Mystinteriors: Fore- and Afterword

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Instructions

[Mystinteriors](#) is a virtual/mixed reality, smartphone-based, 360° video experience meant to be viewed on a full phone screen. The Mystinteriors experience lasts for approximately 14 minutes. We encourage viewers to immerse themselves in the experience by dimming the lights in their living rooms and wearing headphones. This setup allows viewers to wander through the solitude of their personal spaces while exploring the virtual world of the performance.

To fully engage with the interactive elements on the screen, viewers will need to move their smartphones in all directions. This movement enables them to discover hidden elements within the virtual space. For an enhanced experience, we recommend viewing the performance multiple times, as each iteration may reveal new elements of the experience and provide a fresh perspective.

Elvis Bendana Rivas, Ph.D. serves as an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Southern Indiana, also pursuing his passion as a classical guitar performer, orchestra conductor, and interdisciplinary scholar. His research explores the role of Latin American pop and folk music in revolutions and social movements. Additionally, he explores ways to enhance the concert experience through immersive and interactive performances, blending traditional art with modern technology. **Irina Kruchinina, Ph.D.**, born in Moscow, Russia, is a Teaching Assistant Professor of Performance Studies at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an interdisciplinary performance artist-scholar who explores poetry as intermedia between modes of human expression. She received her first M.A. degree in the Swedish Language and Western World Literature from Moscow State University in Russia and a second M.A. in Performance Studies from the Department of Communication Studies at Louisiana State University. She also holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Georgia in Athens. She creates spectacles, installations, and improvisations in the form of poems exploring the metaphorical aspects of human experience. She actively collaborates with music, art, theatre, dance, and digital media artists, directing, devising, choreographing, and reimagining visual art.

Inside Mystinteriors

Mystinteriors was conceived before the global spread of COVID-19, but its design and development unfolded during the Pandemic, which provided a real-life context for what we had envisioned to create. The work began with the idea to juxtapose Francisco Goya's allegorical etching "El sueño de la razón produce monstruos" and Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's pictorial soundscape (inspired by Goya's work). We were curious to conceptualize musical vision by exploring what Tedesco's piece reveals about the etching. We decided to combine psycho-physical and traditional music performance to recreate in space what the eye cannot see without the music. While our initial plan of making a live performance was altered due to the Pandemic, in the condition of global isolation and the emergence of the digital world as a principal stage of social connection, Mystinteriors capitalized on the virtual relation-scape. With constant reference to Goya, we designed a dream space where millions of solitudes could meet by sharing a unique introspective journey from the confinement of their living rooms.

Through the first 8 months of COVID lock-down, Mystinteriors grew into an immersive experience of visual art we attended to as a mis-en-scene of the invisible processes of the human psyche. Borrowing from Goya, we constructed an introspective space where solitudes could meet. In 360° video, we translated Goya's allegory of a dream into poetic, musical, choreographic, and digital imagery. To show how deeply inward processes form lived landscapes, we used projections, embodiment of allegorical characters, and the figure of the musician as a collective image of solitude.

Tedesco's musical interpretation of the etching functions as a natural soundscape of the dream world of Mystinteriors via cinematic rendering of a traditional guitar performance and traditional guitar performance; the body of the player constitutes a dome over the space in which we are experiencing as our inwardness. The music offers a unifying measure of time and character to the scattered visual elements. By orchestrating their impression according to Tedesco's musical logic, participants may rediscover their surroundings as being coextensive to their inward experiences, and as an existential leitmotif shared with people across times and places. The musicalization of the visual art along with the pictorial function of music in Mystinteriors is meant to confuse the senses and condition perception to see in space what one experiences inside when listening to the music. We coined the act of experiencing oneself situated in the physical environment as being symbolic to the musical experience: as "hearsualizing" the space.

Finally, we solidified this hearsualized space in word by transposing both the etching and the music into a single poem. We found a sonnet about the imprisonment in illusions by Sor Juana Inés De la Cruz, "Detente, sombra de mi bien esquivo," could function as both a song with Tedesco's music and an inscription under the table on which Goya's sleeper rests his head—bedeviled by his inner monsters. De la Cruz's words function as signifiers of the optical and acoustic illusions within the room.

The initial performance of Mystinteriors had two iterations: First, the audience experienced the video without words. The second version included the voice-over. In this final version, the poem functions as a name-giver to thoughts and feelings we don't have words for, just like the etching brings to the surface inner events that often do not have a place in people's life. Thus, De la Cruz's poem also offers itself as a shared narrative where solitary experiences of the performance can converge.

Our major design choices included a seamless connection between the virtual and physical, deeply internal and emphatically empirical, along with musical and visual images. What happens in the performance takes place in physical space on both the creators' and the spectators' side. The interiors of our mysteria was built in a living room, while spectators experience the performance by superimposing phone images/videos over the walls of their own private spaces. We dressed our myst-interiors in white sheets to create a reverie-like world—exposing the vulnerable ways in which we're found asleep. The viewers we imagine ideally experience the performance at night, as well, when the shapes of their interiors dissolve easily into the dark. Tedesco's piece was performed live for the first recorded performance; Meanwhile, in the spectators' room, it is meant to function as the sound of their inwardness.

The design of Mystinteriors also mirrors the process of etching, as we attend to the participant's mind as a metaphorical copper plate. Lines of thoughts, impressions of life, and memories projected onto Goya's figures mark the negative space that would constitute a final etching. The imagination confronts the logical mind with monstrous visions, akin to how a dissolvent fights metal during the etching process. Finally, the press of time manifests a resolution between the visions and the visible, between the virtual and the objectified. Finger cushions fighting the metal of strings promote a sense of resistance that shifts into harmony, similar to inner conflicts and resolutions participants might experience during the performance.

Further, Mysteinteriors focuses on the dialogue between two ways of thinking—through images and through sounds—in the form of interaction between two performers. The dancer silently shadows the music by imitating Goya's etching, while the guitarist processes the image through music, creating a landscape for the dancer to move in. The final images emerge through this dialogue, just as aquatint etching reveals a print image meticulously carved by the decisive hand of the artist. At the same time, the unpredictable spread of rosin mist over the etched image can cause mysterious tonal transformations. The mist of time in the performance turns the echo (reverberation) of desires and fears into the presence of the sacred "hechizo" (myst[ery]), which viewers may even want to reach and eagerly replace by images that they have created:

> …Imagen del hechizo que más quiero, bella ilusión por quien alegre muero, dulce ficción por quien penosa vivo… (De la Cruz)

De la Cruz's sonnet functions as a type of rosin, as well, layered over Goya's figure of a dreamer and etched by music into the participants' sense of space, self, and time.

Our 360° video expands the potential for viewers to sustain responsive presence within the orbed dimension of the virtual living space, while enabling an exploration of physical interiors as fragmentary similes of inner life. The first scene of Mystinteriors teaches participants to operate the technology as a new mode of self-consciousness. They are placed at the bottom of a narrow well, the walls covered by sonnet lines hatching images of their own interpretations. Above, one can see the gigantic figures of the creator-performers putting familiar and strange objects around participants, stirring their 360° awareness and helping them discover a fuller sense of presence. From there, the walls of the well open and the participants are left to catch the dispersed mirages of meaning, continuously escaping sight and dissolving into the air.

The performance offers a choice to move around the room—chasing the dispersed promises of meaning—or to remain still, which facilitates agency as participants can explore the virtual surroundings at their own rhythm and from any angle. Our video aims at defamiliarizing the participants with the ambience of their own homes and encouraging the rediscovery of a new dimensionality in their interiors. The holistic view creates a safe space for participants to delve into a dreamlike world of conflicting intrapersonal emotions, interpretations, longings, and fears. The projection of one dream onto many individual spaces is intended

to generate an inner-voice resonance, where participants who explore the darkness of their self-enclosed mind-space might hear it resound in the same melody. Thus, Mystinteriors explores musical vision as poetry and as an inter-sensory medium.

As digital performance of literature, Mystinteriors explores new and immersive ways in which literature can be performed and experienced. Mystinteriors showcases the potential of technology to enrich our engagement with art and literature and to inspire exploration of the edges of empirical and imagined realities. Rather than a smartphone simply being a device to reach for when minds are closed, we ask: How can this technology extend our senses and increase our responsiveness? How can we rethink the concept of space—which can enclose us within ourselves—by rearranging living spaces into abstract zones of encounter where our dreams might meet? Finally, how do we accomplish this while attending to each other with care and without breaking personal boundaries?

Works Cited

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