

'The Paradox of Presence': Creative Response

KATHERINA RADEVA, *Two Destination Language*

"I am here."

"I am next to you."

What do you feel when you hear this?

Do you trust me, the voice of the writer that I mean, really mean - I am here and that I am next to you? My voice is close to your ear, just on the right of your left ear.

I am here.

I am next to you.

Or do you feel like I am faking it? Like I am not *really* here, close to your ear? Do I really mean that I am *here*, and I am next to you?

Presence and reality, or is it lie and fiction? Of course, what political regimes around the globe have thought is, that like in a good drama, xfiction can be a reality.

The paradox of presence is a poignant exploration of intimacy and distance. It creates a kind of map of presence. A map of a very personal experience of embodied grief from afar. A kind of map across space, across time, and across experience. A map across environment and circumstances.

As an immigrant myself, or if I may put it differently, as a fellow traveller, I often find myself caught in these questions. Questions of presence. There is often a strong feeling of guilt about not being "there". My physical body is far away even if my mind is really *there*. Imagining what it is like to be there and often having a technology-mediated version of seeing what I am "missing". So, am I really missing it?

Having "missed" family deaths and many births and many parties, I have often asked myself: How can my empathy be present from such a vast physical distance?

This work, this exploration, is a reminder that trust is at the heart of every communication. That trust forms so much of how we relate and translate the world for ourselves and those around us.

And presence is key to that trust. And, by presence, I really mean a *shared experience*. And any shared experience may happen in person, it may be mediated by technology or by an analogue form. A shared experience is based on a communication exchange, like a conversation.

So, therefore the main notion of “being there” explored in the work, as a support system and mechanism, absolutely forms the connection sought across space, time, circumstance and physical presence. Because being there and listening and responding is an active and informed choice to participate. And so, to partake or to participate and to listen deeply, is to be present.

If anything, this pandemic has taught us is that connection, when truthful, whether mediated or in physical proximity, is companionship.

“The paradox of presence” is a moving reminder of how the human experience is captured and shared, how experiences are translated, and how care can be administered even through Messenger, with love.

Biography

Katherina Radeva is a multi-award-winning theatre maker, visual artist, set and costume designer, and creative director at [Two Destination Language](#). She tours internationally and her visual artwork has been exhibited across Europe and the United States. She is a vocal campaigner for inclusion and diversity and fair pay for arts and cultural workers. Born in Bulgaria, Katherina has lived in the UK for over 20 years as a first-generation migrant.

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