Theatre Beyond Spectatorship

Mapping the intersections of theatre and interactivity

Alfred Jeffrey Gordon Howle

MA by Research

University of York

Arts and Creative Technologies

March 2023

Abstract

Interactive theatre is a category of theatre involving the interactions of audience members in performance. However, within this category, there are any number of non-standardised definitions describing a plethora of practices, theories, and performances. Many theories surrounding this area are often enclosed to a specific emergent definition, but these often elide or omit disparate performances which differ greatly in how their interactivity manifests.

This thesis aims to add some structure and consistency to the definition of interactive theatre. Its research question is: *"How to define the intersection between theatre and interactivity?"* In answering this question, I develop an analytical framework for the rigorous analysis of any interactive theatre performance based on three essential pillars of *liveness*, *co-presence*, and *performance* as central to theatre's ontology, while maintaining an awareness of the performance's theatricality and individuality. My methodology is to map a wide corpus of interactive theatre performances along this framework to establish nuanced understandings of the interactivity in theatre. Supporting the framework with existing theories of interactivity, I argue three core types of theatrical interactivity: *involved theatre*, where audience interaction is essential; *participatory theatre*, which is typified by an interactive "invitation"; and *immersive theatre*, which describes the complex category of texts where spectacle and spectator are contracted. In formulating these three types of interactivity, I thus present a robust and cogent analytical framework which not only accommodates interactive theatre texts in all their variety, but is also malleable and expansive for extended future development and usage.

Keywords

Immersive, Interactive, Participatory, Theatre, Liveness, Co-Presence, Performance

List of Contents

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr Jenna Ng for guiding me through the turbulent process that was this thesis, and for supporting me enthusiastically in my first foray into postgraduate research. I would also like to thank Dr Nick Jones, the member of my thesis advisory panel for giving me clear feedback throughout my thesis and encouraging me consistently with discussions about my work. I am also grateful for Dr Lisa Peschel, who wisely prompted me to undertake this degree.

I thank my family for their undying, unequivocal support, especially my parents, whose guidance has always been at the front of my progress. Finally, I thank Annie, for fuelling every drive and humouring every ramble.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

1. Introduction

Numerous movements and genres in theatre's history exhibit examples of interactivity—insofar as "interactivity" describes those cases where audience and performer are '[r]eciprocally active; acting upon or influencing each other'.[1] Examples include British pantomime, Jonathan Fox's and Jo Salas' Playback Theatre, and Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*.[2] With respect to pantomime, this interaction takes a vocal form, as with the typical phrase "he's behind you", but audiences also may be elected or volunteer to interact with set pieces, actors and costume onstage. Interactivity in Playback Theatre is a mix of improvisation and spectator control where audiences' personal experiences are performed by a group of improvisational actors. Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* takes many interactive forms, ranging from the seated vocal interaction of '*Simultaneous dramaturgy*' to the '*Forum theatre*' where the audience 'has to intervene decisively in the dramatic action and change it.'[3] In that sense, Boal's work alone demonstrates the considerable breadth of interactivity in theatre.

Following on from these cases, I argue that in recent decades, a trend of theatre with interactivity has become commonplace in numerous different theatrical contexts. This trend involves modern theatre practices whose productions require or invite, in increasingly varied, complex and nuanced ways and degrees, the intervention of audience members in the theatrical spectacle. Interactivity aligned with this trend is prevalent in the work of contemporary practitioners such as Punchdrunk, Coney, Blast Theory and many others, resulting in numerous theatrical subgenres, styles and traditions. Examples of performances include *Sleep No More* (2011), *Then She Fell* (2019), and *Tony and Tina's Wedding* (1988), all of which have seen critical and commercial success. Many of the works created in this trend are described as "interactive," "participatory," or "immersive" by their creators, marketers or reviewers.

These various emergent texts, forms and styles of theatre with interactivity from the last few decades are the object of this thesis. My research question is: *"How to define the intersection between theatre and interactivity?"* In my thesis, I aim to answer this question by forming an

[1] 'interactive', in *Oxford English Dictionary*, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/97521?redirectedFrom=interactive#eid [Accessed 24 May 2021].
[2] Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, trans. by Charles A., Maria-Odilia Leal McBride and Emily Fryer, (London: Pluto Press, 2008).
[3] Boal, (2008), p. 109; 117.

analytical framework with which to examine the various crossovers between theatre and interactivity.

1.1 Why an Analytical Framework?

The purpose of such a framework is to develop a critical overview of what aesthetically *occurs* in such theatrical productions where interactivity is a feature. Its aim is to provide a clear structure of theatre/interactivity crossovers which is easy to read, enhance, update, alter and utilise in analysis. Much of the academic writing on this topic focuses on particular practices or aspects of interactive, immersive, participatory theatre or theatre with "audience engagement". There is no framework or organisational structure specifically designed for analysing theatre texts with interactivity. The terms "participation", "interaction", "immersion", "engagement" are often used interchangeably.

However, as this thesis will show, two performances dubbed "interactive" or with similar terminology by their makers may exhibit little to no aesthetic resemblance to one another, and may use completely different performance features to initiate interaction. With this lack of clear definitions, the aesthetic properties of theatre texts which exhibit different *types* of interactivity result in vast and confusing diversity. Moving towards an elucidation of these terms through my analytical framework will therefore help to clarify descriptions of theatre texts with interactivity by theatre makers, writers, and analysts.

In this thesis, the foci of my framework are:

(i) the various *kinds* of interactivity present in theatre with interactivity;
(ii) the *methodologies* used to employ interactivity;
(iii) the performance *features* of such interactivity; and,
(iv) the *implications* of interactivity for theatrical performance.

I believe this framework is important to provide clarity and accuracy in studying the variations of theatre with interactivity. It will enable a fuller understanding of the respective key concepts from which both theatre and interactivity derive their ontology. Using these concepts as bases of knowledge, the aim is to enable clear analysis of any case study which exhibits both interactivity and theatrical performance to be made.

1.2 Methodology

The first step of my methodology was to conduct a literature review of concepts relevant to theatre and interactivity. Following the search results, I read a wide range of academic writing centred on interactivity, as well as texts more specific to theatre with/and interactivity, such as those by Gareth White, Rose Biggin, and Gary Izzo. From this reading, I cross-referenced concepts and developed an understanding of the dominant theories and ideas circulating around this topic. I made a similar search for the dominant concepts in theatre utilising the same databases with the terms: 'theatre ontology', 'theory of theatre', and 'aesthetics of theatre', in addition to searching through classic texts such as Marvin Carlson's *Theatre: A Very Short Introduction*,[4] Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*,[5] and Simon Shephard's and Mick Wallis' *Drama/Theatre/Performance*.[6]

Next, I searched for theatre productions as data with which to understand interactive theatre. I used the Google search engine and the *Theatre Journal* review database to find texts, using the search criteria 'interactive'; 'immersive'; and 'participatory.' I determined the value of the data based on the following criteria of my own invention: "any theatrical work in which the audience do not conform to their traditional spectatorial role exclusively". This definition helpfully reduces texts to only those which I would describe as "interactive". However, as will be explored in 2.3 Types of Interactivity, using Homan and Homan's example of a performance which "became" interactive against the design of the production, I added another caveat to this criteria which determines that interactivity must be *prescribed* by its makers in order for a piece to be "interactive" in this sense. While this caveat omits the countless examples of non-prescribed interaction which have existed in theatre for much of its history, the framework this thesis develops is an *empirical* one which intends to develop an understanding of interactive theatre as its own subcategory separate from the trappings of Western passive traditions. As such, I only selected performances which deliberately sought interactivity to examine both its effects and its employment.

I then shortlisted these productions based on the three pillars of theatre which I had established (see section 2.1): "liveness," "co-presence," and "performance." If any production did not conform to these essential features of theatre, I discounted it for the purpose of this thesis. I also discovered production titles through my academic reading. One limitation to this corpus is its centricity on the Western hemisphere (particularly Europe and the USA). I believe that

[4] Marvin Carlson, *Theatre: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)
[5] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006)
[6] Simon Shephard and Mick Wallis, *Drama/Theatre/Performance* (London: Routledge, 2004)

this limitation is due to the same centricity being present in the vast majority of the scholarship and journalism by which I discovered these texts. In essence, the corpus in this thesis does not reflect as broad a variety of cultures, traditions, and practices of interactive theatre as I would have liked, and whose limitations may also be reflected in the analytical framework.

Another limitation was that I only saw one of the titles in my corpus live (Megaverse's *Surge*). I also watched a recorded performance of Hidden Track's *Standard:Elite* online. Otherwise, the information I gleaned about each performance's content was via newspaper reviews, promotional/website video or written content, or scholarship which described a scholar's experience of a performance. However, I do not believe the usage of secondary literature adversely affected my understanding of the titles. This is because the foremost important aspect of each performance I needed to ascertain was the mechanics and presentation of interactivity or immersivity, which were often easily documentable and accessible in script.

I then developed the analytical framework by first identifying the features of interactivity in the productions in terms of:

- the methods through which audiences interact,
- when and where the audience interact,
- how interaction affects performance.

I then grouped those identified features or modes of interactivity into the following categories:

- "**involved**" (texts where the audience's interaction is *essential* for the text's ontology)
- "**participatory**" (texts whose ontology is only *partly* determined by interaction, where the interaction is initiated by an *invitation*)
- "**immersive**" (texts whose audiences' emotional, epistemic, and physical involvement in the world of the performance exceeds that of their traditional role; often they exist in a non-standard theatrical space which is designed to make audiences feel part of the story world)

In turn, these categories form the central tenets of my analysis in this thesis. To ensure rigour, I grounded the framework on my corpus of theatre texts. At the same time, I also fed into the framework theories from my reading, as well as new and expanded definitions of the categories which I discovered in my reading of the production texts. In these ways, I changed, re-formulated, and refined the parameters and facets of the framework. Eventually, I iterated my framework as a Venn diagram (see 2.3) to display the crossover of various types of interactivity

in theatre. In the rest of this thesis, I elaborate on the framework through explanation of concepts and broad sampling of theatre texts exhibiting various types of interactivity in theatre. The performances which constituted my corpus were analysed *only* for their interactivity. Particularly, how this interactivity affected or was accommodated for or troubled by a piece's performance features/theatricality was of interest, in regards to interaction, participation, and immersion. As such, the effect of interactivity on a piece's aesthetics or politics were untouched, unless those aesthetics or politics were essential to note or dissect in order to aid an analysis of a piece's interactivity/immersion, such as with Dries Verhoeven's *Life Streaming* (see 4.3 Forms of Co-Presence in Immersive Theatre). In essence, I reduce the texts in my corpus to their interactivity and how this interactivity relates to their theatricality.

1.3 Chapter Outline

The thesis proceeds as follows. Section 2 is a literature review, which presents numerous definitions of theatre in subsection 2.1, and examines the literature surrounding interactive theatre as its own subgenre or subcategory of theatre in subsection 2.2. Finally, subsection 2.3 is an examination of the types of interactivity which I observe as present in the interactive theatre of my corpus based on existing theories of interactivity and theatre.

In my first main chapter, 3. Liveness – Involvement, I discuss the relationship between liveness and interactive theatre, especially to justify the term "involvement". Here I point out the types of freedoms available in interactive theatre. In 3.1, I underline the modes of interaction available to interactors in theatre and the importance of those modes. In 3.2, I compare these modes of interactions with the amount of influence a theatrical interactor might have on any interactive performance. Lastly, I discuss in 3.3 the ways these freedoms and interactive theatre's relationship to other interactive media alter the nature of the interactive theatre in comparison to non-interactive theatre.

In chapter 4. Co-Presence – Immersion, I develop an understanding of immersion in a theatrical setting, focusing on immersion as an experiential phenomenon. Section 4.1 examines existing theories of immersion and develops a tripartite categorisation of immersive theatre along the lines of agential, sensory, and emotional immersion. Next, section 4.2 analyses the potentialities of what I have identified as *involved* and *participatory* immersion in regards to both type and degree. Finally, I acknowledge the growing variation in co-presence fuelled by immersive theatre and happening within pre-existing immersive spaces, and how immersion is being formed in completely non-physical co-present performances.

In my final chapter, 5. Performance – Participation, I discuss the nature of participation as a uniquely live and co-present type of interactivity, and in 5.1 analyse the functionality of participatory theatre based on the concept of "invitations". In 5.2, I analyse how these invitations exist alongside various freedoms granted to interactors, along what I call a "horizon of participation". Finally, in 5.3, I discuss the ways in which performances and performers may and must adapt to interaction in any participatory context.

Section 6 concludes with a summary of my findings and some pointers of the ways in which my research may be developed, raising questions for further research and assessing my thesis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Theatre: Liveness; Co-Presence; Performance

"Theatre" has no concrete definition. Marvin Carlson describes theatre as 'universal human activities' which have 'combined and developed in countless different ways in different communities and cultures, resulting in the modern world in a vast array of theatre and theatre-related forms.'[7] Western theatre is often connected to a historical canon and set of traditions, the theory of which is often characterised by Aristotle's writings on 'the poetic arts'.[8] However, non-western theatre traditions cannot be categorised along the same traditions and culture, while contemporary western theatre practice often seeks to oppose or resist traditions in making new, unique work. As such, theatre *per se* eludes easy conceptualisation.

2.1.1 Theatre as event

To remedy this elusion, a key understanding of theatre rests on the centrality of the "event" in theatre. This event is an *instance*, instantiated by performers and observed by audience and this ontology differentiates interactive theatre from other interactive media. As Simon Shephard and Mick Wallis outline, '[i]n traditional Western theatre, the written drama scripts the theatrical event.'[9] Richard Schechner nuances this definition:

[7] Marvin Carlson, *Theatre: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 1.
[8] Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, trans. by Stephen Halliwell, W. Hamilton Fyfe, Doreen C. Innes, Rhys Roberts, revised by Donald A. Russell, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 29.
[9] Simon Shephard and Mick Wallis, *Drama/Theatre/Performance*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. 2.

> The theatrical event includes audience, performers, text (in most cases), sensory stimuli, architectural enclosure (or lack of it), production equipment, technicians, and house personnel (when used). It ranges from nonmatrixed performance to highly formalized traditional theatre: from chance events and intermedia to "the production of plays."[10]

Schechner's definition de-emphasises "drama", and simultaneously highlights theatre's instantiation as well as its breadth. Schechner's definition also implies that theatre is made of *prescribed performances*, produced through a culmination of production, play text, direction, etc.

However, the bounds of this prescription remain unclear. Liberally, Peter Brook famously states: 'A man walks across [an] empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre.'[11] Erika Fischer-Lichte similarly posits that 'the minimum pre-conditions for theatre to be theatre are that a person A represents X while S looks on.'[12] These definitions simplify the theatre event to a simple relationship between presentation and observation. From this, we can ascertain the theatre event's reliance on only two simultaneous concepts: *performance/presentation* and *observation/spectatorship*.

Correspondingly, Fischer-Lichte describes that this event of theatre 'comes into existence through the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators [at] a certain time and place' wherein performers 'do something' and 'the spectators perceive them and react.'[13] Similarly, Philip Auslander highlights 'physical co-presence of performers and audience; temporal simultaneity of production and reception; [and] experience in the moment.'[14] This thesis relies heavily on such a conception of the theatre performance event. These performances are ethereal, non-reproduceable events which are instantiated by the performance of performers and spectatorship of spectators.

2.1.2 Three Pillars of Theatre: Co-Presence, Liveness, Performance

[10] Richard Schechner, '6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre', *The Drama Review: TDR*, 12:3, 41-64, p. 41.
[11] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate*, (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 7.
[12] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theatre*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 7.
[13] Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Sense and Sensation: Exploring the Interplay between the Semiotic and Performative Dimensions of Theatre', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 22:2 (2008), 69-81, p. 73.
[14] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (Taylor & Francis, 2008), p. 61.

From the literature above on theatre performance as a temporal-spatial event, I distinguish three main pillars of theatre which I argue *define* the ontology of theatre. These pillars are **Co-Presence**, **Liveness**, and **Performance**.

"**Co-Presence**" refers to the "place" of Fischer-Lichte's definition. It describes the *spatial* simultaneity of theatre shared by performer(s) and audience. I argue that co-presence is redefined in much contemporary practice as new performance spaces—including virtual and text-based ones—emerge, to be explored further in Chapter 4. "Co-Presence – Immersion".

"**Liveness**" exists alongside co-presence. It refers to the *temporal* simultaneity—the "time"—of performer(s) and audience, as the temporal correspondent to spatial simultaneity. In concert, liveness and co-presence define the instantiative performances of theatre.

Lastly, "**Performance**" is the least easily quantifiable or definable pillar of theatre. This pillar refers to the "doing" and "seeing" system which theatre follows. Some concepts of performance are broad and encompass much of human behaviour. For instance, Schechner's definition defines performance as '[s]howing doing', or 'pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing.'[15] Similarly, Erving Goffman refers to performance as 'all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers.'[16]

However, this broad concept of performance is unhelpful when analysing just interactive theatre. In essence, these activities can be observed in teaching, sport, or just conversation. As such, to better fit the purview of this thesis, I have simplified the definition of performance into two camps. First is *prescribed performance*, performed by those who are "allowed" or "expected" to a perform in a given circumstance (in this thesis, that circumstance is theatrical performance), who at various points may be a professional performer, or even an audience member. Second is *non-prescribed performance*, which includes any performative action beyond that prescribed by a specific production or context. This thesis involves predominantly *prescribed performance* within the pillar of performance, and *non-prescribed performance* will be signposted as such.

In this thesis, I thus hold up these three pillars of theatre against contemporary concepts of theatre to delineate the core concepts worthy of analysis in theatre's ontology. In turn, the

[15] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction,* 2nd Edn., (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), p. 28.
[16] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 32.

culmination of these three pillars in concert with interactivity will make up the facets of the framework in this thesis.

2.2 Theatre and Interactivity

Despite Lars-Erik Janlert and Erik Stolterman's view that '[t]hese days, everybody seems to be talking confidently and comfortably about interaction',[17]--thus suggesting a wealth of cases and practices—theatre's interactivity remains somewhat unclear and untouched in scholarly writing.

One major concept in the area of theatre and interactivity is the inherence of interactivity in traditional theatre. Shephard and Wallis argue that '[t]he audience is not simply a collection of psyches "reading" the mise en scene; it is a set of bodies in relationship to one another and to the space they are in, a set of eyes moving in their sockets.'[18] This observation highlights the activity audiences undertake, hence defying the traditional notion of the "passive spectator". Daniel Homan and Sidney Homan express a similar construal:

> When filtering the play through his or her own life experiences, needs, agendas, interests, preoccupations, the spectator in the theater has always been a "player" in the loose sense of that word.[19]

This idea implies that the audience, while inactive in instantiating a performance, take part in a *mental interaction* wherein signs are interpreted and contemplated. As David Mason points out:

> [N]either the game player nor the theater audience looks passively. The "this is me, looking" awareness in the first-person perspective requires the audience member to make decisions: where will my gaze rest, when will I turn away, what will my eyes avoid, whom will my eyes search out.[20]

[17] Lars-Erik Janlert and Erik Stolterman, *Things that Keep Us Busy: The Elements of Interaction*, (MIT Press, 2017), p. 2.
[18] Shephard and Wallis, p. 238.
[19] Daniel Homan and Sidney Homan, 'The interactive theater of video games: the gamer as playwright, director, and actor', *Comparative Drama*, 48:1-2 (2014), 169-186, p. 170.
[20] David Mason, 'Video Games, Theater, and the Paradox of Fiction', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 47:6 (2014) 1109-1121, p. 1118.

As such, one could also argue that the observation of theatre etiquette—knowing where to look, paying attention to the performance, clapping, and laughing—are all part of the traditional activity of theatre spectators.

While this is true, I argue that such activity does not constitute interactivity on the terms of this thesis. Including texts in the classification of interactive theatre based on the mental interaction of their audience would render such a classification useless, as *all* theatre would be included. Homan and Homan's concept of mental interaction echoes Umberto Eco's notion of the 'open work', where the 'comprehension of [an] original artefact is always modified by [the spectator's] particular and individual perspective.'[21] Similarly, Roland Barthes states:

> The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination […] the birth of the reader is the death of the Author.[22]

These theories highlight the mental interaction of spectators. However, this thesis seeks to focus *specifically* on "interaction", ones which are defined apart from the everyday activity of the audience, i.e., gazing, thinking, etc. As such, I focus on audience activity which may be considered to be *inter-active*, as in it involves a relationship with another entity (see further below in 2.3), and *prescribed*, as with prescribed performance as discussed above (2.1.2).

2.3 Types of Interactivity: Weak and Strong Interaction

Interactive theatre scholarship shows explications of interactivity in theatre to be vast and various. For instance, much writing, such as Rose Biggin's practical analysis of Punchdrunk[23] or Josh Machamer's *Immersive Theatre: Engaging the Audience*,[24] focus on the practices of particular creators, drawing on their features from specific practitioners to form an understanding of theatre with interactivity. Another scholarly focus is specific *types* or *genres* of theatre with interactivity. This category includes Gareth White's *Audience Participation in*

[21] Umberto Eco, 'The Poetics of the Open Work' (1962) in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop, (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), pp. 20-40, p. 22.
[22] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (Whitechapel, London: MIT Press; Cambridge, Michigan: MIT Press, 2006), 41-45, p. 45.
[23] Rose Biggin, *Immersive Theatre and Audience Experience: Space, Game and Story in the Work of Punchdrunk*, (Cham: International Springer Publishing, 2017)
[24] Josh Machamer, *Immersive Theatre: Engaging the Audience*, (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks, 2017).

Theatre[25] or Josephine Machon's collection of interviews, *Immersive Theatres* which discuss participatory and immersive theatre as generically distinct from other interactive theatre, while not considering their crossovers.[26] This range and depth of practitioner- and genre-focused scholarship proves the diversity of theatre types which *prescribe* interactivity.

Izzo attempts to define this range in five genres:

- 'Intimate Theatre', which occurs 'when the traditional proscenium-style stage is altered to bring the action on the stage closer to the audience';
- 'Audience Participatory Theatre', which 'opens the production up to the spontaneous actions and responses of the audience';
- 'Variety Entertainment', which is 'a form of participatory theatre' which relies on 'an act of skill' and the 'wit of the artist' rather than narrative;
- 'Improvisational Comedy', which feeds on 'suggestions from the audience as variables in improvised scenes'; and,
- 'Interactive Theatre', which is defined by 'an *environment*--one that encloses both audience (or guest) and actor alike.'[27] (emphasis as original)

Izzo's understanding of interactive theatre is paradoxically too broad and too specific. 'Intimate Theatre' is typified by a broad aspect found in much interactive theatre, creating an unhelpfully large category. Conversely, 'Improvisational Comedy' is extremely specific in its specification of performed, interactive, improvisational comedy, as compared to the overbroad 'Intimate Theatre'. Nevertheless, I still find it useful to adopt Izzo's approach of building an understanding of interactive theatre through its various forms. Unlike Izzo, I do not formulate my understanding of the crossover of theatre and interactivity based on *genre*. Rather, I look to develop a broad understanding of the kinds of interactivity present in theatre based on whether interactivity is *prescribed*, namely how it occurs, and what activities of which it consists.

Specifically, I categorise types of interactivity along a revised version of Dominic McIver Lopes' taxonomy of non-theatrical interactive art. Lopes divides interactivity into two camps

[25] Gareth White, *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[26] Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres, Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[27] Gary Izzo, *The Art of Play: The New Genre of Interactive Theater*, (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 1997), pp. 21-25.

of ‘weakly interactive’ and ‘strongly interactive’ works. *Weakly* interactive works consist of interaction limited to ‘navigating content’. Such works include books, hypertext, or interactive DVD interfaces. On the other hand, s*trongly* interactive texts are ‘those whose structural properties are partly determined by the interactor’s actions.’[28] An example of such interaction would be a videogame, whose ‘structural properties’ cannot be appreciated without interaction.

Lopes’ binary of *weakly* and *strongly* interactive texts allows me to narrow down *which* texts might lie within this thesis’s purview of interactive theatre. However, his binary is also inapplicable to an analysis of theatre with interactivity in two ways.

First, ‘navigating content’, defined as *weakly interactive* by Lopes, is not a typical characteristic of theatre as with, for example, a novel. As such, in theatre, this type of interaction *must* be considered *strong*. The ability to navigate a performance both spatially (as with a game) and temporally (as with a book) would therefore be considered *strong interaction*.

Second, the ‘structural properties’ of a ‘strongly interactive’ work are unclear. For instance, reading a traditional novel back-to-front rather than front-to-back would greatly influence the book’s “structure”, while interacting as expected with a pantomime performance would alter its structure very little. It would be unrealistic to say therefore that reading a novel is more strongly interactive than being invited onstage or shouting out “he’s behind you” in a pantomime. As such, I remove this concept from my reformulation of Lopes’ concept.

To accommodate these differences, and to clarify the application of the concept, I redefine Lopes’ binary of *strong* and *weak* for my own means, to better suit an analysis of *theatrical* interactivity. To support this change, I maintain Lopes’ later concept of interactive works which ‘prescribe that the actions of their users help generate their displays’ to be *strong* interactivity.[29] Essentially, in order for a performance to be *strongly interactive*, the interactions of the interactor must be prescribed by the performance as well as help in instantiating the performance’s display.

I then redefine *weak* cases of interaction to include cases of “mental interaction”. These, alongside cases defined by Gareth White as exhibiting ‘accidental’ invitations to interact are omitted. These invitations might be, for instance, where audiences mistake a performance feature for a participatory invitation, or ‘uninvited’ invitations, or where audiences ‘interject

[28] Dominic McIver Lopes, ‘The Ontology of Interactive Art’, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 35:4 (2001), 65-81, p. 68.
[29] Dominic McIver Lopes, *A Philosophy of Computer Art*, (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 37.

deliberately when no invitation of any kind has been given or misunderstood'.[30] An example of the latter might be the performance of *Waiting for Godot* at the San Quentin Prison observed by Homan and Homan, wherein 'inmates continually interrupted the performance, asking questions of the characters as if they were real persons, making observations, offering advice, and relating what was happening onstage to their own lives.'[31] Interactions such as these are not applicable to this thesis' framework as they are unprescribed. This is not to say that the interactivity in *Waiting for Godot* was not *strong* interactivity. On the contrary, Homan and Homan's observations imply that the display of the performance was greatly altered by the interactors' interactions. However, as expressed in 1.2 Methodology, this thesis specifically seeks to justify *interactive theatre* as its own category of theatre, rather than judge the nature of interactivity as a concept. Therein, *Waiting for Godot* was not prescribed to be an interactive performance.

As such, to explain how an interaction might be prescribed I look to Aaron Smuts's revisory definition of interaction:

> *X and Y interact* with each other if and only if (1) they are mutually responsive, and (2) neither X nor Y completely control the other, and (3) neither X nor Y responds in a completely random fashion.[32] (emphasis as original)

Thus (in reiteration),

> …*[s]omething is interactive* if and only if it (1) is responsive, (2) does not completely control, (3) is not completely controlled, and (4) does not respond in a completely random fashion.[33] (emphasis as original)

Smuts' definition of interaction is helpful in its description of interaction, and it enables a justification for omitting non-prescribed interaction from the framework. This definition also forefronts interactivity as a *human* behaviour before a digital (or theatrical) one. As such, it is a somewhat universal definition of interactivity, saving the work of having to develop an entirely new, purely theatrical definition of interactivity. This universality resolves a minor vacuum in the scholarship surrounding interactive theatre (see 1.2 Methodology) wherein there are numerous definitions of digital-centric interactivity and few definitions outside of this

[30] Gareth White, (2013), p. 42.
[31] Homan and Homan, p. 177.
[32] Aaron Smuts, 'What is Interactivity?', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 43:4 (2009), 53-73, p. 65.
[33] Ibid.

context. That being said, I also find value in the use of digital interaction definitions when developing metaphorical understandings of interactive theatre's systems and interfaces, such as David Z. Saltz's definition (see 3. Liveness – Involvement). I use these to further remedy the vacuum of co-present, live definitions of interaction in wider scholarship. At its core, though, this thesis uses Smuts's conception. Notably, non-prescribed interactions, while they follow Smuts' precedent, remained excluded.

Smuts' definition is also helpful in that it may be applied to interaction beyond of interacting with an interface, such as that of a computer. As Smuts puts it:

> My definition is more restrictive than most, but it does not confine interactivity to a particular medium, such as computer technology; even a stage play could be interactive if it was appropriately responsive to audiences.[34]

As such, any prescribed interaction which falls in line with Smuts's definition as well as my own is applicable to this thesis.

After discussing the general concept of interaction in interactive theatre, I turn next to exploring the *types* of interactions available in theatre.

2.4 Types of Interactivity in Theatre: Involvement; Participation; Immersion

On potential modes of interaction, I look to Lawrence Ashford's separation of '*interactive*' theatre from 'immersive' and 'participatory' theatre. He writes on *Pollyanna* (2012-2013), in which he also performed:

> Our goal was to create a work that was not immersive or participatory, but *interactive* […] We envisaged a work in which an audience would have *control* over the narrative, its form, and the way it would be revealed[35] (emphasis added)

While it is somewhat unclear how Ashford differentiates 'interactive' theatre from 'immersive' or 'participatory', I borrow his concept of 'control' as an indicator of what makes a theatre piece interactive. Potentially, the difference between 'participatory', 'immersive', and

[34] Smuts, p. 70.
[35] Lawrence Ashford, 'The flexible performer in interactive theater: developing The Last Great Hunt's *Pollyana*', *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 9:2 (2018), 142-257, p. 146.

'interactive' theatre is the *degree* of control admitted. However, there are other matters which I consider to be as important in discerning existing kinds of interactive theatre.

First, I assert that the *modes* by which an audience may interact with a performance are important to its ontology. These modes are numerous and are granted by various means, all of which produce different effects. Such variation can be seen in Jaclyn Meloche's analysis of *The Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar* (2006, 2012, 2016), where audiences drink 'colorfully named samples of breast milk,' offered by the performer, experiencing various 'colors, flavors, smells and tastes [depending] on the body that they came from.'[36] Meloche's observation is vastly different to Homan and Homan's observations of *Tony N' Tina's Wedding* (1985-), where audiences 'play guests at the wedding of a fictional couple' and are 'encourage[d] to dance to the chicken dance , the dollar dance, and "YMCA"'. [37] As such, I consider it important to discuss the numerousness of interactive theatre by the *modes* present in its interactions. As will be uncovered, the list of "modes of interaction" is an large, growing list of potential activities.

Second, in response to Ashford's claims of the difference between 'interactive', 'participatory', and 'immersive' theatre, I draw up three dominant overlapping categories of interactivity at work in theatre which I will now define. The three intersecting categories are **Involvement**, **Participation**, and **Immersion**. (Fig. **1**).

[36] Jaclyn Meloche, 'Milk *Does* The Body' in *Immersive Theatre: Engaging the Audience,* ed. by Josh Machamer, (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Network, 2017), 109-128, p. 109
[37] Homan and Homan, p. 173.

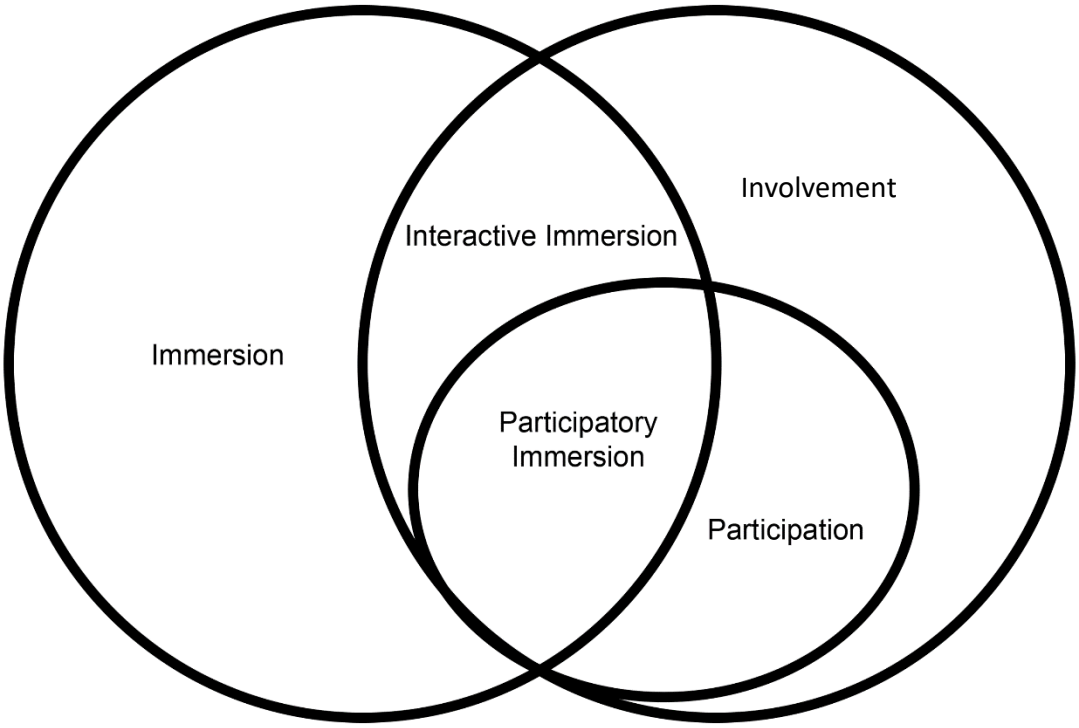

Figure 1: The Venn diagram of theatre with interactivity.

Predominantly, these categories are determined by the ways in which audience members within these categories may interact with—or be immersed by—an "involved", "immersive", or "participatory" performance. These categories function as descriptors of three *types* of interactive theatre, based on the modes of interaction available to interactors, how this interaction is employed, and the elusive experience of immersion. I will now discuss each category in turn.

2.4.1 Involvement

"Involvement" describes cases of performance within which interaction is *necessary* for a successful instance of it. I derive the term "involvement" from Robson and Meskin's concept of 'SIIFs', or 'self-involving interactive fictions', which are 'fictions that, in virtue of their interactive nature, are about those who consume them.'[38] Some performances, such as Coney's *A Small Town Anywhere* (2008, 2011, 2012), exhibit the 'self-referential interactivity' required to justify a text as a SIIF, as interactors here are entirely involved in performing their narrative

[38] Jon Robson and Aaron Meskin, 'Video Games as Self-Involving Interactive Fictions', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* 74:2 (2016), 165-177, p. 156; p. 167.

role and thus creating their own story. However, not all involved theatre includes narrative involvement, but still requires involved interaction for instantiation.

To better include the concept of 'involvement' (be it self- or otherwise) in my framework, I again redefine its parameters. In the case of this thesis, involvement refers to theatre performances whose audience's interactions are essential in order for a performance's display to be generated as prescribed. In other words, involved theatre is involved because it cannot be engaged with as prescribed without interaction beyond the activity of a traditional spectator. Involved theatre is thus typified entirely by the aforementioned *modes* of interaction, which may be described by both their type, and by how they allow an interactor to instantiate a performance.

In chapter 4, I discuss this category in depth relating to *how* interactors interact in involved theatre. This is described along the *modes* of interaction which are the freedoms given to a given interactor, specific to performance but observable among much involved theatre.

2.4.2 Participation

In my consideration, participation functions based on the same modes of interaction as involvement. However, I consider participation to be different in how this interaction begins and exists in performance. Gareth White defines 'audience participation' specifically as 'the participation of an audience, or audience member, in the action of a performance.'[39] His framework determines that participatory theatre is made up of a number of "frames", a term he borrows from Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis*. Goffman defines frame as a situational descriptor; frames are 'definitions of a situation [which] are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them.'[40] In a theatrical setting, Goffman defines frames by the roles which are contingent upon them. White explains Goffman's position:

> [T]he actor is present both as 'stage-actor' and as 'stage-character'[;] the spectator is present both as a 'theatregoer' and as an 'onlooker'.[41]

However, in participation, the frames occur differently due to various 'episoding conventions' which determine the boundaries of frames.[42] As White states:

[39] White (2013), p. 4.
[40] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), p. 11.
[41] White (2013), p. 36.
[42] Goffman (1986), quoted in White, p. 37.

> If we can accept that we see the actor in different roles during the evening's show [then] we can also accept this flexibility for the theatregoers too: they too can take on more roles than that of onlooker.[43]

White thus implies a "participatory frame", or a state where onlookers become interactors, where he observes the episoding convention of 'invitations' which transforms the onlooker into the interactor.

I argue that these invitations are what defines participatory theatre. Unlike immersive and involved theatre, where the audience's initial frame is inherently interactive/immersive, the audience-participant in participatory theatre begins (usually) as a non-interactor but becomes one after receiving an invitation. Thus, the invitation is a spatiotemporal moment in performance which indicates a change from a spectatorial frame to an interactive one. As such, that participation occurs during 'the action of a performance' is helpful, and implies participation's reliance on liveness and co-presence. Or, participatory interaction must be live and co-present.

Further, Gareth White codifies these invitations. He describes three core classes of invitation in audience participation:[44]

1) '*overt*' invitations, 'where the performers make clear to the audience what they want them to do'.[45] (Examples include the direct instruction[46] present in Complicité's *Mnemonic*,[47] or the requests to '[shout] out suggestions of a setting, musical styles and the title of a show' in *Show Stopper! The Improvised Musical*);[48]
2) '*implicit*' invitations, 'where a convention does exist for participation and nothing has to be described to the audience' (White's example here is the 'learned, culturally specific traditions' of 'British 'panto', including phrases like 'he's behind you'.)[49];
3) '*covert*' invitations, where performers 'lead an audience or a spectator into participating without letting them know that this is happening'.[50] (A clear example is Boal's

[43] White (2013), p. 36.
[44] White (2013), p. 42. (I have omitted 'accidental' and 'uninvited' because these fall under non-prescribed interactive invitations, which are excluded from this thesis.)
[45] Ibid., p. 40.
[46] Elizabeth Sakellaridou, '"Oh My God, Audience Participation!": Some Twenty-First-Century Reflections', *Comparative Drama*, 48:1 and 2 (2014), 13-38, pp. 23-24.
[47] 'Mnemonic', *Complicité*, http://www.complicite.org/productions/Mnemonic, [Accessed 1 August 2022].
[48] 'About the show', *Showstopper!*, https://showstopperthemusical.com/about-the-show/, [Accessed 1 August 2022].
[49] White (2013), p. 40.
[50] Ibid., p. 41.

> ‘Invisible Theater’, where a ‘skit’ suddenly emerges ‘in a location chosen as a place where the public congregates. All the people who are near become involved in the [performance] and the effects of it last long after [it] is ended.’)[51]

When these invitations are “accepted” or thrust upon the audience, the new participatory frame is limited by and defined by what White describes its ‘horizon of participation’, which is

> …a limit and a range of potentials within that limit, both gaps to be filled and choices to be made. […] When invited to participate we construct, in this way, an initial assessment of the potential activity appropriate to the invitation – in Goffman’s terms we understand a frame […]The horizon is a limit in the sense that it stands for the point at which we recognize [...] invited and appropriate action ends, and inappropriate responses begin.[52]

On the terms of clarity of these invitations, White’s definition of participation is thus helpful as an opening to the analysis of participatory texts. The notion of an invitation is useful in that it defines both the ways in which the interaction is employed and the modes of which it consists. Furthermore, the notion of an in-performance invitation emphasises participation’s reliance on the spatiotemporal liveness and co-presence of theatre. This reliance highlights the crossover between theatre and interactivity, as invitations are a purely theatrical interactive feature.

However, White’s definition also misses a few important factors. First, White does not define the breadth of prescribed invitations in themselves beyond overt, implicit, and covert. Yet it is unlikely two separate overt invitations will resemble one another, being presented differently and with different expectations and rules implied through them. Second, while White acknowledges the change in frame during participation, he does not examine the potential changes in role frame change might incur. Lastly, White neglects to explore the potential changes to a performer’s perception and performance when invitations occur. These issues will form the basis of my argument in chapter 5. Performance – Participation.

2.4.3 Immersion

Immersion is the outlying type of interactivity in theatre. White identifies immersive theatre as that which ‘tends to make use of spatial and architectural interventions, and to ask spectators

[51] Boal, p. 122.
[52] White (2013), p. 59.

to involve themselves physically in tracking down or pursuing the performance.'[53] I find this description of "immersion" to be useful for many performances. Most theatre marketed or analysed as immersive will fall into this category, such as much of Punchdrunk's work which often consist of large-scale, interactive environments relating closely to the navigable worlds of virtual videogame or VR environments.

Apropos of virtual environments, Oliver Grau gives a useful concept when defining immersive environments, which he dubs 'hermetic' immersion. Such immersive texts

> install an artificial world that renders the image space a totality or at least fills the observer's entire field of vision […] Unlike, for example, a cycle of frescoes that depicts a temporal sequence of successive images, these images integrate the observer in a 360˚ space […] with unity of time and place.[54]

Grau's notion of totalising immersion can thus be applied to the sense of immersion to which White refers, especially given the coordinating mention of 'unity of time and place' relating strongly to temporal liveness and spatial co-presence. However, this definition (along with White's) seems to imply immersion as a singular monolith, wherein immersion may only be felt in totalising environments in which interactors are fooled into believing they are present separately to their own world.

In reality, immersion is a deeply experiential concept, consisting of seemingly numberless, very difficult to taxonomize types. To extrapolate immersion, I look to more particular categorisations. For instance, Marie-Laure Ryan, writing on digital interactive narratives (e.g., videogames), defines two categories of immersion:

- 'Ludic immersion' which 'is a deep absorption in the performance of a task'. 'This experience is independent [of] mimetic content'; and,
- '[N]arrative immersion', within which there are four types:
    - 'spatial' immersion: 'experience space through movement [and] emotional attachment to a certain location'
    - 'temporal' immersion: the immersion found in things being revealed as space is traversed, characterised by 'suspense' and 'surprise'.
    - 'epistemic' immersion: the immersion fuelled by desiring to know, the

[53] Ibid., p. 2.
[54] Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, trans. by Gloria Custance, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), p. 13.

> ‘prototypical manifestation’ of which is ‘the mystery story’. This is usually characterised by the melding between “past”, non-interactive narrative events and “current” or “future” interactive narrative events in the form of a mystery.
> - ‘emotional’ immersion: the immersion felt through emotional investment in emotions ‘directed toward ourselves, and those directed toward other creatures through a vicarious experience known as empathy.’ Typically, games’ emotions ‘are overwhelmingly self-directed ones, because they reflect our success and interest in playing the game.’[55]

Ryan’s focus on the spatiotemporal is helpful to my thesis, as the immersion she describes can be made immediate to an interactor without the need of a constructed virtual engine via liveness, performance, and co-presence. In much hermetic theatrical immersion, a narrative is presented in an epistemic way, namely, to be discovered through exploration, linking space to emotion and plot. However, Ryan’s list gives a good way to extrapolate other kinds of immersion in theatre. Its mixture of ‘ludic’ and ‘narrative’ immersion thus differs from the ideas of totalising hermetic immersion via White and Grau.

Ryan’s taxonomy refines immersion to an experiential phenomena; immersion is applied to aspects of human experience, i.e., spatiality, temporality, epistemology, and emotion. However, there is further extrapolation to be made into this experiential ontology, namely, an categorisation of the ways by which immersion is employed, as well as felt, might be made.

One way of categorising immersion-experience-employment is by degrees. Josephine Machon expresses three degree-based categories:

> **1. Immersion as absorption**. Here, the theatre event is able to engage the participant fully in terms of concentration, imagination, action and interest; a total engagement in an activity that engrosses (and may equally entertain) the participant within its very form. This is applicable to large-scale immersive events and intimate one-on-one encounters, including those designed within a wider immersive experience.
> **2. Immersion as transportation**. Where the audience-participant is imaginatively and scenographically reoriented in another place, an otherworldly-world that requires navigation according to its own rules of logic. Whereas in games practices this occurs

[55] Marie-Laure Ryan, ‘From Narrative Games to Playable Stories: Toward a Poetics of Interactive Narrative’, *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 1 (2009), 43-59, pp. 53-56.

> in a conceptual space, in immersive theatre a central feature of the experience is that this otherworld-world is *both* a conceptual, imaginative space *and* an inhabited, physical space. […] This otherworldliness, outside of the everyday, can be established within minimalist one-on-one moments just as it can with elaborately designed large-scale events.
>
> **3. Total immersion**. This involves both of the above and leading to an uncanny recognition of the audience-participant's own *praesence* within the experience. Where total immersion occurs, there is always the experience of formalistic transformation in that the audience-participant is able to fashion her own 'narrative' and journey. Certain events may enable emotional or existential transformation to occur due to the ideas and practice shared.[56]

Machon thus opens an intriguing aspect of immersion, namely, worth investigating, which is whether or not there are degrees to the immersion in which an audience might take part, and how those degrees can be identified. For instance, what differentiates the potential immersion felt by a spectator versus a fully-involved audience-interactor? A number of factors become apparent in exploring this concept, including type, degree, and activity. Chapter 4 Co-Presence – Immersion will explore *how* the audience is immersed, related to senses, emotions, and activity (pertaining to the modes of interaction) as well whether immersion, as an experience, may be participatory or involved.

2.4.4 Interactive Immersion

As for interactive immersion (the section of my Venn diagram where involvement and immersion intersect), some immersive theatre includes interactivity, and in most cases, this is involved interaction. Immersive environments, as will be explored, are often immersive as a result of their interactivity. Grau and White's ideas of perception align with this kind of immersion, which I later dub "agential immersion". However, as will be explored in 4. Co-Presence – Immersion, much immersive theatre can be described as immersion based on varying factors separate to interactivity, such as sensory or emotional outputs.

2.4.5 Participatory Immersion

However, unlike participatory theatre, which relates directly to involvement, participatory immersion can mean that either the immersive elements or the interactive elements of a

[56] Machon (2013), p. 63.

performance are participatory. In other words, some participants might be "more" immersed than others, or might be able to interact in more ways than others. This will be explored more in 4. Co-Presence – Immersion.

3. Liveness - Involvement

Liveness describes the temporal spontaneity of performers and audience. Instantiation in theatre is contingent on liveness, for; temporal ethereality means performances are irreplicable. As Carlson describes: theatre performances, 'however highly controlled and codified, [are] never exactly repeatable'.[57] Interactivity in theatre therefore implies a doubling of instantiation; both performance and interaction alter the display. Involved theatre—theatre whose interactivity is essential for its instantiation—is a good exemplification of this doubling of instantiation. As established (see 2.4.1), involved theatre includes performances whose *entire* audience *must* interact *throughout* the performance's duration in order to generate a prescribed display. As such, involved theatre performances *categorically* define a mix of instantiating interactions and instantiating performances to form a performance's 'putative ontology of disappearance'.[58]

Furthermore, an implication of this mixed instantiation is that both prescribed performers as well as audience-interactors are granted instantiative "freedoms". In other words, in involved theatre, both agents are responsible for instantiating a prescribed display, blurring the roles of performer and audience to varying degrees. With this blurring comes an instantiative "risk", where interactors may be more likely to generate *non-prescribed* or *undesirable* displays when given certain freedoms. Such risk will be addressed in 5.3 How Participation Shapes Performance. As freedoms are shared, the complexity of the theatrical event is heightened, both performers and interactors become involved in instantiation, and risk is increased.

As will be examined (section 3.3), the interactivity of involved theatre is based on a balance of control between audience and performer. As such, *how* interactors may interact, and to what degree these interactions *instantiate* the performance display, are key. I describe two types of freedoms granted to interactors relevant to this discussion: *particular* and *instantiative* freedoms.

[57] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 4.
[58] Auslander, p. 8.

These two kinds of freedom are central to the analysis of involved theatre, as they account for the actions an interactor takes during spatiotemporally defined instances and the effects these interactions have on a performance display. Furthermore, this analysis preserves the subjectivity of interactive performance, as it focuses on the potential instantiations available, the list of which may grow as more performances are analysed.

3.1. The Particular Freedoms of Interactive Theatre

Particular freedoms relate to the ways in which an interactor interacts as prescribed. These freedoms are typified by the *modes of interaction*, but also markedly the combination and iterations of these freedoms. Some of these modes are present in much interactive art, while others are contingent on the liveness, co-presence, or performance of theatre. The quantity, degree, and effect of these modes are a staple in the analysis of interactive theatre, as they describe what the audience-interactor is able to do in instantiating performance.

As such, the clearest way to include particular freedoms in my framework is to compile a wide-encompassing and malleable list of modes of interaction. Theatre's physical liveness and co-presence is close enough to real life that the *physically* potential list of interactions within it is endlessly broad, as these are limited only by the spatiotemporal bounds of real life. Such a list would include human-to-human interaction *in toto*.

Therefore, the list of modes of interaction present in my framework marks only the *prescribed* modes of interaction not found in traditional theatre, drawn from the examples constituting my corpus. For reference, non-prescribed interactions are the "random" interactions implied by Smuts (see section 2.3).[59] These interactions break the regulatory conventions of a given scenario, and so cannot be prescribed for a performance. To use a Gricean maxim as a metaphor, these interactions fail to achieve 'relevance' in their given frame.[60] (The risk of such interactions will be observed in 5. Performance – Participation). Inevitably, this list will not be exhaustive. Hence, the mode-categories are broad enough to encompass all interaction found within my corpus, but malleable enough to include any modes I have failed to discover.

The modes of interaction are tools at interactors' disposal. Many modes are sensorial, as the senses are our ingrained comprehensive and interactive tools. In interactive theatre, the senses are paramount. As André Lepecki and Sally Banes point out, '[t]aste, touch, smell, vestibular

[59] Smuts, p. 65.
[60] Bethan L. Davies, 'Grice's Cooperative Principle: Meaning and Rationality', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39 (2007), 2308-2331, p. 2309

and kinesthetic senses, pain, and hearing sound *qua* sound are pivotal sensorial experiences in making and experiencing performance across cultures.'[61] Sensorial interactions in my framework also cross the boundaries of other modes, as sensory interaction may be additional to other interactions or kinds of interactions. They may also develop their own centrality in an interactive experience. Such experiences often 'transgress the boundaries of the visually iconic and of the linguistically and musically sonic' which dominate audience experience in the theatre spectacle. They replace this traditional sensuality with sometimes intense sensorial experiences of various descriptions, focusing on various senses.[62]

I have listed the modes of interaction of involved theatre below, broadly classified into two categories: physical; and non-physical. These are fluid, broad categories which easily merge, intersect, and iterate. Some non-physical modes (such as narrative interaction) are contingent on physical modes of interaction (such as touch, or movement). Reliance on liveness and/or co-presence is signposted alongside these modes.

Physical:

- ***Touch***: There are two types of this mode: *haptic* and *tactile*. The haptic involves physical manipulation of objects and people while the tactile focuses on touch's sensory output including being touched. Most touch does not require co-presence. However, any reciprocal touch does, as well as touch enacted by multiple participants.
- ***Movement****:* This mode of interaction can be separated into *spatial* and *expressive* movement. Spatial movement involves bodily movement within an environment, including locomotion and navigation. Expressive movement refers to any movement not connected to spatiality/navigation, but instead communication/expression, like dancing or gesture.
- ***Play****:* This mode also falls into two categories, namely, 'paidia' and 'ludus', Ryan's borrowings from Roger Caillois.[63] Ludic texts 'are strictly controlled by pre-existing rules accepted by the participants as part of a basic game contract' and 'lead to clearly defined states of winning or losing'. Conversely, paidic texts have 'pleasures' which

[61] André Lepecki and Sally Banes, 'Introduction: the performance of the senses' in *The Senses in Performance*, ed. by Sally Banes and André Lepecki, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 1-9, p. 3.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, cited in Ryan, p. 45.

'reside in the free play of the imagination'. These texts 'are fundamentally mimetic activities.'[64]

- ***Language**:* Language interaction can be natural—resembling everyday speech—or controlled, such as by performers, a system, rules, etc. Furthermore, language interaction might be written, spoken, or signed. Finally, some language interactions are co-present, while others are not. Interactive dialogue, for instance, requires co-presence, while taking notes does not.
- ***Digital**:* Digital interaction includes any interaction executed by way of a digital device. In theatre, this is generally a multimedia technique, and requires the inclusion of a digital interface order to be employed. This mode is included as a "physical" one due to the physical movements/actions required for an interactor to utilise a digital interface. This concept begs further discussion, beyond this thesis, pertaining to the presence of digitality in interactive theatre, and the potential 'futurity' of narrative via the interrelation of the physical and the machine, as Jenna Ng states of *Sufferrosa*, 'where the fingers handling the computer mouse morph into the controlling grasp of technology' leading to a troubled sense of agency.[65]
- ***Olfactory*** and ***Oral**:* These modes relate to the sensory input/output of the mouth (taste) and nose (smell). These modes are lumped together as they, together with sight, hearing, and touch, make up sensory interaction, but are possibly the least commonly found modes within theatre.
- ***Performance**:* This mode includes presenting oneself in a performative way as observed by an "audience". The nature of this performativity, its boundaries and expectations, is context-dependant, as the conditions which determine an act as performative (other than liveness and co-presence) are non-universal.
- ***Costume***: Costume interactions include wearing or donning costume (the determination of which is also context-dependant) during performance.

Non-physical:

- ***Narrative**:* Narrative interaction concerns the actions of an interactor which impact any performance's narrative or story. This may include alteration of story features like

[64] Ryan, pp. 45-47.
[65] Jenna Ng, 'Fingers, Futures, and Fates: Viewing Interactive Cinema in *Kinoautomat* and *Sufferrosa*', *Screening the Past*, 32, http://www.screeningthepast.com/issue-32-screen-attachment/fingers-futures-fates-viewing-interactive-cinema-in-kinoautomat-and-sufferrosa/ [Accessed 20 June 2023].

characters or events, roleplaying a character within a story (as with SIIFs), or simply causing the progression of story through interactions. In more instantiative narrative interactions, narrative 'agency' increases, such as with, as Carolyn Handler Miller describes, 'the ability to make choices and to see and enjoy the results of those choices.'[66]

- ***Epistemic**:* This mode is non-concrete, but includes interactions related to the discovery of information. This mode may be a subset of narrative interaction in some cases, and is similarly contingent on the employment of other modes. This mode also relates closely to Ryan's concept of 'epistemic immersion', which will be further examined in 4. Co-Presence – Immersion.[67]
- ***Democratic**:* Democratic interactions describe interactions with a quasi-political system employed during performance. Instances of this mode often consist of voting. This mode relies often on some temporal simultaneity with the events on which the voting impacts, since both the voting and the outcome are temporally confined.

As this list shows, the modes of interaction are an analytical tool which prioritise the subjective interactivity of performances and interactors. Their malleability allows for the examination of complex systems of interaction where interactors may interact in a variety of different ways.

3.2. The Instantiative Freedoms of Interactive Theatre

Instantiative freedoms, which are contingent on particular freedoms, describe the instantiative influence an interactor's interactions have over a performance. The degree which an interactor has over a performance-instance is typified by their instantiative freedoms in conjunction with the particular freedoms which act as instantiative tools. I.e., an interactor with *low* instantiative freedoms has little influence over a performance display. In essence, the more instantiative freedoms an interactor has, the more influence they have over the performance display.

Most often, the particular freedoms of a performance create the system within which an interactor's actions may instantiation performance. One example which exhibits such a system is an involved performance, Metis's *3rd Ring Out* (2010),[68] where interactors are treated like policy makers who vote on decisions given to them simulating a 2033 climate crisis where

[66] Carolyn Handler Miller, *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide To Interactive Entertainment*, 3rd edn., (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2014), p. 68.
[67] Ryan, p. 55.
[68] '3rd Ring Out', *Metis*, https://metisarts.co.uk/projects/3rd-ring-out [Accessed 11 November 2022].

London is flooded. The audience are met with moral and fiscal quandaries, including 'spending billions to improve the sea defences of whole of the UK, not just London' and 'refusing to accept Bangladeshi climate change refugees'.[69] The audience's decisions directly instantiate the outcome of the story, and such instantiative narrative control is granted by the ludic and democratic freedoms afforded to interactors (which is also enhanced by the potentially immersive haptic interactions with a war-map type board). The play's story (ergo display) requires interaction, devoting high particular *and* instantiative freedoms to interactors.

However, such complex immersive systems are not always required for entire performances' displays to be instantiated by interactions. For example, in *Show Stopper! The Improvised Musical* (2008-), audience's singular verbal suggestions determine a show's content. Similarly, in *Love Letters Straight From Your Heart* (2017), audience member's submitted love letters become part of the prescribed performance.[70] Notably, these performances are both participatory, containing very little particular freedoms, but arguably very high instantiative freedoms for those who participate.

That is not to say that involved theatre presupposes a high amount of involved or particular freedoms. Dreamthinkspeak's *The Rest is Silence* (2012) allows audience-interactors to navigate a space 'enclosed on all four sides within a multi-reflective structure' to watch a self-interrupting and interlocking performance 'simultaneously and from a variety of angles.'[71] While the particular freedom of spatial navigation is meaningful in how it instantiates the subjective experience (no two spectators will see the same scenes proceed in the same way nor from the same place), this instantiation applies only to the spectator's experience, rather than influences the relational experience between performer and interactor. As such, the instantiation of the personal experience here is *high*, while the instantiative influence over the performance display is *low*. *The Rest is Silence*'s instantiation is akin to that made available by averting one's gaze in a traditional performance.

Many involved performances exhibit such instantiation, which is spectatorial in nature. In such cases, the instantiative freedoms afforded are unlike the freedoms performers possess, which directly *influence* a display. Ontoerend Goed's *The Smile Off Your Face* (2004) is an immersive

[69] Lyn Gardner, '3rd Ring Out', *Guardian* (2010) https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/jun/30/3rd-ring-out-review [Accessed 11 November 2022].
[70] 'Love Letters Straight From Your Heart', *Fuel*, https://fueltheatre.com/projects/love-letters-straight-from-your-heart/ [Accessed 11 November 2022].
[71] 'The Rest Is Silence', *dreamthinkspeak*, https://dreamthinkspeak.com/productions [Accessed 11 November 2022].

experience within which the interactor is 'blindfolded' and 'in a wheelchair, tied up.'[72] Subsequently, the performer touches, moves, feeds, and speaks with the interactor along a fixed set of events uninfluenceable by the interactor. Here, the particular freedoms (although often thrust upon the interactor, and perhaps better described as "experiences") are high, whereas the performer possesses almost all of the instantiative freedoms, and even revokes the interactor's traditional audio-visual freedoms. This lack of freedom for the spectator is what highlights this performance's immersion. In a sense, *The Smile Off Your Face* is totalising in reverse way to traditional totalisation, where sensorial experience is deprived in order to create a world separate to the real world wherein the spectator may be immersed.

In opposition to *The Smile Off Your Face*'s freedom-deprivation immersion, some immersive theatre develops its immersion through high instantiative and particular freedoms. Often, immersion is developed by an interactor's agency in a given environment (to be explored more in 4. Co-Presence – Immersion). *A Small Town Anywhere* (2009-2012) by Coney has audience-interactors interact entirely with *other* interactors, playing roles and solving fictive issues, with absolutely no prescribed performers present.[73] As such, performers are replaced with interactor-performers, and their actions are the instantiating factor. The particular freedoms are low and uncomplex, but the display is *entirely* instantiated by these, similar to the imaginative pleasures of roleplay or videogames. This relates to David Mason's experience of first-person shooter *Dark Forces*:

> [The game] grants me agency in a world that may be fictional, but that my exercise of will can shape and alter, as though an *I*, somehow apart from the me but feeding perceptions back to me, acts in that world.[74] [emphasis as original]

Immersive theatre functions similarly to *Dark Force*'s immersion. *A Small Town Anywhere* provides an extreme example, with very high instantiation delivered by almost total audience-control over a narrative space. In playing this powerful role, the audience-spectator *I* is almost lost to the performer-performer *I*.

A less extreme example of these immersive freedoms is *Tina N' Tony's Wedding* (1985-), where an interactor is invited as a guest to a fictional wedding, presented naturalistically. In

[72]'The Smile Off Your Face (2004)', *Ontroerend Goed*, http://ontroerendgoed.be/en/projecten/the-smile-off-your-face/ [Accessed 12 November 2022].
[73] Coney, 'A Small Town Anywhere', *Coney*, https://coneyhq.org/?s=a+small+town+anywhere [Accessed 24 March 2023].
[74] Mason, p. 1113.

this performance, instantiative control is more balanced as prescribed performers greatly outnumber interactors.[75] Here, the *I* resembles closely the real *I* of everyday life. This resemblance relates to Ryan's holodeck-like naturalised interaction, wherein users 'interact with the computer-generated world in exactly the same way people interact with the real world: through language and through the gestures of the body.'[76] *Tony N' Tina's Wedding*'s particular freedoms consign to their interactors instantiative freedoms almost identical to those of real life. Here, performers accommodate 'both physical actions that change the fictional world [and] verbal acts that affect the minds of its inhabitants and move them to take action.'[77]

3.3. Roles, Systems, and Interfaces

As shown above, freedoms are best analysed on a case-to-case basis. Due to the vast potentialities of complex interactive systems wherein roles are alterable and displays heavily instantiated, interactive theatre requires a system of analysis which prioritises not only the types of interaction at play, but also the employment of these types using existing performance and interaction analyses.

As Lopes states, digital interactive works are 'implementations of rule-following algorithms', the interaction with which produces a 'sequence of states' which alters per 'playing' or 'interaction-instance'. The 'algorithm' of a digital text determines the text's displays and accounts for their instantiation. Therefore, Lopes states that 'two interaction-instances [are] correct instances of one work provided that they are correctly generated by the same algorithm', 'run on programs that implement the same algorithm', and 'have a provenance connecting them to the same author.'[78] I argue that theatre's instantiation functions similarly, where a script or set of directions replaces the algorithm, so that; two performances of the same script are both "correct" instances of it. This instantiation is commonplace in many practices and traditions, but is disturbed by many sub-forms of theatre, including interactive theatre.

However, I argue that interactive theatre doubles this theatrical instantiation with interactive instantiation. In most cases, an algorithmic system cannot function in a live, co-present, and performative setting. Even theatre which occurs within algorithmic environments, such as those within a videogame engine, like ORGG Productions's in-game *Minecraft* performance of *The*

[75] 'Tony N' Tina's Wedding', https://www.tonylovestina.com/about-tony-n-tinas-wedding [Accessed 24 March 2023].
[76] Ryan, p. 47.
[77] Ryan, p. 48.
[78] Lopes, p. 76.

Lion King (2020-), does not apply to this thesis as they are not cases of interactive theatre. Here, the 'playings' of the game *Minecraft* are instantiated by the game's algorithm. However, as the virtual performances within the game are defined by the same liveness and co-presence of physical theatre, the performance itself is not instantiated by interactions with the *game*, making these performances non-interactive.[79]

To reiterate, algorithms do not function alongside theatre's instantiation (as observed within my corpus). Despite this, I will describe the functionality of interactive performance through a metaphorical, comparative understanding of the workings of digital interaction. David Z. Saltz's 'informal' conception of digital interactivity acts as a springboard. He states that 'for a work to be interactive, the following events must occur in real time':

> 1. A sensing or input device translates certain aspects of a person's behavior into digital form that a computer can understand.
>
> 2. The computer outputs data that are systematically related to the input (i.e., the input affects the output).
>
> 3. The output data are translated back into real-world phenomena that people can perceive.[80]

This conception of digital interactivity aligns with Smuts' ideas of equivalent responsiveness, control, and predictability (see 2.4.1 Involvement). If an output is inconsistent with an input, the interaction becomes unprescribed and unsatisfactory.

Essentially, audience-interactor's interactions provide "input data"—where I use "data" metaphorically to codify the systems, roles, and interfaces of involved theatre. The responses of prescribed performers (or prescribed co-interactors) function as the 'sensing or input device', which "compute" interactions utilising a predetermined system and 'outputs data that systematically related to the input.' The system in performance is the same as traditional theatre in terms of, the script, set of directions, or general "blueprint". Performers are prescribed and prepared to filter and regulate interactors' interactions to produce a relevant and prescribed

[79] ORGG Studios, 'The Lion King – A Minecraft Musical', (2020), https://orggproductions.de/studios/the-lion-king-a-minecraft-musical/ [Accessed 19 November 2022].
[80] David Z. Saltz, 'The Art of Interaction: Interactivity, Performativity, and Computers', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55:2 (1997), 117-127, p. 118.

output. *How* this process is undertaken is multitudinous, with some common features emerging, such as roleplaying, improvisation, and games.

Some performances' systems of interactions are "in-set", where game-like conditions are created to avoid unprescribed inputs or outputs. Pig Iron's *Pay Up* (2006) exemplifies this well.[81] This performance consists of 'eight sectioned-off theater performances', which each cost a different number of the 'five one-dollar bills' with which each interactor possesses for interaction. Furthermore, each performance can only be viewed for a limited time, indicated by 'warning buzzers'. This limitation prompts interactors' momentum.[82] The performance utilises a restrictive, algorithmic system, wherein interactions are temporally and spatially controlled and limited by fiat value. This system develops into an interactive *environment*, where the entire performance revolves around a transparent interactive system controlled by technology and performers, some of whom chaperone guests in-character.

Moreover, *Pay Up*'s performers highlight another potential metaphor relating interactive theatre to wider interactive media, namely, the interface. In digital media, the interface is the proxy through which users interact. In theatre, this interface has no concrete comparison, but may be used metaphorically once again to refer to a variety of practices. In some cases, interfaces are simply attached to the interactive object, such as; a chess game's interface is the pieces and the board with which the players are haptically engaged. However, there are some more enshrouding types of interface to be observed, which exist both more concretely (or traditionally) as well as more abstractly than the interfaces of *Pay Up*.

Most simply, digital interfaces may be directly included in interactive performance as an interactive tool. In Gamiotics's *The Twenty-Sided Tavern* (2021-), audiences use an app on their phones to interact with the (ludo)narrative of a live performance.[83] On a participatory level, Megaverse's *Surge* (2022) required two virtually co-present audience members to wear VR goggles and motion capture suits to interact with a game.[84] Sometimes multimedia performances utilises a variety of digital interfaces, such as fanSHEN's (now Fast Familiar) *Invisible Treasure* (2015) which utilised lighting, sound, and installed screens to provide an

[81] Pig Iron, 'Pay Up', *Pig Iron*, (2006), https://www.pigiron.org/productions/pay [Accessed 24 November 2022].
[82] Brandon Baker, 'FRINGE REVIEW: Pig Iron Theatre's "Pay Up"', *Philadelphia Magazine*, (2013), https://www.phillymag.com/news/2013/09/20/fringe-review-pig-iron-theatres-pay-up/ [Accessed 24 November 2022].
[83] 'About the Show', *The Twenty-Sided Tavern*, https://www.thetwentysidedtavern.com/about [Accessed 28 November 2022].
[84] Megaverse, *Surge*, Sage Gateshead, 2022.

interface for audience digital interaction.[85] Furthermore, theatre within virtual or digital environments may use existing interfaces to instantiate performance, such as Third Rail Project's *Return the Moon* (2020), which, 'presented on Zoom', allowed audiences to interact via the existing Zoom written chat function.

Having said that, interfaces may also manifest in non-digital forms. Ashford's observation of the immersive, large-scale *Pollyanna* included what he calls a 'performer-as-interface'. This performer 'facilitate[d] audience input into, and interaction with, the interactive world' of *Pollyanna*.[86] This descriptor is effective in describing the performers in many interactive environments, such as *Pay Up*'s chaperones who assist the audience in-character as both *facilitators* of interaction, as well as interactive *objects*. Both filter inputs and produce outputs. Here, as with much interactive theatre, the performers use their 'bod[ies] as an interface between the work of art and the audience', as Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau state of interactive artists.[87]

Ashford's performers-as-interface is an analysis of *Pollyanna*'s 'inadvertent' relation to Ryan's 'poetics of interactive narrativity'. This relation 'allow[ed the audience] to experience the sensation of agency in their interaction with the work'.[88] As Ashford asserts, theatre's liveness and co-presence might elicit interactions analogous to a 'Natural Interface', which consists of interaction 'with the computer-generated world in exactly the same way people interact with the real world: through language and through the gestures of the body.'[89] Particularly, some immersive theatre hinges on the concept of verisimilar interaction where interactors act *as if* within a fictive environment, rather than referring to an explicit interface. White observes in Shunt's *Dance Bear Dance* (2002) how a space in its performance is changed into different settings, including 'a casino' where 'those who know the games available will be able to participate more fully than those who do not.'[90] The lack of resources available to some interactors and not others tells of a naturality to *Dance Bear Dance*'s interface, as with an actual casino, some visitors will be more prepared than others. Similarly, Louise Ann Wilson's *Fissure* (2011) and *Mulliontide* (2016), take place during hikes in nature, relying *entirely* on

[85] 'Invisible Treasure', *fanSHEN*, https://www.fanshen.org.uk/invisible-treasure/ [Accessed 28 November 2022].
[86] Ashford, p. 152.
[87] Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, 'Cultural Interfaces: Interaction Revisited', in *Imagery in the 21st Century*, ed. by Oliver Grau with Thomas Veigl, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 201-219, p. 204.
[88] Ashford, p. 152.
[89] Ryan, p. 47.
[90] White (2013), p. 47.

the natural interface of the wilderness as well as natural language interactions with performers. Augusto Boal's 'invisible theater' is a style which accentuates this natural interface, as will be discussed in 5. Performance – Participation.

The natural interfaces above rely on 'corporeal actions', which establish interactors' relationship to their space, merging Ryan's concept of the Holodeck with physical co-presence. While physical interactive environments may not be as editable or destructible as, for instance, the worlds of *No Man's Sky* or *Minecraft*, liveness, co-presence, and physicality grant a co-present, verisimilar fidelity to theatrical interactive environments currently unavailable to virtual ones. Plus, live performers and co-interactors are more socially and emotionally available and reactive in theatre, making the "social" side of Ashford's performer-as-interface very important in interactive theatre. The "social interface" consists of the 'semiotic transactions' which codify one's 'direct relations to other human beings'.[91] Particularly, Ashford's 'facilitat[ing]' interfaces are somewhat restrained in their social interactions, while more meaningful social interfaces can be seen in the verisimilar *Tony N' Tina's Wedding* and the cooperative *A Small Town Anywhere*, where equally prepared audience members interact as peers.

Finally, social interfaces may also be simultaneously verisimilar while also present performers as individuated interfaces. *Queen of the Night* (2013-) is a vivid example, whose performers engage in 'a private show of card tricks […] being made to read erotic passages aloud to a naked woman in a bath [and] passing through a gauntlet of gorgeous young women delivering a series of sexy challenges, [including] shar[ing] personal secrets', and in the case of the reviewer, being able to 'passionately kiss one of [the performers] on the neck.'[92] These interactions are so intimate and sensorial that, as Paul Masters observes', 'consumption, conspicuous and otherwise, becomes the primary mode of engagement', effectively replacing 'participants' agency to construct narratives for themselves'.[93] Here, social interfaces double as regulatory filters as well as gateways to intimate sensory interactions, which inhabit *other* performers-as-interfaces.

---

[91] Ryan, p. 47.
[92] THR Staff, 'Queen of the night: Theater Review', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 2014, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lifestyle/lifestyle-news/queen-night-theater-review-676398/ [Accessed 29 November 2022].
[93] Paul Masters, 'Site and Seduction: Space, Sensuality, and Use-Value in the Immersive Theater', in *Immersive Theatre: Engaging the Audience*, ed. by Josh Machamer, (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks, 2017), 17-44, p. 25.

To conclude, the potential interfaces of interactive theatre are complex and varied, including physical, digital, social, and natural interfaces. Involved theatre functions using a concrete interface to ensure constant, prescribed interactions with relevant outputs to ensure the interactors' instantiation of the performance display. Immersive theatre often borrows this reliance on an interface, while also ensuring that *immersion* is as constant and responsive as interactivity. Finally, while participatory theatre may functions similarly to involved theatre, it requires an invitation to interact, meaning that interfaces must adapt not only to the varying roles and inputs of audiences, but also to the various frames represented by invitations.

4. Co-Presence – Immersion

Co-presence determines the spatial simultaneity of bodies, images, or avatars representing individuals. The extents of this spatial simultaneity is various. Co-presence in theatre is integral to its interactivity in the same way as liveness; theatre's ontology delineates unique forms of interactivity in the sense that is not present in other media. In particular, as explored, co-presence predicates modes of interaction unique to theatrical interactivity. I will argue in this chapter that co-presence generates unique forms of *immersion* via various techniques. As discussed in my literature review, non-interactive media is often described as immersive. However, in line with modern cultural awareness, this thesis treats *immersive theatre* as its own entity, while still acknowledging immersion as a purely experiential feature of performance.

4.1 Types of Immersion; Agential, Sensory, and Emotional

Immersive theatrical practice is various in style and practice. Most commonly, the label "immersive theatre" is used to describe large-scale promenade fictive environments through which audiences navigate. This kind of work is made by Punchdrunk, Third Rail Projects, Look Left Look Right, etc. However, as Adam Alston observes, immersive theatre is 'theatre that surrounds audiences within an aesthetic space in which they are frequently, but not always, free to move and/or participate. At best, the immersive label is flexible. However, the extent of that flexibility jeopardizes terminological clarity'.[94] This chapters seeks to remedy this lack of clarity.

[94] Adam Alston, 'Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value: Risk, agency and responsibility in immersive theatre', *Performance Research*, 18:2 (2013), 128-138, p. 128.

One method of clarification is to focus on the various *ways* in which audiences might be immersed. This is Ryan's focus when she differentiates 'ludic', and 'narrative' immersion (which includes 'spatial', 'temporal', 'epistemic', and 'emotional').[95] I utilise Ryan's types to a strong extent, but categorise more broadly. As stated, broader categorisations in my framework allow for a malleable understanding of the concepts of interactivity, while still being specific enough to define categories. As such, I separate immersion here into three categories: "agential", "sensory", and "emotional" (see Fig. 2). These categories arise from Janet Murray's metaphor of liquid immersion, where she claims immersion is 'the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus.'[96] To extend as a metaphor, one can be immersed in the sense of being submerged in sensory output, emotional content, or by

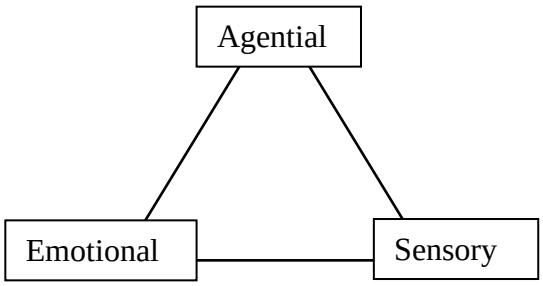

Figure 2: The three kinds of immersion.

submerging oneself through actions - this is 'learning to swim, to do the things that the new environment makes possible'.[97]

4.1.1 Agential Immersion

Agential immersion can be connected to and characterised by the particular and instantiative freedoms of 4. Liveness – Involvement, which also align with Ryan's immersion, where spatial immersion can be linked to spatial navigations, and epistemic immersion to epistemic interaction. Borrowing from Salen and Zimmerman, Rose Biggins dubs this freedoms-based immersion as 'explicit interactivity', where 'the participant's contribution is the most obvious', or where the interactor has 'something to *do*' (emphasis as original).[98] In this sense, the more interactions one has the freedom to execute, the more agentially immersed they might become.

[95] Ryan, pp. 53-56.
[96] Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: the Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2017), p. 125.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals,* (London: MIT Press, 2004) mentioned in Rose Biggins, *Immersive Theatre and Audience Experience: Space, Game and Story in the Work of Punchdrunk*, (Springer International Publishing, 2017), p. 89.

Notably, any immersion that includes agential interaction constitutes the position of "Interactive Immersion" on my Venn diagram (see 2.4),. Conversely, any immersion that does not include this constitutes "Immersion", and if this interaction is participatory, it constitutes "Participatory Immersion".

However, as Murray states, agency is better characterised by an autonomy generated by 'the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices', rather than 'interactions per minute'.[99] This autonomy is applicable to the narrative interactions of Lucien Bourgeily's *66 Minutes in Damascus* (2012), where the audience are "kidnapped" as refugees to give them a simulated version of the experience allegedly undergone by war refugees. Here, an audience's language or paralinguistic interactions are treated as if part of the fictional setting, and fuel emotional output:

> The best bit comes in a dark basement where we encounter an elderly man who has been imprisoned for 20 years. "You are English?" he asks. We nod. "You came too late," he says sorrowfully.[100]

In this performance, its emotional output is directly attached to the interactor's interactive input, which culminates in agential immersion.

Agential immersion also develops ludic accomplishment in *3rd Ring Out*, where interactions of various modes impact the successes and failures of a narrative wherein the interactor's are story-driving agents. Therefore, the interactions are ludic, but also emotionally involved. As such, a sense of 'ludonarrative harmony' is developed. Frédéric J N Seraphine describes 'ludonarrative dissonance', where the ludic and narrative aspects of a text are misaligned or imbalanced, causing 'emersion', opposed by ludonarrative 'harmony', where events of a story and the actions taken to impact that story are equivalent and consistent. Ludonarrative harmony is another example of clear agential immersion, as presumably plot events are intrinsically affected by agential freedoms.[101]

Finally, agential immersion often culminates in an immersive social output, as with Ashford's *Pollyanna*, where an audience member orders a pizza with her phone unprompted (this is essentially an uninvited interaction, but one which was adapted to by performers), putting a

[99] Murray, p. 159; 161.
[100] Lyn Gardner, '66 Minutes in Damascus – review', *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/jun/21/66-minutes-damascus-review [Accessed 7 February 2023].
[101] Frédéric J N Seraphine, 'Ludonarrative Dissonance: Is Storytelling About Reaching Harmony' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Tokyo, 2016), p. 2; 5.

strain on the '*tenuous contract of interactivity*'. The interaction was resolved when a performer '*enters, dressed in a blue polo shirt and a baseball cap […] explaining that there was a fault with the pizza oven at the restaurant, and providing a bag of chips and a bottle of soft drink in good faith.*'[102] The maintained output of the audience's input in this case demonstrates the clear 'results' of the 'decisions and choices' of the interactor, again this essentially is agential immersion. Notably, this particular example highlights how the barriers that distinguish non-prescribed interactions may be looser in immersive environments, as many immersive texts seek to create a naturalistic, verisimilar environment wherein particular and instantiative freedoms are more malleable and more broad.

4.1.2 Sensory Immersion

Sensory immersion focuses on the sensory output of an immersive piece as the key determinant of immersion. This is a common concept in digital immersion. As Grau points out, '[t]he most ambitious project intends to appeal not only to the eyes but to all other senses so that the impression arises of being completely in an artificial world'. He dubs this kind of immersion as 'hermetic immersion', where the goal is to 'almost wholly visually seal off the observer hermetically from external visual impressions'. In doing so, this sealing 'give[s] the viewer the strongest impression possible of being at the location where the images are.'[103]

As with digital totalising technology such as VR and videogames, such an hermetic experience is difficult to replicate in immersive theatre. Hence, I turn to Murray also, who states: 'the experience of immersion is not merely the result of sensory intensity' as 'immersive experiences [are] fragile and easily disrupted.' Instead, she argues 'immersion requires consistency and detail, and most of all careful regulation of the boundary between the imaginary and the real.'[104] As such, sensory immersion is not necessarily hermetic. Rather it requires consistency of detail and freedoms to ensure acceptance of a fictive environment.

Often, sensory immersion belies verisimilitude. One example is Sakellaridou's account of The Experimental Art Theater of Thessaloniki's *The Cherry Orchard* (2013), which was performed 'on the romantic premises of the late nineteenth-century Kapantzi mansion' where 'the whole fictional space [could] be identified with real space in a fully immersive way for both performers and spectators'. Here, performers 'toil and suffer [at the audience's] feet in a

[102] Ashford, p. 154.
[103] Grau, p. 13.
[104] Murray, p. 155.

continuous come-and-go of physical and emotional turmoil, to open suitcases, and to take off their shoes to splash into imaginary water, feeling fully immersed'.[105] This is a clear employment of sensory immersion, and the consonance between the found performance space with tireless, menial performers deemphasises the particular freedoms of the audience for an emotional and sensory experience.

However, as is my main argument, sensory immersion can align with agential immersion to create engaging immersive experiences. For example, Sara Tiel notes that in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More* (2011-), audiences 'spend the majority of their time digging through trunks and closets to fully comprehend the extensiveness of the installation. In so doing, playgoers engage with the immersive 1930s design in a tactile and olfactory, rather than merely a visual or aural way.'[106] This develops a sense of what Masters defines as 'an enigmatic forest of signs and signifiers, with participants distributing and mapping meanings across as much of the site as can be explored'.[107]

In these ways, *Sleep No More* develops an 'immersive environment', wherein agential and sensory output marry and 'the range of allowable behaviors should seem dramatically appropriate to the fictional world', as Murray puts it.[108] Furthermore, spatial co-presence asserts that the interactable world takes place in an immersive place. Some performances construct environments physically, like *Sleep No More* or Shunt's *Tropicana* (2004) in the Shunt Lounge, where White observes that a 'series of *coups de théâtre* – the theatre disguised as a storage room, the fake lift, the long, long walk into the depths of the normally invisible space under the station – was an adventure into the interior of the industrial city'.[109]

Other performances utilise a 'site-specific' approach, such as *Queen of the Night* (2016) or ANU's *Torch* (2018), where an audience are guided through the buildings of a town and are able to interact freely there. Similarly, many immersive environments are developed simply using the outside world as immersive. *You Once Said Yes* (2011) by Look Left Look Right,[110]

[105] Sakellaridou, p. 18; 19; 20.
[106] Sara Tiel, 'Game/Play: The Five Conceptual Planes of Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*' in *Immersive Theatre: Engaging the Audience*, ed. by Josh Machamer, (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks, 2017), 55-64, p.59.
[107] Masters, p. 35.
[108] Murray, p. 132.
[109] Gareth White, 'On Immersive Theatre', *Theatre Research International*, 37:3 (2012), 221-253, p. 224.
[110] 'Look Left Look Right: You Once Said Yes', *Total Theatre*, https://totaltheatre.org.uk/look-left-look-right-you-once-said-yes/ [Accessed 16 February 2023].

as well as *You, the City* (1988) by Fiona Templeton,[111] both have audiences explore an environment and encounter prescribed performances with actors at various points to gradually uncover a story through spatial and language interactions.

Having said that, the immersive environment is not the only way by which immersion may occur. Fuel's *Ring* (2015),[112] wherein an audience sit in the dark donned with binaural headphones playing dialogue and soundscapes, utilises intimate audio technology and lighting to create immersion. Lyn Gardner recounts a dizzying experience from this performance where intimate audio forces uncertainty in the mind of the audience, as well as enhances emotional story values.[113] In these ways, *Ring* exemplifies the intersection of sensory and emotional immersion, where sensory intensity and depravity heightens the emotional content of scenes. Furthermore, there is no hermetic environment in *Ring*, while sensory immersion is still strongly felt.

Environment-less sensory immersion is a broad category, and its cases vary more distinctly than environmental immersive texts. For instance, Ontroerend Goed's *The Smile off Your Face* is an example of one-on-one intimate sensory immersion: Here, the audience is 'caressed, jostled and photographed', where such 'consensual intimacy enables the actors to push at the edges of the comfort zone' until 'in an almost unbearable invasive moment, something large and cold is rammed between your hands.'[114] Sensory experience is prioritised here to exhibit a facet to immersive theatre, where sensory physical experience almost entirely constitutes immersion. Similarly, Adrian Howells's *The Pleasure of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding* (2011)[115] and *Foot Washing for the Sole* (2010) entail intimate performances of physical sensorial interaction, where agential immersion marries with sensory immersion in an intimate 'bodily "conversation"'.[116] Again, far from the hermetic.

4.1.3 Emotional immersion

[111] Fiona Templeton, 'YOU-The City (1988)', *Fiona Templeton*, https://www.fionatempleton.cloud/youthe-city [Accessed 16 February 2023].
[112] Fuel, 'Ring', *Fuel*, https://fueltheatre.com/projects/ring/ [Accessed 07 February 2023].
[113] Lyn Gardner, 'Ring – Review', *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/mar/14/ring-review [Accessed 16 February 2023].
[114] Claire Armistead, 'The Smile off Your Face – Review', *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/mar/04/smile-off-your-face-ontroerend-goed-review [Accessed 16 February 2023].
[115] Deborah Pearson, 'Unsustainable Acts of Love and Resistance: The Politics of Value and Cost in One-on-One Performances', *Canadian Theatre Review*, 126 (2015), 63-67.
[116] Deidre Heddon and Adrian Howells, 'From Talking to Silence: A Confessional Journey', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 33:1 (2011), 1-12, p.7.

Emotional immersion is less concrete than sensory or agential immersion, as it is almost entirely experiential, mostly unaffected by modes of interaction or the sensory output of a performance. *Sleep No More*'s audience may feel emotionally immersed by their satisfying agency over their fictive world, while *Ring*'s audience may feel emotionally immersed in more passive ways by just sensory output alone. Ryan observes fictive interactive media where emotions 'are overwhelmingly self-directed ones'. Conversely, that outward emotional reactions occur in rare cases where 'characters [are] sufficiently lifelike to generate emotional reactions only by limiting the player's participation and hindering self-centred feelings.'[117] As theatre's origins are more emotional than ludic, it seems somewhat apparent that other-directed emotions are more likely to occur in emotionally immersive theatre.

However, as Biggins writes of *The Drowned Man* (2013), there is a cognitive act at play in immersive environments in the form of '[t]he creation of an individual narrative via an audience's member's route around [a] show, or the process of piecing together separate fragmented rooms/scenes into a wider world or story'.[118] In this way, instantiative freedoms relate closely to inward emotional immersion. As does sensory immersion, as Lawrence Switzky proposes: '[i]mmersion does not have to mean just a temporary visit to a virtual sensorium; it can also mean how especially distressing and enlightening simulations spill into and linger on hands, retinas, and taste buds.'[119] Conversely, *Ring*'s audience engage more passively; due to a lack of self-involvement, their consumption of a traditional narrative mostly culminates in outward emotional immersion.

Apropos of involvement, texts like *66 Minutes to Damascus*, *Pollyanna*, or Hydrocracker's *The New World Order* (2007, 2011) – where the audience are taken through Brighton Town Hall and given orders directly by performers in a play about authoritarianism –[120] all have performers address audience members as if they were a part of the narrative world. This simple technique involves the audiences into the narrative, and merges real experience with imagined experience. This immersion-involvement can be enhanced, like in *3rd Ring Out*, by ludic

[117] Ryan, pp. 56-57.
[118] Biggins, p. 80.
[119] Lawrence Switzky, 'Transmedia Ethics: Why Theater Needs Philosophy Needs Virtual Reality Needs Video Games', Theater, 46:2 (2016), 55-67, p. 65.
[120] Lyn Gardner, 'The New World Order – review', *The Guardian* (2011), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/may/16/new-world-order-brighton-review [Accessed 18 February 2023].

interactions to which emotional responses are attached; failures in this game result in avoidable fictional deaths.

4.2 Involved and Participatory Immersion

Immersion interacts with involvement and participation in a variety of ways. Some concepts arise from this crossover. First, simultaneous participation, immersion, and involvement implies two potential counter-concepts: *involved immersion*, as opposed to *participatory immersion*. These concepts can mean either of two things:

1) Immersive theatre wherein participatory or involved interaction occurs, or;
2) Immersive theatre wherein *immersion* is participatory or involved.

The majority of immersive theatre prescribes its immersion as involved. Especially when immersion is accepted as a totalising experience, it would be difficult to attend an immersive performance *without* being immersed. Imagining *participatory* immersion, where immersion is invited *during* performance, is more difficult (participatory invitations are explored in 5. Performance – Participation). I propose here two lenses through which immersion might be considered participatory.

First, immersion might be understood by *degrees*. As mentioned in 2. Literature Review, Machon presents a somewhat degree-based understanding of immersion, with the concepts of '[i]mmersion as absorption', '[i]mmersion as transporation', and '[t]otal immersion'. While Machon's description of immersion is somewhat narrow, there is value in the potential acknowledgement of *more* or *less* immersive performances. An 'absorbed' and 'transported' interactor might be more "totally" immersed than an interactor who is only 'absorbed' *or* 'transported'. In other terms, an emotionally, agentially, and sensorially immersed interactor may be immersed more so than an only emotionally immersed one. In line with the participatory invitation, these two interactors may be at the same performance, but are separated by their different types of being immersed. This feature applies to both performances where some of the audience are spectators and some interactors as well as those where *all* of the audience are interactors.[121]

For instance, Hidden Track's *Standard:Elite* (2016-2019) has participants take part in participatory games during a performance while other audience members watch. The

[121] Machon, p. 63.

interactors in this performance are absorbed in agential immersion, while the spectators are immersed only in the traditional theatrical sense. To extend the metaphor of immersive "liquid" pervasive in performance, the spectators in this example are watching the medium wherein the participant is actively swimming and is surrounded by water.

The second lens is that of *type*. While degree describes immersion as participatory with differing instantiative freedoms and levels of immersion, type describes immersion as participatory with differing particular freedoms and types of immersion. As immersion is inherently experiential, interactors might be separated by participatory frames based on the kinds of freedoms and immersion they experience. As such, immersion becomes participatory not by unbalancing freedoms, but by variegating available freedoms.

Christine Jones's *Queen of the Night* prioritises its agential and sensorial immersion over the emotional (as mentioned in 3.3. Roles, Systems, and Interfaces). In doing so, the performance engineers participatory immersion based on partitioning spaces including different immersive and interactive features which contract audience and performer agency to create interlocutional subjective experiences. Furthermore, some of these experiences are available only to specific ticket holders. As Masters puts it, access to 'an increasingly set of diverse spaces [is] not contingent on attendance at the performance'. He states that 'these add-on experiences become part of the production: you need a ticket to experience them. Additionally, such experiences relates to the potential stimulation participants might be privy to—sexual or otherwise.'[122] This system exposes *Queen of the Night*'s participatory nature; those who have bought a certain kind of a ticket are privy to spaces others are not, and therefore have the potential to be immersed in unique ways. While it is true that in any immersive environment some experiences may be avoided by some and accessed by others, *Queen of the Night* (as with Punchdrunk's *The Burnt City*)[123], monetises this participation, ensuring that the experiences for some ticket holders will be separate to others, making type—and potentially degree—participatory by prescription.

4.3 Forms of Co-Presence in Immersive Theatre

The concept of "immersive environments" in theatre implies an acknowledgement of the malleability of theatre's co-presence. Such malleability is inherently displayed in involved,

[122] Masters, p. 26.
[123] Punchdrunk, 'Ticket Information', *The Burnt City*, https://www.theburntcity.com/ticket-information/ [Accessed 27 February 2023].

immersive, and participatory theatre as the medial space between audience and author is elided or removed, both communicatively and physically. However, immersion suggests co-presence in entirely new ways in entirely non-standard performance spaces. For instance, in virtual forms. This widening of co-presence's definition can be accentuated, as non-standard modes of co-presence are used to deliver interactive, immersive, and participatory performances. Furthermore, these new kinds of co-presence might bring with them immersion unavailable to spectators with physical co-presence to their performers.

Dries Verhoeven's *Life Streaming* (2010) was a performance wherein performers in Sri Lanka and audience-interactors in Europe were co-present only through video and text chat software. The performance centred around the 2004 tsunami which happened on the beach where the performers were stationed. The interactors and the performers communicate using a text chat, while the performers follow a script and set of directions. Throughout, '[i]nterventions in the space transform the conversation into a physical experience' including the introduction and reduction of lights, the moving of walls, and ultimately the introduction of water as '[t]he piece ends when the European internet café is inundated by warm water.'[124] Sensory immersion is at the forefront of this performance's immersion, as the introduction of water into the audience-space, physically separated from the performer-space, highlights the lack of physical co-presence—and medial distance—between the two geographical regions, Europe and Sri Lanka. However, paradoxically, this performance's aims are met only through the use of *digital* co-presence via the chatroom software and video cameras. The lack of physical co-presence is used here as a demonstrative tool, to highlight itself and prioritise the screens through which information about the tsunami and the people it affects is conveyed to Europeans. In a way almost completely opposite to *66 Minutes in Damascus*, whose audience are tussled and forced through a deeply physical sensory experience, the radical *lack* of physical co-presence in *Life Streaming* is equally used to comment on westerners' detachment from far away tragedies.

Third Rail Projects's *Return the Moon* (2021) has a similar mode of delivery to *Life Streaming*. *Return the Moon* is presented entirely on Zoom, where live performers speak to audience members who may respond via the text chat function.[125] As a tonal primer, the audience are asked to lower their blinds as well as answer some questions about themselves and their

[124] Dries Verhoeven, 'Life Streaming', *driesverhoeven*, https://driesverhoeven.com/en/project/life-streaming/ [Accessed 4 March 2023].
[125] Third Rail Projects, *Return the Moon*, https://thirdrailprojects.com/return-the-moon#returnthemoon [Accessed 6 March 2023].

relationship to their immediate environment. Various screens show a number of images recorded live by performers in their homes. Here, layers of immersion and co-presence are constructed; the audience's requested alterations of their spectatorial space is used as a means of providing sensory immersion, by matching the tone of the story with the tone of the "auditoria".[126] All this happens as a result of the digital co-presence between audience and author, who share the Zoom space. Through their ability to communicate via the chat and the facial expressions and gestures available on-screen, they are deeply involved in the performance. Furthermore, the intervention into the private space of the audience's rooms elicits a sort of metaphorical co-presence, where space, lighting, and therefore tone are set to a prescribed type by the performance. Thus, the tonal experience on-screen and in the physical space is concordant, which can be viewed as a method of preserving some of the lost simultaneity of theatre during lockdown by simulation, or it could be viewed as a hybridised form of this simultaneity, where digital and physical marry tonally and therefore enhance the overall immersion of a potentially uncompelling experience.

Lastly, digital co-presence can manifest in already existing virtual environments, creating a virtual co-presence which simulates the physical co-presence of real theatre. Alternatively, such co-presence may also replace simulation with simplistic interfaces as the medium through which performers and audience might interact. Mostly, the 3D virtual environments of video games are a common platform for virtual co-present theatre. For example, ORGG Productions's *The Lion King – A Minecraft Musical* (2020) was performed inside a public Minecraft server for other players as audience members, using in-game texture packs and mods to simulate the real-life musical. Similarly, YouTuber Rustic Mascara's performance of *Hamlet* (2022) was performed inside the game *Grand Theft Auto Online* to live, virtually co-presence audience members in the game server. It was also livestreamed on YouTube to a live chat audience.[127] While neither of these performances are interactive *as* performances, they exist within interactive virtual environments. In one sense, the inherent immersivity of these games' worlds is proven by the existence of these performances, since the capabilities to simulate real behaviours such as large-scale performances are made available to players. Furthermore, these

[126] Kathryn Yu, 'Return the Moon' Shoots for the Stars (The NoPro Review)' (2021), *No Proscenium*, https://noproscenium.com/return-the-moon-shoots-for-the-stars-the-nopro-review-5424bc9accee [Accessed 6 March 2023].
[127] Rustic Mascara, 'William Shakespeare's Hamlet Performed Inside Grand Theft Auto Online' (2022), *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Lut5leeOr0&ab_channel=RusticMascara [Accessed 6 March 2022].

performances add depth to the notion of virtual or digital co-presence, as player-performers co-present with player-audiences suspend the rules and expectations set out by the videogame's world and engine for the sake of the continuation of the performance as prescribed. As will be explored in chapter 5, the audience of a prescribed performance of *GTA: Online Hamlet* alter their behaviour consciously by not shooting or maiming any of the performers, just as a real-life audience member refrains from shouting out or running on the stage during a physical performance.

5. Performance - Participation

Performances are the temporal-spatial instances predicated by liveness and co-presence. These are generated by prescribed performers along the lines of a blueprint, who are prepared to instantiate performance as prescribed. In involved theatre, the ontology of a performance is prescribed by instantiating interactions, which account for "gaps" in their blueprints. As White puts it:

> [A] significant part of the work of an interactive work consists of creating the structure within which these particular gaps appear, and the work of the interactive performer consists of repeating this structure and allowing the participants to fill the gaps in different ways in each fresh iteration of the work.[128]

These gaps are thus filled by prescribed modes of interaction.

However, in cases of participation, I argue that these gaps are specifically demarcated by what White describes as an 'invitation'. Participatory invitations are their own spatiotemporal moment *within* a performance event. This invitation can take many forms, and is typified by equivalent interaction. As Smuts implies, in participation 'we react to or are reacted to by another agent.'[129] Smuts' claim is true of participatory theatre, and reactivity highlights liveness and co-presence as central to participation. Thus, invitations require a live, co-present set of inviters and invitees. Therein, all participatory interaction is live and co-present.

In this chapter, participation is placed alongside performance, which is also entirely predicated on liveness and co-presence. Ask observed from White, invitational participation indicates a change in 'frame' when a participant accepts an invitation, which alters expectations and

[128] White (2013), p. 30.
[129] Smuts, p. 62.

freedoms available to interactors. This invitations draws heavily on the common presence of both spectatorial and participatory audience members during participatory performances. However, such invitations may also be accepted by an already interacting audience member, indicating multiple participatory frames per performance, as with *Queen of the Night*.

As participation is only contingent upon an invitation, it borrows the modes of interaction utilised within its frames from 3. Liveness – Involvement. This chapter will examine the types of invitations possible, the participatory invitation in regards to its effect on performance, the roles of participants and performers as a result of the invitation, and the performance features which emerge to facilitate invitational participation.

5.1. The Participatory Invitation in Performance

I look to White's classifications of invitations as a starting point. He defines 'overt', 'covert', and 'implicit' invitations (see 2.4.2 Participation).[130] However, I believe that these categories do not define well enough the potentials of invitations available to initiators. To first deepen this definition, I clarify these terms into two broader parent categories of "elective" and "voluntary" which intersect with White's:

	OVERT	COVERT	IMPLICIT
Elective	✓	✓	✗
Voluntary	✓	✗	✓

Figure 3: A chart of elective/voluntary invitations based on whether they are overt, covert, or implicit.

White's focus on the awareness of the audience when the invitation is given can thus be described by two broad categories of "elective" and "voluntary". Elective invitations are those initiated by performers to a specific participant or group of participants.. Voluntary invitations are those initiated by an audience member in response to a stimulus, volunteering themselves as participant. Overt invitations can either be elective or voluntary, as participants are made fully aware of the invitation. Conversely, covert invitations may only be elective, as one cannot volunteer themselves without knowing there is an invitation being made. Finally, implicit invitations may only be voluntary as 'nothing has to be described to an audience' for a prescribed instance of this type of participation.[131]

[130] White (2013), pp. 40-41.
[131] White (2013), p. 40.

However, as actual experience is rarely so quantifiable, I choose to represent the binary of awareness along a spectrum. Two extremes emerge: a *completely aware* participant, and a *completely unaware* one. Once again, this type of analysis accounts for malleability while still establishing clear categories.

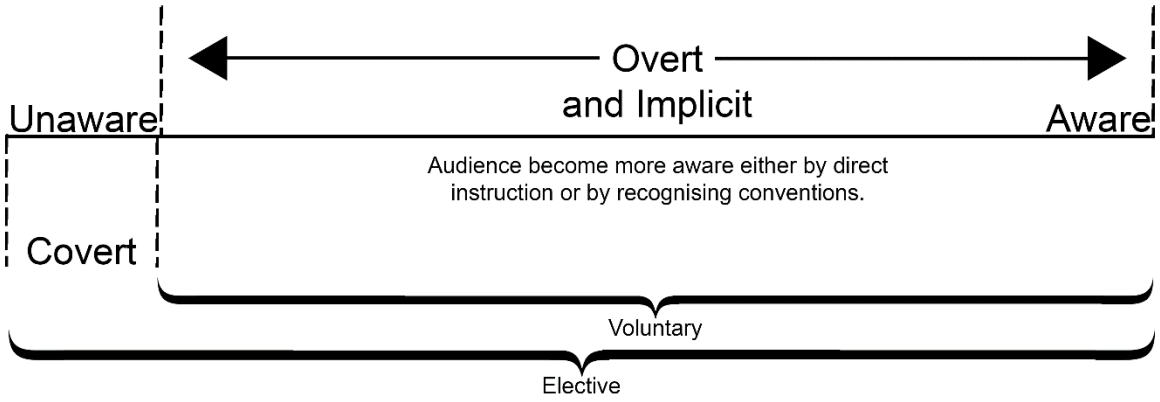

Figure 4: The spectrum of participants' awareness.

Completely unaware participants can be found in Boal's 'invisible theater' which 'erupts in a location chosen as a place where the public congregates. All the people who are near become involved in the eruption and the effects of it last long after the skit is ended.' The aim of this '*invisible* [form] of theatre' is to 'make the spectator act freely and fully, as if he were living a real situation'.[132]

Conversely, fully aware participants are rare for two reasons. First, a completely prepared participant who is aware of an invitation's expectations and outcomes falls into the limits of prescribed performers, and as such, cannot be considered a participant in most performance. Second, a complete awareness of an invitation and its outcomes ruins the participatory experience. As Smuts states, 'the kind of responsiveness characteristic of things we are interacting with cannot be completely random or entirely predictable.'[133] As such, awareness is often granted up to the extent where participation is still satisfying. Rupert Holmes's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* ' 'asks the spectators during intermission to vote on who killed Drood, the identity of [a character], and what characters will fall in love by the end of the show, thereby allowing a happy ending.'[134] Here, an awareness of the narrative implications of a decision are

[132] Boal, p. 122; 125.
[133] Smuts, p. 64.
[134] Homan and Homan, p. 171.

involved in the invitation, but not the outcomes of the subsequent display. Thus, the interactions instantiate an epistemic outcome without ruining the story.

Drood's invitations provide high awareness by specifying parameters of participation. This transmission allows an audience to know exactly *how* they will interact. In this case, it is through democratic interaction. Alternatively, high awareness can also be implicitly inferred from cultural or genre-specific features, allowing for voluntary participation. British pantomime is formed on a culture of implicit invitations (e.g., "He's behind you!"). Arguably, pantomime does not grant awareness then, but relies on a pre-existing culturally specific awareness. However, this awareness is subjective and unassured. An aware participant will know when to say "oh no he isn't", while an unaware one will not. Furthermore, invitations naturally are open contracts and are therefore highly subjective. Each individual instantiates their own experience of a performance simply by responding to (accepting, refusing) an invitation.

This subjectivity of awareness is highlighted in ANU's *Torch* (2018), where audience members are led through an 'immersive promenade production' set within many locations across 'private and public space' focused on the stories of women in the town of St Helen's.[135] During the performance, a reviewer noted an 'increasingly involved' audience, displaying 'encouraging nods and smiles' to actors; the reviewer 'watch[ed] a woman instinctively place her arm around an actress.'[136] While there are no genre conventions here, implicit, voluntary invitations still occur based on a participant's *emotional immersion* within the show, causing them to react to stimulus as if it were real, simultaneously generating and accepting an invitation in one act.

On the other hand, real-life awareness is predicated by the *low awareness* of participants in invisible theater. As Boal states:

> It is always very important that the actors do not reveal themselves to be actors [because] after all, it is a real situation![137]

Boal's participants are completely unaware of the performance, which generates a similar effect to *Torch*. Participants react freely and openly according to the expectations of everyday life, generating voluntary invitations without realising they are such. Unlike *Torch*, which

[135] 'Torch (2018)', *ANU*, http://anuproductions.ie/work/torch-2018-2/, [Accessed 3 August 2022].
[136] Miriam Gillinson, 'Torch review – so real it makes you want to reach out and help', *The Guardian*, (2018), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/nov/26/torch-review-st-helens-anu-productions, [Accessed 3 August 2022].
[137] Boal, p. 125.

occurs in a highly controlled environment, invisible theater focuses on the unpredictability of public engagement, yet both exhibit potentially similar invitations.

Dries Verhoeven's *Wanna Play?* (2014, 2015, 2018) exemplifies a similar reliance on unaware participants. A single performer (Verhoeven) resides in a glass booth and lives in front of a spectatorial audience in a public square. Here, Verhoeven invites completely unaware participants by matching with them on the dating app *Grindr* and inviting them into the booth. Verhoeven's chats with his interlocutors (unbeknownst to them) are projected for the spectators to see. Once Verhoeven's *Grindr* invitations are accepted, the participant is invited to 'meet [Verhoeven's] non-sexual needs', including, 'washing each other's hair, singing together in the shower, or holding hands for an hour', in a fashion similar to Adrian Howells.[138] Once present in the space, the participant is now highly aware, as they accept subsequent invitations and may observe the spectatorial audience. Once co-present and with access to many particular freedoms, the participant's frame, and therefore role, changes. Highlighted here is another layer of subjectivity, where invitations predicate freedoms which are bound by varying levels of awareness, liveness, and co-presence.

As *Wanna Play?* and *Torch* have similarly aware participants, I infer that participation might be analysed by an intersection of factors, not just awareness. Two examples highlight some of these factors.

Firstly, Tim Crouch's *I, Malvolio* is a solo performance wherein an actor monologues to an audience as Shakespeare's infamous Malvolio. He confronts them about their predilections and blames them implicitly for Malvolio's textual demise. In the performance, natural spoken language interaction is scripted throughout. However, one major interaction occurs when the performer '[prepares] to hang himself with the aid of two audience volunteers', then leads 'an audience countdown to his own suicide',[139] as per the stage directions:

> **Malvolio** *attempts to hang himself. He enlists members of the audience to help him in this act – always checking with the audience if they are all right about it, if they find it funny. Volunteers to hold the rope. A volunteer to whip the chair away from under him.*

[138] Dries Verhoeven, 'Wanna Play?', *driesverhoeven*, https://driesverhoeven.com/en/project/wanna-play/ [Accessed 3 August 2022].
[139] Stephen Purcell, '*I, Malvolio* (Review)', *Shakespeare Bulletin,* 38:3, (2020), 506-510, p. 508.

A volunteer to check his pulse after an appropriate amount of time. It is horrific and funny at the same time. A countdown to the moment, halted by a poem[140]

This is an elective invitation with highly aware participants, 'enlisted' by the performer. This participation exemplifies how participation can be central to plot and tone. In essence, emotional immersion in performance is being developed by participation's closeness to character. As Lyn Gardner states, 'Crouch does more than simply allow Malvolio to take his revenge on the audience that laughed at him. […] it puts the audience on the spot, luring us to a place a where we think we're safe and then turning the tables to force us to consider our moral bearings, what we really think.'[141]

The second example, *Showstopper! The Improvised Musical* (2008-), is similarly elective with highly aware participants. During performance, 'the cast creates a new, never-to-be-repeated' musical performance 'entirely improvised from audience suggestions.' An invitation is given, in response to which participants must '[supply] a setting, a title and assorted musical styles from which the actors will spin a story.' Here, participation is essential for instantiating a prescribe performance. Despite particular freedoms being lower than *I, Malvolio*, participants in *Showstopper!* instantiate performance to a far greater degree, as the entire performance's content is improvised based on a small few language interactions.

As can be seen, an analysis of participation based on awareness along does not sufficiently differentiate *I, Malvolio* and *Showstopper!*. Instead, some key differences emerge:

1) the level of instantiation granted to participants via an invitation; *I, Malvolio* relies on scripted interactions with predictable outcomes, while *Showstopper!*'s display is improvised based on interactive input;
2) the modes of interactions made available to participants via an invitation; *I, Malvolio*'s participants may haptically or linguistically interact, while *Showstopper!*'s interactions are limited to short utterances, like 'a funeral parlour', 'Stiff!' or 'Six';[142] and;

[140] Tim Crouch, 'I Malvolio' in *I, Shakespeare* (London: Oberon Books, 2011), 13-34, p. 26.
[141] Lyn Gardner, 'I, Malvolio – Review', *The Guardian* (2011), https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/aug/24/i-malvolio-review [Accessed 4 August 2022].
[142] Chris Wiegand, 'Showstopper! The hit musical that's made up every night', *The Guardian*, (2019), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/jan/23/showstopper-the-improvised-musical-ken-campbell-west-end [Accessed 24 March 2023]

3) the performance techniques required to facilitate participatory invitations; *I, Malvolio* relies on the low risk scripted approach, while *Showstopper!* relies heavily on the improvisational skill of its performers.

The remainder of this chapter examines these potential differences based on the roles and frames generated and supported by invitations that determine freedoms and expectations. I will also explore how performance displays are instantiated by invitational participation, in relation to involved and immersive theatre. In tandem with awareness, these concepts constitute my framework's approach to analysing participation as a uniquely instantiative and live kind of interactivity.

5.2. Depth and Breadth of Interactivity in Participatory Theatre

A helpful tool in codifying freedoms, expectations, and roles within given participatory frames is White's metaphor of 'horizon[s] of participation' (see section 2.4.2),[143] characterised by the possibilities and limitations of a particular frame. Each invitation indicates a change in frame, and therefore a new horizon, typified by new freedoms, limitations, and expectations (henceforth called "resources"). A participant's role is determined by a balance of these resources, implying an upper and lower limit to freedoms and roles, separating participants from prescribed performers. While participatory theatre 'provide[s] arenas where people can socialize, and not feel cut off or removed from the performance', as Kurt Lancaster puts it,[144] the *actual* influence of a performer compared to a participant is completely different. As stated, a participant with complete awareness, preparation, and agency becomes redundant as their freedoms match a prescribed performer's. However, this fact does not mean that performers and participants are completely cleft. Instead, a malleable flux of freedoms exists in participation, typified by frames, which may be physical, spatial, or agential.

Therefore, using White's 'horizon' metaphor, I define participatory roles along two parameters—*depth* and *breadth*—determined by particular and instantiative freedoms. Depth of participation is measured by the *instantiative* freedoms of a participant, while breadth is measured by their *particular* freedoms. To elucidate, I describe *Wanna Play?* as *deep* and *broad*, while *I, Malvolio* is *shallow* and somewhat *narrow*. This understanding of participation helps to describe the potential balances of freedoms between audience and performer, and to

[143] White (2013), p. 50.
[144] Kurt Lancaster, 'When Spectators Become Performers: Contemporary Performance-Entertainments Meet the Needs of an "Unsettled" Audience', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 30:4, 75-88, p. 83.

assess this balance across involved and immersive theatre too. Furthermore, notably, as depth and breadth increase, creativity and risk also increase.

To exemplify this analysis, I use *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* which relies on the restricted democratic interactions of participants to decide the nature of a story in the form of votes. This restriction determines this text as narrow (there is only the one vote) with a single defining moment of depth wherein a pre-determined display is decided. This shows a lack of consistent instantiation shared between audience and author, as with, for instance, *The Twenty-Sided Tavern*, where various instances of democratic participation occur throughout the performance via a mobile digital interface. Through this democratic interaction, participants instantiate the story by 'vot[ing] for different locations, battle[ing] different monsters, choos[ing] different actions or scenarios, personality traits, and even answer[ing] riddles and trivia questions', as Jessica Neu observes.[145] As such, both *Twenty-Sided Tavern* and *Edwin Drood* include only one major mode of interaction, so are equally broad. However, they have differing levels of depth via these interactions. In fact, the instantiation of *Drood*'s participants 'offers only the illusion of choice [akin to] early video games where the gamer made decisions, but only within a carefully scripted scenario,' to borrow from Homan and Homan.[146]

Involved theatre can be distinguished along these same terms of depth and breadth. However, in participatory theatre, the invitation to interact is important. The invitation presents an initial distinguishment of interactors versus spectators by delineating frames wherein freedoms and expectations change. By virtue of their highly scripted nature, *Drood* or *I, Malvolio*'s invitations include low instantiative and particular freedoms. This scripted ontology is similar to what Grant Tavinor observes, where 'the largely fixed narrative[s]' of many video games are mostly displayed via 'noninteractive films—cut-scenes—that are interspersed through the gameplay'.[147] In *Drood* and *I, Malvolio,* invitations happen at fixed stages and include fixed outcomes.

However, *Drood*'s and *I, Malvolio*'s fixity does not indicate that deeper or broader texts are more interactive or theatrical than those mentioned above. Participation cannot be measured in *degrees*, but described by its spatiotemporal invitations and the depth and breadth of the frames

[145] Jessica Neu, 'Review: "The Twenty Sided Tavern," You Are Sure to Laugh Your Way Through the Adventure', *onStage Pittsburgh*, (2022), https://onstagepittsburgh.com/2022/04/16/review-the-twenty-sided-tavern-you-are-sure-to-laugh-your-way-through-the-adventure/ [Accessed 8 August 2022].
[146] Homan and Homan, p. 171.
[147] Grant Tavinor, 'What's My Motivation? Video Games and Interpretive Performance: What's My Motivation?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 75:1 (2017), 23-33, p. 26.

these invitations open up, on a case-by-case basis. Shallow and deep participation both share a reliance on the inherent risk of invitational participation as a live, co-present phenomenon. Varying instantiative and particular freedoms designate a performance's identity, rather than their placement in a hierarchy. As Sakellaridou writes, in texts with higher instantiative and particular freedoms, that 'boldness and imaginative power on the part of the spectators and more inventive skills on the part of the performers' is required.[148] This presents an entirely different dynamic to a text with low freedoms. Yet in this case, other performance features become necessary, such as a more rigid script. Therefore, using depth and breadth, one can maintain a subjectivity central to my framework by focusing on the instantiative invitation.

Importantly, while a difference in freedoms *does* prescribe different roles to participants, that difference is equally non-hierarchical. As mentioned, as depth and breadth increase, the participant's role becomes similar to that of a performer, especially in cases with separate spectatorial and participatory audiences. However, such similarity or near-similarity does not impose performer-ship on highly interactive participants and therefore imply a lack of importance for *less* interactive participants. For instance, Uli Jäckle's productions include actors 'speak[ing] directly to the audience', or audiences 'walk[ing] from playing area to playing area during the course of a production'.[149] However, I argue that those actions do not conscribe audiences as performers. Homan and Homan claim that Jäckle's audience are

> …playing the triple role of audience, actor, and playwright in the basic script set by [Jaeckle's] productions [therefore giving] the player a status equal to the playwright and actor.[150]

Rather, I contest this claim by utilising depth and awareness as concepts. Depth, constituted by instantiative freedoms, can only be "fully deep" for completely prepared and aware instantiators, which is a title only prescribed performers possess. As such, a participant cannot, via accepting an invitation, be regarded as equivalent in instantiative freedoms to a performer. As Andrew Kania states, interactors mostly 'lack the knowledge of the work required to produce a display with features [they intend] it to have, for the appreciation of an audience.'[151] As such, participants who are given performance as a mode of interaction might be described

[148] Sakellaridou, p. 22.
[149] Brian Rhinehart, 'Forum Heersum: Uli Jäckle's Landscape Theatre', *Western European Stages*, 22:2/3 (2010), 33-40, p. 33.
[150] Homan and Homan, p. 177.
[151] Andrew Kania, 'Why Gamers Are Not Performers', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 76:2, (2018), 187-199, p. 190.

as "participant-performer". However, this description does not place such participants abstractly higher than other participants, and does not constitute their equivalence with prescribed performers.

Despite this, when invitations are granted during performance, leaving some participants as spectators, the actions of a participants are often highlighted for spectators' viewing. In *Surge*, two participants play a VR game the display of which is projected onto four screens around which spectators walk and look. While these participants move in performative ways (assisted by dancers) spectators view their movements as part of the display. But, this display is simply a demonstration of the instantiative freedoms being *granted* to the participants *by* the prescribed performer. Furthermore, in interactive and immersive environments wherein participants are invited to move from one already interactive frame to another, this kind of spectatorship of participants with different freedoms to oneself admittedly still might occur. However, the gap in depth here is far less vast than between an interactor and a spectator.

As discussed, participation with high freedoms and participation with low freedoms must be treated differently, because instantiation is shared to varying degrees. The force which accounts for these differences is *risk*. As Sakellaridou describes of participation with high freedoms, it 'can create equal anxiety for all parties involved because there is no clear dividing line among the roles designated for each'.[152] Such anxiety is especially prevalent in many immersive contexts, where the 'relationship [between participant and performer] is open and renegotiated every single moment and for every single performance, especially in less static cases of audience participation'.[153] However, I also wish to move away from the implication that 'static' participation is less risky or instantiative than its opposite, as will be discussed in the next and final section.

5.3. How Participation Shapes Performance

As discussed, the instantiation of participation can range from almost entirely determining a performance's display, as with *Wanna Play?*, to simply designating the outcome of a ludic game, as with *Standard:Elite*, to instantiating the major crux of a performance as with *Showstopper!*. As such, various performance features are employed in order to ensure prescribed displays with varying levels of freedoms and invitations. Furthermore, various kinds of risk emerge from both scripted performances, where invitations are predetermined, and with

[152] Sakellaridou, p. 22.
[153] Ibid.

less scripted ones, such as *Queen of the Night*, where invitations are generated live and somewhat randomly. Such risk is further troubled by the fact that already immersive or interactive environments, such as *Secret Cinema*, *Pay Up, Then She Fell*, and *Tony N' Tina's Wedding*, might include participatory invitations.

I examine here the kinds of performance features and techniques within my corpus which account for participants' instantiation, ensure a prescribed display, and prevent non-prescribed interactions or refusals of invitations. One major example of interaction-accommodating performance is improvisation, as seen in *Twenty-Sided Tavern*, *Wanna Play?*, *Showstopper!*, and many others. Here, fixity is sacrificed to ensure high audience instantiation. Immersive theatre is particularly influenced by improvisation, such as *Tony N' Tina's Wedding* or *Pollyanna*, where the audience 'as an interactive agent in the performance, is absolutely central to the movement/physicality and sensual design of the event', as Josephine Machon writes. In such events, there is a 'continuing, immediate and interactive exchange of energy and experience between the work and the audience'. This exchange precipitates improvisation as a method of accommodating interactive instantiation.[154] Furthermore, with the closeness that theatre's interactivity bears to everyday interactions, improvisation may also be key to ensuring verisimilitude and preventing immersion breakage.

Furthermore, improvisation not only upholds instantiative boundaries, but may also broaden them. In *Pollyanna*, unexpected interactions occurred, to which 'suitably skilled performers, those with university-level experience training and theatre making and devising',[155] could respond using improvisational technique. Moreover, 'group leaders', acting as 'performer[s]-as-interface' were specifically tasked with reducing unprescribed interactions. Here, improvisational acting allowed for voluntary invitations to occur fluidly and become a prescribed part of the display, reducing the risk of non-prescribed interactions and increasing participants' freedoms and agency in the process. However, improvisation may only have this effect when freedoms are limited to familiar, everyday modes of interaction, such as natural spoken language and haptic interaction. As Ashford writes, 'the social nature of such a language-based process [allowed] the audience member and the performer-as-interface [to take] part in a negotiation [with a] satisfactory outcome.'[156] Herein, improvisation becomes a good tool with the limitations of skill and limited modes of interaction. In particular,

[154] Machon, p. 57; 44.
[155] Ashford, p. 152.
[156] Ashford, p. 156.

Showstopper! embraces this limitation by limiting its particular freedoms and in doing so prioritising instantiative freedoms. As well as *Pollyanna*, these works are good examples of

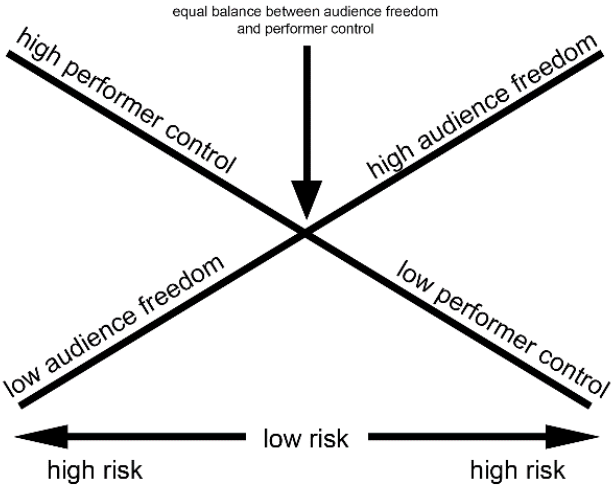

Figure 5: The balance of performer control and audience freedom.

how participatory performances must find a balance of freedoms (Fig. 5) to avoid risk on either ends of a spectrum:

At the heart of this balance lies a mixture of audience freedoms and performer control, the imbalance of which causes instantiative risk. On one end, high freedoms cause unpredictability. As Sakellaridou writes:

> When an audience is called on to take a more energetic role, one that would give them the impression that they are entering the performance as real players, the problem of guidance and control becomes more complicated because it brings higher risks, and tests the limits of compliance and voluntary participation on both sides involved.[157]

Many immersive-participatory performances exist with this balance in their ontologies, such as *Queen of the Night*, where participants enter an sensorially immersive environment in which 'consumption, conspicuous and otherwise, becomes the primary mode of participation.'[158] The interactions of participants here are unpredictable and potentially non-prescribed, despite their awareness of rules and conventions. In a way, *Queen of the Night* reduces the risk of non-prescribed interactions by making freedoms so high and many that few interactions are *not* prescribed.

[157] Ibid.
[158] Masters, p. 25.

On the other end, low freedoms beget another risk of an instantiative nature. As Susan Kattwinkel writes:

> Certainly the willingness of the spectators is of great import in theatre relying on audience participation […] performers in a show relying on audience input may find themselves with no play to perform when faced with [a taciturn audience].[159]

As with *I, Malvolio* or *Standard:Elite* (wherein participants specifically have a "no, thank you" card), restricted, and scripted performances lack the verisimilitude and intimacyof *Queen of the Night*, meaning that the refusal of an invitation cannot easily be accommodated. However, this scripted nature also means that unprescribed interactions are far more unlikely. Refusal of an invitation is a purely participatory risk, but does point to a requirement of interaction in such cases, somewhat similar to involved theatre.

However, there are also other strategies, such as ludic interaction and narrative immersion to ensure participants' interaction. For example, in *Standard:Elite*, half of the audience are designated "Standards", and the other half are "Elites". In the world of the work's play, Elites are more advantaged and important than Standards, and so Standards take part in ludic games to vie for a place among the Elites. The more they 'impress' the performers, the higher their likelihood of becoming of an Elite. Ludic involvement attached clearly to an narrative, emotional value prevents taciturn audiences, and specific delineated moments led by performers ensure very high awareness for participants, further preventing reluctance. Therein, the entire audience are given props to indicate role (Standard or Elite) and to vote, which establishes a lowly interactive environment, easing participants into an interactive frame. Furthermore, "no, thank you" cards are available, providing a prescribed method of invitation refusal.

A similar method of reducing taciturn participants can be seen in *Surge*. Here, VR participants are completely divided spatially and sensorially to the spectatorial audience. The VR participants are viewable to the spectators, but not vice versa. Not only does this represent clearly two separate participatory *frames* (one of which also includes deeper immersion than another), but also exemplifies participation wherein the invitation is given pre-performance. Thus, participants do not tend to feel self-conscious and are unlikely to refuse to participate.

[159] Susan Kattwinkel, 'Introduction', in *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance*, ed. by Susan Kattwinkel, (Westport, Con.: Praeger, 2003), ix-xviii, p. xi.

This willingness to participate is enhanced by the sensory separation of participants and spectators, as participants' awareness of others is reduced.

6. Conclusion

The research question this thesis answers is *"How to define the intersection between theatre and interactivity?"* I have answered this question by developing an intersectional analytical framework evidenced by a corpus of interactive theatre performances.

In this framework, liveness, co-presence, and performance form theatre's ontology, and are intersected with observable types of interactive theatre: involved, immersive, and participatory. These categories are clearly defined and each have methods by which their performances may be analysed individually while also retaining solid placement into a category. As per my Introduction, these categories overlap, culminating in a framework which preserves performance and experiential subjective individuality, while simultaneously maintaining the conceptual standards which dictate type.

As such, I have developed an understanding of interactive theatre that is simultaneously specific and malleable, allowing for various types of interactive theatre as long as they are within the bounds of one of the three categories (involvement, immersion, participation). This framework exists as an emergence of varying theories on interactivity and theatre. I merge conceptions of interactivity presented by Murray and Ryan alongside ideas of theatrical interactivity, such as White's invitations, to develop an understanding of interactive theatre as coexistent alongside other interactive media, while also giving consideration to theatricality. Therein, I develop a more precise and considered taxonomy of interactive theatre than Izzo's list, while also presenting a more generalisable analysis of interactive theatre than texts such as Machamer's *Immersive Theatre* or Biggins's *Immersive Theatre and Audience Experience*. Therefore, this research belongs in a growing intersectional area of research analysing the conceptual aspects of both interactivity and theatre to conduct various research. Switzky's 'Transmedia Ethics' is one work that represents this area in its examination of the employment of ethics in theatre against interactive media.

In this area, my malleable framework might be useful in the context of future research as a method of categorising and understanding interactive theatre, principally because it is an empirical framework based on a case-by-case basis. As such, this framework can be simply utilised, augmented, or integrated into other theatrical analyses. The lack of 'terminological clarity' mentioned in my Introduction that plagues the confusion of this area is thus avoided, meaning that my framework can be used as a baseline or springboard for further research. The clarity of my framework thus 1) reduces a researcher's need to develop their own framework from scratch; and 2) has the potential to identify a common language of analysis of interactive theatre, meaning various in-depth research can arise from the same or similar baselines. As an example, this framework might be used as follows:

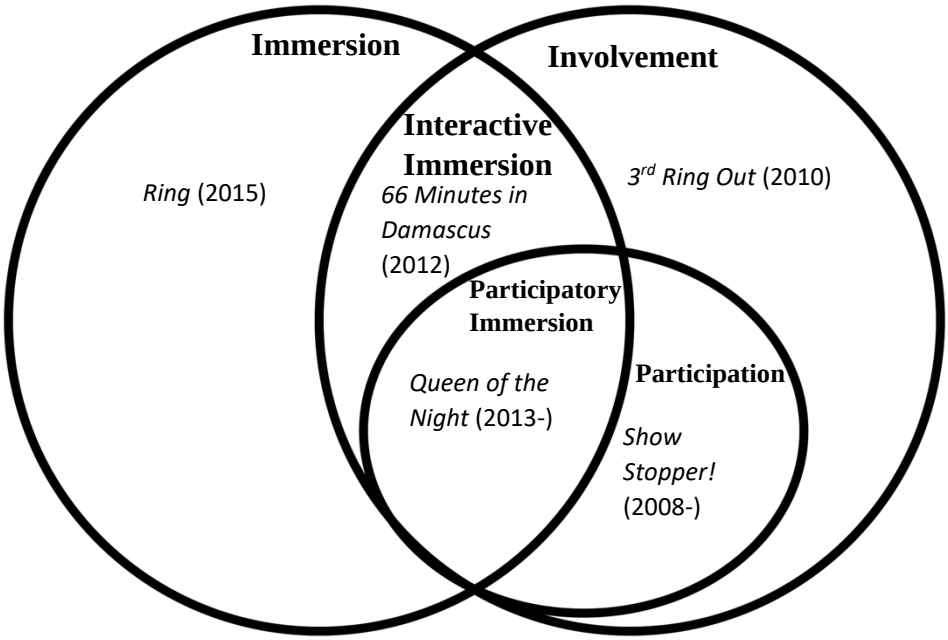

Figure 6: Usage of the Venn diagram.

As displayed, cases can be mapped onto the framework, and concurrently delved into great depths, depending on which area of the framework they reside in. As stated, this framework is malleable, and iterations of each section can be imagined, as well as new sections to the framework.

However, there are a few limitations to the methodology of this thesis which, which helpfully remedied by the framework's malleability, are still present and could demonstrate flaws in the framework's structure. First, the framework is unfortunately built on a somewhat limited corpus of texts, meaning that the framework is unexhaustive. Second, my methodology of focusing on a breadth of performances meant that close analysis of each performance could not

feasibly be undertaken. As such, potential hidden modes of interaction, aspects of immersion, or types of participatory invitations might remain available to discover. However, this methodology was essential for the framework's initial, broad development, and also distinguishes its malleability. Furthermore, gaps within my corpus of texts may easily be remedied by more specific—or more broad—analyses to bolster the corpus inspiring the framework.

In addition to this potential future additional research into the framework, a few questions emerged during my writing which may pose as points of consequential research. First, there is a tension between Homan and Homan and Andrew Kania regarding the potential performer-ship of interactors. Kania strongly defies potential in videogames, as interactors 'typically [lack] the knowledge of the work required to produce a display with features she intends it to have, for the appreciation of an audience'. He argues that, in the case of interactors being observed, a performance is being made of a 'playing' rather than the game itself.[160] Meanwhile, Homan and Homan propose that, in interactive theatre, interactors have the potential to become playwright, actor, and player all at once. While I agree with Kania's ideas in terms of non-theatrical interaction, the liveness and co-presence of an interactor (especially in participation) suggest a kind of performance occurring during interactive theatre. A question I raise regarding both theatrical/non-theatrical interaction for future/further thought is therefore "*can* interactors be performers?"

In a similar vein, this thesis omitted the vast wealth of non-prescribed interactivity which has been at the heart of much of theatre's culture and ecology throughout its history. There is a wealth of intrigue in this field of research, which could not have been explored here due to a limited scope. While I do believe that it is important to justify interactive theatre as its own category with its own devoted empirical research, there are numberless questions which may arise when discussing or researching the interactivity in theatre which is *not* prescribed. Through certain lenses, *all* theatre might be regarded as strongly interactive by virtue of its liveness and co-presence, as I have expressed through my conception of invitations and prescription. This is especially cogent when considering that the majority of scholarship regarding interactivity focuses on the interactive of digital media, which is inherently interactive a completely different way, or film, which is *not* inherently interactive. Theatre, interactive media, and film can all be "made" interactive by the employment of certain features.

[160] Kania, p. 190; 194.

However, theatre is the only media (of these three) which might be "made" interaction in live, co-present ways. Such discussions are broad and complex, and I encourage any research into theatre's interactive history and inherency.

Furthermore, I also hope that this research encourages the analyses of interactive theatre types left out by this thesis for the sake of simplicity. For instance, extra-theatrical interaction, such as that observed by Ben Walmsley in 'co-creation', where audiences provide post-performance feedback and suggestions is a good example for further consideration.[161] Or, in Jack Thorne's *After Life* (2021),[162] whose interactions occurred in an online 'companion piece', named *After Life Experience*, where audiences answered an instantiating questionnaire.[163] Another part of this category includes interactive theatre outside of the scope of this thesis, such as the ritual theatre observed by Schechner or any of the other long historical theatre cultures which include interactivity. The scope of this thesis is defined narrowly to contemporary theatre mostly existing within the Western hemisphere (notably Europe and the USA). These temporal, spatial, and therefore cultural and historical restrictions imply a wealth of interactive, immersive, and participatory theatre beyond the scope of this thesis. In particular, new research utilising my framework and expanding upon it in forms of theatre mostly untouched by this thesis would be valuable.

In this vein, there is great potential for the consideration of how interactivity in theatre might coincide with the politics of a piece or its rhetoric. This framework could be further finessed by including the consideration of politics. I would encourage the analysis of a work's politics which are analogous with its interactivity or aims, such as *Life Streaming*, as well as pieces whose interactivity relates to a wider political or social discourse, such as the potential democratisation of a collective voting system like *Drood* compared with the elitist systems of *Standard:Elite*. Such analyses would enhance my framework, but also add a dimension to it which might open up extensive discursive literature, similar to that already seen in the work of Adam Alston, Anna Wilson, and Anar K. Ahmadov.

Furthermore, an understanding of the technological elements and inspirations on interactivity which have impacted the concept's usage here remains to be explored. A question I would posit

[161] Ben Walmsley, 'Co-creating theatre: authentic engagement or inter-legitimation?', *Cultural Trends*, 22:2 (2013), 108-118, p. 110: p. 113.
[162] 'After Life', *National Theatre*, https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/shows/after-life [Accessed 24 November 2022].
[163] Coney, *After Life Experience*, https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/shows/after-life [Accessed 25 March 2023]

is: are there forms of "old" interactivity from before the advent of digital interactivity, and if there are, how do they relate to and differ from "new", computer-based or -inspired interactive forms? The considerations of what kinds of interactivity emerge in this dynamic are vast, and the implications of interactive media's influence on interactive theatre is intriguing and somewhat untouched.

These questions only arise due to a strong understanding I have gained of interactive theatre's function and breadth. This thesis establishes interactive theatre as its own medium, connected to and intersecting with both theatre and interactive media, but chiefly representing a doubling of the instantiative ontology of both. Furthermore, this thesis constructs a method of interactive theatre analysis with a clarity and empiricism somewhat unfound in previous analysis, and that considers cases based on their subjective interactivity and theatricality.

Bibliography

'3rd Ring Out', *Metis*, https://metisarts.co.uk/projects/3rd-ring-out [Accessed 24 March 2023]

'About The Show', *The Twenty-Sided Tavern*, https://www.thetwentysidedtavern.com/about [Accessed 24 March 2023]

'After Life', *National Theatre*, https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/shows/after-life [Accessed 25 March 2023]

Alston, Adam, 'Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value: Risk, agency and responsibility in immersive theatre', *Performance Research*, 18:2 (2013), 128-138

Ashford, Lawrence, 'The flexible performer in interactive theater: developing The Last Great Hunt's *Pollyanna*', *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 9:2, (2018), 142-257

Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, trans. by Stephen Halliwell, W. Hamilton Fyfe, Doreen C Innes, Rhys Roberts, revised by Donald A. Russell, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995)

Armistead, Claire, 'The Smile off Your Face – Review', *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/mar/04/smile-off-your-face-ontroerend-goed-review [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Auslander, Philip, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (Taylor & Francis, 2008)

Baker, Brandon, 'FRINGE REVIEW: Pig Iron Theatre's "Pay Up"', *Philadelphia Magazine*, (2013), https://www.phillymag.com/news/2013/09/20/fringe-review-pig-iron-theatres-pay-up/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop, (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), pp. 41-45

Biggin, Rose, *Immersive Theatre and Audience Experience: Space, Game and Story in the Work of Punchdrunk*, (Cham: International Springer Publishing, 2017)

Boal, Augusto, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. by Charles A., Maria-Odilia, Leal McBride, and Emily Fryer, (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

Brook, Peter, *The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate*, (London: Penguin 2008)

Carlson, Marvin, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2003)

--, *Theatre: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

Coney, 'A Small Town Anywhere', *Coney*, https://coneyhq.org/?s=a+small+town+anywhere [Accessed 24 March 2023]

--, *After Life Experience*, https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/shows/after-life [Accessed 25 March 2023]

Crouch, Tim, 'I Malvolio' in *I, Shakespeare* (London: Oberon Books, 2011), 13-34

Davies, Bethan L., 'Grice's Cooperative Principle: Meaning and Rationality', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39, (2007), 2308-2331

Eco, Umberto, 'The Poetics of the Open Work' in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop, (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), pp. 20-40

Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *The Semiotics of Theatre*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992)

--, 'Sense and Sensation: Exploring the Interplay between the Semiotic and Performative Dimensions of Theatre', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 22:2 (2008), 69-81

Fuel, 'Ring', *Fuel*, https://fueltheatre.com/projects/ring/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Gardner, Lyn, '3rd Ring Out', *Guardian*, (2010) https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/jun/30/3rd-ring-out-review [Accessed 24 March 2023]

--, '66 Minutes in Damascus – review', *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/jun/21/66-minutes-damascus-review [Accessed 24 March 2023]

--,'I, Malvolio – Review', *The Guardian* (2011), https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/aug/24/i-malvolio-review [Accessed 24 March 2023]

--, 'The New World Order – review', *The Guardian* (2011), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/may/16/new-world-order-brighton-review [Accessed 24 March 2023]

--, 'Ring – Review', *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/mar/14/ring-review [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Gillinson, Miriam, 'Torch review – so real it makes you want to reach out and help', *The Guardian*, (2018), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/nov/26/torch-review-st-helens-anu-productions [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Goffman, Erving, *Frame Analysis*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986)

--, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (London: Penguin, 1990)

Grau, Oliver, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, trans. by Gloria Custance, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003)

Heddon, Deidre and Adrian Howells, 'From Talking to Silence: A Confessional Journey', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 33:1 (2011), 1-12

Homan, Daniel and Sidney Homan, 'The interactive theater of video games: the gamer as playwright, director, and actor', *Comparative Drama*, 48:1-2, (2014), 169-186

'Interactive', in *Oxford English Dictionary*, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/97521?redirectedFrom=interactive#eid [Accessed 23 March 2023]

'Invisible Treasure', *fanSHEN*, https://www.fanshen.org.uk/invisible-treasure/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Izzo, Gary, *The Art of Play: The New Genre of Interactive Theater*, (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 1997)

Kattwinkel, Susan, 'Introduction', in *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance*, ed. by Susan Kattwinkel, (Westport, Con.: Praeger, 2003), ix-xviii

Kania, Andrew, 'Why Gamers Are Not Performers', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 76:2, (2018), 187-199

Lancaster, Kurt, 'When Spectators Become Performers: Contemporary Performance-Entertainments Meet the Needs of an "Unsettled" Audience', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 30:4, 75-88

Janlert, Lars-Erik and Erik Stolterman, *Things that Keep Us Busy: The Elements of Interaction*, (MIT Press, 2017)

Lehmann, Hans-Thies, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006)

Lepecki, André and Sally Banes, 'Introduction: the performance of the senses' in *The Senses in Performance*, ed. by Sally Banes and André Lepecki, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 1-9

'Look Left Look Right: You Once Said Yes', *Total Theatre*, https://totaltheatre.org.uk/look-left-look-right-you-once-said-yes/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Lopes, Dominic McIver, 'The Ontology of Interactive Art', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 35:4, (2001), 65-81

--, *A Philosophy of Computer Art*, (New York: Routledge, 2010)

'Love Letters Straight From Your Heart', *Fuel*, https://fueltheatre.com/projects/love-letters-straight-from-your-heart/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Machamer, Josh, *Immersive Theatre: Engaging the Audience*, (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks, 2017)

Machon, Josephine, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

Mason, David, 'Video Games, Theater, and the Paradox of Fiction', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 47:6, (2014), 1109-1121

Masters, Paul, 'Site and Seduction: Space, Sensuality, and Use-Value in the Immersive Theater', in *Immersive Theatre: Engaging the Audience*, ed. by Josh Machamer, (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks, 2017), 17-44

Megaverse, *Surge*, Sage Gateshead, 2022

Meloche, Jaclyn, 'Milk *Does* The Body' in *Immersive Theatre: Engaging the Audience*, ed. by Josh Machamer, (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Network, 2017), 109-128.

Miller, Carolyn Handler, *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment*, 3rd edn., (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2014)

'Mnemonic', *Complicité*, http://www.complicite.org/productions/Mnemonic [Accessed 23 March 2022]

Murray, Janet, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: the Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2017)

Neu, Jessica, 'Review: "The Twenty Sided Tavern," You Are Sure to Laugh Your Way Through the Adventure', *onStage Pittsburgh*, (2022), https://onstagepittsburgh.com/2022/04/16/review-the-twenty-sided-tavern-you-are-sure-to-laugh-your-way-through-the-adventure/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Ng, Jenna, 'Fingers, Futures, Fates: Viewing Interactive Cinema in Kinoautomat and Sufferrosa', *Screening the Past*, 32, http://www.screeningthepast.com/issue-32-screen-attachment/fingers-futures-fates-viewing-interactive-cinema-in-kinoautomat-and-sufferrosa/ [Accessed 20 June 2023].

ORGG Studios, 'The Lion King – A Minecraft Musical', (2020), https://orggproductions.de/studios/the-lion-king-a-minecraft-musical/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Pearson, Deborah, 'Unsustainable Acts of Love and Resistance: The Politics of Value and Cost in One-on-One Performances', *Canadian Theatre Review*, 126 (2015), 63-67.

Pig Iron, 'Pay Up', *Pig Iron*, (2006), https://www.pigiron.org/productions/pay [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Punchdrunk, 'Ticket Information', *The Burnt City*, https://www.theburntcity.com/ticket-information/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Purcell, Stephen, '*I, Malvolio* (Review)', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 38:3, (2020), 506-510

Robson, Jon and Aaron Meskin, 'Video Games as Self-Involving Interactive Fictions', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 74:2, (2016), 165-177

Rustic Mascara, 'William Shakespeare's Hamlet Performed Inside Grand Theft Auto Online' (2022), *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Lut5leeOr0&ab_channel=RusticMascara [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Ryan, Marie-Laure, 'From Narrative Games to Playable Stories: Toward a Poetics of Interactive Narrative', *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 1, (2009), 43-59

Sakellaridou, Elizabeth, '"Oh My God, Audience Participation!": Some Twenty-First-Century Reflections', *Comparative Drama*, 48:1 and 2, (2014), 13-38

Salen, Katie and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, (London: MIT Press, 2004) mentioned in Rose Biggins, *Immersive Theatre and Audience Experience: Space, Game and Story in the Work of Punchdrunk*, (Springer International Publishing, 2017)

Saltz, David Z., 'The Art of Interaction: Interactivity, Performativity, and Computers', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 55:2 (1997), 117-127

Schechner, Richard, '6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre', *The Drama Review: TDR*, 12:3, (2010) 41-64.

--, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 2nd Edn., (London: Routledge, 2006)

Seraphine, Frédéric J N, 'Ludonarrative Dissonance: Is Storytelling About Reaching Harmony' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Tokyo, 2016)

Shephard, Simon and Mick Wallis, *Drama/Theatre/Performance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004)

Smuts, Aaron, 'What is Interactivity?', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 43:4, (2009), 53-73

Sommerer, Christa and Laurent Mignonneau, 'Cultural Interfaces: Interaction Revisited', in *Imagery in the 21st Century*, ed. by Oliver Grau with Thomas Veigl, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 201-219

Switzky, Lawrence, 'Transmedia Ethics: Why Theater Needs Philosophy Needs Virtual Reality Needs Video Games', Theater, 46:2 (2016), 55-67.

Tavinor, Grant, 'What's My Motivation? Video Games and Interpretive Performance: What's My Motivation?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 75:1 (2017), 23-33

Templeton, Fiona, 'YOU-The City (1988)', *Fiona Templeton*, https://www.fionatempleton.cloud/youthe-city [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Tiel, Sara, 'Game/Play: The Five Conceptual Planes of Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*' in *Immersive Theatre: Engaging the Audience*, ed. by Josh Machamer, (Champaign, IL: Common Ground Research Networks, 2017), 55-64

'The Rest Is Silence', *dreamthinkspeak*, https://dreamthinkspeak.com/productions [Accessed 24 March 2023]

'The Smile Off Your Face (2004)', *Ontroerend Goed*, http://ontroerendgoed.be/en/projecten/the-smile-off-your-face/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Third *Return the Moon*, https://thirdrailprojects.com/return-the-moon#returnthemoon [Accessed 24 March 2023]

THR Staff, 'Queen of the night: Theater Review', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 2014, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lifestyle/lifestyle-news/queen-night-theater-review-676398/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

'Tony N' Tina's Wedding', https://www.tonylovestina.com/about-tony-n-tinas-wedding [Accessed 24 March 2023]

'Torch (2018)', *ANU*, http://anuproductions.ie/work/torch-2018-2/, [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Rhinehart, Brian, ‘Forum Heersum: Uli Jäckle’s Landscape Theatre’, *Western European Stages*, 22:2/3 (2010), 33-40

Verhoeven, Dries, ‘Life Streaming’, *driesverhoeven*, https://driesverhoeven.com/en/project/life-streaming/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

--, ‘Wanna Play?’, *driesverhoeven*, https://driesverhoeven.com/en/project/wanna-play/ [Accessed 24 March 2023]

Walmsley, Ben, ‘Co-creating theatre: authentic engagement or inter-legitimation?’, *Cultural Trends*, 22:2 (2013), 108-118, p. 110

Wiegand, Chris, ‘Showstopper! The hit musical that’s made up every night’, *The Guardian*, (2019), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/jan/23/showstopper-the-improvised-musical-ken-campbell-west-end [Accessed 24 March 2023]

White, Gareth, *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

--, ‘On Immersive Theatre’, Theatre Research International, 37:3 (2012), 221-253

Yu, ‘Return the Moon’ Shoots for the Stars (The NoPro Review)’ (2021), *No Proscenium*, https://noproscenium.com/return-the-moon-shoots-for-the-stars-the-nopro-review-5424bc9accee [Accessed 24 March 2023]