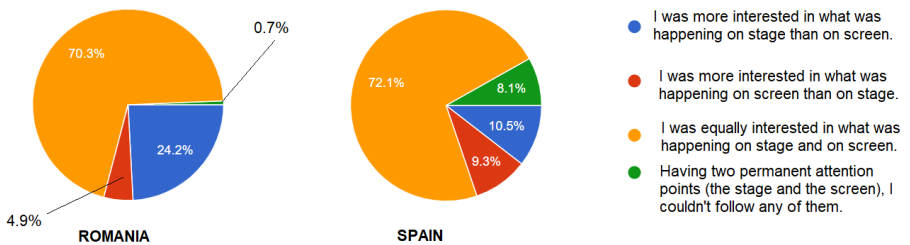
Attention

Since two simultaneous actions were going on during the performance, one on stage and the other on screen, each audience member had to create their personal montage by selecting what to watch at any one time. This process of selection, accompanied by personal interpretation, is what Eugenio Barba calls “the

spectator's dramaturgy" (Barba 2010: 47-49). **Most people in Romania (70% of the audience) and Spain (72% of the audience) mentioned they paid equal attention to the stage and the screen.** The next percentage in both countries, though much reduced in size, shows that the physical stage was overall more attractive than the screen, which contradicted our initial fears that the big screen would suffocate the stage action, keeping the audience glued to the film.

Fig.9: own collated chart using Google Forms

Distribution of Attention between Stage and Screen



Philip Auslander's much-discussed theory of liveness served as a caveat in our consideration of how we could guide the audience's attention. In discussion with Ion Mircioagă, I invoked Auslander's argument about the prevalence of the screen over physical bodies on stage:

[...] it is clear there are ways of asserting the presence of a human body over that of a projection, for instance, or vice versa, and that screened images may integrate seamlessly with live ones, or one may be used to comment on the other, and so on. However, none of this changes the fact that

such performances occur now in a cultural context in which the projection is more closely related to the dominant media than is the live body, a fact that undoubtedly has implications for how the audience perceives the whole performance. (Auslander 2008: 43)

Hence, we began to think of ways to counteract the fascination with the screen, as other artists working with film in a theatre context have done before us. For instance, Steve Dixon's explorations with The Chameleons Group centred on adapting aspects of Artaud's theory to render the physical body and its digital recorded double equal in liveness (Dixon 2011: 45-46). Our situation was different from Dixon's since the digital bodies in *The Planet of Lost Dreams* were telepresent, so already *live*. **The dialogical nature of telematic theatre, which rests on its inherent liveness and natural ping-pong of lines between the characters on screen and those on stage may have contributed to the equal relevance of mediated and physical actions.** By contrast, Steve Dixon and his group had to strive to attain the immediacy of live dialogue between the actors and their recordings (Dixon in Kershaw & Nicholson: 48).

As for the methods we employed to orient the audience's gaze, they were up to a point similar to those used on a regular stage with parallel actions. First of all, we tried to balance the actors' movement occurring at the same time in Romania and Spain. However, we intuited that other elements might also be at stake. In the questionnaire, we tested the following factors to find out to what extent they influenced the audience's attention⁴⁹:

⁴⁹ The question read "How much did the factors below influence the attention you paid to the screen or the stage?". Then the respondents had to rate the degree of influence of each factor in the list with *constantly*, *sometimes*, *very little* or *not at all*. During analysis, the factors rated predominantly with *constantly* and

- the **light** on stage (dark stage = more attention to the screen; bright stage = less attention to the screen)
- the **video montage** (fast frame shifts = more attention to the screen)
- the **story** of the play (the emotional intensity of the situations)
- **the actors' performance** (the actors' movement on stage or on screen and the emotional intensity of their acting)
- in general, the actors' **physical presence** drew my attention more than their presence on screen
- in general, the actors' **presence on screen** drew my attention more than their physical presence
- the **film quality** (poor image quality or clumsy film frames = less attention to the screen)
- the **dimension of the projection screen**

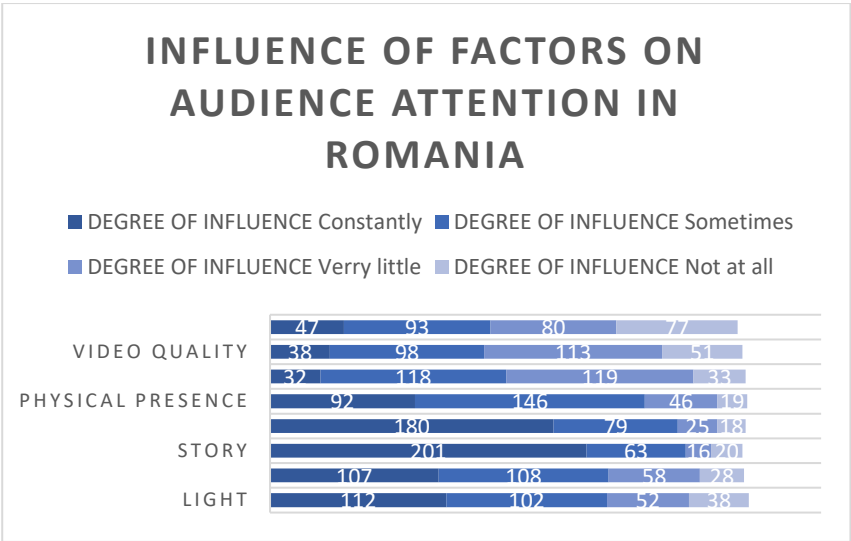
The main factor influencing attention in both Romania and Spain was the **story**, associated with the emotional intensity of the situations. Extremely close to it was the **acting** – the emotion the actors conveyed and their movement on stage. In Romania, the next in line was **physical presence**, succeeded by **video montage** and **light** (with minor differences between them), then by the least significant factors: **screen presence**, **screen dimensions**, and **video quality**. The order in Spain is slightly different: **story** >⁵⁰ **acting** > light >= video montage > physical presence > video quality > screen dimensions > **screen presence**.

We can deduce that issues of content were paramount to both our audiences, while telepresence (the

sometimes were deemed a strong influence, while *very little* and *not at all* were associated with a weak influence.

⁵⁰ The “>” sign stands for greater influence on the audience’s attention.

actors’ presence on screen) was the least obtrusive factor, melding seamlessly into the flow of the action.



The numbers on the bars correspond to the number of people who have chosen a degree of influence.

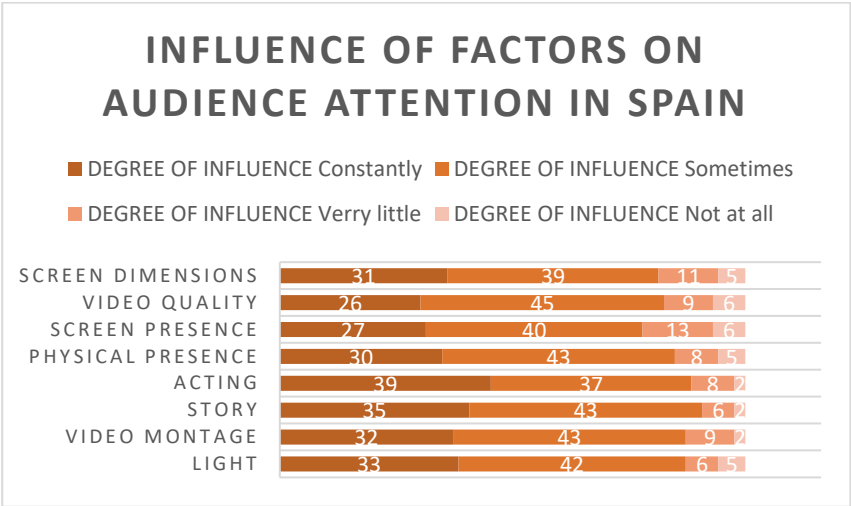


Fig. 10: own charts created based on the replies.

Post-Show Discussions, Personal Observation, and Internet Comments

Attitudes to migration. At the end of most performances, we held a joint Q&A session for the audiences in Romania and Spain⁵¹. Ruxandra Oancea, the Romanian actress playing Carmen in Spain, was the live interpreter. Most questions were addressed to us, the artists, either on the theme of migration or on the process of creation of the performance. However, there were times when the Romanian audience initiated a conversation with that in Spain (rarely the other way around). Some persons wanted to know how the performance felt for those in Spain since they assumed that migration was not as important a theme for them as it was for us. To everyone's surprise, one person in Spain said that he resonated a lot with the performance, since they, the Spanish, also have relatives living abroad or have undertaken migration at some point. Our questionnaires indeed confirmed this. Furthermore, the Spanish audience brought forth the theme of the family, which is universal, meaning they relate to it as well. On a different evening, the Romanian audience wanted to know how migrants are perceived in Spain. The reply came fast: everyone is welcome in Spain. Our interviews with Romanian migrants attest to the welcoming environment they encountered in Spain⁵².

Mistrusting technology. An intriguing set of comments came from people who could not believe the performance was actually taking place in Romania and Spain simultaneously, at least not until they got the chance to talk live with the audience on the other side! This occurred even if at the beginning of each performance, Ion Mircioagă in Romania and Javier Galindo in

⁵¹ A sample discussion can be watched at the end of the livestream: 1:42:00.

⁵² See Mircea Kivu's essay in this book.

Spain explained to the audience that they were going to see actions happening in real time in Romania and Spain. **This scepticism in relation to technology and the need to prove that communication occurs in real time, in connection with real people/objects/places, is also noted by other telematic performance practitioners, such as Ken Goldberg or Susan Collins:** “I became increasingly interested in this particular act of verification – this effort to ‘establish the actual’ – and the way in which it appeared to take over the original aim of communication ...” (Collins in Zapp 2004: 48).

Personal identification. One evening, a Romanian woman who currently lives in Spain came to see the performance with her Spanish husband (a theatre director). During the post-show discussion, with tears in her eyes, she told us that Carmen’s story is precisely her story! She started recounting what she lived through, to the frustration of a young lady behind her, who also had a story to tell. Once she got to talk, she confessed that Betty’s story was similar to hers and that children suffer the most because of migration, not their parents. The two women’s speeches were so intense and overflowing that the audience in Spain could no longer keep up with the rhythm of the conversation.

The reactions generated by our performance were very intense emotionally, as the project team can testify, starting from the artistic to the technical staff. From personal observation, I can say that people in Romania shed tears at every performance, partly because they identified with the situation presented. At the end of many performances, some people came to talk to us (Ion Mircioagă and I were present during every performance), either to congratulate us or to tell us about the strong emotions they felt since they also had family living abroad.

Internet comments were scarce – most of them for congratulation purposes, including from people who had seen the live-stream. One person even wrote a message to the official Tele-Encounters Facebook page in which he expressed his opinion of migration. Another person commented under the YouTube video of the performance that he had found out about it “ironically,” from the Blue Air flight magazine, which is read by thousands of Romanian migrants.

YouTube Analytics – The Livestream

According to YouTube Analytics, there were 84 views of the performance during the live-stream (so up to 84 live viewers⁵³ and a maximum of 16 concurrent views). The average view duration was 15:26 minutes out of 100 minutes⁵⁴, while the added watch time reached 1,297 minutes. In the following seven months, the YouTube video was accessed on demand another 440 times, bringing it to 524 views at the moment of writing⁵⁵. The attention span of the post-event audience was almost three times smaller – 5:43 minutes. One month later, we added on YouTube an edited version of the live-streamed video (approximately 83 minutes long), with incorporated English subtitles and a video introduction acknowledging support from the Creative Europe programme. In six months, this second video reached 181 views, a total view time

⁵³ As explained before, the number of views on YouTube does not necessarily correspond to that of individual viewers, but actually refers to the number of viewing sessions.

⁵⁴ The performance itself lasted around 80 minutes, while the audience discussion another 20 minutes.

⁵⁵ 2nd May 2019, 12:57 (RO).

of 733 minutes and average view time of 4:02 minutes (4.9% audience retention). The impact was achieved organically, without paid advertising.

The discrepancy between the live and on-demand watch times suggests that people may be more inclined to watch filmed theatre at the moment of presentation rather than post-event. Let us call this real-time bias. Andy Lavender explains the sort of audience engagement generated by live-streamed theatre in terms of the communality of experience that the remote others feel with all potential viewers and participants in the event:

Webcasting here offers access, but also a vicarious form of phenomenal engagement. I found the piece to be absorbing and interesting, not least because I understood that I was cotemporal with the event as live performance, and co-terminous with the festival spectators (whose responses – whose spectating – I could hear on occasions) in the venue with the performer. This act of remote viewing became the more concentrated precisely because it existed in a distributed present. I find myself wondering how this is different to watching the football online. It is so, I think, because of the call for attention that theatre makes, and the deliberate conferring of attention in return. (Lavender 2017: 349-350)⁵⁶

In other words, while the audience may dispense with shared space, they still value *shared time* as a feature of mediated

⁵⁶ The comments above refer to Forced Entertainment's live-streamed series, *Table Top Shakespeare*.

theatrical performance. Of course, the factors influencing the watch time on YouTube are various, from the content of the video to viewers' Internet broadband, their age, nationality, and cultural background. Even the device on which one accesses the performance can influence the viewing time. Our analytics indicate that the first video was mostly played on smartphones, which featured the lowest degree of audience retention (5:13 minutes).

VIII. Conclusions

Throughout this essay, we have explored the dramaturgical role of telepresence in *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, inspired by the methodology of Practice as Research. Our investigation has illuminated how the understanding of telepresence can shift as a result of its theatricalization and how the geographical, technical and conceptual limits of dramatic theatre can be stretched by a structure based on telepresence.

Among the new traits it acquires in a theatre context, telepresence enables actions from a distance that are not only physical but also visual or auditory inasmuch as these can also influence the persons at the other end of the communication channel. We have thus exited the exclusive realm of telerobotics, conferring to telepresence the ability to connect bodies, spaces, and objects in a feedback loop which rests on shared time. Moreover, we have seen how performing actions in “reality” and “virtuality” is ontologically similar in dramatic theatre, as it delves the audience into the fiction of the characters' lives and their simulated worlds. Of course, physical and virtual simulations are

structurally different, yet we can still speak of theatrical telepresence as potentially giving us access to both.

Since New Media Dramaturgy only explores the liberation of the machine from the constraints of narrative and the way technology shapes *postdramatic* performances, we have sought to demonstrate how telematic theatre reinterprets the relationship between the technological form and content in a *dramatic* context. No interface is devoid of significance and no content can escape the determinations of the chosen form. Furthermore, being the backbone of telematic theatre, technology is as dependent on the narrative as the narrative is dependent on the affordances of the technological matrix.

Concerning the technological dramaturgy of *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, we have discussed the phases of the app development process and the key parameters of building a telematic performance that incorporates live video: communication protocols, live video montage and the interface between physically present and telepresent actors and audiences. We have shown how most technical choices are also aesthetic and will thus have a bearing on all compositional layers.

The narrative dramaturgy implied organising the material into theatrical situations. While the story itself is also about the use of technology, conceiving the plot and situations was informed by the reality of communication between remote family members. The coordinates of realism and fantasy and the incorporation, multiplication or rejection of the “fourth wall” offered the framework for the narrative construction.

Further, we analysed the spacetime matrix in its capacity to bring together or not the performers and spectators in Romania and Spain and the online audience. Aligning with Andy Lavender’s conception of the shared time of Internet performance, we have seen how space could not reunite all participants, yet the sense of communality deriving from their simultaneous experience could.

In addition, we introduced the notion of a *multifaceted theatron* as part of the plurality of spaces inherent in telematic performance.

Our study of the audience's perception of *The Planet of Lost Dreams* suggested the existence of what we called "site-specific bias" (or "taking sides"), which may comprise aspects such as national and cultural particularities, opinion trends in each country and a potential tendency to feel more attached to the physically present characters than to the remote ones. In light of our results, the interplay between the story and physical presence can engender greater attachment and closeness to the characters than other factors. However, given the large margin of error of the questionnaires from Spain and the impossibility of accounting for extraneous variables such as the audience's age, this hypothesis needs further testing. Similarly, the larger question of empathy in telematic theatre deserves to be explored more in-depth.

Another element we verified was the audience's attention – following most replies, it was equally divided between the stage and the screen. The most important factors influencing attention were the story and the acting. The survey and our personal observation revealed that the audience were touched by the performance and part of them gained new insights about migration and Internet communication. Supporting the idea of the shared time of telematic performance and the importance of the present moment, the YouTube Analytics highlighted the online audience's preference for the live-streamed performance as opposed to its on-demand recording.

Telepresence is a powerful tool for dramaturgy, but also a means for understanding the sweeping changes our world is undergoing. We need only look around to realise to what extent we are conducting our relationships in a (poly)mediated⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Polymedia is a concept introduced by Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller in their book, *Migration and New Media*.

environment. Our story of the family separated by migration, living their joys and sorrows on the Internet, is just an extremity on the increasingly large continuum between physical reality and mediated presence where all of us belong.

Bibliography:

Books:

Ascott, R. (2003), *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness*, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, University of California Press.

Auslander, P. (2008) *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture (Sec. Ed.)*, London and New York, Routledge.

Barba, E. (2010) *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House* (trans. J. Barba), London and New York, Routledge.

Bay-Cheng, Sarah, Kattenbelt, Chiel, Lavender, Andy & Nelson, Robin (eds.) (2014) *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press.

Birringer, J. (2008) *Performance, Technology and Science*, New York, PAJ.

Bracken, C.C. & Skalski P.D. (eds.) (2010) *Immersed in Media: Telepresence in Everyday Life*, New York and London, Routledge.

Dixon, S. (2007) *Digital Performance – a History of New Media in Theatre, Dance, Performance Art and Installation*, London, The MIT Press.

Eckersall, Peter, Grehan, Helena & Scheer, Edward (2017) *New Media Dramaturgy - Performance, Media and New-Materialism*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Eisenstein, Sergei (2010) *Towards a Theory of Montage* (trans. Michael Glenny), London, New York, I.B.TAURIS.

- Giannachi, Gabriella & Kaye, Nick (2017) *Performing Presence - Between the Live and the Simulated*, paperback edition, Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- Goldberg, Ken (ed.) (2000) *The Robot in the Garden: Telerobotics and Telepresence in the Age of the Internet*, Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press.
- Hayles, N.K. (1999) *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*, Chicago, Chicago University Press.
- Kac, Eduardo (2005) *Telepresence and Bio Art: Networking Humans, Rabbits, and Robots*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.
- Lavender, Andy (2016) *Performance in the Twenty-First Century: Theatres of Engagement*, London and New York, Routledge.
- Leavy, Patricia (2017) *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*, New York and London, The Guilford Press.
- Lehmann, Hans Thies (2006) *Postdramatic Theatre* (trans. Karen Jürs-Munby), London and New York, Routledge.
- Madianou, Mirca & Miller, Daniel (2012), *Migration and New Media - Transnational Families and Polymedia*, London and New York, Routledge.
- Manovich, Lev (2001) *The Language of the New Media*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.
- Nelson, Robin (ed.) (2013) *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Paulsen, Kris (2017) *Here/There - Telepresence, Touch and Art at the Interface*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, The MIT Press.
- Wright, Michael (1997) *Playwrighting in Process*, Portsmouth, NH, HEINEMANN.

Zapp, Andrea (ed.) (2004) *Networked Narrative Environments as Imaginary Spaces of Being*, Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, MIRIAD.

Book Chapters:

Borgman, Albert (2000) 'Information, Nearness, And Farness' in Goldberg, Ken (ed.) *The Robot in the Garden: Telerobotics and Telepistemology in the Age of the Internet*, Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press: 90-107.

Dixon, Steve (2011) 'Researching Digital Performance: Virtual Practices' in Kershaw, Baz, Nicholson, Helen (eds.) *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press: 41-62.

Grau, Oliver (2000) 'The History of Telepresence: Automata, Illusion, And The Rejection of The Body' in Goldberg, Ken (ed.) *The Robot in the Garden: Telerobotics and Telepistemology in the Age of the Internet*, Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press: 226-243.

Articles:

Ascott, Roy (1991) 'Connectivity: Art and Interactive Telecommunications', *Leonardo*, Vol. 24, No. 2: 115-117.

Goldberg, Ken (1998) 'Virtual Reality in the Age of Telepresence', *Convergence* 4, no. 1 (March 1998): 33-37.

Haans, Antal, IJsselsteijn, Wijnand A. (2012) 'Embodiment and Telepresence- Toward a Comprehensive Theoretical Framework,' *Interacting with Computers*, Volume 24 issue 4.

Lavender, Andy (2017) 'The Internet, Theatre, and Time: Transmediating the Theatron,' *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 27:3, 340-352.

Sheridan, Thomas B. (1992) 'Musings on telepresence and virtual presence,' *Presence-Teleop. Virt.* 1: 120–125.

Online articles:

Minsky, M. (1980) 'Telepresence,' *Omni Magazine*:
<https://web.media.mit.edu/~minsky/papers/Telepresence.html>
(accessed 09.05.2019).

Weijdom, J. (2017) *Mixed Reality and the Theatre of the Future - Fresh Perspectives on Arts and New Technologies*, Brussels, IETM:
<https://www.ietm.org/en/publications>

Websites:

Administrația Prezidențială (2018) *Raportul Grupului de Lucru Interinstituțional pentru Copiii cu părinții plecați la muncă în străinătate (CCPPMS)*:
[https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/Raportul Grupului de lucru Interinstituional dedicat situatiei copiilor cu prini plecai la a munc in strintate.pdf](https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/Raportul_Grupului_de_lucru_Interinstituional_dedicat_situatiei_copiilor_cu_prini_plecai_la_munca_in_strainatate.pdf), p.10 (accessed 02.05.2019)

Margin of Error Calculator: <https://goodcalculators.com/margin-of-error-calculator/> (accessed 30.04.2019)

Migration Data Portal (2017), *Romanian Diaspora (total)*:
https://migrationdataportal.org/?i=stock_abs_origin&t=2017&cm49=642 (accessed 02.05.2019)

Migration Data Portal (2017), *Number of Romanian Immigrants in Spain*: <https://migrationdataportal.org/?t=2017&cm49=724&i=groups> (accessed 02.05.2019)

Oxford English Dictionary: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/> (accessed 09.05.2019).

Audience responses to questionnaire: <http://www.tele-encounters.com/audience-feedback-telematic-theatre/> (accessed 21.05.2019).

Online performance:

The Planet of Lost Dreams EN version:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8dS-AHjTTE&t=58s>
(accessed 28.04.2019).

Planeta Viselor Pierdute Livestream:

<https://youtu.be/T8dAPFSGWSs?t=1195> (accessed 01.09.2019).

Other:

Email communication with Professor Johannes Birringer –
23.11.2018

Dries Verhoeven (2016) *Guilty Landscapes*:

<https://driesverhoeven.com/en/project/guilty-landscapes/> (accessed
10.05.2019).



Fig.11 Radu Solcanu physically present in Romania and Ruxandra Oancea (video-projection) in Spain. Photo: Costin Fetic

The Planet of Lost Dreams

Notes on Working with Actors

Ion Mircioagă

I don't think that I know how to work with actors, I don't have a method; what I know is that I care for an environment favourable to rehearsals and, in order to create and maintain one, my relations with them are based on respect. This means, first of all, that my performances coagulated around the actors. This statement may seem redundant, but we shouldn't forget that, over time, plenty of theories were born, most of them pertinently argued, which call into question the importance of histrions. As for me, I adhere to the idea that a theatrical act implies a space, a person animating that space and a witness to that action. (Brook, 2014). You can give up on the scenery, you can perform in broad daylight or in the light of a candle, etc.; there is no theatre without the relation between the actor and the audience.

Whenever I'm working on a show, I am equally preoccupied with the story and the acting expressiveness because the development of the story is conditioned by the histrion's evolution; moreover, the story is more attractive as the acting is more seductive. "The actor's job is to act in such a way that his acting – and others' – will give the audience more pleasure than the simple reading of the text of the play." (Mamet 2013: 11). I wrote *The Planet of Lost Dreams* together with the project manager, Marina Diana Hanganu. This is not my first experience of the kind, I wrote texts in tandem before – for example, with Radu Solcanu (1951. *Provisional Title*). Nevertheless, this is a new situation for me due

to the fact that this is the first text I wrote starting from true facts which came to my knowledge while performing, also together with the project manager, a series of interviews with Romanians who live or lived in Spain and with their left-behind families in Romania.

I have been meditating on **the theme of the play, the relationship between the newest means of communication and the fate of the families affected by the migration**, ever since Marina Hanganu was writing the project. The elaboration of the text involved the selection of the most valuable testimonies resulting from the interviews. Their number was impressing; from this point of view, the selection of the data proved to be difficult. We operated with one of the norms of dramatic realism, according to which the events take place here and now. We increased the fluency of the story by giving up on the idea of integrating information that is particularly emotional and relevant from a factual perspective; we recovered the information in the accounts of our characters.

A decisive phase was the creation of the identities, of their biographies since the prehistory of the text; at this moment, the data which couldn't be integrated into the scenic narration proved useful. "It's not the drama that makes the characters; it's the characters that make the drama. First of all, we must have the characters: alive, free, active." (Pirandello 1967: 586). We gave our full attention to how the existence of the characters was to be captured by the show (we even thought about what would happen to them after the end of the play). Nothing could be sketched without establishing the conflicts and the narrative. Finally, in line with the substance of the concept, we were constantly concerned with **the organic enclosing of technology into the story – the significant novelty of the project**. We can state that we understood and we used the writing of the text as a

technical means subsumed to the show (Barba 2012).

Due to the fact that we worked with actors coming from different schools and due to the fact that **our show supposed a constant dialogue, nota bene: a live dialogue, between the physical presence in a certain place of some actors and the images projected on the screen of other actors, physically present in another place**, we were preoccupied, more than in other situations, with the language unity of the interpretations. Our stylistic option, realism, assumes different means in the theatre compared to a movie theatre (Ostermeier 2016), but ***The Planet of Lost Dreams*** asks the actors to use concomitantly **scenic and film-related means of expression**. The live editing was ensured, for all the performances, by Marina Hanganu who set herself a number of video scenes through which she passed every time. Those moments are crucial for the story and important as significance. To a small extent, other than that, the editing was different from one performance to another, having as main criteria what the actor found in front of the camera would offer in an M moment on a D day. Another element on which the editing depended was the totality of the technical conditions, inevitably variable, which depended first of all on the speed of the Internet.

We can say that **a particularity of our work was generated by the necessity to balance the rigors imposed by the cinematographic image with the way the stage is used**; the economical acting imposed by the video close-up had to function at the same time with the body expressivity, specific to the theatre. The audience benefited, at the same time, from the static perspective offered by the place in the auditorium and from the dynamics of the framing shots offered by the video camera (Proferes 2005). From the moment our attention focused on the way actions enhanced each other in 2D and 3D, the way of working in the theatre had to keep up with the speed imposed by the way of

working in filmmaking. The rehearsals took place fortissimo, as “what in theatre implies a slow winning; in films, it means a whipped accumulation.” (Pintilie 2017:494) We have to mention that in Romania as well as in Spain, there were two cameras: one of them was fixed and allowed, when it was the case, the projection of the wide shots; the other one was mobile and, as we have shown, represented an element of the narration. The shots offered in the second case varied from wide shots to close-ups. The mobile camera was not a character as we didn't attribute it any will, reasoning, feelings; it was used by actors to communicate with each other. Without it – a laptop in the first scenes, a smartphone in the others – the story wouldn't have existed. **The use of the cameras allowed us to figure and to materialize the superposition or the complementarity of some actions. The purpose was to describe, with means never used before, the dynamics of the relationships among the characters found at thousands of miles away.** We can find an example of coincidental actions in the first part of *The Christmas Scene*; the family uses the Internet to spend together the holiday: the mother, the father and the child are having a good time, they are opening the presents at the same time, Carmen is dancing with George. The distance seems to compress, the relationships are warm, harmonious. Contradictory actions can be found in *The Crisis Scene*: in Murcia, Carmen and her new husband are getting ready to go out, while in Buzău Betty is feeling desperate because of George's critical state of health. The family doesn't exist anymore, the relationships among its members are irreversibly damaged.

From a desire to offer a natural, unembellished image of the effects caused by migration, **the editing of the projected images** was based on the frame cut and **was volens nolens linear.** Another specificity of the project is that we can also talk, if we examine the performance as a whole, about an

editing that, for the moment, we are calling parallel. This was subjective, being done by each spectator individually, according to how and where they would focus their attention. The eye functioned as the balance between the sharpness and unsharpness of a camera: it would focus on the close-up of the visual range, on the background or on both.

The linear editing was setting up temporal relationships and allowed the story to advance. The sui-generis editing made by us specified extremely special spatial relationships, which allowed **another characteristic of the performance, the creation of a unique theatrical place, under the circumstances of the considerable physical distance between the two stages.** More, in certain parts of the narration, we suggested that the power of feelings can put between brackets the number of kilometres; the two spaces became one.

Our proposal is for the editing allowing the spectator to choose the perspective on a certain moment of the development of the performance to be named *cross-cutting*; and we intend to analyse this kind of reference of the audience to the performance in a separate study. Another consequence of the option for realism was our conception of the actors' movement so that they never relate directly to the images projected exclusively for the audience. The characters usually communicated within the physical spaces and it was strictly mediated through laptops or phones in the virtual space. The equipment was, according to the playwright, in their possession. At the same time, out of the desire to give expressivity to the cross-cutting, we gave our full attention to the internal cadence and to the content which are appropriate to the two places where the performance was taking place. We were preoccupied, of course, with the good functioning, as support for the information, of the

whole achieved through the juxtaposition of 2D and 3D images. Therefore, we conceived, and we worked on the stage movement so that, if in Spain it was rapid, in Romania it would be slow. And the other way around. The exception was represented by the changes of scenery which, for the benefit of the rhythm given to the entire performance, we wanted to be as rapid as possible. Their speed was conditioned by the fact that they were performed by actors who stayed in character during the respective moments. Sometimes, the change or a part of the change was represented by a directorial fragment. The actors would always play their general condition, for example, Radu Solcanu interpreting the infirm father; they never contradicted their state of the moment. After she finds out that the mother has a connection in Spain, Betty tries to get past the shock and rushes to meet her boyfriend, but the news she received takes a toll on her.

The subject of the play coagulated around Internet-based video-audio communication. Obviously, using the cameras was an important part of the work with prop. As we have shown, the shooting devices had no identity, but the characters' connection with them was alive, active. Betty places her phone in a certain way when she feels the need of her mother's presence, like in *The Crisis Scene*: she has the impression that the camera betrays her, it's really difficult to establish communication; the subjective time dilates beyond tolerable limits. The relation with the same object is totally different before *The Study Scene*: it's a warm day, the waters are still, the people have patience with each other and they all seem at peace with the environments in which they evolve. If we compare the two short moments, we notice that the girl's conflicted relationship with the world equally includes the relationship with the phone and that rushing has the opposite effect.

The positioning and the handling of the phones were integrated into the stage movement and they took into account the

necessities imposed by the narration of the events and by the desired expressivity at each moment. In the directorial fragment which we could name *I'm learning how to do my own make-up*, the cameras are situated in such a way that the mother and the daughter are face to face, so that the "lesson" is efficient. At the same time, due to the shot - counter-shot editing and to the close-up and plan-detail framings, the moment allowed the two actresses a suggestive game whose stake was the characters' desire for normality - nota bene, again, in a virtual space which became unique, physically too.

Ever since we were writing the piece, we were trying to imagine the development of some moments. Sometimes, certain theatrical images would impose themselves and the text would flow according to them. It should be specified that not all of those scenic hypotheses were confirmed. That is normal since the decisive phase in creating a performance is essentially represented by the confrontation with the liveliness that the actor gives to the character - an actor with his/her own personality which has to be respected, and his/her own means, which need to be cultivated. By writing, we sketched the shapes of the character; by acting, the actors gave them life.

In portraying a role the actor cannot develop a character, the actor reveals character. Only the playwright develops the character, in the creation of the play. Once the character has been developed to the requirements of the play, it exists as an entity. In the process of character analyses the actor "completes" the character through re-creation, storing a rich source of material from which to work. (Dean & Carra 1989: 256)

Right after the first readings, whole scenes were cut and

modified - of course, without vitiating the essence of the project; more, we removed one character - Aunt Ana, who, in the final version of the text - the fourth one! - is only mentioned.

Almost concomitantly with the work on the text variants, we started establishing our intentions and dividing the scenes in directorial fragments. A specific characteristic of the work on *The Planet of Lost Dreams* was represented by the creation of a team made of three directors - the initiator and the artistic director of the project, Marina Hanganu, myself from Romania and Javier Galindo from Spain. The first joint activities (undertaken how else but online?) were to negotiate and to set purposes and thresholds; the actions derived from those remained a personal choice, but they were supervised and coordinated by Marina Hanganu. During the rehearsals, obviously, we benefited from the actors' creativity - an example is the punctuation mark that Radu Solcanu put in *The Study Scene*.

An important phase in the creation of a show was the meeting in Buzău, at the middle of March 2018, with the Spanish team, led by Javier Galindo. It was a full week in which we worked on the technical details, on the definition and the understanding of the situations, on the coordination principles of the mise-en-scene in the two spaces. We finished the table reading, which was a success since the leading actress from Murcia, Ruxandra Oancea, had arrived in Romania two weeks earlier. Her advance with regards to the analysis of the situations and the decoding of the characters favoured the rapid integration into the project of Ana Polo and Tony Blaya. Then, we split in two rehearsal rooms and made Kinect animation attempts. Besides, by taking into account the established intentions, we drafted in parallel the movements in every scene, and then we examined the moments together, we analyzed the results and we decided on the directorial and acting solutions which were worth being retained.

After the team members of Murcia went back home, the

rehearsals took place online, the same way they had started, as we have shown above. The success of each meeting depended not only on the professionalism of the participant but also on the technical conditions, mainly on the Internet speed.

We need to further detail, at this point, another specificity of the work on *The Planet of Lost Dreams*. One day, after we had moved on connecting the scenes and on drawing the relationships between the characters at a deeper level, the online connexion was very slow: the projections were unsatisfying, and the sound didn't allow the actors to understand each other. At that moment, Radu Solcanu requested that, for fruitful communication between the actors, the discursive component of the theatrical image should be given maximum importance. A hundred years ago, that imperative would have been superfluous but, especially since Artaud, the drama art has been calling into question the oral expression.

The dialogue - in his written and spoken form - doesn't belong specifically to the stage, it belongs to the book; the proof is the fact that the textbooks of literary history reserve a place to drama, seen as an accessory branch of the history of the articulated language. I think that the stage is a physical and concrete place which asks to be filled and that it needs to be allowed to speak in its concrete language. My opinion is that this concrete language, designed for the senses and independent of the word, has to satisfy first of all the senses, that there is a poetry for the senses as there is one for the language, and that this physical and concrete language I'm alluding to is theatrical only to the extent the thoughts it expresses are out of reach for the articulated language. (Artaud 1997:32).

Artaud's rebellion is generated by the tyranny exerted by a theatre whose obligation was to illustrate the dramatic texts (Grotowski 1998) and in which the stage was an adjuvant of playwriting.

The first curtain known in France distinguishes itself through the absence of any allegory; that is the curtain which opened at Palais Cardinal for *Mirame* (1641) by Richelieu. The ornamentation reduced to a couple of engraved words reminds of a book cover page, the one we had to open in order to see the theatre. This curtain announces the importance of the word and the text in France immediately. (Banu 1993: 189-190)

The most important win of the insurrection, whose main germ was Artaud, materialized in exempting the directors from the task of using the stage exclusively to make the dialogue plausible. Thus, the dialogue became important through what it was hiding, and the subtext became the main preoccupation during the rehearsals. After going from the painted scenery to the one in 3D, the stage favours, at present, the incidence of the actions, and space and time become each other's feature.

The big difference between the narration-through-words and the narration-through-actions can be likened to the difference between the logic of time and the logic of space. The narration-through-words, both the written and the spoken ones, must order the events one by one, following the time vector. The narration which takes shape in theatre can, in exchange, show two or more different events *at the same time and in the same space*. (Barba 2012: 203).

It was inevitable that even the playwrights reconsider the function of the word in theatre. Eugene Ionesco, noting the inability of speech to support meanings anymore, uses during the first creation phase aberrant dialogues and advocates for the decomposition of the articulated language (Ionesco 1992).

In the former communist countries, the stage text was under assault equally from a totally different direction. It was the censorship, which was interfering at two levels - the performance and before that, the piece (Malița 2018); more precisely: a playwright could not see his text on stage if it did not get past the ideological control.

The changes occurring after 1989 determined, from a theatrical perspective, giving up on what was called Aesopian language, in a situation in which the freedom of expression caused problems related to the power of the word and the responsibilities coming from it.

In today's world, there is a new type of responsibility unknown by history so far: the communicational responsibility. In the absence of this responsibility, the modern world is threatened by the moral chaos and by the generalized confrontation. In other words, we have to pay attention to what we say, to whom we address, how we say it and when we say it; if we don't take these aspects into consideration, the communication act can have unexpected consequences ("secondary effects") or even contrary to our purposes (the so-called "perverted effects")...That is why the saying "I was just talking, I didn't hit you with a stick" is no longer available. Today, we are aware that "talking" is worse than "hitting someone with a stick." An irresponsible communication act can

create a series of chain reactions that nobody else can control; it can set off irreversible processes, with considerable damage. (Borçun 2010: 113-115)

We are far from calling into question the way arts synergy contributes to theatre expressivity and from disputing the winnings related to the diversity of the spectacular manifestations brought by Artaud and by those who followed him; at the same time, we can't ignore the way in which the force of the word is reappraised, sometimes precisely by those who minimized it. "Words are the most beautiful thing. And I, and so many other people who used to mock the language in our plays!" (Ionesco 2011: 100). There's no way it would go unnoticed that in his offensive Artaud could not liberate himself from the discursive language: "Despite his anti-semantics rhetoric, the latest analysis indicates that Artaud depended, in a helpless way, on words to transmit his view on a theatre that would have extended beyond the verbal constraints." (Mitter & Shevtsova 2010:70). **A singularity of our project is generated by the special attention given to the balance between visual and orality.** "The art of theatre, then, does not lie in the visual but in its balance with oral-aural experience." (Hodge 1988: 164) The text rehearsals, especially those online, occasioned the assiduous study of sound articulation, precisely because the physical distance between the actors needed to be somehow compensated. Beyond the necessity to give coherence to the emitter-receiver relationship, the intonation, the tone and the intensity of the utterances emerged as constituent elements of the supports for the circulation of information - between the actors, as well as between the performance and the audience. **"Speaking" is in *The Planet of Lost Dreams* a fundamental action:** wanted, accomplished, failed, rejected, made with love or resentments, with effects sometimes healing for the sensibilities of the characters, and other times devastating.

Maybe **we took a risk by defying the custom, but we didn't treat the word as a deadweight, but as an essential communication element** - the woman relieves her homesick by seeing her husband and daughter as well as by hearing them. Consequently, we insisted on finding, in all situations, “the word that is the spoken action itself, the living word which affects, the immediate expression organically tied to the action...” (Pirandello 1967:586).

The importance given to the word favoured the creation of a unique audio space, which allowed us to pursue our research regarding the way communicational technologies influence human relations. We have to equally underline the fact that **the online table rehearsals generated surprising theatrical images precisely since uttering became a more powerful energetic support than usual**.

In Murcia, the lines said in Romanian were subtitled in Spanish, and in Buzău the lines in Spanish were subtitled in Romanian. During the rehearsals, we used English and Spanish, and in this second case, Ruxandra Oancea made the special effort of translating. In these conditions, the energy flow which establishes during the rehearsals between directors and actors was more endeavouring and its maintenance required a special concentration. What's important to note is that this detail equally reveals the necessity to contain Artaud's revolution in theatre and to move on by equally recovering the virtues of the discursive language. This being the case, we gave equal importance to the work with the voice and with the body (Allain & Harvie 2012), without claiming to be original in this respect.

The body and the voice are intimately linked. If there is tension in the body, especially in the neck and shoulders, it will affect the voice. The actor will

sound strained and tight, as if the sound were a large object being forced through a small funnel. If this is the case, you will get tense watching the actor, and the character that the actor is playing will not be credible. So wherever possible, work on movement and voice together. (Mitchell 2009: 84)

I would have insisted less on the way we treated the word in our performance if I hadn't participated in a disturbing event occasioned by one of the performances reserved, in Buzău, to the students of the Special High School for the Visually Impaired. They came to the theatre accompanied by four teachers. They entered in a row holding hands. They sat down on chairs and when the performance started, the murmurs faded away, nobody coughed, nobody fussed. The focus of the audience was at its top. Every word and every phrase, every interjection and every exclamation, the statements, the negatives, and the questions constituted essential elements for how the universe of the performance structured itself. The bridge built through the energy exchange between the audience and the actors was quasi-substantialized. Andreea Darie declared: "What does it feel like to act in front of an unsighted audience? Wonderful! They are probably some of the few people who are present to really pay attention to you. They don't afford to let any details get by them. There was a certain silence which lets you «be», there, in your stage reality. I asked myself how did they «see» the performance? I don't have a clue. But I think that they notice things which the rest of us are obviously missing." The words had for us too, those on the sidelines - the directors and the technical team - mass and volume, density, maximum relevance. The experience I'm talking about is the most convincing plea in favour of reconsidering the function held by the discursive language in theatre.

An important characteristic of the performance was

determined by the original acting space. Physically speaking, as we have shown already, the mise-en-scene happened on two different stages, at thousands of miles away. The stake of the project was, from a scenographic perspective, to create a specific, original theatrical place, with properties which allow us to reveal the way a whole world is falling apart.

The judicious set design made by Alexandra Constantin, based on the principle of symmetry, was extremely useful in order to achieve our goal. In front of the audience, there is the projection screen and at its right, a multifunctional body, identical as structure both in Romania and in Spain. By ingeniously using various elements of the ensemble, as well as the light and the camera positioning, the set designer materialized various places of the action: a living room, a bedroom, an Internet-cafe, an office, the kitchen of a restaurant, a doctor's office.

When the wide shots were used, the Spanish audience could see on the projection surface the ensemble in Romania, forming an organic whole together with the scenery found in front of it - an image which was coinciding with that in Buzău. This way, we were able to benefit from a space which could be either unique, either made of two distinct places. **The distinction was based on narration and was made by the actors' performance.** The moment of the make-up is performed by Andreea Darie and Ruxandra Oancea, starting from the theatrical axiom that they find themselves in front of the one and the same mirror. We are in the same place.

In *The Passport Scene*, the relevant fragment is the one in which the father tries to engage in a dialogue with Don Pedro. The places are at a distance, connected only by technology. Communication is hard to establish because George is drunk. Don Pedro notices the discomfort felt by Carmen and steps out. The clearly different actions of the feminine characters are crucial to

achieving our purpose in the moment mentioned above: Carmen is busy with the prop specific to the restaurant, Betty rushes to place the father's clothes in a suitcase. George is aggressive, Don Pedro is delicate, Carmen is anxious. Everyone is in their own emotional space. Betty alone tries to connect the places. She doesn't succeed. Another specificity of the performance was the way we introduced and used the soliloquies, the functions we gave them. The soliloquy is defined as "a pure expansion of the self, in a state of lack of control or of poor self-control... without a recipient, even an imagined one" (Uberesfeld 1999: 53). We should not forget that "the spectator is the secondary recipient of any stage utterance..."(idem) but for the actor, the acting theme is the character's pressing need to clarify his/her emotional state rationally; to this end, the actor acts by addressing to himself/herself.

Where should I look, in such communication, for this myself? The human being is a vast universe. To whom should I address?... The idea is that, except for the usual centre of our nervous psychic life, which is the brain, I realized that there is another centre, close to the heart, where the solar plexus is. I tried to start a conversation between the two mentioned centres. I think that they did not only fixated in me, but they also began to communicate. (Stanislavski 2013: 426-427)

From a desire to emphasize the effect that the separation of the family has on its members, we wrote four pairs of soliloquies. For the purpose of the analysis, we can talk about the first pair: the father has a guilty conscience for having lost Betty's trip money and passport, the mother realizes that her marriage can't go on. By talking to themselves, each one of them

invokes the other, but communication does not take shape, it falls apart. In the end, George and Carmen call each other, at the same time. The phones are both busy. The moment suggests that even if the husband and the wife would make efforts to reconcile, the breakup became irreversible. Working with actors in the case of the soliloquies focused on developing relevant and organic physical actions - in accordance with the basic state and with the emotional and discursive flow - to take place on the partner's lines. The actions were conceived to reveal the opposition between the characters; an important support in this regard was building the lines.

A peculiarity of the work on *The Planet of Lost Dreams* was generated by the delicate relationship of the actors with their characters. Andreea Darie and Radu Solcanu allow me to disclose that each in their own way sees herself/himself in the performed part - her, to a greater extent. Working on the depth of the characters involved stimulating sometimes painful emotions. As a result, activating the feelings took place concomitantly with protecting the intimate reality Barba (2012) talks about when referring to the acting underscore. During the discussions which accompanied the table reading, there were cases when Andreea Darie made use of her own experience in order to offer some points of view in building the character. We have to mention that at the moment the text was being written, the actress was not taken into account for playing the part. The performance benefited from her generosity. At the same time, we were careful that the analogies between the actors' personal biographies and those of the characters do not favour inappropriate scenic moments by emotional overload (Mitchell 2009). Overlapping the actors and the characters is a sign of convenience and has to be entirely avoided.

I once heard a remarkable actor saying: "Hamlet was just a guy like me!" He instantly unmasked his

inner laziness, which failed to explore in more detail Hamlet's personality and the lack of interest towards anything exceeding the limits of his own personality. (Chekhov 2017: 19)

Working with the two actors was different not only because, obviously, they have distinct personalities, but also because the two parts have different structures. Both of them had to play changing physical and moral traits, but each one in a different manner. Andreea Darie embodied a girl who, going from the age of a schoolgirl to that of a high school graduate, goes through life stages which clearly do not resemble at all.

The body, the mimicry and the voice of the actress are used in a certain way when she embodies the child excited about dolls and in a different way when she plays the teenager outraged by her parents' selfishness, and in a totally different way when she does the disoriented young girl. Radu Solcanu played a man affected by alcoholism, more and more enslaved by this addiction, sometimes aware of the damages of his diseases, who decides, at some point, to give up drinking, but whose will is too weak to succeed to heal. George is a loving man, but jealous and too impregnated with macho preconceptions. Therefore, his marriage to Carmen is inevitably null and void. The father loves his girl, but his feelings are often annulled by quirks and by his alcohol addiction. Andreea Darie, who had as basic theme the eager search for ideals, had to delineate the ages clearly and inside the scenes, to underline the moods and mark the thresholds; Radu Solcanu was tasked with making the intricacies of a tragic existence believable and expressive, condemned to isolation and lacking perspectives because of an accident. They both understood that the natural on stage has to be built and they used themselves in this respect, not by outbidding, but by acting while controlling their emotions, without reaching meanwhile the drastic *via negativa* Grotowski

talks about (1998). At the same time, we made sure that the actors did not fall into the trap of identifying themselves with the characters and did not limit to installing themselves in the suggested situations.

If the text asks you to see a mouse in the kitchen and jump on a chair, screaming hysterically, it is a loss of time to say “But I would never do something like that. If it were me, I would break its neck and throw it in the trash.” It’s not about what you would do in a given situation, but about the acting of being in the respective situation. (Wright2016: 115)

The ability to impress by acting in a dull manner is the measure of the two actors' gift. By adding fiction to their own realities, Andreea Darie and Radu Solcanu distinguish themselves from the performers and opt for “acting in the full meaning of the usual use of the word.” (Lehman 2009: 188)

A defining characteristic of the performance was the use of the Kinect animation. The concept, its materialization and the integration of the acting art belong to the project manager, Marina Diana Hanganu. My contribution to this part of the project was equivalent to that of an assistant director. Obviously, what I could say is insignificant.

The director is not the actor's boss, but his/her collaborator. For their effort to accomplish, it takes a permanently perfected technique and discipline. Searches are efficient when they are accompanied by rigour.

Periodically, there have been violent reactions to the idea of discipline in art bringing about movement like *nihilism* and *Dadaism*, or closer to our times the rebellion of the 1960s, when “do your

own thing” was the cry for release from all rules and traditions. By their demise, these short-lived movements only have reaffirmed the truth that any individual's expression needs some form of discipline if it is to be something more than indulgent self-expression. (Dean & Carra 1989: 2)⁵⁸

The director's obligation is to work rigorously with himself/herself and re-creatively with the actors so that they give the measure of all the possibilities they have; maybe even more. Runcan (2005) shows that the actor is one of the vehicles allowing the communication flow within the theatrical discourse; we will allow ourselves to say that it's the most important one. It's true that the histrion, through the functional mobility, can call into question the semiological cohesion made by the scenery-light-sound combination, but it is the director's duty to act so that the language of the performance is coherent without jeopardizing the liveliness of the actor.

Personally, I've never gone to a rehearsal without a previous in-depth text analysis, being aware that the analysis is just a necessary step – not a sufficient one – in order to put on a show. "Adequate play-analysis is no guarantee of success but is the insurance that the director is at least familiar with his materials." (Hodge 1988: 18). I completed the research with serious documentation. I tried to emotionally prepare myself to the best of my ability, that is to use myself the same way actors use themselves. *The Planet of Lost Dreams* made no exception.

This way, I got to obtain the relaxation necessary to listen to the actors, to stimulate and to maintain their creativity, the pleasure of acting, to favour their power of reliving the emotions methodically (Banu 2012).

⁵⁸ Editor' note: all quotes in this essay have been translated freely from Romanian

I don't feel comfortable talking about how accomplished the performance was or wasn't. I'd rather let the reviews talk and briefly draw the conclusions of the research.

I don't believe in methods of working with actors. And even if I did, the attempt to apply a method in a project like ours, entirely original, would have been doomed to fail. A method involves a system, or **one of the stakes of our research, the organic integration of the new communication technologies into the scenic narration excludes, through its originality, the verified means of editing a play.**

My suspicions towards norms do not exclude, but amplify the need to prepare myself for the meetings with the actors, which implies a text analysis, documentation and affective preparation – everything according to my conviction that theatre audience is, essentially, interested in two components of the performance, which are interconnected: the story development and the acting virtuosity. In this case, the lab phase coincided with the handling of the interviews and the writing of the play. Besides, I consulted works approaching international migration. In the same line, the discussions with the sociologist Mircea Kivu, who created the interview guide, were extremely useful. I have to underline the fact that analyzing the text, establishing the situations, and the intentions were teamwork. I worked with Javier Galindo and Marina Hanganu, the artistic director of the project. The emotional preparation was based on the disturbing confessions of the interviewed characters. Relevant data taken from mass-media and from studies dealing with the problems of the families affected by migration added to them.

The performance was put together by equating the scenic expressivity and the cinematographic rigours. The editing of the images was linear. As editing technique, we used the frame cut. At the same time, **we can equally talk about**

subjective, sui-generis editing, the parallel editing created by each individual spectator, through the juxtaposition of 3D and 2D images. We called that cross-cutting. It requires the 2D images to be live so that the audience is aware of their fugacious nature. The consequence of these conditions was the stimulation of the arbitrary character in which every spectator balances between the sharpness and the unsharpness of the images. The cross-cutting allowed the creation of a unique theatrical place, despite the thousands of miles between the two stages. We conceived the movement of the actors according to this new relationship between the unique acting space and the separate scenes. The video cameras, while being the most important prop elements, were integrated into the theatrical narration.

As a consequence of working on *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, the ratio between the discursive and the visual components of the theatrical language was re-evaluated. “Speaking” is in our show acting, moving, happening. The need to communicate can’t be satisfied by ignoring the possibilities offered by the articulated language.

The purpose of *The Planet of Lost Dreams* was to introduce revolutionary technologies into the theatrical performance and, at the same time, not to give up on the ability of the scenic art to touch and to stimulate the spectator to meditate on fundamental life themes. Whether that was a success or not, you can check anytime, online.

Bibliography

Books

- Allain, P & Harvie, J. (2012) *Ghidul Routledge de teatru și performance*, (trad. C. Modreanu și I. T. Todoruț), București, Nemira
- Artaud, A. (1997) *Teatrul și dublul său urmat de Teatrul lui Seraphin și Alte texte despre teatru*, (trad. V. Sasu și D. Tihu-Suciu) Cluj-Napoca, Echinocțiu
- Banu, G. (2014) *Monologurile neîmplinirii*, Iași, Polirom
- Banu, G. (1993) *Roșu și Aur. Teatrul spectatorului*, (trad. C. Corciovescu) București, Fundația culturală română
- Barba, E. (2012) *Casa în flăcări: despre regie și dramaturgie*, (trad. D. Cozma) București, Nemira
- Brook, P. (2014) *Spațiul gol*, (trad. M. Andronescu) București, Nemira
- Chekhov, M. (2017) *Gânduri pentru actor: despre tehnica actoriei*, (trad. O. Bogzaru și C. Bilciu) București, Nemira
- Cormoș. V.-C. (2015) *Schimbări identitare în lumea migrației internaționale*, Iași, Lumen
- Craig, E. G., (2013) *Despre arta teatrului*, (trad. A. Bardaș și V. Poenaru) București, Cheiron
- Dean, A. & Carra, L., (1989) *Fundamentals of Play Directing*, Fort Worth, Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc.
- Grotowski, J., (1998) *Spre un teatru sărac*, (trad. G. Banu și M. Nedelcu-Patureanu) București, UNITEXT
- Hodge, F., (1988) *Play Directing. Analysis, Communication and Style*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall
- Ionesco, E. (1992) *Note și contranote*, (trad. I. Pop) București, Humanitas

- Ionesco, E. (2011) *Sub semnul întrebării*, (trad. N. Cernăuțeanu) București, Humanitas
- Lehman, H.-T. (2009) *Teatrul postdramatic*, (trad. V. Scoradeț) București, UNITEXT
- Mamet, D. (2013) *Teatrul*, (trad. M. Bottez) București, Curtea veche
- Mitchell, K. (2009) *The Director's Craft. A Handbook for the Theatre*, New York, Routledge
- Mitter, S. & Shevtsova, M. (2010) *Cincizeci de regizori-cheie ai secolului 20*, (trad. A. Ioniță și C. Modreanu) București, UNITEXT
- Mircioagă, I. (2016) *Realitatea și realismul în teatru*, București, UNATC PRESS
- Ostermeier, T. (2016) *Teatrul și frica*, (trad. V. Russo), București, Nemira
- Proferes, T. N. (2005) *Film Directing Fundamentals: See Your Film Before Shooting*, Oxford, Elsevier
- Pintilie, L. (2017) *Bricabrac: De la coșmarul real la realismul magic*, București, Nemira
- Pirandello, L. (1967) 'Acțiunea vorbită' in *Teatru*, (trad. F. Potra), București, Editura pentru Literatură Universală: 585-588
- Runcan, M. (2005) *Pentru o semiotică a spectacolului teatral*, Cluj-Napoca, Dacia
- Spolin, V. (2008) *Improvizație pentru teatru*, (trad. M. Bălan-Bețiu), București, UNATC PRESS
- Stanislavski, K., S. (2013) *Munca actorului cu sine însuși*, I, (trad. R. Rădulescu), București, Nemira
- Stanislavski, K., S. (2014) *Munca actorului cu sine însuși*, II, (trad. R. Rădulescu), București, Nemira
- Șerban, M. (2011) *Dinamica migrației internaționale: un exercițiu asupra migrației românești în Spania*, Iași, Lumen
- Ubersfeld, A., (1999) *Termenii cheie ai analizei teatrului*, (trad. G. Loghin), Iași, Institutul European

Uscătescu, G. (1987) *Ontologia culturii* (trad. S. Leahu și G. Novac), București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică
Wilson, E. (1988) *The Theatre Experience*, New York, McGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY
Wright, J. (2016) *De ce râdem la teatru? O explorare practică a comediei fizice*, (trad. M. Aciobăniței), București, Nemira

Journals:

Kantor, T. (1995) *** (anonymous trans.), *Rampa*, nr. 41, p. 7.
Borțun, D. (2010) ‘Responsabilitatea comunicațională – un nou tip de responsabilitate’, *Institute, The.*, nr. 1, p 113-115

Online sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre_of_the_Absurd#Theatrical_features accessed 14.10.2018

https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugen_Ionescu accessed 12.10.2018

<http://www.tele-encounters.com/ro/category/interviuri-familii-ramase-acasa/> accessed 11 octombrie 2018

<http://www.tele-encounters.com/ro/interviuri-cu-emigranti/> accessed 11.10.2018

Burileanu, B. „e-migrația Când tehnologia nu înlocuiește omenia – *Planeta viselor pierdute*”

<https://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/23039/Bogdan-Burileanu/e-migratia-Cand-tehnologia-nu-inlocuieste-omenia-Planeta-viselor-pierdute.html> accessed 27.10.2018

Cântec, O. ‘Teatrul românesc postbelic, sub controlul ideologiei comuniste’,

http://www.bcut.ro/dyn_doc/revista/colpol1.site/colpol1.p.61-80.

accessed 10.12.2018

Horvath, I. 'Aspecte ale culturii migrației în România',

<http://www.criticatac.ro/aspecte-ale-culturii-migratiei-in-romania>

accessed 10.12.2017

Kivu, M. 'Plecăt-am după 90. Scurtă taxonomie a diasporei românești' [https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tema-](https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tema-saptamanii/articol/scurta-taxonomie-a-diasporei-romanesti)

[saptamanii/articol/scurta-taxonomie-a-diasporei-romanesti](https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/tema-saptamanii/articol/scurta-taxonomie-a-diasporei-romanesti)

accessed 5.12.2017

Malița, L. [https://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/12197/Liviu-](https://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/12197/Liviu-Malita/Interdictii-si-tabuuri-la-teatru.html)

[Malita/Interdictii-si-tabuuri-la-teatru.html](https://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/12197/Liviu-Malita/Interdictii-si-tabuuri-la-teatru.html) accessed 27.10.2018

Nicolae, M. 'Plătesc eu!' [http://bookhub.ro/planeta-viselor-](http://bookhub.ro/planeta-viselor-pierdute/)

[pierdute/](http://bookhub.ro/planeta-viselor-pierdute/) accessed 3.12.2018

Ornea, L. 'Pași în doi',

<https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/pasi-in-doi/> accesat

11.10.2018

The Planet of Lost Dreams

Space, Time and Consciousness

Javier Galindo

Could we state, as Peter Brook has, that theater today is still someone walking across an empty space while someone else is watching them?

No doubt, theater has the simplicity of a specific moment, of an instance of performance that can be summed up – in Vittorio Gassman's words – as someone who pretends to be who he is not and someone who pretends that what they are watching is real. The poor theater that Grotowski stood for is today equally necessary, since deep inside, at its actual core, performance is nothing more than actor and audience, and that is where the foundation of communication lies.

Over the course of theater tradition, we have fought in order to defend theater's ability to summon all arts and remain an art that is capable of integrating all others in a single space and within the same time unit. Architecture and painting for space design, poetry for drama and so on and so forth until the film came into being.

The rise of a new expressive art such as the seventh meant, for some, a threat to the millenary art of performance that would eventually bring about the death of theater (Mozo 2006). For others, it was the opportunity of integrating an element that was as powerful as it was expressive and had a great capacity to create meaning.

The game in which we engage the audience during a performance involves a number of different dimensions, such as the ludic, reflexive and participatory ones; but if we were to synthesize, a performance is place, time and space.

To be specific, *The Planet of Lost Dreams* was a performance meant to tell the story of migration from both sides: the part that migrates and the family that is left behind. The intention was to articulate a show that would lean on two separate venues located in both countries involved in the migration process. In this case, Spain as a host of the migrant mother and Romania as the residence of what we might call the 'donor' family. That was the starting point for creating a single performance, or rather telling a single story that would be performed for two separate audiences. On the one hand, the audience in Buzău, Romania, and on the other hand, the audience in Murcia, Spain.

This article reflects on the new theatrical dimension that seems to be emerging as we present a performance that challenges the audience's space and time while it casts a shadow of doubt over the limits of theater by including the audiovisual as a narrative element.

Considering *multispace* as a place where theater can happen, the audience will be able to live, without even moving from their seat, a duplication of the stage in real time and space – only thousands of kilometers away – through a projection screen that presents a mixed signal. This new window implies a multiplication of the stage (Pavis 1998, 171).

Tele-Encounters, through *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, leaves the door open for a game of space and time such as always has been the case with theater, only with a new dimension that now breaks the *Hic et Nunc* criterion (Pavis 1998, 476) on which we had previously relied in order to determine the quintessence of theater.

With regard to time in drama, Anne Übersfeld distinguishes between stage time and dramatic time and she agrees with Pavís by defining stage time as the time the audience lives, as opposed to the time of the story, that evolves within a continuous present (Falska 2009); dramatic time is, therefore, the time of the fiction, of the illusion, that contains not only the events that are performed on stage ‘but also those that the audience rebuilds in their imagination using the data provided by the dialogue’ (Falska 2009). And this is where one of the initial games appear, which we came across as we maintained two spaces and a single stage time.

But what time does the audience live? According to the reception criterion, the *here and now* must be lived in present, physically, with no intermediation whatsoever between the actor and the audience members who share that very space and time. In this case, there is a window open through which actions occur in a continuous ‘now’ but that objectively relates two very clearly separate spaces which, thanks to technology and the audiovisual as an independent language in itself, can now be brought together for the audience as a mixed reality of theater and television.

As a difference from film, the language of television is live transmission. The audience is conscious that everything they see is happening simultaneously in a separate place. At least that is the purpose with which television is born: that of broadcasting images in a continuous time (Domínguez Lázaro 2010). Film, on the other hand, focuses its language on the richness of editing and the postproduction of previously shot material meant to be exhibited at a later date. Adding recorded television material or rebroadcasting events will cause the audience to doubt whether what they are watching has the *veracity* that can only be bestowed upon by the concept of live transmission. As for the narrative ability of audiovisual editing, the present possibility of live editing adds a special rhythmic, stylistic and discursive richness, offering

a new combined sign to the stage. Even so, the projection of image on stage maintains an element of Brechtian estrangement over the audience.

Analyzing this new dichotomy, we can discuss two terms, veracity and verisimilitude: that which the audience is willing to believe as true and on the other hand the issue of consciousness.

Truth in theatre is a multiple, collective truth, shaped by all the elements that are present at a given time, provided that a certain, specific combustion occurs. (Brook 2004, 67)⁵⁹

The audience needs to be aware that what they are seeing is actually occurring. Theater cannot conceal this second issue, that of consciousness – there is a live performance that shares the same time and space going on in front of the audience. Directly related to this basic aspect of theater is the verisimilitude, once we have questioned the degree of reality of what is happening on the other side of the screen.

Presenting *The Planet of Lost Dreams* on stage meant taking one determining aspect into account. Upon entering the room, the audience was briefed minutes before the show on the singularity of the project they were going to attend. In this introduction, they were announced that, through a UE funding program, the text had been written based on real testimonies of Romanian migrants in Spain and Romania and that the performance would take place in two theater venues at the same time. The other side would be present by means of a real time projection on the screen that was a part of the scenography. This previous condition secures a conscious reception on the part of the audience attending a *telematic* theatre show once they are convinced, right before the show, that on top of everything else, they share the fact of being an audience with an extension of the performance that is going on at the other end of Europe.

⁵⁹ Free translation.

The *correct* reception of this performance is therefore subject to the condition that the audience are familiar with this aspect. It is a common element in all arts since we have to attend the contract of fiction in full consciousness, convinced that we are watching a faked reality that we accept to believe. But in this case, having the audience suppose this reality would only make them lose part of the meaning. The fiction in this show also requires an element of the reality that the public must know about. Some of the audience members confessed, once the performance had finalized, that during the show they had doubted whether the projection they were looking at had been previously recorded. Some of them only were convinced upon seeing the actors bow in front of the Romanian audience.

As we were saying, television must have helped us gain this previous conviction. The countries involved in this project are both part of the information society, so the audience is more than likely to have been trained in new information technology and to be constantly *connected* over several social media as part of a world that lives in *streaming*. Our audience accepts the game knowing that they are attending a theater play that combines audiovisuals as a narrative element in order to connect other spaces to the present one; given the audience's previous training, this game is verisimilar.

The idea of *tele theater* has been exploited in Spain ever since 1965, when RTVE began work on theater adaptations for television. This possibility of bringing theater production closer to the greater public by broadcasting it on *Estudio I* meant a lot of benefits and finally increased the passion for theater (Mozo 2006, 99). But once it added the elements of the audiovisual such as the camera, the shots, the rhythm of the editing, and since it was broadcast on television, theater ceased to be such and turned into an audiovisual element instead. Nevertheless, these productions have maintained theatrical elements such as acting, stage set

design and stage direction, which even if television-oriented have not lost their stylistic link to the stage.

On the other side, we should mention the trajectory of a Catalan theater company, La Cubana, (La Cubana 2019) who began mixing theater and film genres in Spain in the late 80s. *Cegada de Amor* tries to establish which of the genres is more convincing with a performance defined by transgression and stage challenges. In this show, the characters of the movie interact with the audience attending the performance asking them to keep quiet after a quarrel and from that moment on they keep switching from film to theater, thus creating a unique performance. Another example from the same company of the use of television on stage and a game on the reality of theater, from backstage, is *Una nit d'Òpera*, in which the audience is seated in what looks like some sort of stage machinery of an opera show while Verdi's *Aida* is being broadcast and a supposed audience is watching from their correct location. "Mummy I Wanna Be Famous", in 2003, is a theater play that applies the recipe of a television talent show which involved onstage, direct editing that connected several cameras and real time projections. La Cubana have always challenged the idea of the fourth wall, and in 2012 they created *Campanades de Boda*, where the stage turned into a wedding venue for which the audience became the guests. Finally, the game consisted of having the wedding by videoconference with India. Nevertheless, the game was entirely fictitious, since there was no actual connection to India.

Through the revolution of technology and information at the beginning of the 21 century, telematics has brought us deeper into a world that is hyper connected over the World Wide Web and gets live feeds of political, social and even terrorist events, as well as an ever-growing expansion of social media that turns our personal reality into a continuous *livestream*.

Also, the possibility of continuously rebroadcasting and replaying that Internet offers – streaming – has allowed for an explosion of live experiences offered to any individual user, thus bringing live entertainment closer, albeit depriving performance of its very essence, in order to make it more accessible, more reachable or cheaper (Vicente 2019). *Streaming* platforms that broadcast live concerts, opera, and other entertainment events have switched their venues for a movie theater or a living room, the stage for a 2D screen, whilst reception has gone from community-based to completely individual.

When exploring limits, we are bound to think of the beginning of something new, or otherwise we will encounter nothing. In this case, the inclusion of the concept of *telematic theater* necessarily makes one think about the intertwining of two specific, autonomous languages such as the theater and the audiovisual. Exploring limits is sometimes about reaching out in order to take a look and then come back in order to stay.

In the case of *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, the exploration of stage limits has made us come up with interesting proposals, such as the need for two stage directors⁶⁰ and a continuous, dynamic relationship between them in order to achieve a common purpose. This performance has meant directing through proposal and response, which allowed us to offer a staging that would be audience-friendly, not only towards those present in the same room with us but towards those that were sitting right on the other side of the screen; working for a *here and now*, in which the *now* is simultaneously several geographical spaces. To this, we add the richness and complexity of multilingual working on sounds and interpretation. A display of shared connection, of teamwork and added experience that finally offers a unique show built from two

⁶⁰ Editors' note - there were three directors involved in the process: Marina Hanganu, Javier Galindo and Ion Mircioagă.

separate points of view: that of the migrant and that of the family that is left behind.

We must conclude by bringing forth the need for a conscious audience, ready for a new type of theater that is open to technology as part of the performance, one that will connect several spaces and audiences. The implementation of the technological revolution in the performing arts has always been a constant and future should not impose barriers to the adoption of new ways of communicating and performing, as long as the basic coordinates of the stage are maintained: more specifically, a shared present of actor and audience will always be required.

The exploration of distance and telecommunication within the family in migration situations that '*tele-encounters*' supposed has caused us to both reflect on and research new technology and the way distance can become less so given the present channels of communication. This relationship between telecommunication and performing arts is what brought true value to our work and has made a performance possible that takes place on two stages at the same time, a performance that will open the door for a *multi-venue system* that makes one envision multidisciplinary shows where the limits are overthrown by technology.

In my opinion, the utility of this project is defined in the opportunities it provides. In the coming together of separate groups of work who share a clear purpose, in the coordination of several dozens of people who work towards a common goal. In the performing and artistic possibilities which it will enable.

We may have contradicted the concept of poor theater that Grotowski advocated for. No doubt, theater needs less devices. In this performance of *telematic theater* we have connected many cables, maybe in order to leave theater behind and do something else, something different, even with a different name. Crossing the stage limits in order to connect new audiences to new stage and audiovisual experiences. But there is no doubt theater is the

perfect place to try involving all arts. And that it could be precisely the art of theater the one that can bring Europe a bit closer.

Thank you, Ruxandra.

Thank you, Marina.

Thank you, company.

Bibliography

Brook, Peter (2004) *Más allá del espacio vacío (The Shifting Point)*, Traducido por Eduardo Stupía, Barcelona.

Domínguez Lázaro, María De los Reyes (2010) 'La Televisión en España, una visión retrospectiva tras la primera década del S. XXI.', *Razón y Palabra*, nº 71.

Falska, María (2009) 'Relación Tiempo Escénico - Tiempo Dramático en algunos ejemplos del teatro español del Siglo XX.' *ÉTUDES ROMANES DE BRNO*: 1-8.

La Cubana (2019) '¿Qué es la cubana?' *La Cubana*. 5 de 2 de 2019.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=UUPLAYER_TVLaCubana&time_continue=1729&v=xpAyo1WRXvw (accessed 10.05.2019).

Mozo, Jerónimo López (2006) 'Televisión y Teatro', *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos*: 99-104.

Pavis, Patrice (1998) *Diccionario del Teatro*, Barcelona, Ediciones Paidós Ibérica S. A..

Vicente, Alex (2019), 'El País', *El Teatro se suma a la revolución del 'streaming'*. 17 de enero de 2019:

https://elpais.com/cultura/2019/01/16/actualidad/1547662940_537117.html (accessed 10.05.2019).

The Planet of Lost Dreams

Notes on Scenography

Alexandra Constantin

1 Concept

The action of the play is staged inside the home, showing the inner workings of the family. We have a contemporary, young, Romanian couple that is shown as living in the city of Buzău and also in Murcia, in Spain. The one place of „home” is divided into two spaces, that are connected by the projection wall, which is a physical barrier but also the only connection between the stages situated in two different countries.

2 Stage Design

The home is defined by a living room that also turns into a bedroom, a workspace or a bar on the Spanish stage. The space is changing according to the evolution of the living and working conditions of the characters, which evolve during the play.

The space is composed of two walls, grey flooring, some cubic seats and an easel that is also a mirror. The furniture in Romania is individualized by a warm yellow color decorated with textiles. As for the stage design in Spain, a dark red tone and more glossy surfaces were used. The white, translucent wall is used for retro-projection while a multifunctional one made of wood contains

many cupboards, a door that turns into a bed or a bar and a foldable desk, that can be extended to a dining-room table. The flexibility of the furniture-wall was planned according to the requirements of the action. The cupboards and shelves are filled with different props, which the actors use for different actions, that help compose the atmosphere of each scene.

The long-distance communication via video and sound is generated with the help of webcams and mobile phones with cameras, which are fixed in different places in the room. There are also some scenes where the two spaces are connected through a technology called Kinect. The actors can interact with each other in a virtual space and are shown writing, hugging and dancing on the same plane of a starry-sky-like dimension. All the technical work was done by Mindscape Studio.

3 Costume Design

The costumes are kept in a casual, contemporary style with variations according to the age and occupation of the characters. There is a subtle evolution from all-day-wear of 2007 to 2018.

The costumes also indicate different events in the family's history, as is the start of school and the graduation party for the girl or the change of jobs for the mother.

4 Production-process

All technical and artistic drawings were designed by the stage designer, Alexandra Constantin, and were sent to workshops in Romania and Spain to be built. Some minor changes were also

made along the way, keeping pace with the creative process of the directors: Marina Hanganu, Ion Mircioagă, and Javier Gallindo together with the actors.

The elements for the stage in Buzău were built at Nod Makerspace in Bucharest, a working hub and production firm with a good team of carpenters, mechanics, and makers. And all furniture items were designed and built to be disassembled in order to be transported.

Mindscape Studio staff made more test-runs in Buzău and Murcia in order to calibrate the software and hardware for the live transmission during the work process. The most difficult part was setting the Kinect device at exactly the right place, angle and distance both in Spain and Romania, so that the image is shown correctly.

The design process was extensive and involved many people from different fields. By working together „The Planet of Lost Dreams”, a theater show about family connections endangered by economic factors causing migration, combining both theatrical skills and contemporary technology, is reaching audiences in two different parts of Europe.

Interviews with the Actors

Andreea Darie (role: Betty)

Ruxandra Oancea (role: Carmen)

Radu Solcanu (role: George)

Tony Blaya (roles: Don Pedro, Juan)

Interviewer: Marina Hanganu

Presence:

1. *What is it like to act with a partner that is present only virtually? What is the difference between playing with a physically present partner and playing with a virtually present partner?*
- *On which of your senses (visual, auditory) did you rely most when communicating with the virtual partner? The absence of touch in relationship with the virtual partner influenced your acting in any way? Please describe.*
- *To what extent did you feel that your virtual partner was “present” in your physical space? Were there any moments when the virtual partner seemed more present to you than in other moments? What influenced your sensation of your virtual partner being present? Were there any moments in*

which you forgot that your acting partner was not present in the same physical space?

Andreea Darie: In our drama schools, we are trained, or advised/encouraged to build with and through our stage partner, whoever that is, which is absolutely logical and normal. Nevertheless, the challenge occurs when we find ourselves in the situation of improvising, of choosing from everything we have "acquired" something to cope with an unanticipated experience. You find yourself inexperienced and desperate in a possibly unique situation. On the stage, the actor is in control or has to be. How can he/she communicate on the stage with a partner looked at through a screen if, in our real everyday life, we find that extremely difficult to accomplish? Technology helps us be together, but, essentially, only partially. We will always get lost through the satellite. In *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, I tried to build the character of the mother based on the face and the voice of my partner from Spain. I cannot say if that was her, if that was the same character as the one she built. I have nothing to compare it to! We never performed together! We never felt each other's breath tension or eye moisture!

Lacking the sense of touch minimized the chances of verifying one's own belief through the partner. What the character "seems to me" to be is really like that? The double understanding of the mechanism remains surprising: the lack of the partner in physical contact - an act generating the permanent feeling of emptiness and the spin of frantic search, the need to find him/her.

The stage partners mostly communicate with the help of the eyes, of the gestures, of every means they have available. This happens no matter if they want to send each other signals concerning the scenic action in which they are involved or others, of disruptive nature, by appealing to the spontaneity and the adaptability in

order to level off the performance. The parasite elements in *The Planet of Lost Dreams* can occur much easier than in many other performances: technology can be controlled, as well as it can get out of control. These are the moments when communicating with the partner becomes difficult to manage, to understand, to synchronize. But, obviously, it is not impossible either. As I was fortunate to have effective and focused partners, the performance was a continuous discovery.

The line of communication consisted of a screen and a couple of loudspeakers, sometimes everything went off without a hitch and other times it didn't. This is also the fate of drama, no matter how telematic and technologized it would be: to be today as we weren't yesterday, as we definitely won't be tomorrow.

Ruxandra's character was an action generator. She determined, most of the times, changes in the scene. We needed to bring her as close as possible to us, otherwise, we wouldn't have connected to the action of the performance, to its story.

Ruxandra Oancea: At the beginning, it felt pretty lonely to not have an actual partner on stage. It all seemed void and kind of purposeless. Unless both sides used the screen, I felt I couldn't communicate since I had no way of telling what my partners could be feeling nor thinking. I think it was precisely this feeling the one that made me discover a somewhat different way of listening to one's partner. They were always going to be a distant presence, if any, so every little thing I could perceive simply started to enhance, as if it had a life of its own, and I just focused on that. I stopped trying to do all sorts of things so as to compensate the seeming emptiness, and I discovered, in turn, I was now a better listener. As a matter of fact, the scene in which I've always felt the strongest connection is the second one, oddly enough the only one in which the mother and daughter are communicating over the

telephone, with no video connection involved. In the end, and given all the rehearsal, the experience was what you would call standard in terms of the relationship between actors on stage during the actual performance, no different than whatever any other element of a given staging would have created in terms of 'obstacles' for the actors.

Radu Solcanu: For me it was a special experience, truly different. I tried to bring my partners from the other space (Spain) close to me and acted as if they were right next to me, as if we were sharing the same space. The sense of hearing ranked first. Hadn't we been able to hear each other, it would have been useless to see each other. Given the topic of the show, adapting to the virtual partner was more difficult, but in the end, it was successful, I would say. Unfortunately, besides my partner next to me, I was sharing my acting with a 3*3 cm image. The audience got the most of it, as it could watch the reactions from Spain on a much, much bigger screen. Otherwise, I just tried to get over the distance that was between us and give my best in the artistic act I was creating.

Tony Blaya: Acting with a colleague who is only present virtually is a very different experience, compared to all the projects I worked on, because there are several factors that you have to take into account: listening, pace, and – most importantly – language, which, in this case, was very different from ours, and the partner's notes were very strongly highlighted to enable the reply. All your feelings must be alert, both vision and hearing, because in live drama, every show is unique and unanticipated situation can happen, where you must improvise and push the scene forward with your colleague, whether it is virtual or right there in front of you. Every moment, you have the feeling that someone is there, someone watching you, looking straight at you, because of course, even though there are scenes when we are alone on the stage, with

our monologue, you still have the feeling that there are a thousand eyes looking at you and judging you

2. *(About smartphone communication) To what extent did you feel present in the space of the other country? What factors influenced your own sensation of presence in one space or the other (1. the physical space in which you were located, 2. the virtual space (the screen), 3. the space in the other country)?*

Andreea Darie: I never felt so strongly present inside the other space, I think that I wanted more to bring the absent character as close to me as possible. It's a shame that I hadn't thought of it before. It would have been interesting to investigate the process the other way around too. I believe that the desire of normality, of scenic familiarity, triggered the perfect construction of my space. I wanted, I believed, I built our universe before the other, drawing from it only what I needed in order to accomplish it. That's selfish, now that I think about it more clearly.

Ruxandra Oancea: I had absolutely no idea of what must have felt like on the other side of the screen, let alone on the other side of the stage back in Romania. Except by accident, such as when I would suddenly hear my own echo, my awareness was always limited to my own space, including the reflection of myself on screen.

Radu Solcanu: I tried many times to feel present in the “other” space. Whether I succeeded in that – it’s the audience and the partners who can tell.

Tony Blaya: Smartphones make the work more accurate, because, besides what I mentioned earlier, you also have to take

into account the frame where you take the phone and move, so that you get the characters and the stage on the screen. The factors that impact mostly on the scene are the pace and the perception that you work with a team of people who are kilometres away from you, and all you have is live streaming, which is weird, because there is normally a delay in the connection. Definitely, in the shows we performed, a lot of unanticipated situations occurred, and we had to save the day, knowing that these were behind the curtains and the team – and therefore the audience in Romania should not perceive them, so we had to improvise. The video projector would go off unexpectedly because of the connection, or you'd get a resonance in the phone call and that would impact on the accuracy of your acting, and that was when we had to improvise, irrespective of the language or the pace, we had to save the day. It was really an experience – seeing and hearing through all this technology, the Kinect and all the others, see and hear how the other person was present, even if it was merely a silhouette. But it gave this feeling of being present, which is what the directors were looking for, I believe. The audience attending our shows was truly amazed by what was happening on stage, because they didn't know exactly how it was done, and after the show, when the round table and the questions would start, most people believed the action had been recorded, that the movement with the Kinect had been recorded in advance instead of being live, as in reality.

3. *(Only for Andreea and Ruxandra.) In certain moments, the mother-daughter communication took the form of digital avatar interaction via the Kinect device. Did you perceive the distant actress's presence as more powerful in the scenes with the digital animation, or in the smartphone communication scenes? (I am not referring to the impact on*

the audience, but to the impact on your own acting). Please justify the answer.

- *Even if physical touch was impossible, your avatars were touching on screen. Did this contribute in any way to your sensation that the distant actress was present? What sensation did this “telematic touch” provoke in you? Did it influence your acting in any way?*
- *How would you describe the sensation of your own presence in the scenes with the digital animation? To what extent did you feel present: 1) in the physical space in your own country, 2) on screen (in the virtual space), 3) in the space in the other country.*

Andreea Darie: I think that the impact it had on me was bigger in the scenes controlled through Kinect. I could have replaced the actress with anyone else, with my mother, maybe. The Kinect scenes would give back the initial enthusiasm and the inner story.

Touching our avatars and lacking the real sensation generated an even bigger desire, a kind of desperation, of uselessness, of incapacity. Nonetheless, it helped reactivate the emotional energy. The visual sensation of touching can accumulate more dramatic tension than touching itself.

The presence of the proper self as an avatar determined the attempt to contextualize and to assume a certain delirium. I did not try to locate myself here or there or anywhere. I was just trying to look for her, the mother!

Ruxandra Oancea: I definitely felt more connection whilst using the smartphones, but that was probably also due to the fact that during rehearsals we didn't get the chance to properly explore the digital interaction made possible by the Kinect, since there were a number of technical aspects involved every single time we used it

and there wasn't enough time for playing and improvising. I firmly believe there's still a lot to be explored in that area (the workshops held in 2019 gave us a different insight, allowing us to take a closer look to just how amazing relying on the Kinect can be). On the whole, the Kinect was the only element that could actually create a common ground, by generating a unique atmosphere both actresses could plunge into and modify at will. It's when I knew both audiences were looking at the exact same thing, and since, as an actor, it almost felt like touching my partner for real, it's very likely that, while we used the Kinect, the audience perceived our interaction as they would had we actually shared the space.

4. *During the performance, were you aware of the audience in the other country? Could you hear the distant audience's reactions captured by the microphones in the other country? Did the distant audience's presence influence you in any way during the performance?*

Andreea Darie: The audience in the other space influenced me with regards to controlling the smartphone, its camera. The remote connection, the way in which the phone was positioned or myself in relation to it, it wasn't random. Everything was very well calculated in order to give the Spanish audience the widest possible panorama of the stage in Romania. Being aware of its presence influenced my perception more than any other reaction.

Ruxandra Oancea: I did hear the audience, and there were several moments I can refer to, since they instantly gave me crystal-clear perception of what the audience in Romania must have felt or thought at a certain point. It was slightly disturbing at first, because I wasn't expecting such strong reactions, but absolutely effective because I could now understand how the

audience perceived the story from the other side. My actions ceased to be my own private territory at yet another level, because I now had to add a brand new fourth direction: I had my partners on stage, my partners in Romania, my audience and my other audience, considerably different from the one sitting in front of me, to reach.

Radu Solcanu: I was not aware of the presence of the audience in Spain during the show and I did not hear their reactions.

Tony Blaya: In my view, the audience didn't influence the show; I felt they were there, but they didn't influence the scene.

Actor-Technology Relationship:

5. *The devices that made the communication possible with the distant partners were the smartphone, the video projection, the Kinect (only for Andreea and Ruxandra), the general webcam, microphones, and speakers (since your partners' voices came out of speakers, not out of the smartphone). Did these devices influence your acting in any way in terms of points of focus on stage, physical actions, emotional exchange with the partners, etc.? Did you feel constrained in any way by these technical devices? If so, in what way? How did you negotiate these constraints? Please give details for every device.*

Andreea Darie: The attention, the physical actions, the emotion and the whole ensemble of my construction were decisively influenced by technology, by the communication through the smartphone, the loudspeakers, the microphones, etc. Neither the voice, the face nor the look was the same. The connection was, in

fact, with a character entirely created from imagination. The constraints occurred at the beginning when the adjustment to this new form of theatre performance had to expose its coordinates. I won some to the detriment of others and so on. I think that it was important to discover what was the initial purpose of the performance, to harmonise it within us and between us. Then things worked out for themselves. Of course, no screen, no smartphone could replace life, but what was, in fact, the purpose? - to expose the illusion of communication!

Turning off the sound on the stage was the biggest fear. It meant ending the performance. Without an image we could go on, considering the general webcam which could nevertheless show the scenic actions, but without sound, everything was hopeless. This was one of the fears which, once accepted as such, didn't create problems anymore. *The Planet of Lost Dreams* was a "carpe diem" performance: be here, now, no matter what! You can't anticipate anything!

By interacting through the smartphone, the two characters seem connected, when in fact they aren't. When they interact using Kinect, they await, they long for the connection, they build it and hope to achieve it. It seems like a meeting with one's own "high expectations".

Ruxandra Oancea: I think that, as an actor, it was simply a matter of adapting yourself to whatever you had to use. Even before one mastered the code, everything could be used in one's favour. As a matter of fact, I remember doing just that while we were rehearsing the first scene. My character hasn't seen her family in a long time, so instead of worrying about not being able to see or hear my partners properly over the smartphone, which happened more times than I can count, or about us not being able to adjust our rhythm, or even using our lines the way we probably

meant to a priori, I decided to use every single thing that happened FOR the character. As for the microphone, it was never an issue in my case given my musical theatre background. Seeing myself on camera wasn't a problem in itself, but I did have to remember being on stage at the same time and not get sucked in by the strong visual stimuli.

Radu Solcanu: I disregarded the fact that the voice was coming through the speakers and I acted with the smartphone, as if it was a true partner. It was not easy, but... *(smiles)*

6. *During the performance, you had to pay attention to how you framed the image with the smartphone camera. To what extent did this extra point of focus influence your acting?*

Andreea Darie: During the performance, we had to pay attention to the positioning of the phone, which initially created inner rebellions. But, maybe, that was the actor's development capacity - the organic inclusion of elements of concrete technique in one's own viscera.

Ruxandra Oancea: It was definitely challenging to act and be aware of my own image at the same time, both for the purpose of generating it and controlling its output, even anti-theatrical I would say, since everything inside kept telling me I should be focusing on my partner rather than myself. But sacrificing the shot would basically mean zero interest in the audience way on the other end of Europe, so I did my best so as to continuously keep this relationship at a balance.

Radu Solcanu: Yes, this was an ever-present issue in all shows. It is possible that the acting on stage was harmed. It was a

combination between movie (not to be out of frame, not to break the frame, etc.) and drama, with a great focus on providing the right visual experience for the viewer.

Tony Blaya: As I already commented – the plan had to be adapted so that the scene can fit fully on the screen, and it was a complex thing, because you had to put yourself in a specific position to be sure that all this would be captured and included in the scene.

Interdisciplinarity:

7. *The performance was a hybrid between theatre and film. Did you adapt your acting in any way for the camera (film acting)? If so, how did you negotiate between the specific requirements of theatre and film acting on stage?*

Andreea Darie: I think that I chose for my acting to be as simple as possible. I couldn't say if it was cinema like or theatre like. There were a lot of moments when the dramatic tension had to be theatrically sustained, as well as I can name clearly filmic sequences. Whether they merged or clearly differentiated themselves, I couldn't say exactly. Nevertheless, it has to be specified the fact that the acting varied according to the one leading the scene in every sequence. Also, the closer I was to the smartphone, the bigger the need to lower theatricality and vice versa. I believe that this was the nature of the variations or at least, this is how it seems reasonable to me right now.

Ruxandra Oancea: I do not consider the show to have been a hybrid in that sense at all, since the video image was always the live streaming of the interaction established and going on between

actors on stage, and this video image was always an element of the show on the whole. It ended up blending in just as any other visual element could have, in a given performance. Recorded footage was never involved, so this was more like theatre-meets-the-Internet since it was built on communication tools specific to the digital era. I would, therefore, define it as, of course, theatre, only with several, separate stages involved in live action that are connected via multiple multimedia devices. In terms of the audience's experience, it is a fragmented, partial performance that perfectly suits the world we are living in. The question remains, is it still theatre if we watch it from home? I think the answer might be yes, provided that at least some audience members share the same space as the actor. In our case, it was only a matter of how many more audience members could access that same experience at the same time, even from another theatre venue. They were still audience members as they were all present at the same time in the same space for a live act, whilst I would call those (only possibly) watching at home simply 'viewers'.

Parallel Actions, One Single Performance:

8. *Many times, it was necessary to synchronize your actions with the actors in the other country. How did you manage to synchronize?*

Andreea Darie: The synchrony of the actions was already well established during the rehearsals. The directors were really preoccupied with our stage comfort. When I say "comfort" I don't mean convenience, but stage normality. After we decided from the very beginning which are the decisive elements of each scene, the harmonization occurred naturally. I think that in this case, the

directors, the eyes from outside, those who were watching us and them at the same time, were the ones who framed the situations accordingly and controlled them. Understanding what was asked of us, we dissolved the indications as if they were ours.

Ruxandra Oancea: I do not think it was any different from other rehearsal processes, in that way. Perfect timing is the actor's responsibility. Working together as a whole is precisely what defines a cast, no matter the tools they were given, the circumstances under which they are evolving or the inevitable obstacles that may happen to come in the show's way.

Radu Solcanu: When the internet speed of the Spanish partners was favourable to us, this was not a problem. Actions were synchronised through rehearsals.

Tony Blaya: I took advantage of the change of scenes to change the props and arrange new locations, such as the bed, the bar counter, the hospital office...

9. *How would you describe the rehearsal process for this performance in comparison with a "classical" theatre performance?*

Andreea Darie: For a so-called "classical" theatre performance, you go to rehearsal in order to build every day a little more and more from the product which is about to exist. It's not that in this case it wasn't the same or that it wouldn't be the same in general for any kind of performance. The difference occurs with regards to the means of rehearsal. The technical elements of the performance conditioned the rehearsals. If there was no Internet connection (with everything it means, from apps to microphones and loudspeakers), if the Kinect didn't function, rehearsals would be

impossible to take place. How to build without the central pillar of the play, which is the actress from Spain, the mother? Rehearsals could take place only in conditions similar to those of the performance, otherwise we wouldn't have the object nor the means.

Likewise, for a “classical” theatre performance, the actors harmonize on the stage through each other's presence. In *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, both the essential things and those extremely trivial needed to be specified. Nothing could be anticipated. Rehearsals were like a dissection. You are seeking to know everything in order to have everything!

Ruxandra Oancea: Much more difficult, on a daily basis, even if not entirely different. It was like having ten times as many obstacles and in the most unexpected, previously taken for granted areas, but there was nothing that couldn't be overcome, at least nothing that couldn't have happened in any other type of show.

Radu Solcanu: Rehearsals for this show were challenging, interesting and creative.

Tony Blaya: The process of working was different in this project, because everything was revolving around the Kinect and the cameras that were there, and especially around the connection. There were days when the connection was not stable, but we solved it, and we were able to act with no problems.

10. What were the main difficulties you encountered during rehearsals and, later, during the performances?

Andreea Darie: The main difficulties during rehearsals were: remaining in a certain shape of the character which could not be developed because of the technical setup (it was assigned to technology for a long time, considering the specificity of the

performance), the defective communication, sometimes with the actors from the other country (the communication through the screen and the microphones caused conflicts, essentially non-existent), the construction of the characters was at times oversimplified, the same way the development was affected, the period of adjustment to the character and to the entire universe of that family being short (we don't refer to the whole rehearsal time, but the effective one). I would like to say that in Romania things have gone great and efficiently. Every difficulty was tackled, the communication was impeccable and the work atmosphere was extremely close to the one I would like to encounter all the time.

During the performances, I think that those in charge of the technical part were under the greatest pressure. The rest of us, those on the scene, could only extend some moments, as much as it was necessary to adjust the potential technical issues. But, after all, all we did was stalling. The ones who made the performance work to the end were the members of the technical team.

Ruxandra Oancea: It was a matter of time and being able to adapt, but it was pretty hard not being able to communicate with my partners because so many other things and people sometimes literally stood in the way. Basic human communication tools such as verbal communication were completely ineffective because everyone was speaking several languages at the same time and over the same channel, and most of the times I couldn't even rely on body language since I could only hear my partners but not see them. Technology also seemed to get in the way; although its original purpose was precisely to help us communicate no matter the distance, it sure took some time for us to be able to use it in our favour and see it for what it really was – our best ally.

Radu Solcanu: The only issues – bigger during the rehearsals and small during the shows – were of technical (audio-visual) nature.

Intercultural Experience:

11. How did you relate to the story of the play?

Andreea Darie: Considering that I am really close to the story of the play, my approach was subjective and unwillingly objective at the same time. I think that my emotions came through just as much as I needed to embody the character. I didn't allow the character to get into my heart too much. I tried not to identify myself. It would have consumed me. Maybe I detached myself from time to time. A single instant of closeness to the character was enough to scare me and to run away. Acting requires the self in expression, but not our personal anxieties and anguishes too, which are of no interest in art if they are just exposed. We use them in a detached and clever manner, we control them by taking them with us. It's drama. It's acting. It's not grief!

Ruxandra Oancea: The story draws from a harsh reality we are facing right now, that of the separated families scattered all over Europe, and not always by choice. Given my background of having lived in both Romania and Spain, this story is completely relatable for me.

Radu Solcanu: The story is touching, and as a professional actor – and first of all as a human being – there is no way not to empathise with it.

12. You had both Romanian and Spanish acting partners. Did the communication language and/or the cultural differences influence your acting in any way?

Andreea Darie: The language didn't influence me in any way, quite the contrary, it gave me even bigger freedom of expression. I was feeling closer to my peers. This remark is slightly selfish, but still, a certain feeling of communion was created. Likewise, I don't think that the cultural differences had any influence on the acting game. The reference to the project was instead the one which created clear differences among us. Either we were too involved, either they were too relaxed. What is certain is that we did not consume the same working principles.

Ruxandra Oancea: The answer is yes, completely. It was also an amazing experience to be able to work in both languages at the same time, and in a theatre performance meant for audiences from both Spain and Romania, simultaneously. I had to separate and blend at the same time.

Tony Blaya: The team that was replying from Romania was only speaking English and Romanian, which was affecting our language, because those of us who didn't have such good command of the language, we used the "gymnastics language" in order to understand each other. Also, of course, Ruxandra, our partner, was always there, and since she speaks several languages, she was an interpreter and an actress at the same time. I don't think any of this would have been possible without her.

Radu Solcanu: No.

13. Did you discover anything new about migration or about the co-existence of multiple cultures in the European space?

Did your opinion on migration, multiculturalism and interculturalism change in any way as a result of this experience?

Andreea Darie: Since I was a little child, I understood a lot about migration that I wish I didn't understand at that time. Instead, it confirmed me that the nationality towards which people migrate shouldn't be the cause of our pains. Whatever the grievances, they are ours. No people is guilty that Romania is losing its workforce through the migration of its citizens. I just reconfirmed myself that I have to make peace with the Italian people, it is not its fault. It didn't steal anything from me.

Ruxandra Oancea: Since I was/am a migrant myself – I kind of feel it goes both ways between the two countries I've lived in – it was extremely rewarding for me to be able to explore both perspectives at the same time.

Radu Solcanu: I didn't discover anything new. I was aware of this issue, as I have similar cases in my family (3rd-4th degree kin).

Tony Blaya: About the topic – it was an everyday thing, so, generally speaking, everything was ok. A woman leaving the country to go abroad and work, and leaving her daughter and husband behind, in the country of origin. As time goes by, the relationship gets colder, frictions come in and the husband becomes jealous, which, because of the remoteness and the lack of interest and because of other things as well, makes her turn into a different person, who wants to live a different life, without waiting for the conversations on skype. She only wants to live a peaceful life, and that's why she gets a new life, which is what puts a definitive end to her marriage in Romania.

Professional Development:

14. Did this experience help you develop professionally in any way? Did you discover anything new about you as actress / actor? Did you discover anything new about the theatre and what it can be in the digital age?

Andreea Darie: About me, as an actress, if I can say so, I learned to control. The stage will always be the actor's territory. He /she can cancel or justify anything. As long as the actor knows this and acts as such, nothing can go wrong.

Ruxandra Oancea: For the audience, theatre is a matter of perspective, it is the angle you choose or are given, it is the place from where you are looking at something. Where you stand determines what you see and how you see it, and everything else goes from there. It was a gift for me, as an actress, to be able to play with so many different points of view at the same time. We had to choose what the audience would see every single moment, and the possibilities were endless. I think I've learned more than my intellect can grasp, since the levels at which an actor can learn are also endless.

Radu Solcanu: Working on this project enriched my professional experience, and I also discovered a wonderful team, we had a great collaboration most of the time. I would repeat this experience at any time.

Tony Blaya: This experience helped me get involved in a different way, in a vision of drama that is more adapted to cinema, and I would repeat such an experience, because you can learn from your colleagues, from the culture of another country, from the body language – which is different from ours in some cases; you learn

from the other way of directing the stage and from the other aspects that have to do with technology; this is why the opportunity to be part of this project was interesting for me.

15. Would you like to be part of another telematic performance in the future?

Andreea Darie: A second experience with the telematic theatre would be a great chance in my acting development, having the possibility to really put into practice everything that I discovered during the project.

Ruxandra Oancea: Definitely yes.

Radu Solcanu: Yees.

16. Would you have any recommendations for the artists involved in the creation of such telematic performances?

Andreea Darie: I don't think that I am in a position to give any recommendations. The only thing I can say is: have faith and be patient! Meanwhile, the actor creates life! Don't be afraid of technology! It exists to help you!

Ruxandra Oancea: Just let themselves be absorbed into it and become a part. Pretty much what I would tell any actor, that is to not resist things they've never worked with before but use everything that comes up in one's favour.

Radu Solcanu: Use all their informational, cultural and physical resources, because this type of acting is not easy. But it is worth it!

Interview with Interaction Designer Cristian Iordache (Mindscape Studio)

Interviewer: Marina Hanganu

1. For how long have you been working in the field of arts & technology? What is your main area of expertise?

I have been working in the field since graduating from the New Media Department at the University of Arts in Bucharest. In the last year there, in 2008, I started to be more interested in installation art and also discovered a programming language (Cycling '74 Max) targeted towards artists. Together with a friend, I started messing around with it, trying to learn as much as possible. Soon after, at a workshop, I discovered Arduino, a microcontroller and open-source platform dedicated to artists and makers. And that was it. I was totally hooked. Since then I have been building many projects together with my colleagues from interactive platforms for dance and theatre shows to light sculptures, from audio-visual installations to interactive installations. My main area of expertise is interaction design.

2. Have you worked on any projects similar to Tele-Encounters?

Most of the big projects I worked on brought new challenges and *Tele-Encounters* is no exception. There are some similarities to other projects I worked on. But that is up to a point. For example, we built a few platforms for real-time interaction on stage, but I never got to work on a theatre piece that was to be played at the same time in two different places at the same time.

3. Please describe the process of technological development before the start of rehearsals.

The first part of the project is the most important. The decisions that I take during this time will entirely affect the outcome. This is the period when we create the concept based on an idea, decide which technology to use and how to use it and generally plan the project. No matter how big the project is, I use a project management application to plan and track all the tasks ahead of us. It also helps me better manage the team and keep the client informed at each step. Because of the uncertainty of a project at this phase, people tend to be rush and regret later on. Fortunately, the directors of *Tele-Encounters* and their team had the general project well planned. So, this made our work a lot easier. But, of course, at this stage, there are some unknowns in regard to what the show will look like in the end. The next step after budget approvals was to gather the team and start working on the ideas presented by the directors. But not before reconfirming the direction of the project with the directors. Some ideas were scrapped at this stage. Other ideas were welcomed. Afterwards we started building parts of the application, testing them throughout and discussing them with the directors. And this went on for about four months. At the end, we had the custom-made applications specifically tailored for *Tele-Encounters* rehearsals and show. Soon after, we went to install them on location at The *George Ciprian* Theatre in Buzau, Romania, and later on in Murcia, Spain. The next step was the training part so that the theatre technical team involved in the project could manage the rehearsals by themselves.

4. The pre-rehearsal period, however, was not the only one dedicated to tech development. What was the specificity of the technological development process during rehearsals and throughout the actual run time of the performance compared to other projects you have worked on?

From my point of view, it is always more difficult to work on a theatre or dance project than it is for a commercial project because the directors and choreographers don't yet fully know what they would want to achieve from the early stage of development. This is understandable considering it is hard to know what direction the show will take until the actors or dancers are on stage rehearsing. So, things had to be adjusted or changed completely. But, all in all, this part was easier than expected.

5. What were the main challenges of Tele-Encounters?

For this project we had to build a platform that integrated a mobile and desktop video chat application, an interactive animation controlled by the actors on stage, and a projection application. All this was running at the same time in both locations, had to be perfectly synchronized in order to work and had to be managed by the theatre technical team without our input. So I would say that was a big challenge. We also worked a lot online because our offices are in Bucharest and the rehearsals were done at the same time in Buzău, Romania and Murcia, Spain. We have clients around the world so we are used to working remotely, but this was more demanding considering the two separate locations.

6. Were there any professional gains from working on Tele-Encounters?

As we consider ourselves a research and development company, we consider any project of this complexity to be a new learning experience.

PART III: 360° FILM EXHIBITION



Ellipses VR Film Exhibition (Lousada, Portugal)

photo: Município de Lousada

Films created by Creative Lemons: Daniel Martins, Cristina Leite, Vânia Silva, Sofia Ferreira.

Producer: Município de Lousada (PT)

The Sense of Presence in Cinematic Virtual Reality

Marina Hanganu

CONTENTS:

- I. Introduction**
- II. Migration as Film Subject**
- III. Cinematic Virtual Reality (CVR)**
- IV. Telepresence, presence or sensation of presence?**
- V. Methodology**
- VI. The Audience's Profile**
- VII. Physical Presence and Mental Absorption**
- VIII. Factors Contributing to the Sense of Presence**
 - IX. Factors Hindering the Sense of Presence**
 - X. Insights into Migration**
 - XI. Empathy?**
- XII. Conclusions**

Bibliography

Annex

I. Introduction

For the second part of the *Tele-Encounters* project, Município de Lousada commissioned multimedia artists Daniel Martins, Cristina Leite and their team (Creative Lemons) to create five 360° short films on the theme of Portuguese migration. These were inspired by twenty interviews with Portuguese migrants and left-behind families taken by Adelaide Pacheco, assistant project manager in Lousada. The Creative Lemons were in charge of the whole production process, from writing the scripts to delivering the films. As artistic director and initiator of *Tele-Encounters*, I created the framework for the films to come into existence but have not been directly involved in their creation.

The Mother, Return, Happy Family, We're Six, and Dream Future vary in length between five and nine minutes and explore different life situations related to migration in a realistic and straightforward style, “with as little effects as possible” (Martins & Leite 2019). Spatialised sound accompanies all films, accurately matching the direction and distance of the sound sources in relation to the viewers. If the viewer turns her head, the direction of the sound is consistent with the position of the person or object emitting it.

We presented the films on VR headsets in Portugal, Spain, and Romania to a total audience of approximately 850 people under the collective title *Ellipses VR Exhibition*. The exhibition was open for one month, March-April or April-May, depending on the country. The participants were invited to complete a Google Forms questionnaire about the films - those who could not complete it online did so on paper, and we later inserted their answers in the Google sheet.

This essay explores the concept of presence in the five short films based on the audience responses⁶¹ and existent theories about presence, telepresence, and immersion.

II. Migration as Film Subject

Let us briefly go over the stories of the five short films which are all inspired by real-life situations identified in the interviews.

The Mother brings about a family which is dysfunctional because of the father's drinking problem. He emigrates after losing his job, to his twenty-something daughter's relief. While he is away, the mother is diagnosed with cancer. Throughout her illness, the father and daughter become close, and he quits drinking. The film is black and white for the most part, then gradually colours as the father-daughter relationship improves.

Return opens with a black and white distant view of a young couple leaving home. We hear their reverberating voiceovers telling their parents they are emigrating for their children to have a better life. The action then jumps into the future, and the video turns to colour. The man and woman are now old and have just come back to their Portugal home, where their adult daughter awaits them. Soon, the daughter tells them she will emigrate to France, the country where she was born. As they say goodbye to her, the old parents are disappointed that they could not prevent her from repeating their choice.

Happy Family presents the disruption provoked by a father emigrating to support his family in Portugal. Initially, we see him playing football with his two sons. The mother takes a

⁶¹ I would like to thank sociologist Mircea Kivu for making the calculations. All data that fed into this study was coagulated into tables and charts with his help. The full results of the questionnaire can be consulted in the Annex.

family picture – their lives seem fulfilled. However, the man soon goes to work abroad. Even if he brings presents when he comes home to visit, his youngest son has turned against him. In the end, there is a conversation between the mother and the boy. Years have passed and, although he now understands why his father had to emigrate, he realises their relationship will never be the same again.

We're Six foregrounds a similar situation. We take part in the hide and seek game played by a father and his four children. The mother interrupts them and announces dinner time, so we get to sit in the middle of the table, surrounded by the joyful family. In the next scene, they say goodbye - the father is forced to emigrate, and for the next part of the film, we witness the family's suffering. The mother plunges into depression, so her children are mostly raised by their grandmother and aunt. The story is told from the eldest daughter's perspective, who takes on the role of both her parents and cares for her younger siblings.

Dream Future is perhaps the brightest film since it features a love story. A young pair decide to get married. We are there when he proposes, and later, when she tells him, they will have a child. She has just finished her Ph.D. in psychology, while he works in a bank, so their social status is higher compared to the other characters. Nevertheless, the bank he works for relocates to Spain, and he is offered a well-paid position in the Spanish branch. Despite being a young mother, his wife encourages him to leave, invoking the ease of Internet communication. In the last scene, we see them talking via Skype – they make plans for all three to move to Spain, the man's salary being big enough to support his wife and baby daughter.

The main reason we chose immersive film to tell stories of migration was to bring the viewers closer to the condition of being a migrant or a left-behind family member. Empathy was considered an aim and at the same time, a tool for raising

awareness about the consequences of migration (we will see next if this was the case). What is more, the films were intended to make people feel less lonely in their situation by comparing their experience with that of other persons affected by migration. I perceived the sense of “being there” as a potential route to attaining these objectives, so I set out to explore it in the films created by the Portuguese artists (Creative Lemons company).

III. Cinematic Virtual Reality (CVR)

We called the film exhibition a VR (Virtual Reality) experience for ease of understanding by the audience, although distinctions should be made between VR and 360° film (CVR).

The commonly held view of a VR environment is one in which the participant-observer is totally immersed in a completely synthetic world, which may or may not mimic the properties of a real-world environment, either existing or fictional, but which may also exceed the bounds of physical reality [...] (Milgram et al. 1994: 283)

In 360° film, as in certain VR experiences⁶², the immersive world is experienced from the first-person point of view via goggles and headphones that substitute for the user’s senses. The films created in *Tele-Encounters* are part of what has recently been called “Cinematic Virtual Reality,” or CVR, which does not use real-time computer-generated content as VR does, but “pre-rendered picture and sound elements exclusively” (Mateer 2017: 15). In other words, the participant in a CVR experience, unlike in pure VR, cannot move within the world of the film, nor interact with any of its elements. The participant’s only freedom is to

⁶² A CAVE environment, on the other hand, offers a VR experience without the need for goggles.

choose what to see at any one time in the environment that surrounds her by turning or tilting her head. However, her position in the virtual space remains fixed, coinciding with that of the 360° camera used for filming.

IV. **Telepresence, presence or sensation of presence?**

When we started *Tele-Encounters*, we employed the term “telepresence” to designate both the experience of being present remotely in a physical space and that of being immersed in a 360° film. **However, our research has led us to redraft the definition of telepresence with the purpose of more clearly differentiating between the artistic experiences enabled by technology.** In the end, there is no right or wrong in the definitions used as long as they help us better comprehend the observed phenomena. Of course, reshaping a concept can only stem from previous research about its existent meanings.

The term “telepresence” was coined by Marvin Minsky in 1980 in the field of telerobotics. In its narrow and technical sense, telepresence involves performing physical actions via telerobots in a remote and often hostile environment. Sherman and Craig emphasize the distinction between teleoperation and telepresence, with the latter involving the *first-person* point of view on the distant location and the former an *external* point of view (Sherman & Craig 2003: 21). In telepresence, the user receives sensory feedback from the remote space (visual, auditory, but most importantly, *haptic*) whereby she gets the sense of “being there” (Minsky 1980).

Perhaps this second dimension of Minsky’s definition (the sensation of “being there”) and the first-person point of view involved in telepresence inspired the adoption of the term in

virtual reality research in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Bracken & Botta 2010: 40). From there, it expanded to include any experience enabled by popular media, such as television, watching a film or navigating the Internet:

Telepresence requires the use of technology and results in a psychological state in which media users voluntarily suspend the experience of mediation in order to feel a sense of connection with the mediated content they are using (e.g., part of the action, connected to characters, involved in the story line). This state is often influenced by the expectation of the technology, the media content, and characteristics of the media user. A sense of telepresence is felt by media users when the technology becomes transparent in the interaction. (Bracken et al. in Bracken & Botta 2010: 42)

The above definition equates “presence” with “telepresence,” the terms being used interchangeably by some theorists, especially in VR research. **The “illusion of non-mediation” invoked by Bracken et al. is essential to VR experiences, and we have used it as a benchmark for assessing our audience’s experience of presence in the world of the films.** Nevertheless, the above understanding of telepresence is perhaps too broad to serve the analysis of 360° films.

In their 1997 article, ‘At The Heart of It All’, Lombard and Ditton make a refined analysis of the concept of “presence” in mediated experiences, reviewing definitions and grouping them into six categories: 1) presence as social richness, 2) presence as realism, 3) presence as transportation, 4) presence as immersion, 5) presence as social actor within medium, 6) presence as medium as social actor. “Presence as transportation” includes

“telepresence” and “virtual presence” as distinct subcategories. Lombard and Ditton conclude their article by remarking that further discussion is needed to establish whether the multiple dimensions of presence are part of a single yet multifaceted concept or should be conceived as distinct (Lombard & Ditton 1997).

In a similar vein, we can ask whether the various types of telepresence (belonging to telerobotics, telematics, VR, popular media) are part of a prismatic concept or should be treated as enabling different experiences. In our study about *The Planet of Lost Dreams* telematic performance, we have adapted the definition of telepresence to suit a theatre context: telepresence is a real-time technological link between remote bodies, objects, and spaces that can enable a range of actions performed from a distance (physical, visual or auditory). In the same essay, we have shown how VR and telepresence overlap when connecting remote people in real time, like in VR social media apps (e.g., AltspaceVR). **For the sake of clarity, we will use a term other than “telepresence” to describe VR experiences which do not enable real-time networking between remote persons.** CVR falls under this category. Would the term “presence” be more appropriate, then?

The discussion surrounding “presence” is even wider than the one about “telepresence,” insofar as “presence” incorporates discourses from various fields, such as philosophy, psychology, performance theory, acting theory or New Media theory. “Presence” can equally refer to a person’s “being physically there”, the quality of her “being there” (like in the actor’s or performer’s presence) (Féral 2012: 30), the feeling of presence in simulated environments (VR) and telepresence (Giannachi & Kaye 2017: 9). At least when it comes to art, theorists are often polarised between asserting the existence of a “real” presence, which they ascribe to

physical bodies in physical environments (e.g., Peggy Phelan and Erika Fischer-Lichte), and the impossibility or lack of utility of opposing “real presence” to its “effects” or illusion. As Giannachi and Kaye point out, the latter discourse is heavily influenced by Jacques Derrida’s theory of deconstruction, in which meaning and presence (the *signified*) are never fixed, but always emerge by “*movement and difference*” in relation to an endless chain of signs (Giannachi & Kaye 2017: 16).

While I agree that “... oppositions between ‘presence effects’ and ‘presence itself’ plainly risk the installation of a normative (and privileged) mode and state of presence” (Giannachi & Kaye 2017: 19), I will argue that *this depends on the context*. Indeed, there is no reason to favour physical presence over mediated presence *in performance* (or art in general for that matter) by reverting to a presupposed “ontology of performance” (Phelan 1993). However, our interviews with migrants and left-behind families have revealed that physical presence is essential to family life, especially when children are very young and their parents far away. “You cannot hug the computer; it could break” (*Tele-Encounters Interview 17* 2018), said a child we interviewed in Romania. For families separated by migration, there is undoubtedly a big difference between “presence itself” and its technological surrogates. As a tribute to the persons who have shared with us their stories, **I will further refer to the “sensation of presence” and not to “presence itself” when discussing the feeling of “being there” induced by 360° films.**

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first acceptation of “sensation” is that of “a physical feeling or perception resulting from something that happens to or comes into contact with the body.” However, the word designates both “the capacity to have physical sensations” and “an inexplicable

awareness or impression.” We can deduce that “sensation” has two dimensions, a physical and a psychological one, providing a direct link to “immersion,” another fundamental concept of 360° film. Lombard and Ditton (1997) speak of “presence as immersion” in its two components: the perceptual, pertaining to the user’s senses which are submerged (immersed) in the virtual world, and the psychological, also identified as mental absorption. Our questionnaires aimed to assess both characteristics, as we will see further.

V. Methodology

We set out to establish by quantitative methods what sort of sensation of presence the participants in our exhibition felt and the factors which influenced it. The questionnaire comprised eleven questions, ten of them closed-ended and one open-ended (which required a qualitative analysis). Four questions were dedicated to audience profiling based on their relation to migration and their age, while the rest focused on their experience of the films. The last item was open-ended, asking for a justification to question number ten: “Have the films made you understand better the problems and/or advantages of undertaking migration?”. The films were viewed on VR headsets by approximately 850 people in the three countries - Romania (450), Spain (150) and Portugal (250) – out of which only 249 persons completed the questionnaire (47 in Romania, 70 in Spain and 132 in Portugal). This is partly explainable by the young age of some of the visitors in Romania (children under eleven were not given a form). Moreover, some of the questionnaires were not analysed because they were incomplete, thereby the margin of error is approximately 5%. The total audience size was also influenced by the number of VR headsets available in each country – two devices in Spain, five in

Romania and twenty-five in Portugal. Watching a 360° film is an individual experience, as one single person can use one headset at a time.

The theories about presence discussed in the previous section and New Media studies served as interpreting filters for the responses.

Table 1: Margin of error calculation

Population size	Sample	Confidence level	Margin of Error⁶³
850	249	95%	±5%

VI. The Audience’s Profile

We have applied two main criteria to determine the viewers’ profile: their age and their relation to migration. For the purpose of our study, we have defined migration as the condition of living in a country different from one’s own for at least one year.

Overall, most visitors to the CVR exhibition were high-school students aged 15-18 (45% of the respondents), this being the most representative group in Portugal (67% of the respondents) and Romania (45% of the respondents). However, in Spain, 75% of the audience were aged 19-25. Young adults form the second-sized category, representing 11% of respondents in Romania and 17% in Portugal. The third groups at the level of the consolidated results are those of people aged 26-35 (6%) and 36-45 (6%), whereas only a small number of persons over the age of 45 responded to the questionnaire and potentially visited the exhibition.

The reasons for this are mostly related to the context in which the films were presented – both The “George Ciprian”

⁶³ I calculated the margin of error using online instruments (Margin of Error Calculator) – see website in bibliography.

Theatre (Romania) and Município de Lousada (Portugal) regularly organise activities for children and teenagers, who are often brought to the events by their teachers as part of extra-school activities. On the other hand, UCAM (Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia – Spain) is a university, so they invited their students to experience the films. Nevertheless, the exhibition was open to anyone interested – apparently, relatively few people over the age of 25 took part. This seems to confirm the over-repeated statement that young people (the Z generation born 1996-2010) are the most likely to enjoy technology-based experiences (Business Insider 2019).

84% of the respondents have never lived outside their country of origin for more than one year: few persons were ex-migrants (5% of the total respondents), while 11% were current migrants⁶⁴. Notwithstanding, migration does affect 81.5% of the people who answered the questionnaire - in total, only 46 persons have no connection to migration (18.5% of respondents). In Romania, 62% have close family members living abroad (parents, siblings, grandparents), compared to 30% in Spain and none in Portugal. Conversely, most people in Portugal and Spain have extended family members who are emigrants.

As in the case of our telematic theatre performance, the results have contradicted to some degree our initial assumptions about the audience's profile. We had expected to find fewer people in Spain with a direct relationship to migration and quite a significant group in Portugal with close family members living abroad (there was no one in this situation, though). Irrespective of

⁶⁴ Nevertheless, it is likely that the respondents in Spain did not pay attention to the “one year” condition stipulated in the question – they might in fact have been Erasmus students (so not literally migrants). Informal discussions with our project partners confirmed that Erasmus students experienced the films, yet we cannot know for certain whether they account for the 12 people who reported being migrants.

the type of connection they had to migration, it is significant that a large portion of our national audiences were in a form or another affected by it.

In Romania, the third question read “Are you informed about the situation of Romanian emigrants around the world?”, while in Portugal and Spain it referred to Portuguese migrants. We inserted this slight variation since Romania and Portugal⁶⁵ were considered countries of emigration and Spain one of immigration. Hence, we tried to formulate the question to be familiar to each audience, although we had expected the topic of Portuguese migration to be quite foreign to the audience in Spain – we thus preferred to gauge their awareness of the condition of immigrants in Spain. The participants in Portugal were the most closely informed, 79% choosing “Yes, [I am informed] rather by relatives and friends who have left their country of origin” and only 9% stating they are not informed at all. At the opposite end, Spain had the highest rate of uninformed people about the situation of Portuguese immigrants, which is explainable by the remoteness of the subject. Nonetheless, even if the films were about Portuguese migration, the audience in Spain recognised the broader issues at play, as we will see in the qualitative analysis of the last question. Romania stands in the middle, with almost equal percentages for those informed by their relatives and friends living abroad, those informed from the press and those unfamiliar with the topic (namely the situation of the Romanian diaspora).

VII. Physical Presence and Mental Absorption

“How would you describe your sensation of “being there” in the world of the film?” This multiple-choice question also allowed respondents to insert other options. 65% of the participants chose

⁶⁵ In fact, this changed in 2017 for Portugal (AFP 2018).

“I felt physically there,” 35% chose “I was mentally and emotionally absorbed in the film,” while 8% made alternative comments. The two types of presence (physical and psychological) overlapped in the case of only 19 people (8%)⁶⁶, thus **in most cases, the physical and psychological sense of presence were not experienced at the same time, at least not consciously**. The percentage of persons feeling “physically there” was higher for those under 18⁶⁷ than for the rest⁶⁸, although the sensation of physical presence was prevalent for people over 18 as well. Moreover, on a scale from one to five, children and teenagers reported a more intense feeling of presence (overall score: 4.03) compared to those over 18 (overall score: 3.35), who also tended to be more critical of what they saw.

I will hypothesise that the sensation of physical presence was stronger for most users because VR / CVR experiences were not familiar to them. Indeed, VR technology has become extremely accessible, yet arguably, few people have headsets at home. It would have been informative to include a question on first time or frequency of use of VR technology to test this claim. Lombard and Ditton explain how one’s prior knowledge of and experience with the medium can influence the sensation of presence. The more one is familiar with the medium, the more one notices its flaws: “The situation is analogous to a magician who knows how a trick is performed and is therefore unimpressed with the illusion.” (Lombard & Ditton 1997).⁶⁹ Perhaps the sensation of

⁶⁶ Which is why the added percentages are over 100%.

⁶⁷ 72% of the respondents under 18 chose “I felt physically there”.

⁶⁸ 58% of the respondents over 18 chose “I felt physically there”.

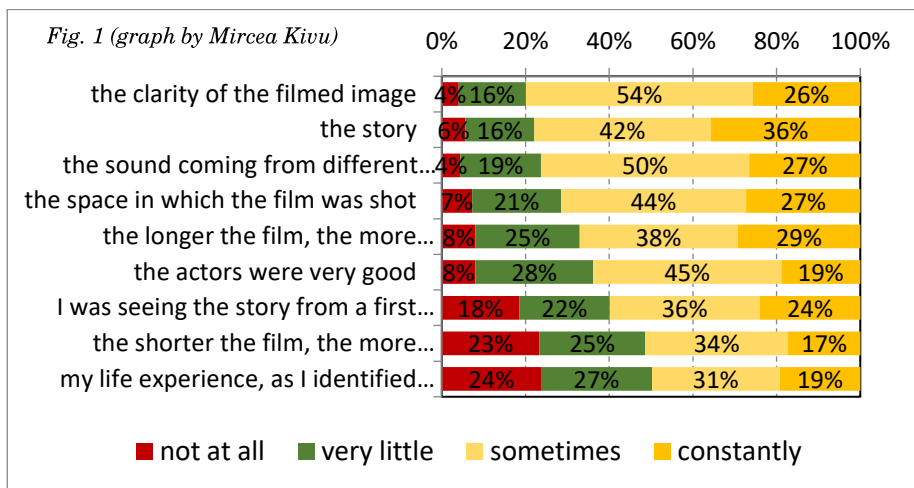
⁶⁹ Conversely, they also refer to the situation when an interactive experience can hinder the sensation of presence because the user is unfamiliar with the medium and she does not know how to use it.

“being there” provoked a “wow” effect in the experimenter that outshined to some extent the content of the films.

VIII. Factors Contributing to the Sense of Presence

We created a rating scale for factors potentially contributing to the audience’s sensation of presence. Respondents were invited to choose whether the variable under discussion made them feel present in the world of the films *constantly*, *sometimes*, *very little* or *not at all*. During the analysis, answers featuring *constantly* and *sometimes* were associated with a strong influence, while the *very little* and *not at all* with a weak influence. The percentages below refer to the number of people who assigned “sometimes” or “constantly” to a factor. Judged at the level of all types of presence (physical, psychological, and other), the ranking of factors in the order of their strength of influence was the following:

1. the clarity of the filmed image (chosen as a strong factor by 80% of respondents)
2. the story (78%)
3. the sound coming from different directions corresponding to the directions of the filmed images (77%)
4. the space in which the film was shot (71%)
5. the longer the film, the more present I felt (67%)
6. the actors were very good (64%)
7. I was seeing the story from the first-person point of view, so I had a role in it (60%)
8. the shorter the film, the more present I felt (51%)
9. my life experience, as I identified with some of the characters (50%)



Insofar as physical presence and mental absorption were rarely experienced simultaneously, we have made a comparative study of the aspects influencing each. The percentages were calculated based on the number of people who chose “I felt physically there” and “I felt mentally and emotionally absorbed in the film”. Those who selected both options were counted under both rubrics.

Table 2: comparison between factors of influence (own table using Mircea Kivu’s calculations)

“I felt physically there”	“I felt mentally and emotionally absorbed in the film”
clarity of the filmed image (82%) ⁷⁰	story (92%)
space (78%)	clarity of the filmed image (85%)
sound (78%)	sound (82%)
story (77%)	longer films (75%)
longer films (68.5%)	the first-person point of view (72%)
the actors were very good (64%)	the actors were very good (71%)
the first-person point of view (60%)	space (68%)
shorter films (57%)	my life experience (61%)
my life experience (49%)	shorter films (55%)

Some of the disparities in the ranking are significant (where we notice a difference of more than 10% between the physical presence and psychological presence columns for the same factor). **The space in which the films were shot determined people’s sense of physical presence** more than their mental absorption: 78% of the persons who experienced physical presence chose **space** as a factor of influence compared to 68% of those who felt psychologically immersed. This correlates to what Lombard and

⁷⁰ This means that 82% of those who chose “I felt physically there” referred to the clarity of the filmed image as a strong factor of influence by rating it with either *sometimes* or *constantly*.

Ditton (1997) called “presence as transportation” (“you are *there*” in the mediated environment), although it is not clear how it differs from what they name “presence as perceptual immersion.” The influence of space points to how important it is for the participant to look around and explore the filmed environment. In other words, the condition of being immersed per se is hugely relevant for the sensation of physical presence, space standing on at least an equal footing with the story.

By contrast, those who were mentally and emotionally involved in the films were more influenced by **the story** (92%), followed by **the subjective point of view** (“I saw the story from the first-person point of view, so I had a role in it” – 72%) and their **life experience**, which caused them to identify with some of the characters (61%). Lombard and Ditton refer to the “social realism” of the content as potentially affecting one’s sense of presence – the consistency of the story and characters and the recognisable life situations can render the film more convincing (be it 360° or not). Whenever the content is flawed, the illusion is broken, as the artificial and mediated nature of the experience is brought to the fore.

As anyone who watches movies or television knows, the storylines, characters, and acting in some media content is more realistic than in others. In a dramatic film or an interactive video game if the story makes sense and doesn't depend only on coincidence, if the characters act in consistent and understandable ways, if the actors skillfully and convincingly create their personae, the experience is more likely to “ring true” for consumers. (Lombard & Ditton 1997)

I will add this is specifically valid for fiction films since they rely more on the “willingness to suspend disbelief” that Lombard and Ditton (1997) include under the “media user variables” influencing presence.

The **subjective point of view** inherent in VR and CVR experiences implies that the viewer becomes part of the world of the film, seeing it as if through another entity’s eyes. While immersed in the 360° film, one can participate by reacting psychologically or even physically to stimuli in the mediated environment (Lombard & Ditton 1997). Nevertheless, as we will discuss further in this essay, the subjective point of view per se is not enough for creating a sense of presence.

The other elements the audience could choose from are similar in their influence on both the physical and psychological sense of presence: the clarity of the filmed image, spatialised sound, the quality of acting and the longer time spent in the film world. The clarity of the filmed image actually refers to the interface between the user and the immersive world. If the film does not have a good resolution, or if the headset lenses are dirty and blur the image, one is reminded that she is not really part of the world of the film. The interface (the screen, the device enabling the experience), which in VR and CVR is meant to be invisible, is rendered visible. Sound matching the visual space supports the illusion of spatiality as it contributes to the masking of the interface. Space and time (the length of the film) are the very structural dimensions of the immersive world – the results show that most participants appreciated more the longer films since they could spend more time inside the fictional world.⁷¹

⁷¹ However, too much time spent in VR (wearing the VR headset) can have adverse effects on the body, especially because of motion sickness (the body does not move, yet you have the sensation of moving because of what you see in VR). Symptoms such as nausea, blurred vision, headaches and not only are specified in the

IX. Factors Hindering the Sense of Presence

19 persons chose “other” when asked what sort of sensation of presence they experienced in the films⁷². While their number is small, I think it is worth going over the alternative answers they provided. Most comments referring to the impossibility of feeling present in the films came from Spain. Apart from being the most mature, the participants in Spain were also the most specialised ones according to our partners at UCAM, who mentioned in informal discussions that they presented the films predominantly to audio-visual and multimedia students. We could group the comments into the following categories:

- **It was a different experience: I felt like an object in the room (e.g., a cup), like a spy, like an invisible ghost**
- The quality of the films prevented me from feeling present: I did not like the films, I was bored, the content did not reach me, there could be technical improvements
- Cinematic language: “Everything is in a wide shot, far from the persons (who have to approach you)”; “I think it's easier to convey concrete feelings if the filmmaker chooses the shots” (a preference for classical film over 360°)
- Lack of involvement of the viewer in the story: “It did not involve me”

It is interesting to note that some audience members perceived their re-embodiment (e.g., into an object) or lack of it (e.g., the

instructions of use for all VR headsets. Therefore, most VR/CVR experiences are quite short. Some of our visitors informally reported feeling slightly sick.

⁷² These persons selected “other” instead of choosing “I felt physically there” or “I felt mentally and emotionally absorbed in the film”.

ghost status) as a “different experience” rather than a vehicle for feeling present in the environment of the film. **Such comments could indicate that the sense of presence, the point of view, and the viewer’s embodiment in CVR are not indissolubly connected after all.** This path could be pursued in future research, yet it exceeds the limits of the current essay.

The answers above (grouped under the “other” category) can be contextualised by examining all the replies given by participants when asked to select the elements that hindered their sensation of presence. In total, 40% of the audience chose “nothing prevented me from feeling fully present.” However, there is a big discrepancy between Romania and Portugal on the one hand and Spain on the other hand since in Spain only 7% of the respondents stated they felt wholly present. The ranking of responses concerning the factors which hindered presence is the following:

1. Nothing prevented me from feeling fully present (40%)
2. The film cuts (jumping from one scene to another) (20%)
Sounds coming from the real world (20%)
3. My role in the story was not clear – who was I in the story? (18%)
4. The rather poor technical quality of the filmed image (12%)
5. The filmed image was moving, while I was not moving (8%)
The acting was poor (8%)
The story was poor (8%)
6. The film was too short (6%)
7. The VR glasses (4%)
8. The film was too long (2%)

In general, the top issues impeding the sensation of presence were the film cuts (jumping from one scene to the other) and the external sounds coming from the exhibition space, followed by the lack of clarity about the viewer’s role in the story (“my role in the

story was not clear - who was I in the story?"). It is worth noting that these have to do with the specificity of the 360° medium.

According to Lev Manovich, VR implies a continuity of experience similar to that of real life which obeys the laws of physics. This continuity is consistent with the first-person point of view of VR and CVR. By contrast, the aesthetics of montage typical of what I will call "classical" film⁷³ is discontinuous, operating by jumps from one shot to another (Manovich 2001: 135-136). In tune with John Mateer, I will argue that CVR follows similar principles to VR experiences, relying on continuity of experience and therefore, single-takes instead of montage (Mateer 2017: 18-19). Unless the sudden change of space or point of view is conceptually integrated, it can be utterly unsuitable. From my point of view, one of the main problems of the short films created as part of *Tele-Encounters* is that the artists used a cinematic language that was not appropriate for 360° film, but classical film. The numerous cuts disrupted the viewer's experience since any cut in CVR is an experiential jump. In the films we are discussing, this was literally the equivalent of space-time jumps that were not always controlled artistically but rather served a functional purpose.

Another medium-specific issue that was not fully accounted for was the viewer's position in the film. As people have commented, they were an invisible entity without a body whose presence was never acknowledged – so why should they have felt present? The body of the user is not visible in CVR since it is actually substituted by the camera doing the filming. In addition, the presence of the camera itself was effaced in post-production by removing all its shadows and its tripod in Photoshop, thereby hiding the mediated nature of the experience. The out-of-body status of the viewer in CVR was described as the "Swayze-effect" by Matt Bourdette and is effectively summarised by Jones and

⁷³ "Classical" film = not 360°.

Dawkins: “This is the idea derived from Swayze’s role in Hollywood film *Ghost* (1990), where he is present but has no agency, cannot interact and has no tangible relationship with the environment” (Jones & Dawkins 2018: 303). What is more, Bourdette also relates the Swayze-effect to “a lack of connection to the characters, environment, and in turn, the story.” (Bourdette 2015). This is precisely what some of our audience members seem to have felt.

Considering that CVR offers the first-person point of view on the action, the viewer inevitably becomes a character in the story unfolding all around her - if neglected, she might become disengaged. The viewer is effectively assigned a role in immersive films such as *Great Performers: LA Noir* (2016) or the CVR theatrical experience *Hamlet 360: Thy Father’s Spirit* (2019), an adaptation of *Hamlet* where one sees the action from the perspective of Hamlet’s dead father. The real challenge and potential of 360° film may well be to create experiences that can assign a clear role to the viewer, playing with her expectations of being inside the world of the film.

X. Insights into Migration

Asked whether the films had made them understand better the problems and/or advantages of undertaking migration, the majority of respondents in each country chose “yes” (77%). Only 90 persons out of 249 justified their answer in writing in the open-ended section - most answers came from Spain (64% of the replies), which may be due to the audience being more mature and capable of elaborating on the subject (since they were predominantly university students). Because of the small number of respondents to the open-ended item in Romania and Portugal (16 persons in each country), we will not draw comparisons between the three national audiences. It is worth mentioning, though, that most

people who justified their answer were affected by migration. Only 3 respondents in Romania and 15 in Spain had no connection to migration – their feedback was mixed, as some did not gain any new insights into the phenomenon. In Portugal, all respondents to this question had relatives living abroad (but, as stated before, not from their immediate family).

The people who said they gained new insights into migration justified their answers as follows:

- I empathised/identified with the characters (since I was watching the action from the inside).
- The theme of the family is something all of us can relate to.
- I got closer to life situations that were unfamiliar to me (I saw these situations in the film, not only heard about them).
- Raised awareness of the difficulties of migration (leaving behind your loved ones, starting anew, adapting to a different country)
- Warning sign against migration (families can break, children feel alone without their parents)
- Raised awareness of the causes of migration (not finding work in your own country)
- A different point of view: the left-behind family's perspective is less commonly brought to attention than the migrant's.
- There are financial advantages, but also the disadvantage of not being close to your loved ones, which may be more significant than money.
- The topic of migration is very relevant since there are lots of migrants.
- One should value their country of origin.
- Sense of physical presence ("It's like we're there")

- Sense of mental and emotional absorption (“The story and how it was told made me feel involved.”; “I felt like a movie character”)
- The films showed various cases of migration.
- I learned from the love story presented in the film.
- **You get the chance to see it is not a personal problem, but one at a much larger scale.**⁷⁴

This last observation, which came from a person aged 19-25 with close family members living abroad (perhaps a left-behind teenager aged 19?), is worth highlighting. Indeed, part of the desired impact of the project was to make people affected by migration compare their experience with those of others and perhaps feel less alone as a result. I was personally touched to discover this was the case for the person quoted above.

However, some respondents did not gain any new insights into migration by watching the films. They justified their “no” option as follows:

- I could not empathise/identify with the characters.
- The films do not accurately represent the topic of migration (e.g., because the theme is too big to be represented in short films).⁷⁵
- The 360° medium prevented me from concentrating on the story.⁷⁶
- The films are not good enough (the story was not engaging, it lacked a plot, there was not enough music, not enough dramatism, the film was too short, the film

⁷⁴ “Ai ocazia să vezi că nu este o problemă personală, ci una la un nivel mult mai mare.” (Romanian)

⁷⁵ “I think that what we are trying to convey is too deep and far-reaching to be turned into a briefly told story that hardly causes any empathy at all. It’s not bad, but the issue should be addressed in a more efficient manner.”

⁷⁶ “I prefer a video in original size with no rotation because it makes me pay more attention to the story.”

was too long and didn't express much, the films appeared to be lacking scenes, the characters' motivations did not stand).

- I didn't discover anything new (I already knew what migration is about - e.g., from personal experience)
- I have no connection to migration.
- The films are only about family drama.
- The language did not help me feel inside the movie (the subtitles were not adapted to VR; the subtitles were in English; the subtitles were too fast for me to be able to read them).⁷⁷

Many of the open-ended replies summarised above referred to empathy and identification as factors helping the participant comprehend more about migration. On the contrary, some persons mentioned that the impossibility to empathise or identify with the characters prevented them from gaining any new insights. These comments suggest that empathy and identification are closely related to the power of CVR to delve deeper into social issues – or are they?

XI. Empathy?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, empathy is “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another,” while identification is “a person's sense of identity with someone or something.” The concepts are related, but not identical. Pavis defines identification as the “Process of illusion whereby the spectator imagines himself to be the character represented and the actor gets right “into the skin” of the character” (Pavis 1997: 176). Indeed, the first-person point of view in CVR can put the viewer

⁷⁷ The films were in Portuguese, with Romanian and English subtitles. The audience in Spain could only read the English subtitles.

into a character's shoes and thus foster identification, yet we have seen how the viewer was not assigned a clear role in the films created as part of *Tele-Encounters*. We will further insist on empathy, not on identification, as we deem it a more fertile topic in the context of our research. Before moving on, we should bear in mind that the terms "empathy" and "identification" have been used subjectively by the audience. Few people are aware of their nuances and differences so we cannot rely on the respondents' common ground of understanding. This can be limiting to our exploration.

Empathy is a more intricate concept than its dictionary definition might suggest and its exploration goes beyond the purpose of this essay. We will try, however, to hint at the potential connection between empathy and the sense of presence. In a recent article, Jones and Dawkins explore empathy in immersive film, critiquing filmmaker Chris Milk's statement that virtual reality is an "empathy machine" (Jones & Dawkins 2018: 299). The authors contradict the notion that any VR/CVR experience can or should engender empathy, a word which they say is simplistically understood by its dictionary definition. "For many writing about VR and immersive film, 'presence' leads to 'embodiment' which, in turn, leads to a greater sense of empathy. The key to this is immersion." (Jones & Dawkins 2018: 300). Engaging in dialogue with existent theorisations of empathy, they contend that real empathy is a process of simulating the emotions of another while being entirely aware they are distinct from one's own (2018: 301). However, some life experiences are impossible to conceive unless one lives them in reality, which is why Jones and Dawkins follow other theorists' lead into proposing "radical compassion"⁷⁸ as a reasonable alternative to empathy. They also discuss the

⁷⁸ Jones and Dawkins mention they borrow the concept of "radical compassion" from G. Bollmer.

manipulation of the experience by the filmmaker, who might resolve to present her own perspective instead of the persons' with whom she strives to bring the viewer to empathise, thus creating a separation between "them" (the characters) and "us" (the audience).⁷⁹ They conclude that the mechanisms of empathy are subjective and therefore hard to pinpoint and that further research is needed into this area, also with the help of neuroscience.

I agree that not all CVR experiences can generate empathy, as clearly shown by the audience's divided comments on the matter. Furthermore, feeling present may be a precondition of empathy, but it is not enough to generate it. At the same time, not being able to feel present could reduce the possibility of empathy. As mentioned, some people could not empathise with the characters. While this can be attributed to many of the factors already discussed that prevented the sensation of being there, **the answers reveal that a big part of the audience assumed they *should* have identified or empathised with the characters. Tension seems to have been in operation between what the audience perceived as the filmmaker's desire to make them empathise with the characters and their impossibility or unwillingness to do so. In some cases, this tension caused the participants' sense of presence to diminish and eventually led them to reject the experience.** Perhaps the films strived too much to provoke empathy, thus having the adverse effect of raising the barrier between the characters and the viewers.

⁷⁹ While I believe the filmmaker's point of view is not inherently a bad thing in VR (in the end, it is an artistic product and it should reflect the creator's attitude), I agree that some experiences can be purely manipulative, which might not to justice to the people represented in the film.

XII. Conclusions

Our research into telepresence has brought us to a narrower definition of the concept compared to the one from which we started. We have seen how “presence” in VR and CVR is related to the sense of “being there” and therefore to “immersion,” whereas “telepresence” involves a real-time exchange between remote physical spaces.

The opposition between “presence itself” and the “sensation of presence” was discussed in the context of performance theory and migration. While privileging a certain mode of presence over another can be limiting in art, real-life situations of migration prove the contrary: the parents’ physical presence is essential for their young children.

In terms of the audience’s experience of the five short films, our questionnaires revealed that physical immersion was prevalent over mental and emotional absorption, especially for younger participants (the so-called “Z generation”), who also reported an overall higher sense of presence than people over 18. We have hypothesised that the potential novelty of the immersive medium might have been responsible for causing the audience to engage more on a physical level than an emotional one. Even so, the sense of presence was not the only way of engaging with the films, some respondents invoking that re-embodiment and re-scaling were more relevant for them (e.g., seeing the world from the dimensions of a cup).

The main factors influencing the sense of physical presence were the clarity of the filmed image, the space in which the film was shot, the spatialised sound, and the story. Mental and emotional absorption was supported first of all by the story, followed closely by the clarity of the filmed image, the spatialised

sound, the longer time spent in the world of the film and the first-person point of view.

The elements hindering the sensation of presence were analysed without a comparison between the different types of immersion. The most significant ones were the film cuts (jumping from one scene to the other), the external sounds coming from the exhibition space and the lack of clarity about the viewer's role in the story. These results could indicate that 360° film cannot effectively incorporate practices common in "classical" film and hence requires new tools. VR and CVR may well rely on continuity of experience akin to that of real life, which can be subverted in a controlled fashion as long as this is part of the filmmaker's concept.

In the end, we have looked briefly at the concept of empathy in CVR, discussing its relationship to the sense of presence and its possible pitfalls. We have seen how the audience can react against what they perceive as the filmmakers' desire to make them empathise at any cost, causing them to reject the film.

Even if limited in scope, this study may inspire further research into CVR that could underpin meaningful artistic experiences and the invention of new vocabularies for 360° film.

Bibliography:

Books:

Giannachi, G. & Kaye, N. (2017) *Performing Presence: Between the Live and the Simulated*, paperback edition, Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Leavy, Patricia (2017) *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*, New York and London, The Guilford Press.

Manovich, Lev (2001) *The Language of the New Media*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

Pavis, Patrice (1998) *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis* (trans. Christine Shantz), Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press.

Phelan, P. (1993) *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London and New York, Routledge.

Sherman, William R. & Craig, Alan B. (2003) *Understanding Virtual Reality: Interface, Application, and Design*, San Francisco, CA, Morgan Kaufmann Publishers.

Book Chapters:

Bracken, Cheryl Campanella and Botta, Renée A. (2010) 'Telepresence and Television' in Bracken, C.C. & Skalski P.D. (eds.) *Immersed in Media: Telepresence in Everyday Life*, New York and London, Routledge: 39-62

Féral, Josette (2012) 'How to define presence effects: the work of Janet Cardiff' in Giannachi, Gabriella, Kaye, Nick & Shanks, Michael (eds.) *Archaeologies of Presence – Art, Performance and The Persistence of Being*, London & New York, Routledge: 29-49.

Articles:

Jones, Sarah & Dawkins, Steve (2018) 'Walking in someone else's shoes: creating empathy in the practice of immersive film', *Media Practice and Education*, 19:3, 298-312.

Mateer, John (2017) 'Directing for Cinematic Virtual Reality: how the traditional film director's craft applies to immersive environments and notions of presence', *Journal of Media Practice*, 18:1, 14-25.

Online articles:

AFP (2018), 'Portugal, the European country that wants more migrants', *The Straits Times*, 22.07.2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/europe/portugal-the-european-country-that-wants-more-migrants> (accessed 10.05.2019).

Burdette, Matt (2015) *The Swayze Effect*: <https://www.oculus.com/story-studio/blog/the-swayze-effect/> (accessed 10.05.2019).

Business Insider (2019) 'Generation Z: Latest Characteristics, Research, and Facts': <https://www.businessinsider.com/generation-z> (accessed 20.05.2019).

Lombard, Matthew & Ditton, Theresa (1997) 'At the Heart of It All: The Concept of Presence', *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, Volume 3, Issue 3, September 1997: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1083-6101.1997.tb00072.x> (accessed 24.03.2019).

Milgram, Paul, Takemura, Haruo, Utsumi, Akira, Kishino, Fumio (1994) 'Augmented Reality: A class of displays on the reality-virtuality continuum' in SPIE Vol. 2351, *Telemanipulator and Telepresence Technologies*: 282-292: http://etclab.mie.utoronto.ca/publication/1994/Milgram_Takemura_SPIE1994.pdf (accessed 3.03.2019)

Minsky, M. (1980) 'Telepresence', *Omni Magazine*: <https://web.media.mit.edu/~minsky/papers/Telepresence.html> (accessed 05.05.2019).

Websites:

Margin of Error Calculator: <https://goodcalculators.com/margin-of-error-calculator/> (accessed 09.05.2019).

Oxford English Dictionary:

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sensation> (accessed 09.05.2019).

Tele-Encounters Films:

The Mother: <https://youtu.be/Vsj1lkZot5Q> (accessed 20.05.2019).

Dream Future: <https://youtu.be/Cu4F2DZrwP0> (accessed 20.05.2019).

We're Six: <https://youtu.be/4s1c5KluWvA> (accessed 20.05.2019).

Return: <https://youtu.be/YO-QNrIaNYo> (accessed 20.05.2019).

Happy Family: https://youtu.be/SM_GMzlmNYk (accessed 20.05.2019).

Other CVR Experiences Mentioned:

Hamlet 360: Thy Father's Spirit (2019) adapted & directed by Steven Maler: <https://youtu.be/Jc88G7nkV-Q> (accessed 20.05.2019).

L.A. Noir: Great Performers (2016) written and directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood and Ami Canaan Mann, produced by The New York Times Magazine and MILK(vr): <https://youtu.be/q6RWfxIKMMQ> (accessed 20.05.2019).

Project documentation:

Tele-Encounters Interview 17: <http://www.tele-encounters.com/interview-17/> (accessed 09.05.2019).

Martins, Daniel & Leite, Cristina (2019) '360°Film – From Theory to Practice' Conference and Workshop held at UNATC on 7th March 2019.

VR film questionnaires audience responses:

<http://www.tele-encounters.com/audience-feedback-vr-films/> (accessed 21.05.2019).

ANNEX

**The calculations below were made by project sociologist
Mircea Kivu.**

1) Have you ever lived outside of your country of origin for more than 1 year?

	Country							
	Romania			Spain			Portugal	
	Count	Column N %	Mean	Count	Column N %	Mean	Count	Column N %
No.	44	94%		51	73%		113	86%
Yes, but I returned to my country of origin.	3	6%		7	10%		3	2%
Yes, I still live in a country different from my country of origin.	0	0%		12	17%		16	12%

2) Have you got any family members who have lived in a different country for over one year?

	Country							
	Romania			Spain			Portugal	
	Count	Column N %	Mean	Count	Column N %	Mean	Count	Column N %
Yes, close relatives (parents, grandparents, children, siblings).	29	62%		21	30%		0	0%
Yes, relatives (uncles, aunts, cousins, other relatives), but not close family members.	0	0%		24	34%		70	53%
							94	38%

3) Are you informed about the situation of Portuguese emigrants around the world? (for Romania: of Romanian emigrants)

\$Q3*Country Crosstabulation						
			Country			Total
			Romania	Spain	Portugal	
\$Q3 ^a	Yes, rather from relatives and friends who have left their	Count	14	8	104	126
		% within Country	30%	11%	79%	51%
	Yes, rather from the press.	Count	16	5	23	44
		% within Country	34%	7%	17%	18%
	Yes, rather from specialized books and articles.	Count	5	2	4	11
		% within Country	11%	3%	3%	4%
	No.	Count	18	55	12	85
		% within Country	38%	79%	9%	34%
Total		Count	47	70	132	249
Percentages and totals are based on respondents.						
a. Group						

4) Which VR films have you watched in our exhibition?

\$Q4*Country Crosstabulation						
			Country			Total
			Romania	Spain	Portugal	
\$Q4 ^a	The Mother	Count	8	14	98	120
		% within Country	17%	20%	74%	48%
	A Happy Family	Count	23	52	92	167
		% within Country	49%	74%	70%	67%
	The Return	Count	6	15	92	113
		% within Country	13%	21%	70%	45%
	We`re six	Count	5	7	60	72
		% within Country	11%	10%	45%	29%
	A Dream Future	Count	9	10	60	79
		% within Country	19%	14%	45%	32%
Total		Count	47	70	132	249

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

a. Group

5) What is your age?

	Country								
	Romania		Spain		Portugal		Total		
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	
0-14	9	19%	0	0%	3	2%	12	5%	
15-18	21	45%	1	1%	89	67%	111	45%	
19-25	5	11%	53	76%	22	17%	80	32%	
26-30	2	4%	10	14%	4	3%	16	6%	
31-45	4	9%	6	9%	5	4%	15	6%	
46-50	1	2%	0	0%	3	2%	4	2%	
51-60	1	2%	0	0%	5	4%	6	2%	

6) On a scale from 1 to 5, how present did you feel in the world of the films you've seen?

	Country											
	Romania		Spain		Portugal		Total					
	Count	Column N %	Mean	Count	Column N %	Mean	Count	Column N %	Mean	Count	Column N %	Mean
On a scale from 1 to 5, how present did you feel in the world of the films you've seen?			4,0			2,7			4,1			3,7

On a scale from 1 to 5, how present did you feel in			
Age	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Under 18	4,03	123	1,024
Over 18	3,35	126	1,127
Total	3,69	249	1,128

7) How would you describe your sensation of "being there" in the world of the film?

\$q7*Age Crosstabulation					
			Age		Total
			Under 18	Over 18	
\$q7 ^a	I felt physically there.	Count	89	73	162
		% within Age	72,4%	57,9%	
	I was mentally and emotionally absorbed in the	Count	43	44	87
		% within Age	35,0%	34,9%	
	Other:	Count	1	18	19
		% within Age	,8%	14,3%	
Total		Count	123	126	249
Percentages and totals are based on respondents.					
a. Group					

8) Which of the factors below made you feel present in the world of the films?

		Country							
		Romania		Spain		Portugal		Total	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
the story	not at all	4	9%	7	10%	3	2%	14	6%
	very little	5	11%	21	30%	15	11%	41	16%
	sometimes	15	32%	31	44%	59	45%	105	42%
	constantly	23	49%	11	16%	55	42%	89	36%
I was seeing the story from a first person point of view, so I had a role in it	not at all	15	32%	13	19%	18	14%	46	18%
	very little	9	19%	23	33%	22	17%	54	22%
	sometimes	18	38%	22	31%	49	37%	89	36%
	constantly	5	11%	12	17%	43	33%	60	24%
the space in which the film was shot	not at all	2	4%	6	9%	10	8%	18	7%
	very little	11	23%	22	31%	20	15%	53	21%
	sometimes	15	32%	28	40%	67	51%	110	44%
	constantly	19	40%	14	20%	35	27%	68	27%
the actors were very good	not at all	1	2%	14	20%	5	4%	20	8%
	very little	10	21%	24	34%	36	27%	70	28%
	sometimes	17	36%	29	41%	66	50%	112	45%
	constantly	19	40%	3	4%	25	19%	47	19%
the clarity of the filmed image	not at all	2	4%	8	11%	0	0%	10	4%
	very little	9	19%	19	27%	12	9%	40	16%
	sometimes	21	45%	30	43%	84	64%	135	54%
	constantly	15	32%	13	19%	36	27%	64	26%
my life experience, as I identified with some of the characters	not at all	15	32%	18	26%	26	20%	59	24%
	very little	18	38%	27	39%	21	16%	66	27%
	sometimes	10	21%	21	30%	45	34%	76	31%
	constantly	4	9%	4	6%	40	30%	48	19%
the sound coming from different directions corresponding to the directions corresponding to the	not at all	3	6%	6	9%	2	2%	11	4%
	very little	11	23%	20	29%	17	13%	48	19%
	sometimes	18	38%	31	44%	75	57%	124	50%
	constantly	15	32%	13	19%	38	29%	66	27%
the longer the film, the more present I felt	not at all	1	2%	12	17%	7	5%	20	8%
	very little	17	36%	21	30%	24	18%	62	25%
	sometimes	15	32%	30	43%	49	37%	94	38%
	constantly	14	30%	7	10%	52	39%	73	29%
the shorter the film, the more present I felt	not at all	6	13%	19	27%	33	25%	58	23%
	very little	13	28%	21	30%	29	22%	63	25%
	sometimes	17	36%	26	37%	42	32%	85	34%
	constantly	11	23%	4	6%	28	21%	43	17%

9) Did anything prevent you from feeling truly present in the world of the films?

\$Q9*Country Crosstabulation						
			Country			Total
			Romania	Spain	Portugal	
\$Q9 ^a	the film image was moving, while I was not moving	Count	4	8	8	20
		% within Country	9%	11%	6%	8%
	the film cuts (jumping from one scene to the next)	Count	9	29	13	51
		% within Country	19%	41%	10%	20%
	the rather poor technical quality of the filmed image	Count	11	14	5	30
		% within Country	23%	20%	4%	12%
	sounds coming from the real world	Count	9	13	29	51
		% within Country	19%	19%	22%	20%
	my role in the story was not clear - who was I in the story?	Count	10	28	8	46
		% within Country	21%	40%	6%	18%
	the story was poor	Count	2	14	3	19
		% within Country	4%	20%	2%	8%
	the acting was poor	Count	5	13	2	20
		% within Country	11%	19%	2%	8%
	the film was too short	Count	5	5	4	14
		% within Country	11%	7%	3%	6%
	the film was too long	Count	0	0	5	5
		% within Country	0%	0%	4%	2%
	the VR glasses	Count	0	4	7	11
		% within Country	0%	6%	5%	4%
	nothing prevented me from feeling fully present	Count	20	5	74	99
		% within Country	43%	7%	56%	40%
	Other:	Count	0	2	0	2
		% within Country	0%	3%	0%	1%
Total		Count	47	70	132	249

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

a. Group

10) Have the films made you understand better the problems and/or advantages of undertaking migration?

	Romania		Spain		Portugal		Total	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Yes.	32	68%	44	63%	115	87%	191	77%
No.	15	32%	26	37%	17	13%	58	23%

11) Please justify your answer above.

The full audience responses can be read here:

<http://www.tele-encounters.com/audience-feedback-vr-films/>
(accessed 21.05.2019)

Notes on the Contributors

Marina Hanganu (editor) is the initiator and artistic director of Tele-Encounters. She has a BA in theatre directing from The National University of Theatre and Film *I.L.Caragiale* (UNATC) Bucharest and an MA in Advanced Theatre Practice from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London. Telematic performances directed: *No.30 Popa Rusu Street* (Theatre 7, Bucharest, 2015), *Before Sunset/After Sunrise* (Bloomsbury Festival, London, 2015 and We Are Now Festival, Camden 2016 – supported by the Romanian Cultural Institute), *Tele-City* (The *George Ciprian* Theatre Buzău, co-funded by AFCN, 2016). Other directing credits: *The Suicide Shop* after Jean Teulé (The Comedy Theatre, Bucharest, 2018), *Orpheus and Eurydice* – audio play with binaural sound performed by visually impaired children (2017) and *Marisol* by José Rivera (UNATC, 2014). She has published novels, articles and an academic essay in the volume *Tele-City – Telematică și Pedagogie*. She is Artistic Secretary of The *George Ciprian* Theatre and a first-year Ph.D. candidate at UNATC Bucharest, where she studies the dramaturgy of telematic theatre.

Mircea Kivu has a degree in Sociology from the University of Bucharest (1978) and an MA in Demography and Social Sciences from École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales – Paris (1991). He is known as the author of several books and papers in sociology, with expertise in demography, public opinion polling, electoral sociology, and ethnic relations. His main activity as a sociologist is in the field of empirical research. Since 1992, he has held top positions in several market and public opinion research institutions (Research Director and CEO at IMAS Marketing și Sondaje, Vice-president for Research on Research at Ipsos

Interactive Services, Operations Director at Mercury Research). He also held courses as a visiting lecturer at the University of Bucharest, Faculties of Sociology and of Journalism and Communication Science. He is also involved in civil society activities as Vice-President of the board of the Foundation for Civil Society Development (FDSC) and as a columnist for several general magazines and newspapers.

Dr. Ion Mircioagă (b. 1955), associate director in the *Tele-Encounters* project, studied chemical engineering and then theatre directing at the National University of Theatre and Film *I.L.Caragiale* Bucharest. He is theatre directing Professor at the National University of Arts *George Enescu* in Iași and secretary general of Cultural Association 7. He has a wide directing experience in both the state-funded and the independent sector, and his shows have participated in national and international festivals. His recent directing credits include: *A Marriage Proposal* by Cehov, *The Hit* by Radu Dragomirescu, *Talk-Show (Reprise)* by Ștefan Caraman, *Fernando Krapp wrote me this letter* by Tankred Dorst, *The Comedy of Love and Hatred* (script and direction, The National Theatre Iași), *Tartuffe* by Molière. Associate artist in the *Tele-City* telematic performance project. Jury member in numerous national theatre contests. He has collaborated as a TV director at the Romanian National Television (TVR). Apart from academic articles, his published monographs are *Reality in the Arden Forest* (2007), *Theatre Realities* (2012), *Reality and Realism in the Theatre* (2016).

Javier Galindo has a BA from the Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático in Murcia in 2008 and an MA in Cultural Management by the Universidad Internacional de Cataluña in 2011. Among his directing credits: *Equus* by Peter Shaffer, *Huesped Anfitrión* and *Ruedas de Bicicleta* by Pedro Vera or the musical *Tic, Tic, Boom*,

written by Jonatan Larson. Stage manager for theater performances, cultural and sports events; technical director for international tours of ESAD Murcia performances. In 2016 he created Espacio Patente, an off theater hall in Murcia. In 2012, he began teaching Stage Managing for Theater and Events in Instituto San Antonio of the UCAM and since 2018 also teaches Sound for Dance BA. He is presently a marketing advisor for companies and an advertising director. His last work has been *The Planet of Lost Dreams* by Marina Hanganu and Ion Mircioagă.

Alexandra Constantin is a young, freelance stage and costume designer. *The Planet of Lost Dreams* is her first collaboration with The George Ciprian Theatre in Buzău. Her work includes theatre shows like *The Government Inspector* (directed by Slava Sambriș), *Jerusalem* and *Humans and their Love* (directed by Bogdan Sărătean), *Eden* (directed by Cristina Giurgea), theatrical concert shows such as *Chiritza in concert* and *Memories* (directed by Ada Milea) and theatre shows for kids (e.g., *ÎmpreLună* directed by Cristina Giurgea). She was an assistant stage designer for Corina Gramoșteanu for *Eliza Dreams* (directed by Florin Fieroiu) and for Adrian Damian for *The Biggest Gulliver* (directed by Alexandru Dabija). Her work in the film industry includes production design for the music video *7 minute*, production design assistance for Adeline Bădescu for the short film *Pipa, sexul și omleta* (directed by Ana-Maria Comănescu), assisting Alexandra Panaite for the production design of *Several Conversations about a Very Tall Girl* (directed by Bogdan Theodor Olteanu) and *Thou Shalt Not Kill* (directed by Cătălin Rotaru and Gabi Virginia Șarga), as well as working on commercial production design.

Andreea Darie is a 2017 graduate of the “George Enescu” National Arts University of Iasi, Drama Department. She is now taking a master programme at the “Lucian Blaga” University of

Sibiu, in the Art of Drama Character Interpretation. She works with the “Bacovia” Municipal Theatre of Bacau, where she worked with stage directors Tapatszo Erno, Horia Suru, and Alexander Ogariov. As an actor, she collaborated with “Victor Ion Popa” Theatre of Barlad, “G. Ciprian” Theatre of Buzau and the Artes Association. She was an assistant director on the team that implemented two shows at the Bucharest Metropolitan Circus. She participated in the Bacau Fest Monodrame on two consecutive years, and this year she was nominated for the Great Award with the show “Trei,” by Margurite Yourcenar, directed by Octavian Jighirgiu. She is on the cast of the “Planet of Lost Dreama,” a telematic drama show directed by Marina Hanganu, Ion Mircioagă, and Javier Galindo.

Ruxandra Oancea has a BA in Musical Theatre Acting from Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático in Madrid, Spain and an MA in Theatre and Performing Arts from Universidad Complutense de Madrid. She has interpreted a variety of roles in both Spain and Romania, such as Nastenka in “White Nights” by Dostoievski, Rose in “Dancing at Lughnasa” by Brian Friel, Dorotea in “Historia del loco Cardenio” by Cervantes, Coral in “Aloma” by Mercè Rodoreda, The Prostitute/Carer/Wife in “Hello Again” by Michael John LaChiusa and Her in “State of Emergency” by Falk Richter.

Radu Solcanu graduated from the Acting course at The National University of Theatre and Film “I.L.Caragiale” in Bucharest in 1999. He has interpreted roles in many theatre productions, among which: “1951” by Ion Mircioagă and Radu Solcanu, “All is Too Much, Nothing is Too Little” (by Ion Mircioagă and Radu Solcanu), “The Hit” by Radu Dragomirescu and “Talk Show (Reprise)” by Ștefan Caraman, all of them directed by Ion Mircioagă, but also in “Tarelkin” (directed by Gelu Colceag at The Metropolis Theatre, 2009) and “Galy Gay” (directed by Lucian

Giurchescu at the Comedy Theatre, 2007). He has also played roles in feature films, short films, and sitcoms.

Tony Blaya (actor) graduated from the Musical Acting course at ESAD Murcia. He has interpreted roles in various musicals, like “Into The Woods”, “Tick, Tick, Boom” and “Spring Awakening”, but also in children’s shows and Spanish Golden Century plays in musical version, such as “No hay burlas con el amor” and “El desdén con el desdén”, which have toured extensively, most notably in the USA and Mexico. In 2018, he produced the musical “Behind the Curtain, Searching for a Musical” (“Tras el telón, en busca de un musical”) as a playwright, director, and actor.

Cristian Iordache – Mindscape Studio: Combine passion with skills and you’ll get us, an ambitious group of bright minds eager to give life to all your ideas, projects, and plans. We specialize in bringing people closer through ultimate technology such as projection mapping, live visuals, and all sorts of interactive installations.

The people who made *Tele-Encounters* possible:

Teatrul *George Ciprian* Buzău (RO):

Gina Chivulescu – project manager of *Tele-Encounters* and manager of The *George Ciprian* Theatre

Cristiana Ilea – financial manager; **Iuliana Pleșoianu** – legal adviser; **Marina Diana Hanganu** – artistic director of *Tele-Encounters*; **Ion Mircioagă** – theatre director; **Mircea Kivu** – sociologist; **Gabriel Sandu** – PR; **Daniela Dughiană** – graphic designer; **Andreea Darie** – actress; **Radu Solcanu** – actor; **Mindscape Studio** (**Cristian Iordache** – head interaction designer, **Dragoș Vasiloiu** – interaction designer), **Florin Ciocan** – sound designer, **Alexandros Raptis** – light designer); **Ruxandra Oancea** – actress; **Alexandra Constantin** – scenographer; **Gabriel Ilie** – sound expert ; **Gheorghe Ilie** – lights technician; **Mihai Vădănoiu** – stage manager; **Eugenia Briotă** – costumes, props and cabins, **Nicoleta Radu** – props and cabins, **Gheorghe Baboi** – driver, technician; **Viorica Craiu** – theatre agent; **Grigore Meica** – technical manager; **Daniel Liviu Berbec**, **Florin Sîmpetru**, **Costel Baboi** – technicians; **Daniel Holeoleo** – technician, storage responsible; **Petrică Enăchescu** – fireworker; **Rodica Dragoman** – secretary; **Mihaela Piron** – accountant; **Georgiana Vlădoiu** – PR and promotion; **Adrian Dragoman** – lights and technician; **Adrian Văduva** – operator sunet; **Adina Plăiașu** – cashier; **Mircea Tabacu** – acquisitions; **Maria Dumitrescu** – theatre agent; **Oana Monica**

Grigore – human resources; **Ion Tăbăcaru** – photographer, **Costin Fetic** – photographer, **Armine Vosganian** – videographer.

Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia – UCAM (ES):

Pablo Cano – project manager, Prof.; **David Heiser** – financial manager; **Javier Galindo** – artistic director for Spain, Prof.; **Carmen Maria Carillo** and **Francisco José Ruiz Gil** – PR; **Tony Blaya** – actor; **Ana Polo** – actress; **Jessica Reche Pujante** – technical manager; **Pedro R. Celdrán Vera** – technical manager; **Prof. Juan Francisco Hernández Pérez**, **Prof. Sergio Albaladejo Ortega** and **Prof. Miguel Ángel Martínez Díaz** – interviewers, **Prof. Jorge Hernandez Bellot** – technical consultant, **Daniele Semeraro** – implementation assistant.

Município de Lousada (PT):

Adelaide Pacheco – implementation manager; **Eduardo Ribeiro** – artistic director in Portugal; **Manuel Nunes** – project manager; **Artur Pinto** – financial manager; **Célia Sousa** – assistant financial manager, **Creative Lemons** film company (**Daniel Martins**, **Cristina Leite**, **Vânia Silva**, **Sofia Ferreira**, **Eduarda Sousa**).

Special thanks to the Creative Europe Desk Romania:

Bianca Floarea, Claudia Romanescu and

Sorin Enuş

for their support throughout the application phase, for
promoting *Tele-Encounters*, and for always being there
for us!

Tele-Encounters is an artistic and sociological research project exploring telepresence and family relationships in the context of migration.

Based on interviews with Romanian migrants in Spain and left-behind families in Romania, we have created *The Planet of Lost Dreams*, a telematic theatre performance about a Romanian family separated by migration. The performance takes place simultaneously in Romania and Spain, with physically present audiences in both countries. The actors in the two studios interact in real-time using video-conferencing and Kinect-controlled animations.

Inspired by interviews with left-behind families of Portuguese migrants, we have commissioned five 360° short films to be watched on VR headsets in each country as part of the *Ellipses* VR exhibition. This book presents the findings of our research under the form of essays and interviews with the project team.

Tele-Encounters is led by The *George Ciprian* Theatre in Buzău (Romania), in partnership with UCAM Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia (Spain) and Município de Lousada (Portugal).

Tele-Encounters is co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.