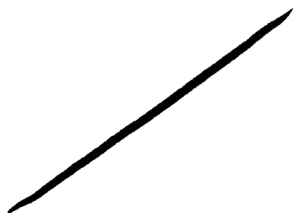


THE SPECTATOR IN VR – AN INVISIBLE-PRESENT OPERATOR

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Abstract: This essay focuses on observations that belong to the storyline, *mise en scène*, and the creation of a character and acting with the 360-degree camera. Productions such as *Carne y arena* (2017) by Alejandro González Iñárritu, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010) by Werner Herzog, or *Millions March NYC* (2015) by Chris Milk and Spike Jonze, are performances that probe the real-time effect, in which the viewer in the VR environment “lives” in a film time both as a character and as an observer. We will follow the construction of the narrative with the camera and approaches to immersion in the virtual environment. *Dr. TEX* (2021) and *One Flew over a Cuckoo’s Nest* (2018) are two productions, one of VR 360-degree film and the other of VR 360-degree theatre, which aim to frame virtual reality in an artistic paradigm, which refers to one-dimensional time as the real one. Starting from Peter Brook’s theories and the observations made by Syd Field in the book *The Movie Screenplay*, we will analyse character construction techniques applied in both VR 360-degree theatre and VR 360-degree film. At the same time, we will follow the construction of the narrative with the camera and approaches to immersion in the virtual environment.

Keywords: Inárritu, Herzog, virtual reality, immersive, realism, VR 360-degree documentary, VR narration, VR 360-degree character, spectator.

How to cite: Ciornei, Ligia (2021) ‘The Spectator in VR – An Invisible-Present Operator’, *Concept 1* (22)/2021, pp. 274-288.

Introduction

Prior to developing observations on the film environment in virtual reality (VR), we mention that this technology appeared in 1960. Morton Leonard Heilig patented, at the time, the *Telesphere Mask*, a device based on miniature TV tubes, which resembles the VR headset, that are used up to today. Two years later, in 1962, this director and researcher, called by his contemporaries “the parent of virtual reality”, developed *Sensorama*, known as the first technology that addresses a single viewer and captures all the five senses. *The Sword of Damocles* was created following the principles developed by Heilig with the *Telesphere Mask*. In 1968, the computer scientist Ivan Sutherland, by mounting a head tracking device, managed to develop in *The Sword of Damocles* a mechanism through which the viewer can track the image along with the head movement. Sutherland’s research continued, and the speed of virtual reality playback increased. Stanford University relied on Sutherland’s discoveries and offered him a chair called *Silicon Graphics*. He and his students explored the limits of virtual reality in detail and, under the guidance of Tom Furness, they managed to create a cabin simulator. Virtual piloting and VR simulators became operational in 1985.

Until 1997, history and discovery in virtual reality were based more on an environment in which this technology contributed to the military or NASA experiments. Although all the research started from a filmmaker, starting with 2015 we can talk about the possibility of an artistic act in virtual reality.

Between 2000-2014, the general public, *i.e.*, potential spectators of VR productions, did not have access to headsets, as these were placed in the space of strict consumption for computer games or *PlayStation*, but starting with their launch at an affordable price, so far we can talk about virtual reality film productions signed by directors such as Alejandro González Iñárritu, Werner Herzog, or Spike Jonze and Chris Milk.

Spike Jonze and Chris Milk are two filmmakers who, together with the *VICE NEWS* team in 2015, brought to the attention of the documentary audience *VR Millions*

March NYC, filmed in 360 degrees. The film focuses on the 2015 protests on the streets of New York, where people taking to the streets demanded an end to the abuses committed by police officers against black citizens. The fascination of the spectators and directors who watched the documentary in virtual reality brought in sentimental discussions of authenticity.

While watching the documentary *Millions March NYC*, viewers felt present amid the protests. This feeling has led to a series of statements regarding the power of film in virtual reality. The strongest idea is that of Chris Milk, who hopes that “this VR is the tool we need to stimulate more compassion for each other” and believes that “VR has the potential to change journalism fundamentally.” (VICE News, 2015)

Another starting point is the virtual reality documentary *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* signed by Werner Herzog, which captures the sensation of a spectator watching the 32,000-year-old cave paintings in Chauvet Cave in France, a cave closed to the general public. This unique virtual reality experience that Herzog proposes creates a set of circumstances for the viewer in VR that can determine a different film experience starting from the uniqueness of the person.

The same survey of staff and emotions generated by virtual reality is exploited by Inarritu in *Carne y arena*, a VR short film that places the viewer in the position of an immigrant trapped at the border and dresses the film’s story in the idea that we are mere visitors and observers of this world.

The first step in the use of virtual reality in the Romanian theatre was made by the team from the “Hungarian State Theatre” in Cluj with the show *Ilegitim* (2018), staged by the film director Adrian Sitaru. I mention this first experiment of Adrian Sitaru because he does an extraordinary thing in the VR theatre show *Ilegitim*. The director assigns the camera the quality of a witness. Basically, by positioning the camera 360 degrees in public, Sitaru creates the typology of the spectator as it should be. Through this option, he reinforces the idea that the spectator is in a performance hall, the actors play on a stage, and the setting and light are framed within the limits of the stage frame.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (2018), directed by Eugen Gyemant, is a 360-degree virtual reality theatre show, lasting 2 hours and 51 minutes divided into 15 episodes. The project was launched on December 15, 2020, in partnership with the “Andrei Mureșanu” Theatre (TAM) and its partners - *Augmented Space Agency*, *Loop Virtual Reality Solutions*, and *Popas Production*. So far, the team mentioned above, of which I was part, is the only one that has a web platform (www.teatruvr.ro), through which you can watch and purchase tickets for 360-degree VR shows.

Dr. TEX (2020) is a 360-degree VR short film, made in partnership with the Excelsior Theatre and Loop Virtual Reality Solutions, whose screenplay is directed and signed by myself. The short film focuses on creating a symbiosis between the action in the film, the 360-degree camera, and the spectator. *Dr. TEX* starts from an original narrative structure that integrates fantastic characters that we find in the repertoire of the Excelsior Theatre, and that is set in a realistic setting, thus stimulating a one-dimensional time to which the viewer in a virtual environment relates as a real-time.

Research methodology

Starting from the above three examples of virtual reality film - *Millions March NYC* (r: Spike Jonze and Chris Milk), *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* signed (r: Werner Herzog) and *Carne y arena* (r: Alejandro González Iñárritu) - we will follow the type of film narrative used. We will establish similarities and differences between the positioning compared to physical or mental immersion. We will also analyse the need for interactivity in the virtual environment in the story or towards the viewer. Based on examples and qualitative research, starting from the theory of cinematic realism and the type of *cinéma vérité*, we will follow the red thread of writing a narrative and a character in virtual reality. Using examples from the analysed films, we will integrate the directorial and dramaturgical opportunities that the virtual environment can offer in fiction, theatre, or documentary film.

The concept by which the viewer is the VR 360 degree camera itself, which becomes an active character and engaged in the story, whether theatre or film, leads to a structure through which the viewer integrates into a perfect dramatic harmony between physical and mental immersion. These aspects of 360-degree VR creation have been debated since the concept stage. Romanian productions in VR 360 degrees *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (directed by Eugen Gyemant) and *Dr. TEX* (directed by Ligia Ciornei) are the first attempts to integrate the viewer as "the camera itself."

Peter Brook says about theatre that:

it is probably one of the most difficult arts because it has to happen simultaneously and in perfect harmony in three connections: between the actor and his inner life, between the actors and his acting partners, between the actor and public. (Brook, 2012, p. 46)

Starting from this hypothesis, virtual reality, in addition to the three aspects that Peter Brook mentions, brings to the attention of the creators of virtual theatre the digital mediation between actor, camera, and spectator. The character, whether we talk about theatre or film, in virtual reality, must be available from a dramatic point of view, so that the activity, attention, and decision of the viewer is moderate as a continuous reality where the viewer is a common body with the virtual environment in which he/she gets in.

André Bazin attributes to the film the quality of "spatial infinity" that focuses entirely on the actor. In Bazin's vision:

the window of cinema can open to a one hundred percent artificial world, but it remains a window: the nature we see through it may have nothing to do with what we know in our daily lives, but it's still nature – it extends in the same way beyond the limits of the framework. (Gorzo, 2009, p. 51)

If we interrogate the dynamic collaboration between "cinema as a window" and the world that "extends beyond the limits of the frame", we will observe a direct relationship between "window as cinema" and the 360-degree virtual space in the VR headset. Thus, the cinema screen is not a scene, but a microcosm that ignores any kind of border and that offers the actor a real-virtual look. Real from the perspective of the character and virtual from the perspective of the camera, which is often identified with the viewer's gaze, and in this case, virtual reality and immersion, are integral parts that probe a process by which viewers identify and make decisions.

Nevertheless, what cinema and virtual reality cannot do, unlike theatrical space, is to access “soulfully” the infinite exchange of information that takes place between the character in the scene (the actor) and the audience.

Starting from the two hypotheses set out above about film and theatre, I will argue the need for a virtual reality character to be the third ubiquitous spectator character. In the case of a VR narrative, it identifies with the 360-degree camera.

Narration and directorial concept in VR

Given the fact that both in terms of content and form, the narrative structure in virtual reality is closest to cinematography and has as a primary factor the concept of using the third narrator as an omniscient, which in the case of narrative in virtual reality, the viewer is the device itself, it must be considered as a first starting point in the construction of a narrative and then a directorial concept in VR film.

In the case of VR fiction, the actors’ play may be closer to Grotowski’s theories and techniques due to the uniqueness of his thinking, through which the theatre becomes a laboratory and the nature of the search for an actor to be a character must meet three coordinates: mentally, physically and emotionally; this can enhance the virtual world created in 360-degree VR. Thus, referring to Grotowski, the “VR laboratory” gives the actor the chance to cling to this freedom of thought generically called “laboratory” and to position himself towards the environment and a single spectator, finding in him the truth. In order to be able to trigger the depth in the viewer and, with his help in virtual reality, to open a world connected to his world, the actor has a responsibility, especially in VR, to create the connection between his own imagination and the viewer’s imagination (Brook, 2012, p. 60), for it to become a common body in the VR narrative.

If Syd Field said that “film means behavior” (2016, p. 43), Orson Scott Card pleads for the construction of a “character who lives and dies according to his own decisions” (1990, p. 155), and André Bazin puts the sequence frame first as the basic narrative unit and the closest way to tell a story within the limits of reality. On the other hand, David Bordwell brings into question the ideal of cinema as recordings of the *mise-en-scène* in a single frame. Starting from this desire of filmmakers to capture perceptual realism through characters, situations, depth of field, invisible cuts and long frames, and through the realistic cinematic style, the viewer to be engaged in narrative freedom that he has in real life, the virtual reality film is subject to the prophecy made by Bazin and resumed by Peter Matthews in the homage article in *Sight & Sound*, according to which “by the year 2000, the cinema will be completely freed from the artificiality of editing” and the final transition will begin from the stage of “art of the real” to the stage of “the reality becomes art”. Well, in how many ways was he wrong? Matthews lists them: the status of the real is more uncertain than ever; mainstream cinema is more oriented than ever towards evasionism, and anyway the digitization of the image relieves the cinema of the moral obligation to be realistic. (Gorzo, 2011, p. 42)

Starting with Herzog, Inarritu, Spike Jonze, and Chris Milk, Bazin’s prophecy seems to becoming true. Inarritu, using the VR environment in the film *Carne y arena*, demonstrates that the cinema has freed itself from editing, and “the art of the real” reaches the stage of “the reality becomes art”. The justification of perceptual realism in VR is through the very way

of capturing and rendering the image. The viewer lives with the characters in real-time, has the freedom to watch 360 degrees and make his own cut-out, is actively engaged in the action of the film, and in some cases, when the dramaturgy requires it, interacts with the virtual environment. However, the strongest example that obeys the paradigm enunciated by Bazin, “reality becomes art,” is the documentary VR. The protests in *Millions March NYC* by Spike Jonze and Chris Milk in virtual reality capture the truth of the “street” in its purest form. If we refer to the three concepts that cinematography has assimilated: direct cinema, *cinéma vérité* and observational film, documentary, and VR film, it can be easily framed in the cinematic movements presented above because the narrative in virtual reality plays events in an impartial manner. Thus, the dogma of *cinéma vérité* through which the filmmaker “challenges the truth” without introducing his own opinion, can emphasize the need for a film like Herzog or Inarritu, which challenges the viewer to seek the truth in himself and add it to the situation proposed by *mise-en-scène* and narration, without being exposed to the improbable feeling.

Therefore, in the movie *Carne y arena*, we can see four roles of the narrative in VR:

- *Realistic from the direct perspective of cinema and cinéma vérité.*

Inarritu reproduces a feeling. For the viewer to empathize with the virtual environment, he becomes the character of an “imaginary documentary” that exposes the tragedies of those who fraudulently cross the border. The characters are chosen according to the typology from the 360-degree frame-sequence, the armed law enforcement and the spectator-character go through the story of an emigrant, provoke an almost possible sense of the world, because the headset user is completely isolated from the real world, and he becomes, in fifteen minutes, the camera and watches an event live.

- *Persuasion and narrative structure.*

Inarritu creates the narrative-sensory context. He puts the spectator in a room to take off his shoes, the temperature in the room is low; the action in VR begins with the spectator stepping in the sand. The spectator is left free to step into a new world. The action can take place in two ways: 1. The spectator is involved in dramaturgy. 2. The spectator can observe.

- *The author’s personal note in the narrative.*

Inarritu arouses curiosity. He leaves the viewer free but creates situations. Such as that of a group of refugees walking through the desert. By letting the group of characters in the narrative speak in whispers, Inarritu challenges the viewer to approach the characters and explore the nature of the situation. Shocking events, such as the appearance of a helicopter, armed officers, and aggressive retorts from law enforcement, allow the viewer to submit to the convention created by the director, *i.e.*, in this case, to kneel like the other characters or move away from the action and be a simple observer.

- *Mise-en-scène and aesthetics.*

In this case, Inarritu proposes a realistic setting and interpretation of events, justified by the desire to keep the argument that VR film is a means by which real space and time, the viewer is practically present but physically invisible. The aesthetics of the approach can be a means of innovative expression based on the expression of truths.

In the case of Herzog and the creators of the 360-degree VR documentary film *Millions March NYC*, the film narrative is reduced to the stylistics of the observational film. In both cases, the author of the documentary uses the camera as a witness to an event that took

place in the present time. Compared to the classic observational film, what brings the new VR documentary is the very experience of being present at a unique event such as *Millions March NYC* or discovering an inaccessible setting as in *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*.

The peculiarity of the virtual reality narrative is based on the participant's actions in the virtual environment. The spectator, the 360-degree camera, and the headset are the three elements that a director or a screenwriter in virtual reality must enhance in the narrative structure, otherwise the cinematic language and the notions of perceptual realism help to create new narrative techniques in fiction film, "to refine the effect of as-if-we-watched-what-an-invisible-operator-filmed-present." (Gorzo, 2011, p. 41)

For this "spectator-operator-invisible-present" effect to work from a narrative point of view, virtual reality helps with the terms of physical and mental immersion, which are defining elements to be considered in the structure of a scenario because they are used only in a VR environment.

The physical immersion in the case of Inarritu's film is implemented since the writing of the narrative and the directorial concept, it being a turning point in the drama of the film. The spectator, concretely, can run away or enter into the action of the film. The spectator can move through the virtual scenery. The viewer can avoid interaction with other characters in the virtual environment. So, he has physical freedom, and immersion is defined by the synchronization of images, characters, and of sound in relation to the movement of the character.

Mental immersion is what gives the viewer the feeling of real-time and creates a certain emotional experience. Basically, viewers of the documentary in VR perceive this mental immersion as an event in which they participated emotionally present but physically invisible. I see angry people, I hear the noises of the street, I see the architecture of the place, I hear the shouted rages, and the viewer of the VR documentary being in the middle of events can change his beliefs and even his behavior towards the action or ideology presented, determining a kind of commitment which the spectator has by being present.

Therefore, immersion in virtual reality has two conceptual values:

1. *Realistic in immersion:* In this case, we refer to the narration, mise-en-scène, acting, sound, and movement in the virtual space as authentic and plausible because any detail that does not fit into the paradigm of the real can break the convention and break the immersion.

2. *Immersive magical realism:* Here, things become more complicated from the perspective of the film because, in addition to the fantastic immersive environment generated on the computer, psychological comfort must be induced upon the viewer so that the imaginary and the immersion do not cause him different physical states. (Example: fear of heights.)

The physical and mental immersion that the Romanian spectator goes through in the context of a 360-degree VR show or film belongs to the creation of the context and the character. The character is and will remain a man who will determine the action, will choose, and will make mistakes so that later, his action (in the scene or in the sequence) will determine the transformation. But this goal of the actor who becomes a character must also transcend to the spectator, so that at the end of the 360-degree experience he can feel a transformation. The action of the characters in the 360-degree VR film or play must be based on a structure that serves the viewer an individualization, which "must present itself as a living reality of situations, states, characters, and actions." (Hegel, 1996, p. 576)

In the VR 360 degree show *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* nest directed by Eugen Gyemant, we referred to the character as the camera itself, i.e. the spectator. However, as virtual reality left in the first years of its appearance on the Romanian market, the feeling that it is a means to experience certain conditions (fear of altitude, flight, claustrophobia), the project team tried to give it physical stability and emotional to the viewer. In the case of the show *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the spectator is placed in the setting, sees that he is in a wheelchair, placed in the body of an immobilized mannequin. Through this directorial option, the spectator becomes a character, and he is in the middle of the action, the other characters interact with him, making him mentally and emotionally active in the action.

The action in the show *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* takes place in a psychiatric hospital and is based on the story of the novel of the same name written by Ken Kesey in 1962. The character Randle Patrick McMurphy limits the viewer's attention to play and action. The nature of the character he leads, does not allow the viewer to be "carried away", without the permission or intention of the director, from the virtual environment in 360 degrees. In the first minutes of the virtual show, the viewer has the time to enter into the convention and have an overview of the setting, light, and characters. Without being put in discomfort, the character-spectator is guided by the action of sounds that belong to the diegetic space of the scene, but also by the other characters that move him to the essential points through which to be emotionally engaged in dramaturgy. Thus, the physical and mental immersion created from the dramaturgy, characters, and scenery brings the viewer closer to the feeling that he is an active character of the show.

In the short film *Dr. TEX*, I built—from the concept of the script—the idea of "character-camera 360 degrees-spectator"; thus, I gave the quality of the spectator as the main character, caught in the body of a doll. As Syd Field says in the book *Screenplay*, the character is the internal foundation from which the essence of a screenplay starts. In Field's vision, the main character "is the soul and nervous system of the script" (2016, p. 49). Starting from this hypothesis and from the awareness that the viewer in virtual reality is captive in a completely artificial world, directly involved in the virtual environment, without having control of the body, I necessarily referred to the viewer as a dying character, to later realize the weightlessness of the physical and mental world. "I'm the character." Starting from this statement, we built the typology of the spectator-character according to the typology of a curious spectator, having as coordinates the interior of a character-spectator, which is taken from everyday life and placed in another body, over which a group of strange individuals set the lid of a coffin. "One way or another, when you build a character you have to keep in mind that you need to arouse in the viewer the sympathy or antipathy related to the character." (Card, 1990, p. 76)

Consequently, what is essential in building a character, especially in building a character in VR 360 degree, is transformation. The beginning and the end of the story essentialize the red thread through which the viewer empathizes with the main character. If in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* directed by Eugen Gyemant, the main character McMurphy enters as a charming character, confident in himself, a revolutionary of the sanatorium, in the end, we see a character defeated by the system. In the case of the short film, the spectator-character enters the story like a spirit trapped in the body of a doll, and in the end, it becomes the consciousness of the character sentenced to death. In *Carney arena*, Inarritu attributes to the spectator a beginning that

“takes him off” from his personal life and throws him into the context of survival at the border so that in the end he feels that he was the “soul and nervous system” of the story. Herzog, together with Spike Jonze and Chris Milk, challenges the spectator to enter directly from his reality, into the reality of unique and true experiences, in order to finally have his own opinion about the so-called historical event.

Therefore, in a VR movie experience, there should be at least one element of immersion that is consistent with a potential life experience of the viewer in VR. Many theories of film and dramatic writing are found in the concepts of making a production in virtual reality, but the factors that create the experience as real is the very feeling of being present in the existence of another world.

Ethical and aesthetic options in VR film

In the book titled *Aesthetics*, Tudor Vianu stated that “the technical evolution of mankind must have been anticipated by a long artistic evolution. The artist is older than homo faber.” (2010, p. 172) Starting from this philosophical concept of *homo faber*, we could integrate virtual reality (VR) as a tool through which the artist can have an original attitude, given that VR through the immersive environment can easily acquire the ability to control the virtual environment and virtual objects.

Inarritu’s *Carne y arena* is based on the same type of force by which the spectator controls his destiny in virtual reality, which brings to the present the strength of the man who is ready to risk his life in order to change his fate. The subtitle “Practically present, Physically invisible” of the *Carne y arena* installation, essentializes the dogma of virtual reality but also contains the statement made by Aristotle regarding artistic thinking.

Since the poet is an imitator like the painter or any other artist, imitation must render things in one of three ways: either as they were or are, or as they are said or seem to be, or as they should be. (Aristotel 1965, p. 102)

Starting from this hypothesis, the creator or director in virtual reality can give to the imitation a value of truth and real using VR technology, and thus, the spectator can reach the quality of *homo faber*, and the artist can continue his ascent, so through him the technique can evolve.

Inarritu manages to create a framework by imitating the human condition, discovered in his long documentaries about the events of immigrants or refugees from Mexico and Central America, to allow the viewer a direct experience, as it should be. Basically, using VR technology, Inarritu puts the viewer in the “shoes” of an immigrant, thus causing a transition into a world unknown to ordinary people, but once you enter it, the director manages to create a direct path to the hearts of viewers, turning him into fifteen minutes in an immigrant caught at the border.

Physically invisible, but practically present are the spectators of documentation in virtual reality. *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, signed by Werner Herzog, highlights the hypothesis that the imitation of reality must render things in virtual reality either as they were or as they are. Being in the middle of a cave with cave paintings, Herzog relied on the cultural value of his discovery. He chose to preserve it and at the same time give the viewer the freedom to look and be in the middle of a unique and inaccessible setting.

Unique and unrepeatable frames are also the moments of protests in New York, and VR technology allows you to document in a realistic way, and then gives the viewer the feeling that he was part of a genuine historical segment, just like in the documentary VR *Millions March NYC* by Spike Jonze and Chris Milk. The 360 frames in the middle of the protests show the events exactly as they were, so the limit of the frame in the classic film and the editing disappear, and with these elements the directorial option to manipulate the story through the grammar of the film disappears. However, what remains for the virtual reality documentary creator is the freedom to return to Dziga Vertov and to place the 360 camera in essential points, through which to cover the atmosphere of the events.

The first example of an audio-visual show in 360-degree VR that Romania had is *Ilegitim*, signed by Adrian Sitaru. The show could be viewed at the same time as a classic performance or as a 360-degree VR show. The viewer had the option to choose whether to get caught up in the story on stage or to put on a VR headset and watch the same show.

Also in Romania, a few years later, the team of the project *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (directed by Eugen Gyemant) set out to go one step further in the development of physical and mental immersion. This happened by personifying the viewer and using short immersive interactions. In order not to be surprised by the spectator, in the prologue of the show the warning that there will be movements is made. In this case, the physical and mental immersion focused on a modest interaction in 360-degree VR. Depending on the position of the knees that the mannequin had in the wheelchair, the action took place there, so that the spectator would not be forced to move his head, thus avoiding to cause him physical discomfort. These options that belong to the aesthetics of the show were moderated by the ethics that the artistic team of the project had to impose, because if in the case of Adrian Sitaru's *Ilegitim* show, the spectator gave up the VR headset and watched the show in real-time, for that the whole concept took place in the auditorium. In the case of the show in 360-degree VR, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the spectators have only one option, that of entering as an observer in the middle of the action.

In the case of the short film *DR. TEX* (directed by Ligia Ciornei), the structure of physical and mental immersion started from the idea that the spectator, in the minimum of time, with the maximum effect, must go through experiencing several emotions, both physical and mental. This led to a series of mental choices that the viewer could make while the action in the film unfolded. He had the opportunity to choose the angle from which he sees the story, but at the same time to position himself as a spectator character who is engaged in the action.

The physical immersion in this case is a harder one, because the spectator is actively engaged in carrying out the action.

- It is set to start watching left behind.
- The focus of the narrative changes within a circle.
- The characters approach him in the foreground and address him directly.
- Using the jump cut in the montage, parts of the story are cut.

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All these aspects are stated at the beginning of the short film. It is important for the viewer to be notified of the interactive, immersive physical, and mental aspects that are part of the 360-degree VR audio-visual product, because when the team does not supervise the spectator, what we believe as artists to be tolerable at the level of immersion, can cause physical conditions in the spectator that can affect him.

Ethics and aesthetics in VR film productions are two essential aspects. Ethics in this case has a unique moral value, which often does not empathize with cultural relativism and the cultural moral differences of society. Ethics, in the case of virtual reality films, pursues a set of moral values through which the viewer and the creator of the VR film are forced to take into account.

Virtual reality can also raise some observations that belong to a moral autonomy and responsibility of the young creator, because this new technology, if used without an ethical foundation, can lead the viewer through states that might affect him sensorially and emotionally. Virtual reality completely isolates the viewer and delivers artificial content, unlike theatre or film, in which the viewer can detach at any time. In virtual reality, the viewer is advised not to spend more than twenty minutes. The fact that he does not see his body and the brain acts and reacts according to the kinetic movements rendered in the headset can cause accidents if he is not constantly monitored. In this case, immersion and kinetic movements, sudden appearances of elements or characters, physical and mental violence in the virtual environment are elements that can trigger physical injuries or forms of panic attacks. That is why using this type of technology is not recommended for those with heart disease, for individuals who suffer from claustrophobia, or for those who have a sensitive medical history.

Therefore, the creator of a VR film, theatre, or documentary, before entering production, could ask himself a series of questions about the ethical and aesthetic course of the story he wants to tell to a single viewer. Who is the spectator in VR? Where does the action take place in VR? Who are his characters? How do the characters relate to the viewer? How does the viewer relate to the characters? What is the story behind the story? Why is immersion and kinetic motion necessary in VR? Who is the VR camera? What emotion does the VR movie creator pursue? What is the dramatic structure from which the emotion should result? What is the character in VR? Why VR?

Conclusion

Currently, I believe that the 360-degree camera provides the documentary director with the chance to present the uniqueness of some events and actions that belong to a historical, social, and contemporary fact. The quality of the film in virtual reality is based on Bazin's own hypothesis that "cinema has not yet been invented" (2014, p. 16) and forces the filmmaker to create in the minimum of time, with the maximum of effect, a story that is in a continuous transformation before our eyes. 360-degree VR theatre, according to VR theatre creator Mark Reaney, can be considered the first "virtual reality machine" (Dixon, 2007, p. 27), because theatre has always had the ability to play with the spectator's imagination.

Therefore, the responsibility of the creator of theatre and film in VR 360 degrees belongs to a thorough knowledge of the human psyche, because the virtual elements are assimilated by the human mind as reality itself, and this aspect forces the VR content creator

to be weighted in the stylistic and dramaturgical options they implement in the concept. The moral conduct of each 360-degree VR creator can raise or eliminate the need for viewers to use and watch movies or shows in 360-degree VR. Basically, the evolution of 360-degree VR storytelling in Romania largely depends on the creators of the environment, on the ethics and aesthetics implemented in the concepts.

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Ligia Ciornei studied Film Directing and Film Production at the National University of Theatre and Cinematography "I.L. Caragiale" in Bucharest, where she is currently a PhD student. She stood out internationally with the short films *Vintage* and *Somewhere in Moldova*. Additionally, she made her theatre debut with the show *Grounded by George Brant*, which in turn was appreciated by critics and theatre selectors. *Citadela* is a performative installation about the first female pilots in Romania and managed to define the young director as an interdisciplinary artist. Currently, her research topic focuses on “Cinematography and theatre as mixed realities” and explores narrative boundaries in VR, AR, and MR. In 2020, she participated as an artistic consultant in the VR theatre project 360 degrees *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and in 2021 she will release DR. TEX, a 360-degree VR short film.