

# Phone Home

A User's Guide to Making and Sharing Digital Collaborative Performance



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## Introduction

*Phone Home* was an innovative theatre performance created by theatre companies in London, Munich and Athens. It was produced simultaneously on stages in all three cities in October 2016, with the audience in each city watching a part of each story. The stories were then completed with the scenes interconnecting live and the actors on each stage communicating via the Internet. The performance was based on the true stories of people who – willingly or not – left their home to create a new one.

The project was initiated in mid 2015. The three companies worked on the issues of moving homes, moving to another country and communicating with those left behind. *Phone Home's* research period coincided with the beginning of the Syrian war and the wide migration it triggered. As a result, many refugee and migrant stories found their way into the final text.

The creators worked with refugee and migrant organizations, connecting with people who found themselves resettling in one of the three participating cities, be it their final destination or just another stop along the way to their new home.

In London, we worked with Fairbeats! Music, Counterpoints Arts, Bards Without Borders, Love To Learn, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Journey MCC Birmingham (in association with Birmingham LGBT Centre), Refugee Action Kingston, Action for Refugees in Lewisham and Freedom from Torture's Write to Life group.

In Athens, we co-operated with Synergy-o and the emigrant theatre group Station Athens, the non-profit organization AMAKA, the Migrants Social Centre Tsamadou 13a and the organization Faros, which supports refugee children and teenagers in Greece.

In Munich, we teamed up with HPKJ (Heilpädagogisch-Psychotherapeutische Kinder- und Jugendhilfe e.V.), Diakonie München-Mossach e.V. and Heilig-Geist-Gemeinde Moosach.

The creative processing of the material and the development of the performance text evolved both via the internet (Skype) and with face-to-face meetings between the three directors and three dramaturgs (Eri Kyrgia, Nora Schüssler, Zodwa Nyoni) in Munich (April 2016) and London (July 2016). The process concluded with the meeting of all three theatre teams in Athens (September 2016), during which major technical issues were also discussed.

The final text was the result of a long process: at first, we selected real stories of people who had to leave their home for one reason or another. During our Joint Artist Workshop in Munich, the three creative teams, consisting of their director, actors and producers, got together to introduce themselves, improvise and finally select the stories that would be part

of the final project. The selected stories were then distributed between the three teams, each undertaking to develop specific issues.

Throughout the writing phase, the six creative partners (directors and dramaturgs) remained in close communication exchanging ideas and notes on the stories now developing into scenes, respecting each director's and each country's aesthetics, mentality and theatre practices.

During the Final Meeting in Athens, actors from all teams read and rehearsed the scenes, while the writers made the final corrections and tweaks on the text. Following that, each team started rehearsing on their own and in common, via Skype interlinked rehearsals.

All 10 performances on all three stages were broadcast live online live online and giving the audience at home the opportunity to choose which theatre stage (Athens, Munich, London) and which part of each story they wish to watch at any given time.

This publication has been edited by Tom Mansfield of Upstart Theatre in London. It is aimed especially at theatre practitioners, technicians and students who are interested in either:

- a) developing a project collaboratively with members of the community, especially people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, or:
- b) developing a theatre project which involves live streaming.

It includes material previously published on the Phone Home website, [www.phonehome.eu](http://www.phonehome.eu). Please visit this website for further information about *Phone Home*, to find out more about the artists involved, and to watch video of the performance.

People with an interest in live streaming theatre may also like to read the *Nine Lives Livestream Report* created by Upstart Theatre and available at [www.phonehome.eu](http://www.phonehome.eu).

*Phone Home* was supported by the funding programme Creative Europe – Support for European Co-operation Projects initiated by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Committee.

Our project was selected for Creative Europe funding in May 2015, receiving high scores because of its close correlation to the EACEA's main directives for re-enforcing European creativity by promoting cultural partnership between artists based in different countries, using new technology to achieve the widest possible interactivity between creators and approaching current subjects and a wide audience of all ages, nationalities and walks of life.

## Getting Started: Blind Dates with Artists or the Origins of Phone Home

By Michael Sommer, Director of PHONE HOME in Munich.

Once upon a time, there was a little theatre practitioner in Southern Germany who had just recently discovered the thrilling possibilities of live streaming as a means of communicating his art to the whole world. And while even the critics of the live streaming project in the little public theatre he worked at had to admit that it was not a bad idea, he thought: “Okay, live streaming a theatre production may be a productive tool of public relations, but can’t we use this technology on stage as well? Theatre is about communication, so let’s try to tell stories by using this.” So, he formed the idea of an interconnected performance that would link different stages by Skype.

I’d like to tell you the unlikely story of how PHONE HOME came into existence, because thinking of how we put all of this together since mid-2013, it certainly is a small miracle to see how far we’ve come already. As I tried to convey in the little fairy tale above, the starting point was the question: It’s cool that we can now live broadcast theatre shows in high quality by using live streaming. The strength of the Internet, however, is that it is not a one-way communication, but that there’s the chance of exchange, of feedback. So, if we can open a door to OUR theatre in any place in the world with an Internet connection, we can also open doors to OTHER theatres on our stage. What happens in our city largely depends on what happens elsewhere, and maybe the ‘refugee crisis’ was what made us really experience the degree of globalisation that determines our lives. So if we tell stories of people leaving their homes to come to the promised land, Europe, we must tell them in an interconnected way.

At the time, I wanted to realize this project at Theater Ulm, where I worked, and set out to find one cooperation partner at the Southern border of the European Union and a second partner outside, e.g. in Northern Africa. I activated all my contacts and asked for recommendations, I researched theatre companies in the African states, and after a while, a number of likely candidates emerged, a couple of emails were exchanged and then: A blind Skype date with a Greek director with an unpronounceable name. Which is when I met Yannis, and I don’t think I exaggerate when I say it was sympathy at first sight. We got talking, he was not only interested, but very well connected in Greek theatre and it looked as if we were going to realise the project with the National Theatre of Northern Greece in Thessaloniki in autumn 2014. With the Northern African contacts, I was not so lucky. Although I succeeded in establishing contact with very interesting theatre directors in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, the communication died away after the first Skype date. So Yannis and I decided we’d just do an interconnected show between the two of us, but the funding application that I had banked on failed and as it happened, Thessaloniki then didn’t see the possibility any more. By the time, I had already developed a very concrete idea for a

production, it was definitely on in Ulm, so with broken heart we decided that REFUGIUM, as it was called, would not be an interconnected performance.

Yannis, however, didn't give up. Even before REFUGIUM came out in October 2014, he had found a production company in Athens who had experience with EU funding and suggested that we apply for Creative Europe funding, which meant that we had to find a third cooperation partner inside the EU. Again, some high-speed research for cooperation partners began, and through a friend in London I met Tom Mansfield and Upstart Theatre. They seemed quite untypical in the English theatre scene in that they did interactive shows and were quite experimental in other ways, too. We connected, I found Pathos München as institutional partner in Munich, and with incredible energy input from Highway's Marilia Stavridou, we put together an application for a new production to be realised in 2015. When the funding was granted in April 2015, the REAL work began :-).

Now what is the punch line of this story? The classical way of establishing theatre cooperations is by getting to know each other at a festival, a guest performance, by travelling wide and far – and you know: You can either do this when you're a reasonably well established freelancer with enough money and spare time to get around Europe or the world, or if you're the director of a public theatre in Germany. If you're neither, you work a lot and don't often get the chance to network on an international level. BUT – there's Skype. The possibility to get to know each other through video calls is a new one, and it very much resembles the way dating has changed with the arrival of the Internet. No, there isn't yet such a thing as a matchmaking service for theatre practitioners, although, come to think of it, that might be a business idea. It's the fact that you get an impression of a person when Skyping with them much rather than just talking on the phone or exchanging emails. We all know that marriages may be made in heaven, but they are played out on earth, so anything that is created in the cloud – like an Internet-based theatre cooperation – must prove its worth on real stages. We are all exploring how electronic communication can help us in life. In the case of PHONE HOME, at least, the transfer was successful: We met in real life and after that nothing could stop us!

## Part 1: Workshops

### Munich Model Workshop #1 - Welcome

*Delivered by Michael Sommer and the Phone Home Munich team on December 11, 2015.*

Theatre, as everybody knows, is about communication. In the end, it always boils down to one question: How do we find a common language? This applies to a professional theatre production as well as to any small performance, to a large and long term group as well as to an informal workshop. How can a director convey his artistic vision to the actors he is working with? How can a performer get across the emotions, thoughts and actions to her audience? How can a group develop a common mode of creative and playful interaction?

If you're working on a given play, have a date for the premiere and a well-structured production, the pressure is sometimes high to achieve this goal; all theatre practitioners know stories in which variations on the theme "I just don't know what he/she is TALKING about" occur. High quality artists are frequently quite eccentric people and often it proves impossible to find a common playground for a creative process. It is clearly an advantage if the pressure of achieving a "product" is taken away from the creative process. In our research phase for the international theatre project PHONE HOME, we are trying to do exactly this: Concentrate on the process of joint creative work, find ways of getting into contact across borders of language and of culture and explore ways of getting to know each other.

This article is intended as the first in a series of contributions in which on the one hand experience we have gained in our PHONE HOME WORKSHOPS is documented and analysed. On the other hand, I will invite theatre practitioners not involved in our project, but working in similar settings to share their experience in a contribution. Thus, we hope to start a collection, a pool of information that may serve as inspiration and pragmatic toolkit for others. After all, theatre is about communication.

Below, I reproduce the entire structure of one of the first workshops we did. It was conducted with fifteen children and adolescents from Syria, Afghanistan, East Africa and five adults from Germany. The group didn't know each other before.

#### INTRO: NAMES

Of course it's names for starters. When the participants arrive, we write name badges for everyone. Serving as an ice breaker and a very simple introduction, we assemble in a circle with a plastic ball (ours is fashioned like a globe). The person with the ball looks at another one, says their name, throws them the ball. There's a certain noise level, a couple of participants say their own name when throwing the ball, but after demonstrating it a couple

of times, everybody gets the rules. So we go for speed, try to make the ball fly faster through the room, and finally, there's a flow.

[Duration: Depending on group size, not more than 5 min. // Material: Ball]

*Note: When first doing this, we tried it without the name badges – bad idea! You may think you've heard a couple of names in your life, but when language is an issue anyway, make sure everyone can also read the names of all the participants.*

#### WARMUP: SHAKE!

We put on some dance music (not too loud) and the instructor starts to demonstrate how to get the rust out of our joints: circling the right hand, circling the right shoulder, left hand, left shoulder, right foot, right hip, left foot, left hip. Finally shaking away your hands like after washing them, similar with the feet. Bow down the upper half of your body to stretch the hamstrings while exhaling; inhale while erecting the spine bone by bone, until you reach at the stars. Repeat several times. Shake.

[Duration: 8 min.]

#### WORK OUT: BALLOONS

In order to channel some of the pent up energy in the participants, we turn the volume of our dance music a little up. Participants are to spread in the room, they can dance if they want to. We bounce a couple of balloons into the group. The task: The balloons must not touch the ground. Very simple if you can use your hands. Harder if you can only use your elbows. Quite hard if you can only use your head.

[Duration: 8 min.]

PAUSE – 10 min.

#### FOCUS: IMPULSE CIRCLE

The "Impulse Circle" is a classic exercise for theatre groups to encourage cooperation and focus concentration in the group. The participants gather around in a circle, one instructor claps his hands together to the next person (ideally, one who's already familiar with the game) and thus "hands it on" to them. This person "receives" the impulse facing the giver, then turns to the next person and claps to them, "handing it on" etc. First goal is to make everyone understand how the impulse is to travel around the group, we try to speed up and make it a smooth movement. The advantage is that this can be explained with little or no words. As soon as all have understood, we introduce a new element; the receiver can now raise their hands to "block" the impulse and give it back, going "Boing!". (A variation is to clap twice to give the impulse back). There's no end of variations to the impulse circle, if the group is familiar with it, you can send the impulse across the room, you can add sounds to a certain movement etc.

[Duration: 12 min.]



#### INDIVIDUALS: GREETINGS

Now this is more challenging, although not impossible to explain to a group in which language barriers exist. The instructor greets the group in their own language: “Guten Tag – auf Deutsch” / “Good afternoon – in English”. Now the question is: What is the greeting in your language? We encourage participants to walk around the room and when they meet exchange greetings in their respective language and learn the greeting in the language of the other person. Additionally, participants can also be encouraged to write their greetings down. If this works well in the group, you might want to encourage the participants to invent gestures to go along with the greetings – the more fantastical, the better. This part of the exercise, though, can be difficult to explain.

[Duration: 10 min.]

#### IMPROVISATION: WELCOME MONUMENTS

Participants sit facing the stage. Bring along a picture of the Statue of Liberty, to illustrate what a “monument of welcome” may mean. Now take one participant on stage and make them assume the pose of the statue. Try to convey that this monument for many people in the past has had a great significance as a symbol of welcome to a new world and a new life. (This is quite a challenge!) Now give the statue a movement – e.g. spreading its arms, which is to be carried out repeatedly. Add another participant to the monument with another movement in another pose, maybe a third or fourth one. When all is “sculpted”, stop the action for a moment, have the audience close their eyes, and when they open them, go “action!” and take a mental picture. Now select a new participant as sculptor who is to arrange his or her floating monument of welcome. Repeat this until everyone has been involved.

[Duration: Depending on the number of participants, 15 to 30 min.]

PAUSE – 10 min.

#### FUN GAME: MIRRORS

Gather the participants in a circle, chose one of them who is now to be the “original” while you play the “mirror”. Imitate their every move, facial expression – if participants have never done this before, it will always get a good laugh. Then change the roles. Have the group pair up and do this individually. In theory, the aim would be to forget about the distribution of roles and find a way of communicating / mirroring without words, but this is hard to convey without verbal explanation.

[Duration: 10 min.]

#### COOL DOWN: LINE DANCE

We put on dance music once more and form two lines facing each other. One instructor starts with some simple dance steps, like four steps to one side, clap, four steps to the other

side clap etc. The lines follow a couple of times. Try to encourage some other participants to invent some dance steps. After a couple of routines, this exercise may well dissolve in some individual dancing.

[Duration: As long as people have fun]

#### CLOSE: FAREWELL

When you sense that the group dissolves, fade out the music and gather the group once more in a circle. Thank everyone for participating and try to explain when the next workshop takes place. Everybody take their neighbours' hands and expand the circle as wide as possible. Start with a low "woooooo" that grows louder as you lead the group to come together in the middle and finish in a big cheer and applause. Afterwards, put on some more music so people can still hang around and dance, if they want to.

#### COMMENT

When we conducted this workshop, we had some other exercises prepared, some of which we skipped, because we felt it to be better, some of which didn't work out that well. The ones I have put together here are (by and large) possible to convey by demonstration and imitation. The programme is suitable for a very mixed group as a first encounter; our participants had a lot of fun.

## Munich Model Workshop #2 - Baggage

*Workshop conducted by Ramadan Ali with 18 children and adolescents from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and nine adults from Germany. Most participants didn't know each other before. Documented by Michael Sommer.*

### INTRO AND WARM-UP

After getting together in a circle and trying to get a grip on the huge variety of names by saying someone's name and then throwing them the ball, Ramo leads the group in a classical warm-up. He makes us form perfect circles with knees, hips, chest and shoulders individually, which is quite some fun to begin with, but when he speeds up the exercise by encouraging double time, he might have distributed hula hoops along with that. Counting the number of circles in German (eight in one direction, eight in the other) serves as an additional language learning input.

[Duration: Depending on group size and age, all in all not more than 20 min. // Material: Ball]

### FOCUS: THE RABBIT

There's endless variations on the theme of the impulse circle; after passing around the impulse in the form of a clap, Ramo introduces three more impulses:

- (1) Imitate a rabbit's ears with both forefingers to your head, flex the fingers and go "Wewe" [/wiwi/], which passes around the circle in one direction;
- (2) Do a cutting movement with your right arm diagonally downward going "Bang", passing this on in the other direction around the circle;
- (3) Hold both flexed arms vertically in front of your face, shielding yourself by going "Boing", which sends the impulse back in the direction it came from.

[Duration: 15 min.]

Note: In our workshop, these two basic sections took an amazing 40 minutes, which was quite long, but possible, as the participants' attention did not wander too much. After this, however, we took a break with some grapes and cookies.

PAUSE – 15 min.

### INDIVIDUALS: BAGGAGE

The following section requires some verbal explanations, so it is only possible to carry this out if you can at least basically talk to your participants. In our case, Ramo, speaking Arabic and Kurdish, which is similar to Farsi, could communicate with nearly all participants.

Ramo explains the topic we would like to explore together: Baggage.

*“Imagine you are about to embark on a journey to a distant planet. What are you going to take with yourselves? Draw the three most important objects.”*

So off we go, drawing and in some cases writing little pictures of the objects we are going to take along. This takes some time, and there’s a lot of talking between the workshop participants going on; the nosier ones ask the shier ones about their pictures, they start to talk about their homes and where they are from, and after quite a while, everyone has finished his or her contribution, including signing with their names. The pictures are collected in a suitcase, Ramo draws one at random and asks the artist to introduce us to his or her work.

There were some very moving pieces of baggage among them: “Sari” (“sand from home”); a dove, because we keep them as pets and you can exchange messages by them; “My mother’s ring, which I lost in the Mediterranean Sea.”; “Jeddara” (a typical Syrian food); “The watch my uncle gave to me.” – and of course a whole bunch of footballs, photographs of friends. Interestingly, none of the kids drew a mobile phone. Although the occupation with these pieces of baggage took more than an hour, all the participants remained very concentrated – one of the reasons being that everyone stood in the focus of attention on stage and got their deserved applause for sharing their work.

[Duration: Variable, in our case ca. 70 min. // Material: Pens, felt tips, paper, a suitcase]

*Note: Ideally, and especially if verbal communication is possible and the group are familiar with each other, the material gathered in this way could form the basis for other work. One could improvise scenes with several these objects; one could do pantomimes with them; one could try to impersonate them. In our case, it would have been too much for the participants to dwell further on the subject.*

#### FUN GAME: MIRROR PAIR

Mark the “mirror line” as an orthogonal from the edge of the stage by chalking it down or sticking a tape line on the ground. Invite two participants to come on stage – one of them is the “original”, e.g. the one on the right side, the other is the “mirror image”. Have the original improvise a situation or just move around a little; the mirror image must imitate his or her every move. After a while, change sides.

[Duration: Depending on number of participants, a couple of minutes per person, but they usually find their own timing. // Material: Tape]

Note: You can further develop this by taking away the mirror line and the strict distribution of original and mirror image.

## COOL DOWN: DANCING AND FOOTBALL

What is football but dancing with a ball? As soon as we put some music on, most of the kids either start to dance or play a little football. Especially playing football is, I find, a perfect way of giving a workshop a nice emotional fadeout.

[Duration: As long as people have fun]

## COMMENT

By contrast to our first workshop, Ramo's schedule contained a considerably smaller number of activities – which on the other hand lasted longer than the exercises we did in the first workshop. The focus of our attention was on exploring the topic of “Baggage” – which did not primarily take place in a theatrical form, but was then presented on stage. Introducing the topic by getting participants to draw was a clever move to make them think differently – as was the way of putting the question in the first place: By inviting them to think about a fantastical journey, they came back to their own experience in a kind of “safe mode”. Both elements – namely combining theatre exercises and creative arts techniques as well as inviting input from participants by transferring their authentic experience to fantastical settings, thus triggering positive emotions – served as example for us when devising later workshops. Although not impressive in its setup, this simple workshop succeeded brilliantly in creating an atmosphere of welcome and leaving us with some very pregnant “pebbles” for the mosaic we are going to create in PHONE HOME.

## **Munich Model Workshop #3 - Encounters**

*Workshop conducted with fifteen children and adolescents from East Africa, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and five German adults. Most participants didn't know each other before.*

## INTRO AND WARM-UP

As usual, we hand out name badges to all participants before embarking on the “World Ball” game – say someone's name, throw her or him the ball, who passes it on, trying to speed up, which doesn't always work. Instead of an impulse circle, we pass on gestures and sounds in the circle, which works well, which may partly be because it's mainly girls as participants.

[Duration: Max. 15 min., depending on group // Material: Plastic ball]

## WORKOUT: DANCE/FREEZE

This game for warming up or powering out your participants has the huge advantage that it can be learned by doing, there's hardly any explanation necessary. Put on some dancing music, ideally with a clear beat. Now one instructor leads the group in performing a very specific – and potentially humorous – dance style (e.g. squatting like a duck, jumping like a frog, doing a jumping jack). Everyone is encouraged to imitate him or her. As soon as the group is going full power, stop the music abruptly. Everybody has got to freeze – if someone

shakes, they're out and become the shake-spotters for the next round. In my experience, those who are out will develop into perfect monitors for spotting their mates' failure.

[Duration: 15 min., can be done longer // Material: Dance music, sound system]

#### FOCUS: CHOP-CHOP-SAW

In many theatre groups, the following game is legend, and probably known to many people. It is a variation on the impulse circle with a somewhat elaborate choreography. The group stands in a circle; (1) person A raises their hands over their head as if holding a light sabre, aims at person B and strikes down vertically going "chop", (2) reacting to this, person B quickly raises their hands over their head as if holding a light sabre going "chop", (3) persons C and D, standing right and left of person B, simultaneously mime striking person B with an imaginary light sabre horizontally in half, going "saw", (4) person B, arms/light sabre still raised over their head, aim at a new victim and start the routine again with step (1). If someone makes a mistake, they're out of the circle. This is a very competitive game which in groups that know each other for a longer time can quickly gain cult status.

[Duration: Until people get bored, perhaps 15 min.]

PAUSE: 15 min.

#### IMPROVISATION: ENCOUNTERS

Doing improvised scenes with people who are neither familiar with theatre work nor know each other as a group is certainly a challenge. We tried out the following setups as pantomimes and they worked well in the sense that the participants got involved and had some fun. It was necessary, however, to have the support of some experienced performers to give the individual situations some direction.

##### (A) The Bus

Prepare some stools or chairs in rows one behind the other – like in a bus. Possibly, a more experienced performer should take the position of the driver. They open the bus, there's people waiting at a station, they get in, must pay, or if not, some conflict can evolve, the driver can be competent or not, the bus can start or not, the driver can drive slow – there's endless possibilities as to what can happen on this journey. In our version, the bus at first didn't start, and when it did, someone else took the driver's seat, driving very dangerously which made it necessary for participants to join in the movements of the driver.

##### (B) The Bathroom

Explain to participants that the situation is a bathroom. They can enter it and do in it whatever it is they do in a bathroom usually. For obvious reasons, the bathroom is a magic place of comedy when people meet in it.

### (C) The Bar

While the bathroom attracted more attention from the females among our participants, the boys were rather interested in joining the bartender and getting some booze, whether they had money or not. Theft and fraud was – I regret to say – very common in the various situations that arose in the bar.

[Duration: It takes some time for the situations to be established, one must invest some time into these exercises, I'd say 15 min. for each one at least // Material: Some basic furniture – we marked each scene by using cardboard stools, a versatile building block]

*Note: This was our first experiment with improvised scenes within the series of PHONE HOME WORKSHOPS. Our disadvantage was that verbal communication with most of the participants was only rudimentarily possible. Thus, we could establish the situation and involve all the participants in the scenes, they had a lot of fun, but that was about it. Don't get me wrong: Getting together, having fun, is an important task when working with people/kids who have been living on the road for weeks and months. Nonetheless, it is also possible to go one step further in empowering workshop participants to express themselves, this exercise, however must remain quite basic if there's no other verbal input.*

### COOLDOWN: LINE DANCE

With many girls from East Africa participating in this workshop, it was easy for us to get dancing. We formed two lines facing each other, and only in the beginning we had to give some movement input – quite quickly, other participants demonstrated some moves and everybody just joined in. It was a very impressive example of non-verbal communication. It faded out into freestyle dancing.

[Duration: Really, find out for yourselves. // Material: Dance music, sound system]

### COMMENT

In previous workshops, we frequently had to deal with the problem of distraction – especially the younger boys participating couldn't keep up their concentration when doing the games/exercises. Having a large number of young women as participants in this workshops made things quite a lot easier. Right from the beginning, it was quite effortless to motivate them – they really wanted to play, to dance, to have fun. Both in the structured games of the first half and in the improvised scenes, we had the feeling that they enjoyed being here, with us, that they accommodated themselves in the Pathos. The most evident hint was the fact that quite a number of them marked their journeys from home to Munich by contributing to our interlinked world map.

## Munich Model Workshop #4 - Perception and Trust

*Led by Andreas Bachmair, performer in Phone Home in Germany, 29th January 2016*

The following exercises are ideas for building an intercultural theatre workshops like the ones taking place in the framework of PHONE HOME.

### 1. Blindfolded conducted by your colleague

*(Necessary material: a few scarves)*

Blindfold your teammate. Make sure they can't see anything. Let them get used to the situation. Ask them to open up their other four senses. Encourage them to encounter the space. The sighted person makes sure that all their attention is focused on the blindfolded one. The sighted person keeps a distance that enables them to jump in if things are getting dangerous and make sure that their aura is not interfering with the experiment. The blindfolded person tries to move as normally as possible. They keep their arms/hands down and try to rather concentrate on their other senses. Change scarf after 10 – 15 minutes. Exchange impressions of the experience.

### 1.2. Move blindfolded to the sound of the city

*(Necessary material: A scarf, a few pre-recorded sounds)*

The group sits in a circle on the ground. Diameter +/- 7 meters if possible. One participant lies blindfolded on his/her back. Give him/her time to get used to the situation. Switch the pre-recorded sound on. Could be the atmosphere of a shopping mall, pedestrian area, restaurant, recording of the Eisbach (a little brook in the Englischer Garten), park etc.\* Play the pre-recorded sounds and ask the blindfolded person in the middle to listen to it and slowly translate it into movement. To take more risk and make the movements bigger. IMPORTANT: Every movement has its quality and every movement has its beauty. Trust in your impulse and forget about the aspect of doing something beautiful. The circle is your fence. If you touch the fence you swap with the one you touched.

This could be an exercise in itself. Ask the participants to record sounds of the city in team of two. This means going to specific places in town to take the recordings. One is the blindfolded director listening to the live soundscape. The other the technician that records the sounds for him/her.

### 2. Close your eyes and fall as a plank

*(Needs a group of 8 participants minimum)*

Have the group stand in a circle. Everybody hold their hands in front of their chests. The inside diameter of this circle of hands is only 50 cm. One participant stands in the middle with closed eyes. His/her body is stiff as a plank. The one in the middle gets out of balance and is gently bounced back by the hands of the other standing in the circle. If the situation feels comfortable, the whole group can take a small step back to widen the diameter.



Widen the diameter as far the group can carry the person and the one in the middle feels comfortable.

### **3. Run blind into the arms of the other**

(Needs an empty space with a length of 7-10 meters)

One half of the group stands on one side of the room in a line. On the other side of the room, you have the “catchers” waiting within two meters from the wall and two people in the middle correcting your course if necessary. The group runs one by one with closed eyes into the arms of the other. Start slow but definitely try to speed it up to maximum speed. Rotate with the catchers.

### **4. Jump into the arms of the other**

(Steady chair, at least a group of 9 people)

a. Four participants stand next to each other, facing four partners opposite themselves. They all have their arms stretched out in front of them, thus forming a “carpet”. They position themselves in front of the chair. One person secures the chair. One steps on the chair making his/her body stiff as a plank and lets him-/herself fall into the carpet of arms. Rotate with the catchers.

b. If the group is used to the technique and weight of the people you can skip the chair and practice the same exercise with a run-up and jump into the catchers’ arms.

### **5. Zig Zag Boing**

(In case you don’t know this one yet)

The group forms a circle with biggest possible diameter. In the beginning, you have three options to transport an impulse. Take both hands to send the impulse to the next player. Use your body centre to stay low and grounded. The sound of your voice comes from your centre, too. Look at the one you send the impulse to.

1. Make the decision.

2. Get into action.

Zig: Send the impulse to the one right or left next to you

Zag: Send the impulse through the circle to someone on the other side

Boing: Block the impulse and send it back by putting the forearm and hand in front of your face.

Once the movement is working try to speed up. Every time one makes a mistake, he or she should leave the circle, the last two persons standing win the round.

(Make it more complicated by inventing other movement and sounds. With focus and the option that one can catch the impulse.)

### **6. Throwing things to each other**

Start with a circle and throwing things to each other. Could be tennis ball as well as socks, plastic bottles etc. Start with one item and add another as the group is able to manage it.

Break up the circle and walk to the space. Throw the items to each other while walking through the space. Sharpen the awareness of the three steps:

1. take focus
2. make contact
3. throw the item

#### 6.1. Throw imaginary things to each other

Same setup as exercise 6. This time you have to manifest an object in your hand. Is it big – small, heavy – light, bouncing – fragile, slippery – concrete etc. When caught, the object can stay what it was when thrown or can change its quality while flying into somebody else's hands.

#### 7. Your private museum of the five senses

1. Seeing, 2. Hearing, 3. Smelling, 4. Tasting, 5. Touching

Ask the participant to think about what objects, sounds, smells and tastes represent them. Their choices could be literal, abstract or symbolic, e.g. the spices of their home country, they use to cook with. Objects that are precious to them. Objects that translate an inner state. Same with sounds: Could be their favourite music as well as noises the body or the outside world makes.

Ask the participant to choose an arrangement/space/corner/area in or around the building to present their items.

Ask them to make a ritual out of the exhibit items. To think of an order to present them and how they will be presented. For example, one participant could be the one trying out and become the performer for the others. Or certain senses could be given to certain people in the group.

7.1. A next step could be to choose domestic objects, taste and smells from the workshop area (could be from outside) that the participant can relate to.

## Athens Model Workshop #1

*Transcribed by Marilia Stavridou, Producer of Phone Home in Greece.*

Date: 16/11/2015

Location: Synergy-o

Participants: 9 plus 5 Instructors

Countries of origin: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Syria, Pakistan, Persia, France, Slovenia, Greece

Brief introduction

– In a circle, everyone introduces themselves, saying their name, where they come from and their main occupation

Warm up

We walk around the room and say hello to anyone we come across

We walk around the room and we laugh our hearts out

Exercises (in a circle)

– Do what I do A: each one takes turns making a gesture, a little dance or a funny face and everyone else mimics the action

– Do what I do B: same as in A, but each person initiating the action comes into the centre of the circle

– Energy “catchers”: mimicking the action of holding an imaginary energy ‘ball’, we send it across to each other by clapping one hand on the other and directing the motion to whomever we wish to send the energy to – we mix it up by changing directions back and forth

– Throw the... pomegranate (usually done with a small plastic ball, but we didn’t have one readily available, so we used a plastic pomegranate instead...): The person holding the pomegranate throws it up in the air and calls out someone else’s name from the group – the person hearing their name need to hurry up and catch the pomegranate, while at the same time changing positions in the circle with each other – if the pomegranate falls, then everyone needs to fall down as well.

– Changing places: we try and change places with other participants just by catching their eye and locking each other’s gaze

Stories (Pantomime)

Using a broomstick, each participant comes into the centre of the circle and transforms the object into something else completely, making up a short story around the action created.

Some of the actions we saw:

- A car crashing
  - Someone washing his teeth
  - A rock star
  - A maestro giving up by the inadequacy of their band
  - An old man using a cane and slipping
  - A parade dancer losing her baton
- and many more....

## Athens Model Workshop #2

Date: 23/11/2015

Location: Synergy-o

Participants: 20 plus 3 Instructors

Countries of origin: Iran, France, Slovenia, Greece

### Exercises A

- Walking around the room A: we try to stop altogether
- Walking around the room B: we try to start altogether
- Walking around the room C: we all try to walk in the same rhythm

### Stories

- Each one tells a funny story in their own language (which no one else understands), using grand gestures: the rest try to figure out what the story is / people speaking the same language, speak in a made-up language so that no one understands them
- Each one tells a secret in their own language (which no one else understands), using no gesture at all, trying to share feeling more than meaning: the rest try to express their own feeling that came up while watching their fellow participants

### Exercises B

- We count gradually one by one without saying the same number twice, keeping our eyes open (reach up to 79)
- We count gradually one by one without saying the same number twice, keeping our eyes closed (reach up to 66)

## Athens Model Workshop #3

Date: 26/11/2015

Location: STEKI

Participants: 20 plus 3 Instructors

Countries of origin: Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, France, Syria, Persia, Egypt, Morocco, Greece

Brief introduction

In a circle, everyone introduces themselves, saying their name, where they come from and their main occupation

Exercises A

- Walking around the room A: we try to stop altogether
- Walking around the room B: we try to start altogether
- Walking around the room C: we all try to walk in the same rhythm
- Energy “catchers”: mimicking the action of holding an imaginary energy ‘ball’, we send it across to each other by clapping one hand on the other and directing the motion to whomever we wish to send the energy to – we mix it up by changing directions back and forth

About Phone Home

- Yannis and Marilia give more details about the project and our goals for the workshops, inviting everyone to participate and invite more friends to join

Exercises B

- We count gradually one by one without saying the same number twice, keeping our eyes open (reach up to 45)
- We count gradually one by one without saying the same number twice, keeping our eyes closed (reach up to 39)
- Tie and untie the knot: Everyone holds hands / without letting go, we start mingling and creating shapes, like tying up knots in a rope / when everyone’s motions are finally restricted, we try to untie ourselves and get back to our original position in the circle, never letting hands go (*group building exercise*)

## Athens Model Workshop #4

Date: 30/11/2015

Location: Synergy-o

Participants: 18 plus 3 Instructors

Countries of origin: Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, France, Syria, Iran, Egypt, Morocco, Australia, Greece

Warm up

- Roll your fingers on your body to relax
- Relax the eyes
- Make fists and pound on your body to wake it up
- Say brrrrr
- Make large expressions, keeping everything in and letting everything out

Exercises

- Toss the ball, say a name: the other person needs to catch the ball before it falls on the floor or else we the entire group sits on the floor
- Walking around the room A: when you hear the clap grab somebody's hand, shoulder, back etc.
- Walking around the room B: when you hear the clap, everyone sits except one or two people
- Walking around the room C: eyes closed (pretend to be blind)
- Make pairs and take turns walking the blind
- Tie and untie the knot: Everyone holds hands / without letting go, we start mingling and creating shapes, like tying up knots in a rope / when everyone's motion are finally restricted, we try to untie ourselves and get back to our original position in the circle, never letting hands (*group building exercise*)

Stories

- Make up a story phrase by phrase, each one talking the story up from where the previous left off
- Act out new stories taking an object\* as a starting point

Objects

1) Group A: Globe becomes The Pregnant lady

A pregnant woman and her friend are watching TV, when she gets into labour – her friend helps her call a taxi and then calls her husband – after a crazy ride, they get to the hospital but don't have any money – The husband comes and pays the taxi-driver, then stays by her side during labour – The doctor and nurse deliver the baby – The husband steps out to make some calls and the wife falls asleep with the baby – Another man comes and kidnaps the

baby – The wife wakes up and starts shouting for help – Husband, doctor and nurse come and call the police – Two policemen come, they take a statement, then start looking for the kidnapper – They find him and bring him to the hospital with the baby: it turns out, he is the wife's ex-lover who thinks the baby is his – The policemen give the baby back to the couple and all ends well!

## 2) Group B: Suitcase becomes The Present

A guy goes to a shop and buys a suitcase – He fills it with a present for his mother who lives in another city – He calls his mother to let her know – He then takes it and tries to find the post office – He asks a couple on the street for directions, but it turns out they both speak a different language and he doesn't understand them – He finally gets to the post-office, where he finds two employees watching a telenovela – After many efforts, he manages to get the information he needs (cost, time of arrival etc.), pays them and leaves the suitcase – One of the two post-office employees takes the suitcase to the port and delivers it to a sailor – The next day, the sailor delivers the suitcase to the guy's mother.

### Participants:

Hasan, Margarita, Yannis, Alexia, Nandia, Nena, Irimi, Christianne, Hanif, Asma, Halil, Panagiotis, Lefteris, Giorgos, Daphne, Coline, Marianna, Reza, Aidim, Zarif, Agit



## Athens Model Workshop #5

Date: 7/12/2015

Location: Synergy-o

Participants: 5 plus 3 Instructors

Countries of origin: France, Syria, Australia, Greece

### Warm up

- Massage each other standing in the middle of the group
- Make large expressions, keeping everything in and letting everything out

### Exercises

- Toss the ball, say a name
- Walking around the room A: funny walks
- Walking around the room B: when you hear the clap, change your walk
- Walking around the room C: when you hear the clap, try to mimic someone else's walk
- Stay in the coop: try to remain in the only one standing in a confined space hopping on one leg like a chicken

### Stories

- In pairs: The group divided in pairs and each learned a little bit about the other one's story
- then they presented the story (or at least, all the elements that the other person wished to share) in the first person, i.e. as if they had become the other person speaking
- Funny stories: Using the same technique as before, each person now narrated and acted out his partner's story – a funny one to be exact

## Athens Model Workshop #6

Date: 10/12/2015

Location: STEKI

Participants: 9 plus 2 Instructors

Countries of origin: Pakistan, France, Syria, Italy, Belgium, Greece

Warm up

- Say my name...
- Relax the eyes
- Make fists and pound on your body to wake it up
- Make large expressions, keeping everything in and letting everything out

Exercises

- Walking around the room A: funny walks
- Walking around the room B: when you hear the clap, change your walk
- Walking around the room C: when you hear the clap, try to mimic someone else's walk
- Weird machines (a group pantomime): represent the clogs of a machine constructing whatever you decide – Group A: a doll making factory – Group B: a weird heart making factory

Stories

- Act out new stories taking an object as a starting point

Objects

### 1) Group B: Fire extinguisher

Five flatmates try to interpret what an extinguisher is: when Flatmate 1 enters the flat holding the extinguisher, she sits down and tries to smoke it, thinking it is a narghile. Flatmate 2 takes over and turns it into a bottle of perfume. Flatmate 3 and Flatmate 4 have different ideas, until Flatmate 5 takes over and turns into hairspray. Everyone then gets mad trying to take the object from everyone else and insisting on their opinion, until Flatmate 5 throws it out the window. After a moment's silence, life turns back to normal.

### 2) Group A: Fruit basket

A farmer picks fruit, puts it in a basket and sells it to a grocery store. A client comes in and starts picking some of the fruit to buy, when he finds a ring inside the basket. The store owner says that the ring is his, but the client refuses to give it to him (finders keepers!), and they start arguing. Two girls pass by the store and see them and they wonder what is going on. The men drop the ring, one of the girls picks it up and the men let her have it. The girl offers the ring to her friend, and she has a great idea: they should plant the ring and let a ring-tree grow to get more rings! The first girl then says that she knows a very good farmer who can grow anything, so both girls set out to find him. As it happens, the farmer is the one we saw at the start of the story. It turns out that the ring is his: he lost it inside the basket while picking the fruit!

More objects: bottle & umbrella → Metamorphosis

Each participant thinks and acts out (mimes) three different uses for one of the two objects.

Some of the ideas that came up:

Bottle: flute, pistol, golf cane, microphone, rolling pin, compass, telescope, firework, rabadomante...

Umbrella: scouter, tea pot, hat, racket, banana, mobile phone, surfing board, magic broom and... her boyfriend Panos!

## Athens Model Workshop #7

Date: 14/12/2015

Location: Synergy-o

Participants: 11 plus 3 Instructors

Countries of origin: Pakistan, Afghanistan, France, Syria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Australia, Greece

### Warm up

- Massage each other standing in the middle of the group
- Turn the massage into short raps, trying to wake and warm the body up without hurting each other

### Exercises

- Circle of trust (we from two smaller circles): one participant stands in the centre and closes their eyes – keeping the feet pinned on the floor and the body tightly wound, the person in the centre starts swinging back and forth, left and right / the rest of the group in the circle try to prop him/her up again, without letting them fall; it is a great trust-building exercise
  - We start with the participant in the middle swinging slowly, then gradually we pick up the pace
- Walk – clap – Fall & Grab: we break the circles and start walking around every which way – when Yannis claps his hands, at least one person has to start swinging and the people closest to him/her need to run over and catch them, not letting them fall
- Then we make it even harder: we walk around and there is no clap – someone just randomly decides to start swinging and the rest of the group need to be extremely alert (we had a couple of falls, but the group did extremely well in general)

### Stories

- We divide into two groups: the participants tell a story to their group (a real one that happened to them – or that they've heard someone else telling it) – the group decides which story they like to play
- The groups rehearse and present their stories BUT without using ANY words – just sounds, gestures and pantomime
- 

1) Group 1: One night at a bar \*inspired by a true story

Two guys walk into a club – the DJ is blasting the music – they start drinking heavily and call the waiter over again and again – then, two girls walk into the club – the boys try to flirt with them, but the girls are not interested – the boys insist, but they are too drunk and one of them even ends up vomiting in front of them – the DJ-turned-bodyguard and the waiter go over to through the boys out of the club and all Hell breaks loose.... After a big fight that leaves both boys unconscious, the girls finally leave... with the DJ!

2) Group 2: Next to the border \*a true (and devastating) story

A group of emigrants tries to pass the border – the trafficker makes them wait for days, hidden behind a small hill. The group protests, but the trafficker will have nothing of it: he doesn't even allow them to light a fire and warm up... One of the boys dies from the cold and exhaustion. The trafficker orders his friend to leave him there – but the boy refuses: after he weeps for his friend, he takes him over his shoulder and turns around. And the rest of the group follows him back home...

## Athens Model Workshop #8

Date: 17/12/2015

Location: STEKI

Participants: 6 plus 1 Instructor

Countries of origin: Pakistan, Afghanistan, France, Belgium, Morocco, Syria, Greece

Warm up

– In couples: we try walking around the room attached with our partner from one specific body part (i.e. shoulder to shoulder, knee to knee, head to head, back to back etc.) without falling or breaking our connection

– In a circle: we start wiggling our limbs, neck and facial features to relax and warm them up

– In a circle: we imagine that we have a small mouse in our hands and pass it on from one to the other noticing how each of us reacts to the animal (it might crawl into our hair, get inside our blouse, tickle us or walk all over our body...)

Exercises

- The Castaway: One person from the group turns away, as the rest decide on one common feeling to represent – when they are ready, they call the cast-away, put him/her in the centre of the circle and start acting like they feel the selected feeling (but without talking, only with facial expressions and body language) – the castaway tries to guess which feeling it is
- The Sculptor: we put some music on and everyone starts dancing or just goofing around to the rhythm. When the music stops, everyone freezes like a statue. One person from the group is selected to become the sculptor: he/she may move the statues around BUT they can't change their body stasis – the sculptor thus tries to put everyone in such a way, as to form a story, inspired by the way the statues look
- Tableau vivant: using the '*living painting technique*' we combine the two previous exercises – one person is cast away from the group, while the rest decide how to represent a feeling again, but this time as a snapshot from a live action: we think of a story which results in a feeling and then choose the perfect time to 'freeze' it, making a tableau vivant – when the group is ready, the castaway comes back and tries to interpret the frozen scene in front of him/her and the feeling the rest try to convey

Epilogue

- Using our bodies to write our names: everyone writes their name on a whiteboard (using their own language) – the rest of the group tries to spell the name using their bodies and some objects found in the workshop space – the result is photographed as a tableau vivant

## Athens Model Workshop #9

Date: 10/1/2016

Location: Synergy-o

Participants: 5 plus 2 Instructors

Countries of origin: Pakistan, Bangladesh, France, Australia, Greece

Today, our theme was playing with *silence*.

Warm up

– Hug it out: we stand in a circle and decide who we want to hug – then we walk towards them, hug them tightly for a second, let them go and go straight to the other side / if someone intercepts, we decide on the spot whether to let them and change our focus or keep our course

– Searching for the silence: we close our eyes and look towards ourselves, keeping the eyes calm – Alexia comes and touches each participant on the face, calming them down and guiding them to remember a time when they felt utterly satisfied / happy / calm / serene in silence (giving an example from her own past) – she then invites everyone to try and recreate the moment and the feeling they felt and relive it in the current silence

– When the participants open their eyes, Alexia asks how long they thought they had their eyes closed for – no one comes even close to guessing right (all think less): it was for 3.5 minutes!

Stories

The group recreates each participant's "*story in silence*" – each lending their body to recreate an object or other element of the other's scene, to help them feel the same way they felt in their original moment in silence.

– Participant C: a room lit up by the morning sun

– Participant D: watching the day and the town waking up after his 2 to 4 watch during the time he was in the army

– Participant B: on top of a mountain, gazing out and feeling free

– Participants E & A: a moment in prayer\*

\*The guys guide us through the practice of Namaz prayer → this leads to an interesting conversation about religion and the way we choose to honour and practice it (or not) passing it on to our children

Exercise on silence:

We divide into pairs and use the following language with silences whenever we choose to create the illusion of a back story – First each couple practices separately, then the team watches each couple and tries to make out the story behind the lines and silences.

The dialogue is:

– Hi ... (name of partner)! How are you?

– Hello. I am fine and you?





## Athens Model Workshop #10

Date: 14/2/2016

Location: Synergy-o

Participants: 6 plus 2 Instructors

Countries of origin: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, France, Australia, Greece

Preparation

Inspired by the fact that it was Valentine's Day, the group first talked about whether they commemorated the day back in their countries. There were some interesting revelations, i.e. the fact that in Pakistan this one the only day that people (in some parts of the country) are allowed to express their feelings openly.

There was also talk about a related myth that came from Afghanistan, but no details could be remembered.

Improvisations

Keeping with the subject of '*expressing love in various forms in various countries*', the team was asked to present improvised stories around the issue, discussing what would be viewed as 'normal' and what as 'strange' back where they came from.

- Improv. 1: Two men have a coffee at a café and react to two different situations: watching two girls, being openly loving towards each other and two men passing by holding hands. The Greek man thought it completely normal watching two girls embracing and kissing in the street, while the man from Pakistan was alarmed. On the other hand, the Greek man started booing the two men holding hands, categorizing them as a 'gay couple', while the man from Pakistan thought that as completely normal: it is common in his country for two friends (men) to hold hands without that having to mean anything more
- Group discussion on how the same image may cause a completely different reaction in two different cultures
- Improv. 2: *Unexpected couples* – the group divided into couples and they presented a short improvisation (without talking) – the instructors had to guess where the couples were from and what was going on between them / Couple A: two cousins in Pakistan going to buy school supplies on a scooter / Couple B: a married couple in a large city in Afghanistan (where they have been trying to follow more European practices) out shopping / Couple C: A man clumsily trying to pick up a woman in a European city – the woman rejects him.
- Group discussion with each participant personally expressing thoughts on what he/she finds strange in 'expressions of love' in their country or in Greece – a very interesting session that got to be very personal, with issues of culture and religion regularly coming up during the conversation
- Improv. 3: *Family ties* – the group had a mission to express family bonds during a short walk from one side of the practice room to the other / they chose an

interesting story: two families arranging marriage for their children: the parents walking ahead discussing (*extra note: the girls played the dads and the boys were the mothers for this*) and the young couple walking behind them, trying and failing to flirt.

## London – Model Playwriting Workshop #1

By Zodwa Nyoni, dramaturg for Phone Home in London.

Director Tom Mansfield and I ran a writing workshop for the Write to Life group at Freedom From Torture on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2016. The main aim of the workshop was to write monologues based on characters the participants had created. The theme of the monologues was 'home'.

The participants have experience in writing and publishing poetry. This workshop was focused on writing for theatre. We began by talking about my play NINE LIVES, which some of the members of the group had seen the show the week previous. It was an opportunity for them to ask me questions about the play and also share their thoughts about the play.

What stood out the most to me was their connections to the characters and their truths. They found similarities within their own experiences with loneliness, disconnection to a place, a loss of home, living in limbo and dealing with the Home Office.

The play was also the basis of the workshop. I wanted the participants to use the monologue structure to write on a subject matter that they may find difficult to speak about from their point of view. We talked about monologues, watched clips of the play and read through the monologues that appear in the play.

The first writing task was a free write exercise. In this task the participants listen to three different pieces of music. I played them: 'Eleggua' by Ibeyi (Yoruba chant), 'Home' by Rudimental (Drum and Bass) and 'Don't Stop Me Now' by Queen (Glam Rock). The aim is for them to listen to the music and write the first thing that comes to them. This isn't work that will be shared. This is for them, their personal thoughts. This is to get them to respond to a provocation and clear their minds.

The second task was to randomly select people that had been cut out from newspapers and magazines. The people were face down on the table. This is done so that they don't pre-empt the characterization. It is done in the moment and gets them out of selecting based on their comfort zones. They chose from a wide selection of races and ages.

They had to come up with a profile of who their character was. They told us their name, age, ethnicity, places of birth, residence, occupations, favourite food, dislikes and likes, family and friendship groups and so on.

From there I asked them to complete this statement in their character's voice: 'The PLACE I CALL HOME IS.....' This was the main section of the workshop.

From this we got responses that found home to be a physical place, for example a flat that the character still didn't feel was home but the place they existed in; and some that described a metaphorical home such as a catwalk and wherever the character's suitcase was.

What was great about the participants was their willingness to write outside of themselves and far away from themselves. Though we still got traces of their experiences through the characters, they relished the opportunity to create new identities in their characters. As they read out their monologues you could see them adopting the character's mannerisms and accents. There is an interest within the group regarding the performative element of theatre.

We left thinking that it would be beneficial for the group, as writers, to work with Tom in the next session on the process of working with a director and actors (which we will bring in next week). I will help them finalise their monologues and prepare them for an actor/s to work on and perform.

## London – Model Playwriting Workshop #2

By Tom Mansfield, director of Phone Home in London.

Two weeks after the previous workshop, on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2016, Zodwa and I returned to Freedom from Torture along with two of our company – actor Simon Carroll-Jones and movement director and performer Jennifer Jackson. The purpose of this workshop was to give the participants the opportunity to test out what they'd written two weeks earlier.

The workshop participants were highly experienced writers. Before coming to the UK, many of them had been journalists, lawyers, teachers, authors, and as members of Write to Life they had authored numerous poems and short stories. Some had been involved in a previous Write to Life theatre project, *Souvenirs*, in collaboration with Ice and Fire Theatre, in which they had performed their own stories. However, most of the participants had no experience of writing texts for others to perform.

We therefore decided the best format for the workshop would be a 'masterclass' model, in which I directed Simon and Jenni in performing a selection of the monologues. We spent approximately 20 minutes on each monologue, first giving the actor time to read through the monologue out loud and ask the writers any questions they might have. We then discussed the character's intentions and their relationship with the audience – stressing the point that in theatre, especially non-naturalistic performance, it's essential that the performer (and character) establish a specific and detailed relationship with the audience. Do the audience offer support, friendship, challenge to the character?

We ran through each monologue 3 or 4 times, with the performance developing in detail each time. Throughout, we took every possible opportunity to ask the writer their opinions. Did this represent the character they'd created? At the same time, I was at pains to point out that in theatre, the writer's responsibility is to create something that is *playable* – so it became important to query each moment of the piece whether what was happening was both engaging to the audience and clear for the performer.

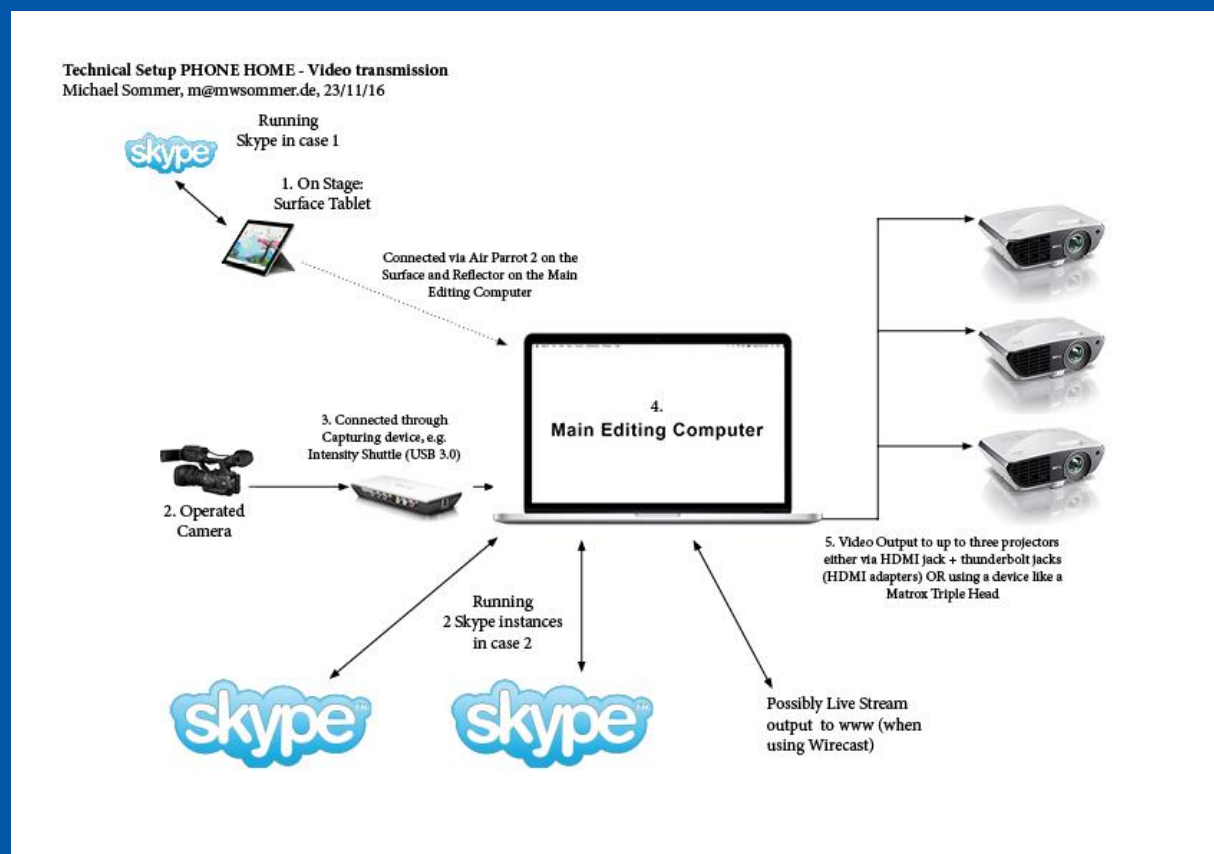
## Part 2: Technical Setups

### Munich

One of the most important challenges of our tri-national theatre project PHONE HOME was finding a way of communicating between the three participating stages. The task was clear: we needed a technical solution for making the two partner stages visible and audible on any of the three participating stages.

#### Hardware

Under the heading of the main task (connecting the three stages via video conferences) two distinctive sub-tasks became apparent during the development of scenes. (Case 1) On the one hand, we wanted to be able to have "realistic" Skype calls on stage, i.e. one actor in Athens handles a laptop on which a Skype connection is open to Munich, where his colleague is handling a tablet. Of course, on both stages, we wanted projections of what was being transmitted on the devices the actors used on stage. (Case 2) In addition to this first sub-task, the second one was to realise Skype calls which would be transmissions using an operated (external) camera rather than devices handled by the actors. The following illustration shows what hardware we used in Germany:



### 1. Surface Tablet on Stage

The reason for using a Surface 3 tablet for this task was simply because Microsoft/Skype had provided us with these devices by way of sponsorship. Although the computers may be very valuable in themselves, they turned out to be quite temperamental and more than once crashed during rehearsal and even shows (!). If we were to repeat this project I suppose we would use an iPad for reasons of superior stability and compatibility.

### 2. Operated Camera

Again, we were lucky to be provided with a sponsored device here, namely an XA35 semi-professional camcorder by Canon. We used the inbuilt HDMI output to feed our capturing device and thus transmit the video image to the main editing computer. The single most important feature of a camcorder to use in the theatre is the opportunity to manually increase or reduce exposure. The stark contrasts in lighting situations make it necessary to adjust manually, since otherwise autofocus (if used) will go mad. The XA35 is a fine camcorder and can be recommended for theatre use - especially if the operators are non-professionals as in our case.

### 3. Capturing Device

Computers do not normally offer input jacks for video feed. If one wants to live edit video, one must resort either to an external or to an internal capture card. As we decided to use a Mac in the German setup, it was clear that we would have to use an external capture card, which was a Blackmagic Intensity Shuttle connected by USB 3.0. (There is also a version of the device that connects via Thunderbolt, yet we needed both the available Thunderbolt jacks of our MacBook Pro to connect projectors). The Intensity Shuttle is - all in all - a reliable piece of equipment, however, were I to do the show again, I would go for a smaller version, e.g. the "Blackmagic Ultra Studio Mini Recorder", which only offers HDMI and SDI input (that's not available for USB 3.0, though, I think).

### 4. Main Editing Computer

Now when using video and streaming applications, a lot of computing power is needed. I had procured a MacBook Pro with an i7 processor featuring 4x2.3 GHz, 16 GB Ram and a 250 GB SSD. While these are impressive features, it turned out that the machine was not up to all the tasks it was intended for. Our colleagues in the UK used a newer MacBook Pro (this one was a couple of years old) and got more CPU power out of it, however, there are good arguments for using a Windows machine (a desktop system) as well: On the one hand, the processor can be as fast as you can afford, on the other hand, you can equip it with internal input and output interfaces. Our colleagues in Greece did use a Windows machine and obviously did not have trouble with CPU power.

### 5. Video Output

One of the huge advantages of the MacBook Pro was the possibility to connect three projectors which served as external monitors: One via the inbuilt HDMI jack and two via the Thunderbolt jacks and Thunderbolt to HDMI adapters. Considering the range of machines available, no specific models need to be cited here; I think the most important features are light output (5,000 ansi lumens recommended) and the fact that they need HDMI jacks.

## SOFTWARE

During preparation, we had experimented with various ways of transmitting sound and video, among them live streaming and various free video conference solutions (Skype, Google Hangouts, FaceTime, Facebook Video Calls). The live streaming approach (each stage encodes a live stream not for the general public, but for stage-to-stage communication) would have had the immense advantage that we could have manipulated the routing. It turned out, however, that the latency was way too high to make a real communication possible - many seconds, sometimes minutes, would elapse, ere the signal from one place reached the other. Thus, we had to resort to one of the free video conference solutions available. While Facebook Video Calls were the least reliable of the four options, giving bad quality in our trials, FaceTime was ruled out because one of our partner organisations (Highway Productions in Greece) would not be working on a Mac system. The question then was whether to use Google Hangouts or Skype. On the one hand, Google Hangouts made it possible to run various "Hangouts" simultaneously, which was necessary for our purpose (each stage needed to have two connections open at the same time), on the other hand the user interface was, due to its browser appearance, less easy to handle. When we had found out that we could run multiple instances of Skype simultaneously, we decided to use this service, not least because we found the quality to be better when compared directly. (It has to be stressed, though, that our tests were by no means empirical.)

### 1. Running several instances of Skype

While on a Windows computer it is perfectly easy to start a second instance of Skype while a first one is running, this possibility is not included in the standard repertoire of Mac operations. Internet research as well as trial and error, however, resulted in a solution. One must start the first instance of Skype, then open the Terminal and type (or paste) the following command line:

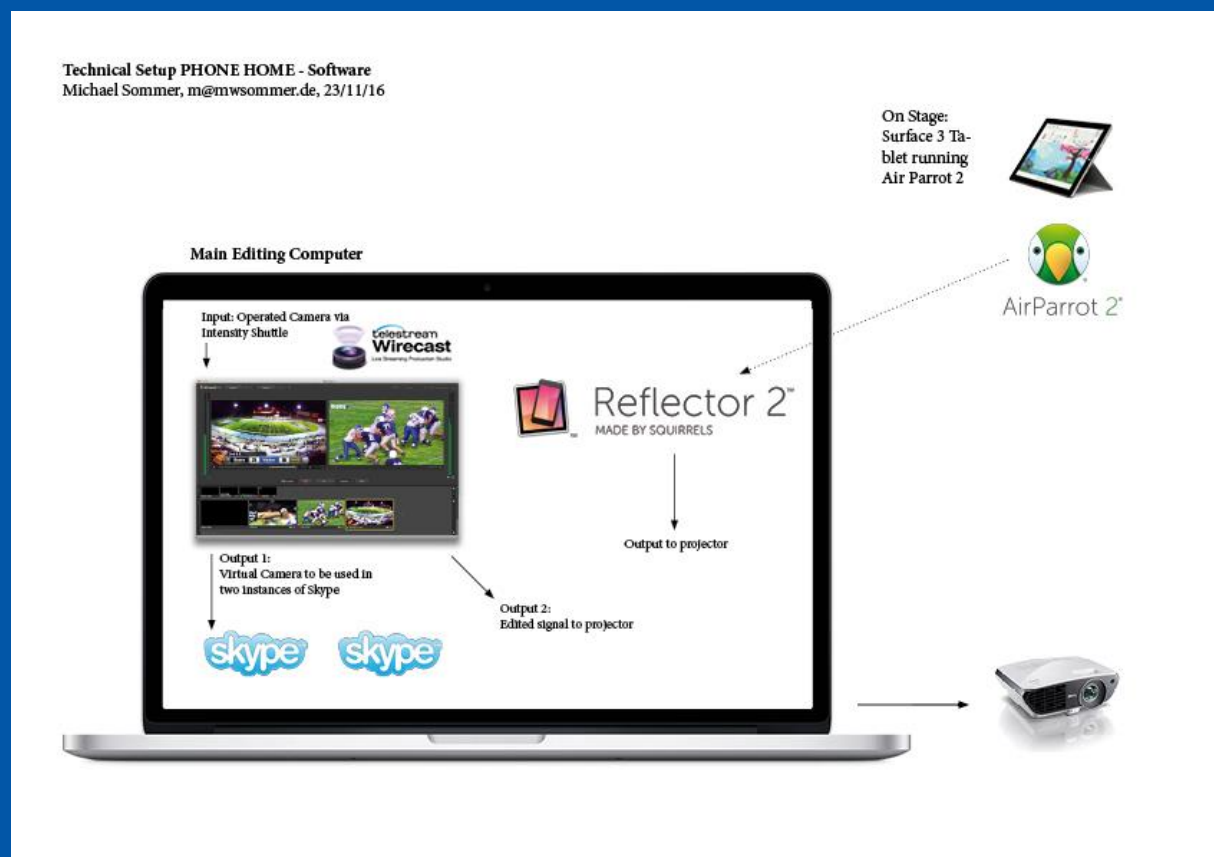
```
open -na /Applications/Skype.app --args -DataPath /Users/$(whoami)/Library/Application\ Support/Skype2
```

And as by magic, a second instance of Skype opens. As it turned out later, by replacing the last digit "2" by "3" and repeating this procedure, one can even open a third instance.

### 2. Virtual Camera - Wirecast



On the main editing computer, we run Wirecast, a very handy application whose main purpose is encoding a live stream signal and sending it out. However, it contains a video editing solution and, most important for us, the possibility to output a "virtual camera". This virtual camera signal we fed to the two Skype instances we were running, to be able to send out the same video signal to both stages. Wirecast, although not quite inexpensive, offers many possibilities of input and output. In addition to the virtual camera (and a potential live stream, it is also possible to output the edited signal to a designated computer output (and one of the connected monitors/projectors). In terms of input, we now only used the connected operated camcorder, although there are various other possibilities of using smartphones or other devices. (There is, for example, an inbuilt "Wirecast Cam" that can be installed on smartphones and tablets, however, the latency of transmission was too high for our purpose). Also, Wirecast offers the possibility to playback pre-recorded video, images and other material. All in all, a very reliable and versatile application.



### 3. Computing Power

One of the many handy features of Wirecast is a display showing the current CPU usage. When mixing a video signal and outputting it to a virtual camera, Wirecast would show a fair percentage here. However, when we went to running two Skype instances simultaneously and Wirecast outputting the virtual camera and an additional signal to an external monitor, the CPU usage peaked at 99% and didn't go below 95% anymore. This has consequences: The MacBook Pro would get considerably slower in reaction, there would be reductions in

image quality and even crashes. By excluding any other computing processes and concentrating mainly on these tasks, we made the system work during our ten performances, but it was a close call. Live video transmissions (Skype in our case) require a lot of computing power, and Wirecast is not a light weight application either. Thus, while being able to handle things as far as this setup was concerned, we in Germany did not succeed in encoding a live stream signal out of Wirecast in addition. It should be said that our colleagues in the UK did that, it was probably possible because their processor was a bit better and younger.

#### 4. Transmitting from handheld device to projector

I have described above the first scenario of using Skype to connect the three stages (i.e. an actor on stage handles a device). For the audience to be able to see what the actor saw, it was necessary to mirror the device's display on a projector. As we were using a Surface 3 tablet on stage, we realised this task by using the software AirParrot 2 on the tablet which connected to the application Reflector 2 on the main editing computer. While this solution worked, it should be said that there were considerable jumps and bumps, latency and drag to the transmission, and there were even crashes of the software. When working with Mac hardware only, the problem was reduced, although latency still appeared.

#### 5. Editing projections / Projection mapping

A decisive disadvantage of the CPU usage issue we faced (see earlier) was the fact that in Germany we did not have the option of using a projection mapping software to smoothly provide transitions into and out of the different interconnected scenes. What I did (for I was operating the main editing computer) was simply to drag the Skype application windows to the projectors in which they were required to be. In Greece, projection mapping was realised by using the software Resolume Arena (Greece), which was possible as the system they were using offered more computing power.

### *Audio Transmission*

One of the main challenges of the project, as it turned out, was to find a solution to transmit audio between the three stages. We had planned to use directional microphones to pick up the actors' speech on stage, but the proximity of speakers and microphones made this approach impossible - we would get a massive echo.

#### 1. Echo cancellation

In a simple Skype call, users will sit in front of a computer or handheld device and use the inbuilt speakers and microphones of their machines. When one talks, his or her audio signal is output by the partner's speakers, but Skype is clever enough, by means of an inbuilt echo gate, to filter out what it has just output from being picked up again by the microphone in the same computer. Now this echo cancellation only works if speaker and microphone are

close to each other (because distance will result in latency), the speaker volume is not too high and the room is not too big (so there's no acoustic echo in addition).

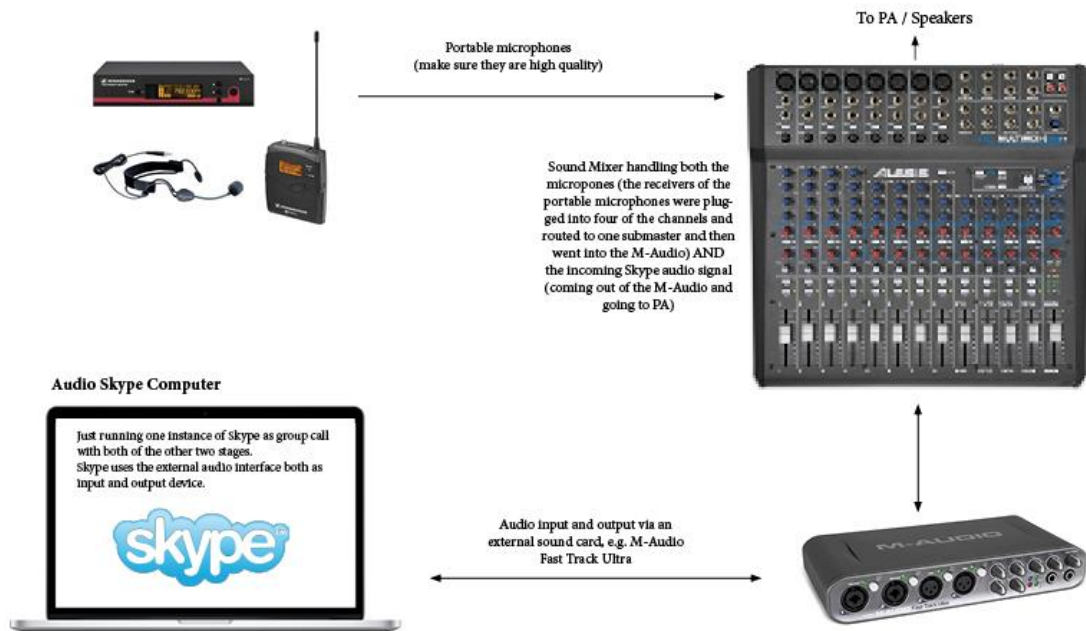
## 2. The problem of multiple Skype calls

I will spare you the painful process of learning we had to go through before we found out the following: It is impossible in a setup such as ours, to use directional microphones, because they will invariably pick up what comes out of the speakers. What is possible, though, is using portable and handheld microphones. Also: You cannot connect three locations by using two Skype audio transmissions (A-B, A-C, B-C), because the inbuilt echo filter, though operational in one Skype call, does not apply to the second Skype call. Now this is a little hard to understand, so to make it clearer:

If Greece, Germany and the UK are connected with one Skype call, the conversation partner in the UK will say something that is output through the speakers in Germany and Greece, but the Skype instance that is running on the Greek and German computers is clever enough not to record that again.

Now if Greece is connected to Germany through one connection, Greece to the UK on the second connection and Germany to the UK on the third connection, we have two instances of Skype running in each country. When the UK partner speaks, then ONE of the German and Greek Skype instances will not pick up again what comes out of the speakers, but the other will, causing a merry go round of echo, which actually sounds a bit like a whale song. It was a creepy experience, I can tell you.

Technical Setup PHONE HOME - Audio  
Michael Sommer, m@mwsommer.de, 23/11/16



### 3. Our solution

Our solution to this problem was using a separate Skype call for transmitting audio only. Two Skype instances in each country would be devoted to transmitting video, the third one (on a different computer), was solely devoted to transmitting sound. As I have described above, CPU usage was an issue, and although it is in theory perfectly possible to run three Skype instances on the same computer, we decided to physically separate the two tasks.

When we had procured high quality portable microphones for our actors, reliable and compatible sound cards to capture the sound into the computer on which the audio Skype instance was running, the transmission of sound was one of the most reliable features of the show. This, however, did not take place till after the dress rehearsal.

### *Live Streaming*

From the beginning of the project, we had intended to offer a live stream of each of our performances. When it became clearer that the show would look very different on the three participating stages, we thought it the most interesting experience for our online audience to offer not one live stream edited from live feed from the three stages, but rather the entire show from the three venues simultaneously. Thus, the audience was enabled to choose for themselves which performance they wanted to follow.

### 1. Choosing a setup

Originally, we had intended to use Wirecast running on the main editing computer (see earlier) in order to encode a live stream of the show. As it became clear that the computer could not handle this due to the additional stress on the CPU usage, we (in Germany) needed to go for an additional system. Time (and money) was short, so we decided to go for the simplest solution available: We used a smartphone, an iPhone 5, running the application Wowza GoCoder in order to encode a live stream. While our colleagues in the UK actually did use Wirecast as encoder, the Greek team used a free application running on a Surface 3 tablet.

### 2. Editing the live stream

Due to the fact that we in Germany were forced to use a very simple live streaming solution, we did not have the chance to use more than one camera or edit the live stream from our stage. Using Wirecast, we could easily have done that (which was actually the case for the UK team).

### 3. Server

As we wanted to offer the live streams from the three countries on our project website, we hired a server from a German company that provided both the distribution, the necessary players and the setup for us. Cortex Media, based in Ulm, have significant experience in this sort of services - I have realised the live streaming from Theater Ulm with them when I was working for this municipal theatre. If you don't have a budget available, it is becoming increasingly simple to work with free solutions as well - YouTube is probably the prime example of this.

### 4. Live Stream Audio

Naturally, one can get as elaborate as one likes when it comes to capturing sound for a live stream. It turned out that the inbuilt camera in the iPhone 5 we were using offered a fairly good audio quality. However, in an ideal world, one would use multiple directional microphones pointed at the stage and / or mix that signal with the portable microphones our actors were using.

### 5. Audience Feedback

When offering the live stream of a theatre performance, it is not only desirable but almost necessary to offer a possibility of audience feedback to go along with it. Although we had considered this feature from the outset of our project, we did not have enough time to implement it. Be it a chat module like the one realised in the live streaming infrastructure of Theater Ulm ([www.theater.ulm.de/live](http://www.theater.ulm.de/live)) or just a website plugin that features the latest Twitter or Facebook posts of a dedicated hashtag - there are numerous possibilities for inviting the online audience to voice their opinions, questions, criticism or feedback on what

they can see live. If I were to do a project like this again, I would definitely put more energy into this channel of communication.

### *Conclusion*

PHONE HOME, although quite big in overall size, was not a big production in each of the participating countries. Also, our financial resources were quite limited. So, while at the one hand we had to answer the need for proper audio and video transmissions between the three stages and realizing a live stream from each stage, on the other hand we had to deal with the fact that we only had a limited number of options. With the technical setup I have sketched above, we were able to realize the needs of our productions in a professional but simple way. As always, there are many alternatives to this procedure and actually the setup was varying in each of the participating countries. Still, it is encouraging that it is absolutely possible to realize an interconnected performance in the way that we undertook it, thus opening the door between one theatre venue and another and through this actually pushing the boundaries of artistic possibilities one step further. As technology is developing with an incredible speed, projects like these will be even simpler to realise in the future, I think, however, that by working on PHONE HOME, we have arrived at some results which may make it easier for future theatre artists who want to work in the same field.

## London

James Blakey, Digital Broadcast Director in London, writes:

The setup for *Phone Home* in the UK was very similar to that used in Germany. However, there were some key differences, particularly in our approach to live streaming.

Our set-up was:

### *Editing Laptop*

We connected a 2016 MacBook Pro to 2 external monitors on my desk, and two projectors, which projected the images if we received from Athens and Munich via the two separate instances of Skype. This helped us to deliver the aesthetic choice that the stage right screen would always display images from Athens, and the stage left screen would always deliver images from Munich. The images that we were sending to Athens and Munich via the same Skype calls were mixed using Wirecast, with our Skype video settings set to 'Wirecast Virtual Camera'. The camera inputs to this laptop, which provided the source for the Wirecast signal were provided by two external camcorders – one positioned as a 'static wide' and the other mobile, operated by Rebecca Kenyon, Video Director using her easy-rig. The cameras were connected with SDI cabling to a Blackmagic capture card.

Due to competition for thunderbolt ports on the laptop we could not have Camera 1 and Camera 2 wired to the laptop simultaneously. Our solution to this was to introduce a switch box with two SDI inputs, which in turn was connected to a single Blackmagic capture card, which in turn was connected to the laptop via a single thunderbolt cable. This was effective but provided a challenge for live editing because it was not possible to preview a shot from Camera 1, whilst a shot from Camera 2 was running live. Cuts between Camera 1 and Camera 2 were most often made using the external switcher, which was inelegant at times.

Despite CPU usage running dangerously high, in addition to running 2 instances of Skype, we were able to live stream from the same laptop using Wirecast. The advantage of this was that both the live stream audience and the Athens and Munich stages received the same, high quality video image. The disadvantage of this was that sometimes the needs of the live-stream audience and the needs of Athens/Munich were at odds with each other but we could only broadcast the same video to both.

### *Sound Laptop*

In order to reduce CPU usage on the Editing Laptop, we ran the Skype call that was used exclusively for sound between the three stages, on a separate laptop. In our case, this was

an older 2011 Macbook Pro. This was connected to an external sound card (Focus Rite Scarlett), with Skype microphone settings set to the sound card, which was set up to receive transmissions from the actors' portable microphones.

NB – We were not able to split the signal from the radio mics so that they could also be received by the editing laptop. This meant that the only way of broadcasting sound to the live-stream audience was by using the microphones attached (or built in) to the two external camcorders. We found that the microphone on the static wide camera was too far away to provide good quality sound, so we ran an XLR cable along the ceiling to a dynamic microphone, which we hung over the stage from a lighting bar. The audio shot in Wirecast relates to the Capture Card, not the individual cameras. This meant that when we cut between camera shots for video purposes, there was also a noticeable change in the volume and quality of the sound in the live-stream broadcast.

### *Mac Mini*

There was a separate system run from a Mac Mini, which was connected to the local speaker system and a third projector, focussed on the centre screen. From here we ran Q-lab for local sound cues, pre-recorded video cues, and local live streaming from the mobile camcorder operated by Becca. This last job was achieved by splitting the SDI cable so that both the Mac Mini and the Editing Laptop received the signal from Becca's camera. This meant that both the London audience and the live-stream audience could view what Becca was filming in different moments of the show.

From here we also ran Reflector 2, to connect with Air Parrott 2 on the Surface 3 Tablets, so that 'realistic' Skype call moments could be projected onto the centre screen. This had the added bonus of removing a task from the overloaded Editing Laptop.

### *Lighting Desk*

In addition to Q-Lab and Reflector 2, the DSM was also operating lighting cues. These included cues to open and shut the DMX shutters on projectors 1 (stage right) and 3 (stage left). This facility gave us control of when to reveal the images being sent by Athens and Munich and allowed the Digital Broadcast Director to monitor the images, and correct any connection or settings faults without these background tasks being seen by the audience.



## Athens

*Stathis Athanasiou, creator of video in Athens, writes:*

### *Hardware Setup*

- Our internet connection was a leased line that is brought to a router (Leased Line Router).
- This router was connected to a high-speed Wireless Router.
- The Leased Line Router was connected via Ethernet cable to the Editing PC.
- The on-stage devices (smartphone, laptop, Surface tablet) connect wirelessly to the Wireless Router.
- An on-stage camera is connected via HDMI to the Blackmagic Intensity card, which is connected to the Editing PC via USB 3.0
- Two edge-blended projectors are connected to the Editing PC, producing a completely mappable unified screen.

Now, how does this all work?

### *On-stage devices*

Each on-stage device (Windows laptop & Surface tablet) has the following software installed.

- Skype
- Manycam
- Airparrot
- Team Viewer

The laptop and the surface tablet can run multiple instances of Skype.

In each Skype instance we use Manycam's Virtual Camera and Virtual microphone as Video and audio source (you can select that from Tool/Options/Audio Settings, Video Settings).

This is done in order to be able to feed the camera and microphone signal to all active Skype instances, depending on the scene.

Airparrot is used to wirelessly transmit the whole desktop image to the editing PC.

Team viewer is running on the background, allowing the operator of the editing PC to take control of the tablet or laptop in case of emergency.

### *Editing PC*

- Manycam

- Sparkocam
- Reflector
- Team Viewer
- Resolume Arena
- Skype (multiple instances)
- Two monitor displays

We use Sparkocam here to feed the on-stage camera to each Skype instance.

Reflector is used to receive the desktop of the on-stage devices on the editing PC. It also is used to wirelessly transmit the PowerPoint based surtitles to the Editing PC.

TeamViewer is used, as I explained before, for the editing PC operator to be able to intervene in case something goes wrong on an in-stage device.

Manycam is used here in a different way. Its virtual camera is not feeding a real camera signal to Skype, but rather it is grabbing the whole desktop of the second display and feeding it to Resolume Arena on the main display. This means that Arena now has full access to the various videos/programmes/interfaces etc., and can project them either in full or cropped or however you like, in whichever part and size on the edge-blended screen. This means that practically we can drag and arrange whichever window or desktop element of the on-stage devices and/or the editing PC on the projection screen.

The surtitling laptop is reflecting its desktop (=the surtitles) on the editing PC via Reflector/Airparrot, which is also being fed to Arena via Manycam, and placed appropriately at the top of the projection screen.

### *Live Streaming*

The whole performance was streamed live from a second Surface tablet that was running OBS, an open source live streaming platform.