Redefining “the here and now”

The aesthetics of virtual telematic communication in Dries Verhoeven’s Guilty Landscapes *and in Amal Omran, Hatem Hadawe, and Kathryn Hamilton’s* Three Rooms.

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the aesthetics of telematic performance. Through a systematic relation among theories and concepts about telematic technology and intermedial performance, it is argued that telematics drives to new understandings of the so-called "here and now". Moreover, focusing on the performances of *Guilty Landscapes* by Dries Verhoeven and of *Three Rooms* by Amal Omran, Hatem Hadawe, and Kathryn Hamilton, it highlights how telematic performance reconsiders the notions of time, space and presence within performance's spatiotemporal apparatus, generating experiences in-between actual and virtual spaces.

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Introduction

> You see things vacationing on a motorcycle in a way that is completely different from any other. In a car you're always in a compartment, and because you're used to it you don't realize that through that car window everything you see is just more TV. You're a passive observer and it is all moving by you boringly in a frame.
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> On a cycle the frame is gone. You're completely in contact with it all. You‘re in the scene, not just watching it anymore, and the sense of presence is overwhelming. That concrete whizzing by five inches below your foot is the real thing, the same stuff you walk on, it's right there, so blurred you can't focus on it, yet you can put your foot down and touch it anytime, and the whole thing, the whole experience, is never removed from immediate consciousness.
>
> (Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, 1974)

Coming from a theatre and performing arts environment I am trained to understand performance as a system of interaction among the performers and the audience based on the “here and now”. I learned to examine performance through the lens of the here and now, and to recognize the power in its unique characteristic, that of liveness. The experience that is generated at a specific shared space in a specific shared moment between the audience and the performers can leave great memories from the ephemeral art of performance. However, this year I came across a very special genre of performance, that of telematic performance. I was immediately fascinated from the intensity of the experience I had during a telematic performance and that made me reconsider my understanding of liveness. As a spectator in telematic performance I experienced space beyond its physical dimensions and relationship and perceived communication as a fluid process that can be applied in a global range of interconnections. It is obvious that as telematic performance occurs through telematic technology, connectivity and interactivity become two concepts infiltrated in its ontology. This research is my attempt to further explore the aesthetics telematic technology can provide in live performance, generating new understandings of the so-called “here and now”. To achieve that, I choose to focus on two recent telematic performances which I find exemplary for further studying how telematics bring new aesthetics in the experience of live performance. Namely, the performances that are going to be examined are Dries Verhoeven’s *Guilty Landscapes* and Amal Omran, Hatem Hadawe, and Kathryn Hamilton’s *Three Rooms.*

I use the term of aesthetics, following the origin of the word, derived from the Ancient Greek “aisthanomai” which means “I perceive, feel, sense”. It is clear from

the etymology of the word that the idea of aesthetics is close to the idea of experience, in which I am going to focus during my aesthetic approach of telematic performance. In this particular research, following what Ranciere calls "Aesthesis" (Ranciere 2013), I understand aesthetics as all the entirely material conditions as well as modes of perception that concern the sensible fabric of experience within which they are produced and thus let it be understood as art (Ibid, x). Based on that understanding, I aim to define the conditions that construct the experience in telematic performance as well as the modes of perception that are generated in it, taking into consideration its hybridized ontology which exists in-between the actual and the digital world as well as all "the technical, philosophical and communication aspects bound up within a larger cybernetic framework..." (Ascott 2003, 195).

Studying the aesthetics of virtual telematic communication is a relevant discourse today, as it is a technology that becomes widely used in time-based art practices that generate within and reflect upon the digital culture. Moreover it tends to be the major mode of communication through which global society, spreads and receives pieces of reality. Considering performing arts as a necessary space, where we, as society, can reflect upon life, gain awareness and invent alternative ways of thinking and acting, this study attempts to put telematics in the microscope of telematic performance to trace the perceptual, societal and philosophical issues that this technology generates in respect of the concept of space. Primarily, this study asks in what ways the aesthetics of virtual telematic communication form the spatiotemporal apparatus of the performance in respect of Dries Verhoeven's *Guilty Landscapes* and Amal Omran, Hatem Hadawe, and Kathryn Hamilton's *Three Rooms*. To answer this question, I have divided my thesis into three different chapters, each one answering in more specific sub-questions and adding more clues to the general one.

Chapter 1 inserts the reader in the theoretical framework I use in my methodology, allowing her to understand my focus on societal and perceptual impact of telematics in our times. Starting from the notion of telematics as coined by Simon Nora and Alain Minc, I discuss the emergence of telematic technology, highlighting the radical changes the latter brought in the vicinity of telecommunication. Next, using the term of 'telematic performance' as it is defined by David Z. Saltz (2004, 128), I look into the hybrid ontology of this genre, which lies in between the practice

of live performance and the technology of telematics, further providing the reader with an insight into the aesthetics the latter generates. In this attempt, I use the concept of intermediality to discuss the self-referential and self-reflective character of telematic performance within which the process of virtual telematic communication is staged. After having described the ontology of telematic performance, I consider the new configurations of time, space and presence that emerge. I approach these new configurations through the prism of the following concepts: *intermedial stage, screenography* and *telepresence*. The concept of *intermedial stage* allows me to explain how theatrical space in telematic performance is understood not as a fixed dimensional point, but as an occurrence. Through the concept of *screenography*, I describe how new interactive interfaces are created by the transformation of analogue scenic spaces to digital ones. Finally, I use the concept of "telepresence" as it is used from Lev Manovich and Oliver Grau, to distinguish the state of being present from the state of feeling present during a live performance, which is the case in telematic performance.

The next two chapters concern the introduction and analysis of the aforementioned study cases. The performance analysis in both chapters is oriented towards an aesthetic approach using the performances as instances that allow a further investigation of the meanings and the experiences that are generated in the apparatus of telematic performance. Specifically, I focus on how the makers deal with the overlapping and fluid spaces emerging between physical realities and virtual spaces and also how they further use the features of telematics in order to address and position the audience. I attempt to answer those questions by studying the cases through a model of interconnection among the performers, the spectators and the intermedial stage. In chapter 2, I discuss how Dries Verhoeven in *Guilty Landscapes* uses virtual telematic communication in order to create a sense of virtual proximity. Analyzing the screenography, I address the conditions of 'immersion' and 'teleaction' that are created through the interactive relationship between the viewer and the performer. In this case is also examined how the meeting of the performer and the spectator in a fluid-digital-almost no- space can transform time to space. In chapter 3, I focus on the choice of Amal Omran, Hatem Hadawe, and Kathryn Hamilton in *Three Rooms* to stage the distance which allows the audience to experience a

ubiquitous presence. Moreover, questions about the effects of juxtaposition of private and public spaces are being addressed.

In the conclusion, one can find a summary of the main insights of this research. Furthermore, considering the whole process of the research, as well as the process of writing this thesis, I reflect upon my methodology and my approach on this topic and propose some suggestions for further investigation.

Chapter 1: Approaching the aesthetics of Telematic Performance

The era of telematics

Before one attempts to examine telematics as a medium of artistic creation and to explore the aesthetics it establishes in performance apparatus, I suggest it is necessary to understand the basic principles that define telematics and its impact in society and in our perception of everyday life. Oxford Dictionary defines telematics as "the branch of information technology which deals with the long-distance transmission of computerized information" (*English Oxford Living Dictionaries* 2018). The term derives from the combination of telecommunications and informatics and now broadly describes digitally-mediated communications among the range of mediated network access processing systems. Historically, it signifies the beginning of a promising new era of telecommunication and at the same time implies a set of societal concerns related to power control. From a perceptual point of view, it declares the era of simultaneous presence between a physical space and a virtual dynamic space of encounter.

More precisely, the term telematics was first coined by Simon Nora and Alain Minc (Nora and Minc 1980), to describe the increasing interconnection between computers and telecommunication. In 1978, Inspector General Nora and Finance Inspector Minc wrote a report for the President of the French Republic, Valery Giscard d' Estaing, in which they propose policies for governmental management of such technological convergence (Ascott 2003, 50). They recognize that the marriage between telecommunications and computers would bring the people close to computers more than ever and probably this close relationship would change radically the way citizens and governments are engaged in societal debates. They describe this phenomenon as: "A massive social computerization" that "will take place in the future, flowing through society like electricity (Nora and Minc 1980).

Nora and Minc seem to have great concerns about the decentralization of the information that this technology could cause, especially in an era that information will be of great importance and a source of power. They describe the future society as “an uncertain society, the place of uncountable decentralized conflicts, a computerized society in which values will be object of numerous rivalries stemming from uncertain causes, bringing an infinite amount of lateral communication” (Ascott 2003, 51). According to them “The debate will focus on interconnectability. [. . .] The breakdown of power will be determined between the people who create networks and those who control the satellites” (Nora and Minc 1980) and thus “mastering the network is therefore an essential goal. This requires that its framework be conceived in the spirit of a public service” (Global Telematics 2018).

The future that Nora and Minc describe in their report is full of contradictions. On one hand, they recognize the significance of the upcoming information age and the potential of telematics to “facilitate a productive transformation of the social order” (ibid) by enhancing adaptability, freedom, and communication in society. On the other hand, they warn that governments or other powerful organizations would desire to use this technology in order to gain more power and control across the constituencies.

Today, after forty years, Nora’s and Minc’s predictions seem proved right. After the Internet became a publicly used technology, the integration of telecommunication technologies to it was instant and gave birth to plenty of new telecommunication services such as email, Internet telephony, web conferencing but also more entertaining services such as Internet television, online music, and video streaming websites. Such services provide a wide range of communication modes, thus making telematics present in various aspects of everyday life, comprising an ever-extending global network where information can flow among interconnected media. The Internet generated and accelerated new forms of personal interactions through instant messaging, Internet forums, and social networking. At the same time one can find telematics to be used for commercial purposes. Online shopping has grown exponentially both for major retailers, small businesses, and entrepreneurs, as it enables firms to extend their "brick and mortar" presence to serve a larger market or even sell goods and services entirely online. Business-to-business and financial services on the Internet affect supply chains across entire industries influencing a

large part of global economy (Wikipedia 2018). Finally, telematics are used not only for social and commercial reasons, but also they are related to the influence of political processes as well as to a large-scale illegal exchange in what is called Deep Web.

The aforementioned phenomena serve as a testimony to the intrinsic character telematics has acquired in societal interaction. This mixture of computer and telecommunication technology characterizing telematics, has undergone a significant growth, because it allows society to communicate via Internet with people of all nationalities and ages from every country in the world, to be aware of global information on the web, and to post information without any license or permission. As Kaye and Medoff argue "the internet is becoming increasingly important in the lives of many people around the world (...) who have grown to rely on it as a source of entertainment, information, and communication" (Kaye and Medoff 2001, 56). In other words, telematics have now more than ever brought us firmly into a communication society where everything can be digitally represented, interrelated and interconnected.

Considering the impact that telematics has in today's society, it seems that while on the one hand the net-users are discovering the potential of telematics and constraints of distance, on the other hand, they become members of a global digital society whose ontology redefines notions such as time and space. Due to its digital and interactive form, telematics is modifying the way we perceive our position in the world as well as communication itself, leading us to understand our state of acting and perceiving beyond the restrictions of the 3-dimensional space. In this line of thinking, I would attempt to argue that this technology becomes an extension of our perception, opening the way for other types of knowledge, other types of consciousness, expanding our modes of experience and providing us with a sense of omnipresence and "hyper-awareness".

The hybrid ontology of telematic performance

The term of 'telematic performance' is first coined by David Z. Saltz (2004, 128), who in his article "Performing Arts" collects, under the title "Telematic Performance", a set of live interactive artistic projects that combine the practice of performance with the technology of telematics, making these two elements their main media of artistic creation. What those projects have in common in order to be in the same taxonomy is that they totally depend upon the technology of telematics and have as a main objective to bring performers and audiences from remote locations digitally together in the same event. The event takes place in a virtual or simulated environment requiring the perceptual engagement of the viewer, mediated through virtual telematic communication. This process as I shall develop below can be described as interactivity. In general terms, projects of this kind could be understood as a form of performance that artists generate between the aesthetic principle of interactivity and the scientific theory of cybernetics (Ascott 2003, 3). In that sense, we could address telematic performance as belonging to the wider category of net-based performance and having an ontology characterized by the hybridity and interrelation of different media (such is performance, video, telematic technology, even the body) – a phenomenon that Chiel Kattenbelt describes as intermediality (Kattenbelt 2008, 20).

I find the concept of intermediality relevant to the theoretical discourse of telematic performance, as it can reveal the performative and self-reflective quality of this genre. Kattenbelt argues that "«intermediality» refers to the co-relation of media in the sense of mutual influences between media" (Ibid, 21). In his conception of intermediality, media is not opposed to art and theatre but instead, arts and theatre are understood also as media (Ibid). In addition, the co-relation among media results in their redefinition, leading to a "refreshed perception" which in turn "allows for new dimensions of perception and experience to be explored" (Ibid, 25). Bringing intermediality in the case of telematic performance and understanding body, performance, video, and telematics as media which affect each other in a spatiotemporal apparatus in-between the actual and virtual world, we can deduct that telematic performance generates new perceptions of time, space and presence. This

process allows communication to be experienced beyond the strict boundaries of the actual world.

More precisely, by using multiple and diverse media such as satellites, computer networks, or computer conferencing, the artists, in the field of telematic performance, encounter the possibilities of the unlimited, rapidly evolving communicational power telematics can provide. The first attempts of telematic performances had the intention to connect artists around the globe in a live-time digital-based interactive artistic co-creation. However, technological improvements in the turn of the century empowered the artists, in order to take telematic art to a next level. In this new phase, telematic art expanded its boundaries, experimenting with remote mass collaboration and alternative modes of communication between human individuals as well as among human and non-human elements (Ascott 2003).

Furthermore, Kattenbelt proposes that performance "because of its constituting (i.e. world making) and staging aspect" is by definition self-referential and self-reflexive (Kattenbelt 2010, 32) and in that sense, as intermediality in performance is primarily about staging media, in consequence, intermedial performance refers to and reflects on them (Kattenbelt 2010, 32). In the case of telematic performance, which stages the media involved in the process of virtual telematic communication, it is clear that it refers to and reflects upon the latter process.

Considering the writings of Roy Ascott, one of the fundamental theorists and practitioners in the field of telematic art since 1978, I would argue that telematic performance intends not only to reflect upon telematics, but also to train the audience's perceptual skills in order to be more aware of telematics' influence. Ascott expanding Nora's and Minc's theory about telematics, claims that, while any radical transformation of the social structure would emerge developmentally as the result of interactions between individuals and institutions in the process of negotiating relationships and implementing new technological structures, it is the artist's responsibility to use telematics in order to "shape and change the world" (Ascott 2003, 51). A lot of artists embracing similar ideas about the role of art in the era of telematics, use the new technologies in order to understand their possibilities and their influence in societal awareness.

As a consequence, telematic performance occurs and reflects upon the process of virtual telematic communication and therefore its form and content are inseparable, totally dependent on telematic technology and make meaning through their combination. As Edward A. Shanken underlines:

> "Form and content in telematic art can neither be considered in isolation from each other, nor outside of considerations of process and context. (...) The processes by which technological media develop are inseparable from the content they embody, just as the developing content of technological media is inseparable from the formal structures that embody it. Moreover, form, content and process must be considered within the particular contexts of their creation and interpenetration" (Ascott 2003, 86).

The platforms and technologies that telematics contains provide different experiences of communication and they are all tools that overlap in the artists' attempts to deal with the artistic potential of telecommunications (Ascott 2003, 59). The multidiversity of telematic technologies that are provided and used by the artists can be understood only in their interrelation, as a part of the general experimentation of constructing interactive aesthetic experiences between remote participants (Ibid, 198). In this line of thinking, I suggest that every choice related to the technology used in telematic performance is followed by the consequences that this technology can bring to the performance's apparatus, creating by default performative conditions and meanings.

Finally, the absolute dependence of telematic performance on virtual telematic communication makes the principles of interactivity and connectivity to be in the core of its aesthetics. Sarah Bay Cheng describes interactivity as the "perceived (if not actual) engagement of the viewer with a virtual, or simulated environment" (Bay-Cheng 2010, 186). In addition, Peter Weibel notes that "for the first time in history, the image is a dynamic system" (Rush 2001, 168). Bay Cheng claims that "if the virtual is essentially a simulation in which the viewer becomes immersed within open-ended possibilities, then the viewer's perception and participation are essential components of virtuality" (Bay-Cheng 2010, 186). Following these arguments, I claim that in the context of telematic performance interactivity allows the viewer to understand that her actions are mediated through virtual telematic communication and that without her actions and her impact on telematics there cannot be a telematic

performance. The viewer becomes a catalyst element of telematic performance and thus redefines her own perception and position as a mediator. This redefinition takes her one step further in understanding telematics influence. If interactivity makes the participants reconsider their virtual ties, connectivity brings them to encounter their physical ties.

I understand connectivity, in accordance to Wolf-Dieter Ernst, who proposes connectivity as a concept through which we can explore "the aesthetics of long-distance transmissions of (digital) information within performance and media art" (Ernst 2010, 186). According to Ernst, connectivity implies an unstable connection "which needs to be continually maintained in order to function" (ibid).That means the transmission of information is not guaranteed to succeed. That makes, in telematic performance, the maintenance of connection even more essential because it is the only way for the remote participants to interact at a distance. Through this connection the participants are able to intervene in an actual reality far-away and in that way they are challenged to redefine the range of the influence their actions can have in the actual world.The aesthetic principles of connectivity and interactivity that are encapsulated in telematic performance, are fundamental in the audience's "training" of perception. They both make the participants aware of their liminal position in-between the actual and virtual worlds. Through the manipulation or use of the different media involved in telematic performance the participants are placed in the hybrid spatiotemporal apparatus that the ontology of telematic performance generates, thus acquiring new perceptions when situated there.

From theatrical space to intermedial stage

The digital quality of telematics that forms in a great scale the apparatus of telematic performance allows an understanding of space beyond the boundaries of the actual world, generating new modes of thinking about how we experience the theatrical space in a live performance.

As Wiens notifies, the rapid changes in science and technology during 20th century drove the contemporary thought to formulate the concept of space in its capacity as communication and action space which "was no longer perceived as

something ‘given’, but rather as an occurrence” (Wiens 2010, 92). Einstein’s insights toward relativity of time and space, the emergence of film as a new spatial experience, or the Freudian theories about mental spaces are only some of the examples that illustrate the reconsideration of space as a fix dimension during the 20th century (Ibid, 92-93). In the realm of performance theory and practice, this reconsideration of space was illustrated through the concept of spatiality which according to Wiens can be defined as:

> “interactions among: (1) theatrical space (architectural conditions oftheatre); (2) stage, or scenic space (set design, scenography); (3) place of performance (the local, sociocultural context); and (4) dramatic space (spatial designs as evoked by the dramatic or postdramatic text, libretto, choreography etc.)” (Wiens 2010, 91).

It is clear that, already in 20th century, space had taken up an important role in performance analysis as a multifaceted agent in the construction of performance. Nevertheless, telematic performance analysis cannot be fit in the set of interactions as mentioned above, because its ontology goes beyond the concept of spatiality that still conceives performance as a live theatre performed before an audience. The discourse of telematic performance can be better related to the discourse of the so-called “second media transition that marked the change from analogue to digital media and its plurimedial, interconnected and newly defined virtual spaces” (Wiens 2010, 93).

Wiens claims that the second media transition led to a new spatial turn where space was not anymore defined as a fix point but mostly as “a temporal, dynamic and highly complex spatial configuration, which is created within the process of performance” (Wiens 2010, 94). According to this understanding of space, she proposes the concept of intermedial stage in order to examine the dynamics of new performative spaces that emerge in-between analogue and digital spaces. This concept describes an adjustable spatial model consisted of every physical and digital space that occurs during the telematic art project and can be understood as “an adjustable platform or interface, in which real, imagined and virtual spaces can performatively reconfigure one another and create enlightening tensions” (Wiens 2010, 94).

Considering the concept of intermedial stage in the context of telematic performance, the traditional configuration of a 3-dimensional theatrical space which is located in specific geographical coordinates has been under reconsideration. The

reconfiguration of the theatrical space consequently drives to a reconsideration of the scenic space which is understood more in terms of a videographic interface than in terms of scenery.

From scenography to screenography

Trying to analyze the theatrical space in telematic performance I had to take into consideration multiple configurations of space. For example, in order to describe the space in both my study cases, I had to take into consideration three different aspects of space; the architectural conditions of the two remote analogue spaces, the scenic space as it is designed in the projection wall and finally the geographical space as it is defined by its geographical coordinates. This fact drove me to understand the theatrical space of telematic performance as an intermedial stage which exists in-between the analogue and the digital spaces including all the interconnections and real-time contacts in-between the performer and the spectator, that are geographically apart from each other (Wiens 2010, 94).

However, while trying to examine the experience that those cases provide, I realized that the use of screen as scenographical choice – what in the concept of spatiality can be described as scenic space – could drive to a hybrid genre of interactive scenography. This genre of scenography is developed in-between the physical and the digital space through the use of screen and I suggest for it to be described as 'screenography'. In telematic performance the projection screen becomes the gate to the "other side" for both participants and it is the main common scenic space. It is important to understand that screenography as a scenographical choice, is a representational digital space enriched with infographic and videographic features. Multiple analogue scenic spaces are transformed to a digital dynamic interface of interaction. In this interaction the web cameras become a playful partner for the participants, allowing them to construct and reconstruct the scenic space of the performance by moving or not moving the camera lens. In addition, the frame of the camera lens becomes a performative space which allows the participants to experiment with their representation in a prospective frame. In that sense, actual analogue spaces are represented through a live-2-dimensional digital format,

underlying the fact that telematics can be a medium through which we understand but also form and construct reality.

Next to this, considering that every part of the participants' ecology becomes a digital sign, creating a semiotic gate were information can be transmitted in real time and in digital format, I suggest that telematic performance reminds the participants, what is taken for granted, that communication is an act of signification. Every aspect of the actual space is automatically transmitted to the "other side" through its representation. Web cameras and codecs become the mediators of that transmission and both the performer and the spectator become at the same time a part of the information exchange and the active agents of new information production. In this line of thinking, the concept of screenography underlines that the communication among the performers and the audience can be only realized through a set of videographic signs in the form of digital data.

From presence to telepresence- From being present to feeling present

The general understanding of presence in theory of live performance has always as a starting point a fixed geographical space where actors or/and spectators are positioned in order to interact. However, I suggest that telematic performance can provoke the participants to feel their presence beyond a fixed geographical point, a phenomenon which is known as "telepresence".

One can find a lot of definitions next to the word telepresence. Roy Ascott defines it as "the experience of being physically present and having one's own point of view at a remote location" (Ascott 2003, 72). Grau understands telepresence as an attempt to realize the prehistoric mystical human will, that of leaving the body and achieving presence at a distance. In his concept of telepresence, Grau traces three forms of presence: the physical location of the user's body, the presence in the virtual space or cyberspace, and the mediated presence in the place which the user is connected

to (Grau 2003, 285). This last form of presence is also described by Lev Manovich as teleaction (Manovich 2001, 166). Manovich argues that telepresence can be understood not only as the presence in a remote physical location, but also as "the ability to see and act at a distance" (Ibid). Elaborating on his idea, he ends up telling that telepresence can be understood as an example of representational technologies used to enable action that is to allow the viewer to manipulate reality through representations (Ibid). The definitions above seem to illustrate the ubiquitous performative power that telematics can provide to the individual. Furthermore, they make clear that the direct physical experience of a location is not necessary anymore in order to have a spatial experience.

Searching for the concept of telepresence in the realm of performance studies one can see that it is often understood as "the temporal proximity" (Wiegel 2010, 51) between the performer and the audience, achieved by a set of audiovisual media. In this line of thinking, telepresence and telematics seem to be closely related in performance theory. Moreover, it seems that telematics can be the main medium which can manage a spectator-performer relation at a distance. In telematic performance, this fact can be attested from the multiple models of relationship between the performers and the audience that object worldwide virtual coexistence. By using the fluid quality of cyberspace, telematic performance provides physical but also out-of-body experiences, confirming what Grau points out, that we probably should start seeing the conception of human beings, with all their mental and physical abilities located in a fixed place, being changed (Grau 2003, 287). Moreover, by constructing interactive models of communication among the performers and the spectators, telematic performance generates a process of teleaction or, as I would call it, a process of tele-interaction, as both performers and spectators are not only invited to see and act, but also to see and interact.

The convergence of time and space

It is already clear that in telematic performance space and presence is approached more in terms of temporal co-existence than in terms of spatial proximity. Therefore, I suggest that the concept of time is a crucial aspect in telematic performance and more precisely time understood in terms of duration.

If we think space as a configuration of a performative process among digitally interconnected individuals which are based in remote locations, then we can see the potential for them to develop a shared experience in the same timeframe. As Sylviane Agacinski points out, the "awareness of time is neither pure nor originary, and it cannot be separated from the empirical contents that structure it" (Agacinski 2003, 33). Telematics, by allowing instant interactive communication globally to thrive, create a common environment capable of hosting shared experiences. These common experiences among the users of telematics create common empirical contents, generating an understanding of time as unified. Remote individuals communicate with each other and the duration of the time they share becomes a common space of interaction. In this line of thinking, in telematic performance, the understanding of space and time seem to converge. Remote spaces are synchronized creating fluid, synchronal spatiotemporal realities, while duration becomes a fundamental agent which ensures the interaction.

In this chapter, I explain the hybrid ontology of telematic performance which can be traced in-between the practice of live performance and in the technology of telematics. Moreover, I enlighten the basic principles that mainly construct the aesthetics of every telematic performance in respect of new configurations of time, space and presence. However, embracing the idea of Groot Nibbelink and Merx, that "each performance calls for or generates its own concepts" (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 2010, 219) and thus becomes itself a source of new interpretations, I decided to explore further the aesthetics of telematic performance through two case studies, that of *Guilty Landscapes, Episode 1* and *Three Rooms.*

The cases selected to be studied are recent pieces and they are characterized by their tension to stretch the notion of performance over the boundaries of "the here and now". They make use of telecommunications and information technology to

distribute the performers between two or more locations and thus are totally dependent on Web cameras and internet connectivity. As a result, the geographically distributed performers and spectators experience the performance simultaneously across the overlapping and fluid spaces emerging between physical and digital spaces. Therefore, I suggest that the term of telematic performance can describe better the ontology of the study cases, making them ideal models through which one can explore the experiences and the themes that virtual telematic communication can bring in the performance apparatus.

Finally, in the next two chapters, the two case studies will function as a frame where the aesthetics of telematic performance can be further explored and analyzed. More precisely, the cases are being examined in terms of how the makers deal with the overlapping and fluid spaces emerging between physical realities and the digital space and also how they further use the features of telematics in order to address and position the audience.

Chapter 2: Guilty Landscapes; Performing Proximity

> "In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy."
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> (Foucault 1986, 24)

Introducing the case

Guilty Landscapes is a series of four autonomous episodes, created by DriesVerhoeven during the year 2016 in different cities around Europe, and the last two years all the episodes are still coming up around the world. Verhoeven is a Dutch theatre maker and visual artist, known for experimenting with the boundaries in-between media, performance and installation art. His series of Guilty Landscapes take the form of interactive installations where the viewer and the performer have the opportunity to share an eight-minute interaction via virtual telematic communication.

When the spectator enters in Guilty Landscapes, she can see a room designed as a white cube. Nearby the entrance there is a sign which defines the ontology of the project: "2 cameras, an autoscript teleprompter, internet connection, a video encoding/decoding system, an HD projector, a sound system and 2 people". Every episode is a single, one-to-one experience between the spectator and the performer, who are coming to an interconnection via telematic communication. The room is filled by a loud soundscape and on its fourth wall, is projected the live-streaming image of a remote landscape. Eventually, the fourth wall of the room is transformed into a screen. After a moment, the performer appears in the projection screen and invites the spectator to join in a 9-minute virtual telecommunication.

Every episode has a different landscape. In the first episode, one can see a long, messy corridor of a large weaving Chinese factory, where women are constantly at work. The second episode reveals an e-rubbish dump in Port au Prince in Haiti. In

episode three a worn-torn street in Syria is appeared and a man in the middle of this scenery stands and stares. Finally, the fourth episode includes the main hall of a strip club in Pataya, where a dancer is positioned, waiting to show his dance. Verhoeven chooses to bring these living landscapes in Western institutionalized theatrical and museum spaces through a digital projection. All of them are representations of pictures that everybody could see in the news and narrate a far distant reality. Verhoeven chooses these landscapes with the intention to provoke the spectator's feelings of guilt, but also to investigate what happens when the spectator becomes a performer, a part of the installation and thus a part of the same news. Addressing the question of "What if the protagonists on the evening news were to look us in the eye?" (Verhoeven 2018), he attempts, through those pieces, to explore how the Western citizen perceives the news that are projected on her own tv screen, laptop and smartphone. His aim is to evoke a shared vulnerability between the viewer and the viewed, and unlocking "the potential for a deeper connection" (Athens Epidaurus Festival 2018).

In order for the installation of *Guilty Landscapes* to be functional, two cameras, an autoscript teleprompter, internet connection, a video encoding/decoding system, an HD projector and a sound system are necessary. It becomes clear that the occurrence of the performance is based in a high quality technology and on a far-distant, fully mediated communication between the viewer and the performer, which can raise a lot of questions about the liveness of the performance and eventually the "here and now" of it. Below, I am going to explain the way the performance occurs from a technological point of view, in order to be easier in the next session to discuss the issues which emerge from its apparatus in respect of the perception of space, time and presence.

Two digital cameras are shooting the rooms where the spectator and the performer are positioned. Next, the video encoding system transforms the video and audio data compressing them according to the specifications of its encoding standard (Technopedia 2018). The purpose of this encoding process is the visual and audio material to be compatible and efficiently functional with a desired set of applications and hardware. However, as a negative result "the compression is typically lossy, meaning that the compressed video lacks some information present in the original video. Consequently, the decompressed video has lower quality than the original,

uncompressed video because there is insufficient information to accurately reconstruct the original video" (Wikipedia 2018).

The procedure of encoding enables the data to be transmitted via internet connection from one space to another (Technopedia 2018). When the data are already transmitted to "the other side" of the telematic event, the decoding system decompresses (Wikipedia 2018) them and converts them to their original states (Technopedia 2018). The decoding process consists of "performing, to the extent possible, an inversion of each stage of the encoding process" (Ibid).

After the video decoding stage, an autoscript teleprompter prompts the performer with a live image of the spectator. Using a teleprompter "is similar to using cue cards. The screen is in front of, and usually below, the lens of a professional video camera, and the moving image on the screen is reflected to the eyes of the presenter using a sheet of clear glass or a specially prepared beam splitter" (Wikipedia 2018). The teleprompter enables the performer to see the spectator's image streaming while she is looking directly into the camera lens and thus it creates the illusion that the performer looks directly to the spectator's space, without leaving any impression of distraction. At the same time the performer's space is projected on the fourth wall of the room through an HD projector, allowing the spectator to have a real-time view on the performer's landscape. Finally, a soundsystem in both spaces allows both the performer and the spectator to share the same soundscape. From a dramaturgical perspective, the choice of this technological structure affects the experience of "being together", the directness of communication, the relation between connection and interactivity, the transparency of the performer's ecology.

Staging uncertainty

For the participants in *Guilty Landscapes*, nothing is neither certain during the performance, nor trustworthy. The intermedial environment, designed by an invisible supporting equipment, creates a sense of uncertainty. The spectator is not sure what is the scenery she sees, as well as if and from whom it is being seen, a phenomenon which Groot Nibbelink and Merx describe as *intermedial experience* (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 2010, 219). According to them, intermedial performance, due to the interplay of different media, "often plays with or even explicitly deconstructs perceptual expectations and produces sensations ranging from subtle experiences of surprise or confusion, to more uncanny experiences of dislocation, displacement or alienation" (Ibid).

In the case of *Guilty Landscapes*, the deconstruction of the spectator's perceptual expectations derives from the interplay between the video and the live performance. What plays a key role in the construction of an uncertain environment is the use of the web cameras. As I have already mentioned, web cameras, in *Guilty Landscapes*, are hidden and eventually at the first moments of the experience, the spectator is not sure if the video she sees is live or pre-recorded. However, even when it becomes evident after a while that the projected performer is live-streamed and interacts in real time to the spectator's reaction, there is still a sense of surveillance as it is not clear that the cameras are only in favor of the two participants. The spectator who is used to have access in recorded images from a safe zone as an anonymous observer, now becomes also an object of spectatorship and this shift confuses her perceptual skills, creating perpetually bonds of trust with the "other side" of the screen.

This state of not knowing drives the spectator to be more persistent on what she sees and eventually invites her to participate actively in the experience, reflecting upon her own role in it. In that sense, I would say that the whole performance is a training of the spectator's audiovisual perception. As Groot Nibbelink and Merx argue, when the spectator "does not know what she sees, what she hears, what she feels, where she is or what is what" then "she is only very much aware of the fact that she is seeing, hearing, and feeling; that she is present" (Ibid, 219-220). The spectator

in *Guilty Landscapes* is invited to explore her relation with what she experiences from the beginning, training herself to understand what the environment she is in and looking at is. In media communication, something is usually trustworthy because its source is known. By creating this environment of uncertainty, Verhoeven reverses this belief making clear that in a mediatized society you can never be sure the origin and the use of a digital image.

Verhoeven creates an intermedial stage where, as he already says in the brochure of the installation "the news watches you back" (Verhoeven 2018). By constructing an experience of interactive telematic communication, he manages to reverse the viewer's mode of looking to a mode of interacting. Image stops being an object for watching and instead becomes a gate for instant communication. In that sense, a "guilty landscape" which is usually presented in the news, now enters the viewer's space. It does so, not as a representation of a, by default, ended story, but as an ongoing situation which has the potential for further exploration and change. Through this construction, Verhoeven critically addresses an era when fake news or curated news are spread around the world through digital screens inviting people to be passive observers. He also manages to reveal the difference between a by-default digitally presented reality and a digitally presented reality which is formed through the interaction between the viewer and the viewed. I would attempt to say that *Guilty Landscapes* deny the dichotomy between the viewer and the viewed, declaring that we are all both actors and observers, nodes of an interconnected world, parts of the same global news.

Finally, Verhoeven chooses to record the space through stable web cameras which capture a specific viewpoint of both spaces. Therefore, both the performer and the spectator have, on the one hand, to deal with a framed space, where they can move in order to be visible to the "other side" of the screen, and on the other hand, they are confronted with a specific point of view of a landscape, without knowing what is hiding behind the camera's frame. This choice makes the communication between the spectator and the performer quite vulnerable and at the same time forces both of them to be active in order to keep in touch.

Being digitally together

In the previous chapter we saw how the intermedial stage of telematic performance as well as its screenography, have the potential to bring geographically remote people, digitally together in an interactive videographic interface, creating the sense of co-presence in terms of connectivity and interactivity. In the case of *Guilty Landscapes*, this potential seems to be one of the main objectives and it is used to a great extent. Verhoeven has structured *Guilty Landscapes* as a one-to-one interactive experience. That means that the spectator is directly addressed by the performer and she is invited to develop an interactive relationship. The special thing in that relationship however, is that despite its mediatized character it tends to be very direct and immersive.

When the spectator gets in the room of *Guilty Landscapes*, the physical absence of the performer is obvious. The room is empty and only in the fourth wall of the room the performer is projected in the huge projection screen. In that sense, it is clear from the early beginning for the spectator and the performer that their physical meeting is not something that can be arranged and thus their communication will be arranged only through the projected screen. However, during the performance, this physical distance seems to disappear, as the screenography in both sides drives the physical distance to collision, connecting both spaces through a virtual gate.

We already saw that Verhoeven has chosen a very sophisticated system to maintain virtual telematic communication. The information between the participants is constructed and deconstructed several times in order to be transmitted in both sides. However, Verhoeven chooses to keep this process of mediatization 'secret' from the spectator creating the conditions of a real-like direct communication. To achieve that he hides every trace of the transmission of signals (even the camera is hidden), and provides a high quality digital image in the projection screen.

As a result, Verhoeven creates an immersive environment which generates a sense of virtual proximity. Immersion in digital performance is related to a sensory experience in which the so-called "experiencer" feels present in "an electronically mediated environment" (Vanhoutte and Wynants 2003, 47). In that sense, the spectator and the performer become co-present in the interactive interface, acting both

as performers in the same screenographic context building their own performative relationship.

As I have already argued, the choice of a stable web camera which captures a part of space from a specific angle, automatically frames the area of action and provides the participants with a specific area in which they can move in order to be visible. At the same time, the restricted area for action in combination with the actor's transformation into a 2D sign, in a landscape with prospect, opens a playful field for physical action and motivates the participants to experiment with the range of movements they can do or with the proximity towards the web camera they can have (enlarging or minimizing their size that is presented on "the other side"). In that way, technology becomes a playful partner for both participants, which functions as a tool of expression and creativity. The restriction of the frame of action provokes the participants to express themselves according to the web camera lens.

An element that makes this exchange more crucial, and drives the participants to put an effort on it, is the limited time they have to communicate. Guilty landscapes is a short-time experience. The spectator is invited to participate in a 'by default' 10-minutes telematic communication. In those ten minutes, she has to figure out what type of relationship she can built with the remoted performer in the projected screen. Time in *Guilty Landscapes* can be urgent both for the performer and the spectator and its limited amount can be an actor that drives both the participants to immerse in the event. In this sense of immersion, time can be considered as space. The now becomes the most important space in which both participants can interact in order to develop their experience. By creating the conditions of an immersive experience, Verhoeven makes the participants aware that they can be physically and emotionally influenced by the other's presence without physical proximity to be needed.

Staging communication

We could say that in *Guilty Landscapes* both the performer and the spectator are at the same time the subject and the object of the installation, the viewers and the viewed. As the spectator and the performer have to communicate through telecommunication technology which allows the installation to occur, and as they have to see and be seen through the screen, they become at the same time actors and observers of their own communication. Moreover, in most of the episodes, Verhoeven does not give to participants the option to communicate through talking, empowering the agency of body language. The whole process of communication is based on gestures providing to the participants a physical experience. From the first moment, the performer responds to the viewer with a welcome gesture, inviting her in a physical interaction and onwards, the model of their communication is built upon the set of the semiotics that their bodies produce. Every action is projected to the "other side's" screen and its result (the other person's reaction) is coming back as boomerang through the screen. In that way, communication becomes a clear illustration of semiotic exchange, where every participant sends a signified action and receives back a signified reaction.

I have suggested in chapter one that telematic performance reminds the participants, what is taken for granted, that communication is an act of signification. *Guilty Landscapes* is an exemplary case of this phenomenon, as it invites both the performer and the spectator to communicate through a system of signs that produce with their bodies. It becomes clear then that the interaction between the participants is not only physical but at the same time becomes mental and rational. Both participants have to read the gesture that comes from the other side and to respond with a gesture that can be communicable, being aware of the fact that their bonding and understanding will be maintained only through a common and mutually understandable system of signification. Considering the physical distance, as well as the fact that the participants see the other person's gesture through its representation, it becomes clear that both participants do not physically interact to the actual gesture but to the significance of it.

Chapter 3: Three Rooms; Performing the distance

Introducing the case

Three Rooms is a collective telematic performance which takes place among three artists (Amal Omran, Kathryn Hamilton and Hatem Hadawe) and three countries (Turkey, the country that the theatrical event takes place and France). As the artists explain during the performance, *Three Rooms* was created and it is still being developed, focusing on the events that take place in the artists' everyday life. Amal Omran, Kathryn Hamilton and Hatem Hadawe first met in Instanbul, where they started creating a performance together. However, the recent political changes in Turkey, forced Amal to be restricted inside the boundaries of the country and Hatem to leave immediately Turkey and live in France. Only Kathryn was free to visit both of them without restrictions, transferring messages from one to another.

Three Rooms is the result of the artists' intention to keep co-creating, against the geo-political restrictions. They made this piece, in order to keep on performing together and to share their story as well as their present situation with a worldwide audience. The way they chose to achieve that is by structuring their performance within a telematic conference. Kathryn Hamilton is always the one who welcomes the audience in a theatre space and arranges the telecommunication with the other two makers, who participate in the performance from their own private rooms. In this concept, the audience accompanied by Kathryn Hamilton is being invited to take part in the telematic conference that takes place among the three friends, to hear their story and to witness their moments of intimacy.

The makers of *Three Rooms* choose a simple and cheap technology to stage their performance, that of the famous telecommunication platform of Skype. Skype is a platform which enables a worldwide instant telecommunication and data exchange, and seems to fit in the makers' intention to create an interterritorial stage. I choose the term "interterritorial" in order to describe better the intention of the makers to resist against geopolitical restrictions. It is important, however, to underline that, although Skype is a technology that can bring people digitally together, it is also an always-already curated platform, which has its own aesthetics and rules of usage. Thus, the

way this platform is designed establishes specific rules and forms of communication, conforming the communication experience to its own standards, having by default specific consequences in it.

The technology of Skype; Staging connectivity and interactivity

Skype is a telecommunication software, which specializes in enabling, via the Internet, the occurrence of video chats and voice calls between computers, tablets, mobile devices and regular telephones (Microsoft, 2018). According to its official webpage, Skype "keeps the world talking", helping them to "share and do more things together" (Ibid). It becomes clear that as a medium provokes a worldwide interaction, which depends on a digital dynamic interface. This interface is generated through the transformation of analogue signs into digital, making the performative utterances of the users to travel across the digital network.

More precisely, Skype is based on a technology called "VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol)" (MUO 2018). What, in first place, a VoIP does, is to capture and transcode the user's voice from the analog format that the microphone captures, into a digital format. To achieve that, it uses CODECS which follow the encoding process as it has been described above. Next, it passes the encoded format on to a compressor that minimizes the size of the audio stream, divides it into small packets which are stamped with the destination address and finally sends them through the network. The receiving end must reconstruct the packets sequentially for ideal reproduction (Ibid). According to Chris Woodford, "all the computers connected to the Internet understand how to send and receive packets like this; thankfully, they all agree to work in exactly the same way using exactly the same system, which is known as the Internet Protocol or IP" (Explain That Stuff 2018). This fact makes VoIP the easiest, cheapest and most popular way to transfer data.

When we sign in to Skype,

> "our computer becomes a node in a global network of equal peers. Each Skype user runs a piece of software called a client that allows them to send messages to other Skype users, make calls, send files, and play real-time games. Each of the clients becomes an active part of the network and, whether it's actively sending messages or

> not, helps the network as a whole to locate and route traffic to other users. Within the network, some of the users with highest bandwidth and best connectivity, known as supernodes, act as traffic hubs. The network as a whole is made up of supernodes connected to one another, with each supernode linking to many ordinary nodes" (Explain That Stuff 2018).

Following the description above, it seems that in ideal situations, in which a broadband connection and electricity are available at all times, Skype can provide a cheap, comprehensive, secure and decentralized way to communicate, allowing the users to have an instant interaction at a distance.

Skype is in general a platform which brings the principles of connectivity and interactivity at the proscenium. It is a low-tech software which can be used by everyone, can be applied everywhere (Perez 2014, 4) and its occurrence is based on a participatory process of long-distance transmissions of (digital) information. However, VoIP is absolutely dependent on internet connection, as it uses Internet Protocols in order to create data packets, and to send them on the same network which is used for email and web surfing and consequently, its occurrence can be very fragile. Sometimes the reconstruction of the packets is not perfectly succeeded, usually due to the public networks, which are prone to congestions during peak hours. Latency and packet loss can render the receiving end to be unable to reconstruct the complete audio stream resulting in blank audio space for short periods. This is a common situation in VoIP's function which reveals and underlines its fragility as well as its absolute dependence on the speed and reliability of the internet connection. In that sense, it becomes clear that the technology of Skype develops a communicative model which depends on connectivity and interactivity, bringing the concept of relationship in the core of its occurrence.

Dealing with intimacy and ubiquitous presence

The makers of *Three Rooms* choose to make connectivity and interactivity, the basic theme of their performance, researching in-depth the effects that those aesthetic principles can have on the process of communication. In this context, they propose telematics as a medium for social sharing and connecting, highlighting the potential of

a global digital participatory performance. Despite the fact that two of the three makers are physically alone, even isolated to their private rooms, telematics enables the three of them to be always digitally together, as well as to share their experiences with a wide audience across the world. What plays a key role in this case is the experiences of ubiquity and intimacy.

The notion of intimacy often implies the idea of closeness. In case of telematic performance however, the experience of closeness can be achieved through the continual synchronized exchange of frames and information (Barton 2010 ,46). In *Three Rooms,* the state of intimacy is a theme which is explored from different points of view. In respect of their own communication, they exploit the interactive character of Skype in order to achieve moments of intimacy. Web camera lens becomes the tool through which they maintain an intimate relationship with the audience. By using the web cameras the performers introduce the audience to their private spaces, as well as their private lives, showing their private rooms or personal objects such as drawings, clothes, family photos etc. In that sense, every projected screen becomes an extension of another space, as well as a gate to the maker's private life, and every single performance becomes another day in which this intimate relationship occurs among the makers and permeates the three rooms.

The audience is being invited to witness this relationship among the makers, by having audiovisual access simultaneously in the two different rooms which are located in remote countries. The rooms are projected in juxtaposition on the walls of the third room where the audience is placed. In this construction, the audience is positioned almost in a traditional theatre form, sitting one next to each other, watching Kathryn Hamilton stand in the front of the room, and the other two performers to be projected in the wall, one next to each other. At a first look, one could say that the audience becomes a group of passive anonymous observers who enjoy the security of speculating the lives of others at a distance. However, the interactive character of Skype's screenography, as well as the dramaturgical strategies the makers choose to follow, transform very quickly the audience into an active agent, continually challenging their position.

The revealing of the private spaces existing behind the camera in combination with the juxtaposition of the three different frames in the same wall make the

audience able to have the overview of the interspatial event, being kind of present in three places simultaneously. This process makes the audience redefine the notion of their presence, which is understood here as a matter of position, that is not anymore necessarily related to specific chronotopological coordinates, but instead becomes a sense of wandering among videographic and infographic representations of space. In addition, the makers choose to talk directly to the audience, breaking the fourth wall and thus, taking them out from their comfort zone. During the performance, the performers expose a lot of personal information, by narrating a lot of the events that happen in their lives, as well as by having very private conversations among them. In this line of thinking, the audience is being challenged to become temporarily part of the conversation among the makers, renegotiating their understanding of private and public space, as well as the continuity, consistency, duration, communicative clarity and confidence of their engagement, features that Bruce Barton claims can construct an "intimate relationship" (Barton 2010 ,46).

The audience is continually provoked to focus on their perceptual and sensorial modalities, deciding each moment their position and the level of their engagement in this interconnective experience. The engagement is primarily mental. As the bodies of the audience are placed on a stable position in one of the three rooms, it is their decision if they are going to keep their focus on what happens in the room, if they are going to explore the performer's projected environments or if they are going to keep a distant overview of the interteritorrial stage. The makers of *Three Rooms* use the ubiquity of intermedial stage to rethink the notion of intimacy as not a matter of physical proximity, but as a matter of mental engagement with a worldwide network.

What keeps us apart can bring us together

The level of engagement in telematic performance is totally dependent on the fragility of the internet connection. In order for intimacy to be achieved, the three remote spaces have to be synchronized. Synchronization is a fundamental condition for the communication among the three performers and can be maintained only through the help of telematic technology, which can provide the space for a shared durational

interactive experience. It is the focus on the shared duration that transforms the performance into a worldwide unified event, driving the actions in three distributed spaces into a total synchronization, affecting each other.

By using the "low-tech" (Perez 2014, 4) software of Skype, the makers of *Three Rooms* make the communication, in this performance, a very fragile, uncertain and totally dependent on technical aspects process. As Skype is low-tech software absolutely dependent on Internet connection its quality becomes unstable. Latency, delay of streaming, packet loss or even connection failure is possible to happen at any second. The aforementioned instability makes time crucial for the communication process. From the beginning of the Skype call, time is projected on the projected screens, becoming visible to anyone who participates in the event. In that sense time is understood as information, which underlines the duration of the shared experience second by second, reminding that the space for interaction can be interrupted anytime.

In this line of thinking, we can see that there is a paradox in the spatiotemporal apparatus of *Three Rooms*. On the one hand, the fundamental role the low-tech quality of Skype has in the maintenance of the performance proves that technology can be unable to achieve connection due to its latency and the failures. In that sense, connection instability underlines the physical distance in between the participants making them aware of the absence of the other. On the other hand, communication via Skype underlines the desire the participants have to be connected. By participating in a communication process which needs a lot effort and patience to succeed, and by resisting against technological failure, both the makers and the audience become present more than ever and are challenged with their potential of omnipresence.

In-between reality and theatricality

As they make it clear from the first moment of their performance, the makers of *Three Rooms* choose to bring on stage memories and even real-time moments of their relationship, sharing them with an invited audience. In that sense, the performance shares a lot of characteristics with documentary theatre, bringing a real story on stage. However, the telematic character of the performance, forces reality to enter the stage directly, but always through a videographic frame. Screenography becomes the space in which the three makers can communicate with each other, and the web-cameras become the tool through which they can introduce themselves and narrate their real stories. In his study, *Esthetique et psychologie du cinema,* Jean Mitry argues that the use of camera distorts reality itself. Namely, denying the argument that camera gives an objective image of reality, he argues that camera reveals a new appearance, correlated to the material world, producing "a certain 'segregation of space', that is to say, a restructuring of the real so that it can no longer be considered 'objective and immediate.'" (Gray, 1967). In this line of thinking, screenography, as a scenographical choice, can highlight the distance between actual reality and virtual one, presenting a perspective which is defined by Maaike Bleeker as "*theatrical*" (Bleeker 2002, 82).

Bleeker argues that the awareness of distance between what is presented on stage, as the object of view, and the viewer transforms, what is presented on stage, into sign and, consequently, lowers its power to absorb the viewer. In other words, the awareness of distance between the performance and the audience reminds the audience the theatrical quality of the performance. In the case of telematic performance, in which stage is in-between virtual and actual spaces, the camera becomes the object that highlights the distance between actual and virtual reality, reminding the audience that what they perceive as a real story is, at the same time, a representation of reality and, thus, can be subjective following the camera operator's will.

As I have already said, the maintenance of Skype is partly based on web cameras. The makers of *Three Rooms* have chosen to keep the use of this medium transparent. The transparency of the whole software and hardware of Skype,

underlines the mediatized character of the performance and reminds the audience that this event would not be able to occur without this technology. Consequently, the audience becomes aware of the technology that is used, and gains an insight of the spectrum of its possibilities, as well as its weakness. Furthermore, by controlling the web cameras, the makers control the view the audience has on their private spaces and their personal lives. The reality is being framed and presented through three different subjective perspectives, those of the makers' eyes. In this line of thinking, the makers state that the mediatized character of telematic performance transforms automatically reality into sign, generating a fruitful space where reality can be reimagined. In the case of *Three Rooms*, web cameras become a playful partner which allows the makers to distort reality in front of the audience's eyes, playing with the idea of distance and proximity in a metaphorical level. An exemplary moment of this playful mood is when they attempt to generate a visual collage by connecting actions and pictures with one space to another through the use of a camera lens, or when they try through the technique of illusion to create a cause-effect action from the one space to another (e.g Kathryn Hamilton use a lighter in order to light on Hatem Hadawe's cigarette on the screen). To conclude with, it seems that the makers of *Three Rooms* convey that we are at the centre of a global geopolitical reconstruction, whose complexity places individuals in the position of being forced to invent new forms, through which we can adapt to this ever-changing environment.

Conclusion

This thesis explores the aesthetics that telematics can bring in live performance. My main observations were set on the performances of *Guilty Landscapes* and of *Three Rooms*, under the concept of telematic performance and within the context of the performative turn in digital art. Although these cases were my starting points to explore the aesthetics of telematic performance, I found, in theories and concepts about telematic technology and intermedial performance, a fruitful source for further investigation. In that sense, my arguments in this thesis were a result of a systematic relation between the two performances and the theoretical framework I used in respect of telematics and performance theory.

The concept of telepresence, as an extension of the presence beyond a fixed point in the actual space, led me to argue that telematic technology can stress the understanding of "the here and now" in live performance beyond the spatiotemporal apparatus of the theatrical space. Moreover, based on the theory of intermediality in performance and considering performance as a phenomenon which reflects upon the media it stages (Kattenbelt 2010, 32), I suggested that telematic performance can be an exemplary case to study our experience of virtual telematic communication.

What proved to be special in telematic performance, comparing to other genres of intermedial performance, is the virtual ontology of its scenic space. Considering the spatial configurations that emerge in intermedial performances and inspired by the concept of intermedial stage, I attempted to approach the space in telematic performance as an occurrence that is generated, designed and exists in-between the interactive relationship of the geographically distributed performers and spectators. Following this argument, I observed that the scenic space of telematic performance is located in-between an actual and virtual environment and that the audience is invited to directly interact through the screen. In telematic performance there is no mediator in between the spectator and the screen and in that sense every spectator is invited to interact directly with the virtual scenic space, being always mentally and bodily active in that relationship. In other words, it is the spectator's body that directly interacts with digital media, making her fully aware of the state of an intermedial experience. In that sense, telematic performance is very much about

staging the communication through screens and as a consequence the screen becomes the scenery, the scenic space which opens the gate to the virtual environment that the event takes place as well as invites the audience to be an active participant on this event.

In addition, it became more and more clear, during my research, that the technological means, through which telematic performance occurs, can play a great role in the construction of the experience, affecting the spectator's perceptual system. In other words, I suggested that the technological means that makers choose in order to set up telematic communication and the way they deal with them, is a process which affects the aesthetics of telematic performance and therefore has to be considered as a part of telematic performance's dramaturgy. In this line of thinking, I chose to further explore the two study cases from a dramaturgical point of view, with the intention to reveal the dramaturgical strategies that can be developed from the use of different technological means and emerge through the interactive and connective features of telematics.

I used these two cases with the intention to discuss how telematic performance can make the audience aware of the ways they experience ubiquitous presence in an interactive and connective global network. Telematics gives us the potential to have access to a wide range of international events and in a way to feel present in them. However, the virtual proximity in combination with the physical distance creates a complex system of communication in which we have to be aware of our position and our agency. *Guilty Landscapes* makes clear that virtual proximity is not only a state of the passive viewer who has visional access to a screen, but instead, includes an interactive relationship where the viewer becomes at the same time the object of view and, thus, all the participants end up being part of the same interface. In addition, *Three Rooms* underlines that telematics is a tool which can have the potential to create a global interactive community, but at the same time states that far-distant relationships are fragile and therefore need care and persistence.

Both cases declare interactivity and connectivity as having a great impact in our perception of today's mediatized society, underlining that telematic communication and the perception of reality through digital images are two complicated processes and that the user has to be aware of their consequences. In an

era, in which digital image becomes the main medium of our communication it is necessary to train our sensorial and perceptual skills in order to understand the mechanism of the mediatized communication and consequently the position and the role we have in it.

It is a fact that telematics has thrived. In contemporary digital culture, this technology is used almost in every aspect of our public and private life, for providing or asking for services, information or products, stressing communication to have a digitized format. This research focused on two cases that explore how we can experience our presence in-between virtual proximity and physical distance during the process of virtual telematic communication and, thus, discussed the ways we can deal with our virtual ties and how are those related to our physical ties. However, there are a lot of other topics that telematic performance can thematize and therefore, more approaches can be attempted in respect of the effects of virtual telematic communication in the apparatus of live performance.

Through the case studies, it became clear that telematic performance can provide the potential of a digital participatory form of art. In this line of reasoning, one can research if and how telematic performance could drive in the democratization of theatre, making every participant the "artist" of the event. Moreover, as another research suggestion, the notion of telematic performance could be examined under the prism of film theory, as a form of interactive cinema, raising questions in respect of the methods that directors and actors use in order to deal with the cameras as a performative partner.

Finally, expanding the field of research, a whole new range of scenographic options seems to emerge in this interface, in- between the actual and virtual spaces, which needs further investigation from both an artistic as well as a phenomenological point of view, revealing new aspects about the way we, as an audience, perceive and experience this specific interface.

This research made me aware of how the hybrid and multifaceted ontology of telematic performance affects the process of research itself, constantly reminding the researcher of the necessity to engage a kaleidoscopic, methodological approach. I structured this study, establishing a narrative in which theories and concepts overlap

each other generating, in their respectful combination, new meaning and perspectives about the object of research.

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