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The Emotive Narrative: How Story is Created with the Audience in Immersive Events

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies

by

David Grant Mancini

Committee in charge:

Professor Leo Cabranes-Grant, Chair

Professor Scott Grafton

Professor Ninotchka D. Bennahum

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The dissertation of David Grant Mancini is approved.

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Scott Grafton

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Ninotchka D. Bennahum

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Leo Cabranes-Grant, Committee Chair

May 2023

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VITA OF DAVID GRANT MANCINI
MAY 2023

Education

PhD Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies June 2023 (Expected)	University of California, Santa Barbara
M.F.A. Theatre (Directing) 2011	University of South Dakota
B.F.A. Theatrical Directing 2005	Chapman University

Employment History

Teaching Assistant	UC Santa Barbara	2017-2022
Courses Assisted	Introduction to Acting Lighting Play Analysis Performance in Global Contexts: Africa & Caribbean Lead Teaching Assistant	
Teaching Associate	UC Santa Barbara Group Studies in Acting and Directing Theatre History: 1940-Present	2018-2019
Adjunct Professor	Mount San Jacinto College, CA	2015-2017
Courses Taught	History of Theatre Introduction to Theatre Introduction to Acting Intermediate Acting World Cinema	
Adjunct Professor	Riverside College, CA	2015-2017
Courses Taught	Stage Management Intro to Theatre	
Adjunct Professor	Chaffey College, CA	2014-2017
Courses Taught	Lighting for Theatre Introduction to Theatre Technical Theatre Introduction to Acting	
Adjunct Professor	Norco College, CA	2015
Course Taught	Introduction to Theatre	
Graduate Teacher	University of South Dakota	2011
Course Taught	Introduction to Acting	

Dramaturgy

Ikaros	Third Rail Projects, Brooklyn, NY	2019
A Night with Janis Joplin	Pasadena Playhouse, Pasadena, CA	2013

Directing

Twelfth Night	University of California Santa Barbara, CA	2019
Romeo and Juliet	University of California Santa Barbara, CA	2018
Normal	The Vagrancy, Los Angeles, CA	2017
Freddie's Last Concert	Ensemble Studio Theatre, Los Angeles, CA	2016
Vanek Trilogy	TE San Pedro Repertory, CA	2015
Oedipus	TE San Pedro Repertory, CA	2014
Vagina Monologues	Cypress College, Cypress CA	2014
Venus and Adonis	United Solo Fest, Theatre Row, NY	2013
Remnants of a Liquid World	Pasadena Playhouse, Pasadena, CA	2013
Venus and Adonis	Independent Shakespeare Company,LA,CA	2013

Assistant Directing

Spit: Light Within the Darkness	Urban Theatre Movement, Hollywood, CA	2014
Se Llama Cristina	The Theatre @ Boston Court, Pasadena, CA	2014
Sleepless in Seattle	Pasadena Playhouse, Pasadena, CA	2013
A Night with Janis Joplin	Pasadena Playhouse, Pasadena, CA	2013

New Play Development

Ikaros by Tom Pearson	Third Rail Projects, Brooklyn, NY	2019
Disappointment Island by Howard Ho	The Vagrancy, Los Angeles, CA	2017
Horse by Cort Brinkerhoff	The Vagrancy, Los Angeles, CA	2016
Remnants of a Liquid World by Bianca Bagatorian	Pasadena Playhouse, Pasadena, CA	2013
Ass by Ellen Simon	Pasadena Playhouse, Pasadena, CA	2012
Footnote to the Iliad by Steven Sater	Pasadena Playhouse, Pasadena, CA	2012

Conference Attendance and Activity

2021 American Society for Theatre Research — Working Group Co-Convener
"**Echoes of Place: Repetition and Spectatorship in Site-Specific and Immersive Performance San Diego"**
2020 American Society for Theatre Research — Working Group Co-Convener
"**Echoes of Place: Repetition and Spectatorship in Site-Specific and Immersive Performance New Orleans"**
2019 American Society for Theatre Research — Working Group Member
"A Matter of Public Taste(s): Food, Performance, and Commensality"

ABSTRACT

The Emotive Narrative: How Story is Created with Audience in Immersive Events

By

David Grant Mancini

Due to the lack of a working model, immersive events have grown through size and grandeur: Design and opulence being offered instead of curation and specificity. To expand in this way takes capital, and the more capital it takes to produce an event the higher the price of entry. Production cost can easily become overwhelming when the working definition of immersion is drowning the consumer in a property. The few academics who have worked toward systemizing immersion as a technique have done so through favoring of the body. Others have denied that there is any difference to traditional narrativization and privileged the mind. I take a more Spinozian approach, privileging neither but requiring them to work in tandem to assemble the narrative for themselves — in other words, a cognition's approach.

The emotive narrative is an exploration into how story is told in immersive events. By utilizing various theories on cognition, affect, memory, thing, kinesis, and media the way immersion can be accomplished becomes clear. Marrying these theories to the techniques that successfully engross the audience/participant in immersive events unfolds a system of storytelling with the emotive as its key operative. The formation of a narrative is experienced through the individual senses and requires the totality of the audiences' mind and body. It is not a passive process but one that requires the whole person, their pervious experiences, and current stimulus. The audience members or as I term them, audience/participants, as they are fulfilling both roles simultaneously are not simply material embedded into the production or

a body that the production acts upon. They are active in every element of the event through this process.

Using this approach this dissertation explores a myriad of immersive events including theatre, dance, fine dining, and media activations. It also takes time to explore immersion during the time of the Covid 19 pandemic shutdowns and how that changed the immersive landscape. The goal of this dissertation, after all, is to examine how the emotive narrative is structured and put into use. These techniques are task-based movement and game, food as story, embodied advertising, and the emotive narrative at a distance (virtual reality, augmented reality, and mixed media).

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The Emotive Narrative,

or The Feel of Sun on your Face before the Smell of Melted Wax Induces a Panic!

A Moment

The salt breeze is heavy with the scent of rosemary when a soothing baritone voice intones Ophelia's famous line from Shakespeare's "Hamlet" about the herb into your earphones, for "remembrance." Another plane soars overhead from the airport across the bay, its sound deadened by the earphones which spill a score that boarders between meditative and ominous, the plane's lights momentarily illuminating the San Diego dusk as you traverse a labyrinthine nature preserve whose make up is a mix of indigenous and well rooted invasive species, much like California itself. The towering stalks of centennial agaves float in the air high above the native trees and bushes that surround the paths that zig and zag through the preserve. A guide, in a neat black one-piece jumpsuit with an earpiece, signals to continue down the path. These guides act as airport marshallers directing your way through winding paths with orange signal lamps. A few steps reveal the bottom of the centennial agave, well-lit and juxtaposed next to two steel agave plants. The man-made version is devoid of the soaring stalk that easily reaches thirty feet into the air and is about to flower. The contrast between the natural and manufactured is emphasized here; while both hold the wild agave's shape and the danger inherent in its sharp needles, only one of the plants can procreate and thus extend its lineage. The act of seeding, when the stalk finishes its plunge into the sky fully flowered and releases the seeds that will hopefully yield new agave plants, also marks the death of the agave. All of the plant's resources go to this terminal event and it will not survive to see its success or suffer failure. The survival of the species is dependent upon the wind, bees, hummingbirds, and soil. The parent must sacrifice blindly for the

survival of its kin. While the monuments are beautiful, their impotence is brought to full relief. Like most works of man, they will remain slowly decaying until they are returned to the earth. The man-made aspects rot away, but like the seeds of the agave, the myth remains blowing across time and sowing invention.

This moment from Third Rail Projects “Ikaros” a production based upon the well-known myth of the boy who flew too close to the sun, weaves together an abundance of affects forming a score for its audience participant to decipher. It is in this manner that both this production and immersive events in general operate. The audience member being the sole interpreter for their experience, narrativizing the affective elements. Most of these elements are curated, but, in examples like “Ikaros” which took place on public grounds and made room for localized segues to enrich the experience, not always controlled. The production is then preformed through memory (making sense of moments, acts of retelling and collective recollecting). It is this process that I theorize as the immersive narrative. Though much has been written about immersion in recent times, very little of the scholarship effectively attempts to set forth the building block of how an audience is immersed. This academic disregard has, in many ways, stilled the advance of immersive entertainment and lead to a market where immersive events (a catch-all phrase for immersive theatre, dinning, brand activations and experiences) favor an economic class with a high disposable income. This privileging of the wealthy is not surprising as it is endemic in all areas of neoliberal entertainment, but with an understanding of the model used to create an immersive experience these entertainments can be extended to those who currently lack the economic means to attend them. I am not placing blame on the academic market for a lack of focus in this matter but simply pointing out an issue that will become all too apparent as this

introduction fades into chapter after chapter of boutique experiences and overtly indulgent events.

Due to the lack of a working model, immersive events have grown through size and grandeur: Design and opulence being offered instead of curation and specificity. To expand in this way takes capital, and the more capital it takes to produce an event the higher the price of entry. Production cost can easily become overwhelming when the working definition of immersion is drowning the consumer in a property. The few academics who have worked toward systemizing immersion as a technique have done so through favoring of the body. Others have denied that there is any difference to traditional narrativization and privileged the mind. I take a more Spinozian approach, privileging neither but requiring them to work in tandem to assemble the narrative for themselves — in other words, a cognitions approach.

Before running through how the emotive narrative functions and the theory on which it's built, lets first look at the most notable immersive theorists that have come before. This groups includes Gareth White, Rose Biggins, Josephine Machon, Frank Rose and Julia Ritter. Starting with Gareth White whose focus is audience participation in participatory theatre (which is where he places immersive theatre) but treats the audience with little more agency than a piece of scenery. In his assessment the audience is functionary receivers of the narrative. "Immersive theatre often surrounds audience members, makes use of cleverly structured interiors and ingenious invitations for them to explore, addresses their bodily presence in the environment and its effect on sense making, and teases them with the suggestion of further depths just possibly within reach. But it has no strong claim to creating either fictional or imaginative interiors in a way that is different in kind than in more conventionally structured audience arrangements" (On Immersive Theatre 233). Denying the

audiences individuality greatly simplifies all theoretical tasks associated with immersion, but immersion is complex. It is messy. And it is deeply rooted into each individual audience member who will have a differing, sometimes wildly so, experience of an event. This is what makes immersion exciting and why its structure is so very different than that of conventional audience arrangements. In his book *Audience Participation in Theatre: an Aesthetics of the Invitation* White claims the audience "becomes the artist's medium, and so the work's aesthetic material" (10). Here again the audience is dismissed for their narrative creating function and rather are simply the building blocks of someone else's vision. As a practitioner, this definition fills me with neoliberal and perhaps Machiavellian joy, but I know it to be false. The audience is not base material to be crafted to my whim (at times in my youth I admit I treated them as such) but are living, feeling, thinking entities. Expecting a uniform reaction from an audience is folly in the best scenarios but considering them reliable material unto which a production can be built without their collaboration is sheer madness. A house of cards would prove a more stable structure. Perhaps it is White's model of immersion that has caused so many promoters to claim their event or show is immersive for having the basest forms of audience participation, often participation that has no effect on the plot or outcome of the piece. This use of immersive as little more than a buzzword has caused a great amount of damage to the form. When an audience is promised a new experience but instead is plied with little more than a ploy and treated as incidental, immersion becomes another in a long line of failed theatrical gimmicks.

Though I can continue to dismantle White's ideas, I feel here is a good point to move to the next theorist. Rose Biggins' work as an embedded researcher with Punchdrunk (a production company whose work has become synonymous with immersive theatre) is

invaluable in many ways. Most importantly she was able to shine a flashlight unto the methods the company uses to produce their large-scale epic productions. Punchdrunk is a juggernaut in the immersive world and the model they follow in creation is both astounding and unrepeatable. The massive resources required to produce as they do are never full addressed in Biggins book *Immersive Theatre and Audience Experience: Space, Game and Story in the Work of Punchdrunk* but when referencing their methods and spaces the general largeness of the budgets become apparent. She also claims a cognitive bend to her analysis and in doing so denies White's assertions while calling for the audience to be active participants in the creation of a piece and not simply material used in it. In this she relies heavily on the idea of conceptual blending. "Conceptual blending is the creation of an extra, additional space that actors and audience share… Conceptual blending offers a theory for how immersive experience might manifest as a "blend" of the real world (the audience members, the working performers, the set as the product of designers and craftspeople, the logistical rules of navigating the space) and the fictional environment of the production (i.e. reading the masked audience members as ghosts or voyeurs, following the relationships between characters)" (31). While I credit Biggins for exploring the brain as the site where immersion takes place, the means to which she settled upon only complicate the already complex way in which the brain constructs narrative by building a space outside of both belief and disbelief where the events of the experience can transpire. The fragility of the experience this theory would produce is insurmountable as belief and disbelief would sit on the sides of any experience like the Symplegades or crashing rocks of Greek myth colliding into each other whenever a sailor was daring enough to test them. Biggins also theorizes that theatrical immersion induces a state of "flow" as imagined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. The

precepts for this state make this idea for an audience member very difficult to achieve. According to Biggins for embodied "flow" to occur:

"1. there are clear goals every step of the way

2. there is immediate feedback for one's actions

3. there is a balance between challenge and skills

4. action and awareness are merged

5. distractions are excluded from consciousness

6. there is no worry of failure

7. self-consciousness disappears

8. the sense of time becomes distorted

9. the activity becomes autotelic i.e. performed for its own sake" (29).

This arrangement for immersion to exist again is lofty at best. The resources needed to maintain each and every step for each individual audience member would be astounding not to mention the delicacy of several of the precepts and how easily they can be accidentally broken.

With that said I will move on to Josephine Machon. In her book *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance*, Machon privileges the body in the analysis of "experiential" theatre, her concepts hinge on an amalgamation of the senses. While I do not agree with many of her conclusions, where she begins her exploration is vitally important. She, as I intend to, looks to the senses, arguing that it is the combination of the body and mind where immersive theatre is experienced. In this way, she is acknowledging that cognition is a nonlinear activity. This is in opposition to Biggins concepts of "flow" and "blending" which require a great amount of linearity. Machon's privileging of the body

through the introduction of body centric theorists such as Antonin Artuad, Susan Broadhurst and Howard Baker is a particularly important intervention as it frames the body as active in narrative creation. The major issue with Machon's work is the back seat the mind take in the immersion process. Rather than a partnership between mind and body, the body is independent of the mind sensing a feeling. To her (syn)aesthetics is "interpretative device which describes *simultaneously* a performance style—its impulse, and processes of production—and the appreciation strategy necessary to articulate a response to such work" (4). While the audience is almost disembodied for Biggins and White, here they are without reasoning capacity as the body has reasoned for them. There is no room for thought. While theatrically attractive in practice the system falls apart as the audience is left to interpret the signals of the body in order to make choices and continue the experience. If the experience is left in the body most immersive experiences would functionally end in the first scene.

Frank Rose and Julia Ritter are the final theorist to consider. Rose takes a deep in *The Sea we Swim* and *The Art of Immersion: How the Digital Generation is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue and the Way We Tell Stories* into how stories are used to sell properties. In these books, he notes the effectiveness of activations in building cinematic and televisual fan bases while also warning of the power that immersive techniques can have in the wrong hands. His focus on storytelling is how information is disseminated, its rate and content. While his systems are novel and explain how the basic building blocks of storytelling adjust, he doesn't look to the audience as the arbiter and keeper of the story. His goals lie in the telling of stories and recognizing that we are living in an amalgam of corporate stories which guide our aesthetics and principles. This dark edge to immersion is something to be aware of as I strive to demystify how its narratives are built. There is no

more powerful story than one that a person tells themselves and that is what immersion at its best does: empowers the audience to assemble the event as they experienced it. This is where Rose shines, when exposing just how immersed into products and ideas society can become without their express consent. While short on theory, his warnings remind the reader that a powerful tool always has multiple uses and immersion can be a very powerful tool.

Ritters intervention into immersion in *Tandem Dances: Choreographing Immersive Performance* is through dance, specifically choreography. While I agree with many of Ritters assertions as to the importance of dance in immersive theatre and the use of dance structures I divert from the strictness of her theorization as choreography often implies a method and result. Ritter does make much of improvisation being impute into choreographic propositions (a term admittedly lifted from William Forsyth), but immediately concerns herself with questions of authorship and co-generation. If the audience is improvising at your proposition who does the story belong to? I much prefer the terminology of score as theorized by Lawrence Halprin. Here there is room for the audience to operate and create independently within the confines of a predetermined structure without the expectation of result or the questions of authorial control. An audience/participant is consistently operating within a score not momentarily propositioned to improvise. One implies a fluid state of dance while the other determines when dance is appropriate and the bounds of the dance. The distinctions might seem minor but when put into the context of an immersive event, one allows the audience to find their comfort in the story without worry of missing an opportunity to play while the other demands a readiness that might take an audience member by surprise, leaving them stuck in the moment of their failure for the rest of the event. Ritter's agreement with White that the audience is "material" in an immersive event could be why the rigidity of

choreography seems an appropriate terming for how the audience is handled. Ritter also theorizes that immersive theatre is built to elicit specific audience responses through choreographic intervention. This would be little more than a fool's errand in practice. Audiences are smart and treating them in any way that belittles their intelligence is a great risk. When attempting to work as Ritter suggests choreography functions "through a sequence of cause and effect, as a movement proposal (cause) by a performer hopefully leads to a response (effect) from a spectator" (122). This is all very simplistic and denies the incredible complexity of audience performer interaction, especially when an important plot point is at risk. While specificity is paramount for an immersive performer the audience cannot be expected to have a singular reaction, as they will not experience a singular narrative regardless of how similar their narratives might be.

How the Immersive Narrative Functions

First, it is important to note that the formation of a narrative is experienced through the individual senses and requires the totality of the audiences' mind and body. It is not a passive process but one that requires the whole person, their pervious experiences, and current stimulus. The audience members or as I term them, audience/participants, as they are fulfilling both roles simultaneously are not simply material embedded into the production or a body that the production acts upon. They are active in every element of the event through this process. As described by Michael S. Gazzaninga in *The Minds Past, a*ll this information is then passed through the left-brain interpreter where a narrative is developed. This narrative operates through a series of specific affects or triggered emotional responses that are ordered

in the audience/participant's left brain. The ordering comes before the audience/participant is even aware they are experiencing anything, but the brain contains systems to allow for the feeling of presence with discovery (63-73). As the body continues to receive information, the brain deciphers, evaluates, orders that information. The contact with the audience/participant is made through an individual sense. Even if the actant attacks through multiple senses (smell and taste, for example) both are experienced individually and collaborated in the brain to make a collective experience. The audience/participant is the arbiter of how these values are ordered and what they mean. Here I suggest that the body and mind collaborate to produce the illusion of linearity. This line of thought is supported by Gazzaniga's work on the left-brain interpreter. Gazzaniga states, "So the brain makes all kinds of computations that determine when we experience things; we don't just listen to our brain firing directly… The only thing that counts is information about the world in the brain, not whether the brain *resembles* the world" (73; original emphasis). This shifts the paradigm of theatrical creation slightly as it is the audience/participant who determines the meaning and use of any individual affect or moment in an event. In fact, in this organization the world of an event is suggested by the production staff but created in the mind of the audience/participant.

The emotive narrative communes with the senses in ways non-immersive theatre does not. This is due to the immersive events privileging of the non-dominate senses in its storytelling. This alters the relationship between audience/participant and environment. In immersive events taste, smell, and touch often take precedence over sight and sound. Dark environments and overwhelming soundscapes force audience/participants into different forms of analysis. Occasionally apparatus, such as blindfolds, masks, and headphones, are utilized to limit further or alter the audience/participants' sense of sight and sound. The

headphones limiting the soundscape and isolating the audience/participant and rosemary bushes that filled the air (in the moment described from "Ikaros") serves as an example of how this is utilized. Here the concept of reciprocal affordance as defined by Scott H. Fray and Scott T. Grafton becomes important as the audience/participant (actor) actively shapes and is shaped by their environment or seeming lack thereof (487). Though it is easy to dismiss immersive theatre as merely another form of theatre, as Gareth White does, it is incorrect to assess its functionality as exact to traditional theatrical experiences. It is the changing environment that plunges the audience/participant (actor) into action and alter the form, reinventing it completely with each individual actor.

In turning from how the brain interprets to what it interprets, we need to focus on affects. In *The Navigation of Feeling*, William Reddy designates these affects as emotives and describes them as similar to a performative in J. L. Austin's "speech act theory." This is due to emotives indicating an emotional state and, much like performatives, requiring rehearsal of that emotional state. As the author asserts these emotives "do things to the world" (105). They are comparable to actants, as Jane Bennett describes them in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things.* Bennett credits the term to Bruno Latour and defines it as "a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events" (ii). Though Reddy's emotives limit themselves to declarative speech, I feel that combining his notion with Latour's actants creates a broader understanding of the affective force immersive events utilize to shape their narrative. In essence, these emotives produce effects in the human body that indicate and inflict emotional responses. Reddy refers to these responses as translations because they can occur between sensory modalities, procedural

habits, and linguistic structures (79). These emotional responses are then ordered through dispositional memory where they are interpreted.

The assemblage and alignment of affective elements into a cohesive narrative begins with the act of translation. The audience/participant in an immersive event is in a constant state of translation. Translations occur between sensory modalities, procedural habits, and linguistic structures (Reddy 79). It is this process that coordinates affective elements with the left brain into a narrative. Because some elements of production take longer to process than others, the event lingers in the audiences/participant's body. The responses are embodied until they can be given presence through functional memory (Assmann 125). Antonio Damasio explains this process at length while developing his somatic-marker hypothesis. Though I am not focusing on how the audience/participant makes decisions, the process at which the body marks an image becomes essential in understanding how the emotives function. Damasio adds the idea of feelings to the argument and states: "feelings are just as cognitive as any other perceptual image" (159 *Descartes' Error*). Damasio's idea of feelings and Reddy's emotives function similarly, which leads me to hypothesize that the cognitive mechanisms involved in decision making are similar to those in narrative creation.

Further exploring the "perceptual image" leads to an understanding of what Damasio terms as dispositional images. Damasio argues that all thoughts are made of images: "both words and arbitrary symbols are based on topographically organized representations and can become images. Most of the words we use in our inner speech, before speaking or writing a sentence, exist as auditory or visual images in our consciousness. If they did not become images, however fleetingly, they would not be anything we could know. This is true even for those topographically organized representations that are not attended to in the clear light of

consciousness but are activated covertly" (p. 106). This last statement is paramount to how these images eventually combine to form a narrative through memory. If we look at the image as an actant, each actant works together to form an emotive. Thus, emotives are a product of entangled images. To take us back, momentarily, to Third Rail Project's "Ikaros", when the voice on the headphones says "rosemary for remembrance" the image of the herb is mingled with that of Ophelia drowned. The sea salt air has picked up the scent of rosemary and takes on new associative meaning. This mingles with the commercial airliner taking off overhead and the centennial agave stalk thrusting into the sky just under its belly. At the base of the long-needled agave lies its steal facsimile. The edges of the steal sharp and deceitful. The copy much more treacherous then its original. All of these affects are made images and intermingle and begin to tell a story of love and sacrifice, technology and creation. While each image clarifies the grander arc of the story the order they are received and evaluated will; vary from audience/ participant to audience/participant.

It is in this way emotives form the further entanglements that functional memory will order into a narrative. Ian Holder defines entanglements "as the dialectic of dependence and dependency" (*Entangled: an Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* 89). The immersive event is dependent upon the audience/participant to form a narrative out of often disparate emotives. This narrative becomes clearer and grows through time as the interpreter is given more information. Due to this, the narration isn't finished until after the event is fully completed. The events ability to remain in the functional memory makes this process possible. Assmann states "functional memory draws a flexible and hence productive boundary between, on one side, chosen, interpreted, and appropriated elements- that is those that are attached to the configuration of story- and on the other side, the amorphous mass of

unattached elements" (125 *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*). These unattached elements are, of course, images that are yet to become entangled. It is in functional memory that entanglements are stored, and dependencies created. As Assmann continues her evaluation of functional memory, she finds it "consists of vital recollections that emerge from a process of selection, connection, and meaningful configuration…In functional memory, unstructured, unconnected fragments are invested with perspective and relevance; they enter into connections, configurations, compositions of meaning" (127). Not only are the entanglements stored, but through the functional memory, they are connected into a narrative to produce meaning. The emotives themselves are only the beginning of a much longer chain of interactions. These interactions require what Reddy refers to as navigation. "Navigation includes the possibility of radically changing course, as well as that of making constant corrections in order to stay on a chosen course… 'Navigation' is used here to refer to a broad array of emotional changes, including high-level goal shifts. 'Navigation' thus encompasses 'management,' which is the use of emotives' self-altering effects, in the name of a fixed set of goals." (122). Immersive events utilize a series of emotives and navigations that, through the course of experience, create a narrative. This narrative, because it is composed in the participant/audience through the participant/audience's senses, is unique, personal, and imprecise. The work of the interpreter is in constant flux while trying to make sense of the event. This is what makes immersive events challenging to examine. In identifying the emotive, or deconstructing webs of emotives at least half of the equation is acknowledged, and a logical conclusion about the emotional indicator's intent can be gleaned. A participant/audience member's navigation of an emotive is subjective and impossible to control due to the mitigating idea of translation,

and the distinctive chains of operation each participant/audience member brings into the experience with them. Created through the multitude of entanglements, that each audience member is subject to during their lives, these chains vary greatly. Though an emotive can be calibrated to affect a specific range of responses, targeting a universally specific response would be impossible. This is why a score becomes such a useful tool to examining immersive experience. When working within a score the audience/participant is free to assemble affects and given the illusion of agency. Because a score in an immersive sense would provide a series of limitations without calling attention to an outcome the experience becomes more personalized, the curation of affect including limitation is where the art of immersion lies.

The danger in this type of work is in unexpectedly triggering an audience member and thus throwing the preplanned emotive narrative off course. This risk is partly what makes immersive pieces so exciting and perilous for immersive artists. The audience/participant cannot prepare for what is going to be encountered and thus is in a position of extreme vulnerability where emotives guide the experience and create an individual narrative through a score. How the dispositional images are arranged, constructed and individually shaped depends on the audience/participant's perception. Perception is a crucial element to the function of the emotive narrative. William E. Connolly, in his essay "Materialities of Experience", defines perception as "intersensory, never fully divisible into separate sense experiences" (182). In Damasio's model, cognitively all things are initially experienced by a solitary sense whose "nerve terminals send signals to circumscribed entry points in the brain, the so-called early sensory cortices of vision, hearing, somatic sensations, taste, and olfaction" (Damasio. *Descartes' Error* 91). From here, the association cortices holds, deciphers, and systematizes the information into dispositional representations (*Descartes'*

Error 93). Then the mitigation of translation comes into play. According to Reddy, translation is cognitive processing (63). It is the moment between affective force and mental navigation where the raw emotive material is made legible. Translation does not dictate what the body/mind does with the material, but how it is perceived and received. The idea of translation and moreover, where an emotive is translated is key to determining the possible intent of the emotive. I will put forth that translation, to a certain extent, is a haptic process; it happens through touch. I will expand this further to say that all sensory experience is activated through haptic elements. We experience our senses through touch; sound is vibration making contact with the eardrum, smell has been theorized by Luca Turin as vibrating molecules joining with receptors in the nose, taste similar to smell but in the mouth, touch similar but on the skin. Sight becomes the hardest to explain in this construction, but the medium one sees through (air, water, etc.) does affect one's vision. When taken with quantum-mechanical theories of light requiring the vibration of both the light particle and the wavelength, which is then sorted by algorithms into an image, the haptic nature of sight starts to reveal itself. Also, it is important to note, in the act of focusing, the eye is in constant motion. Focus becomes akin to touch in this construction as objects outside the line of focus still exist, just as smells, sounds and tastes do, but helps narrow the field of concentration to the specific affective trigger translated for navigation.

So far, I have concentrated on the processes by which the emotive narrative is assembled; now let us address what activates these emotives in the process. These affective triggers are things. It seems an easy and flippant answer, but the very complexity of a thing is what makes them affective. A thing, according to W. J. T. Mitchel, as noted by Jane Bennett, is "the moment when the object becomes the Other, when the sardine can look back, when

the mute idol speaks…" (2). Here we see a thing as an interactive object, but I wish to broaden and complicate this further with Ian Hodder's definition of a thing as "an entity that has presence by which I mean it has a configuration that endures, however briefly" (7 *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things*). This brief endurance of a configuration, according to Ian Hodder, means a thing can also be intangible and makes room for movement and ideas to join the tangible. The intangible is just as affective as the tangible, if not more so due to its ephemerality. Examples of the intangible includes concepts such as love and movements such as a wave of the hand. Reading the word love inflicts a feeling, in only briefly, upon its reader. The size and impact of this feeling is personal and immeasurable, but its existence is difficult to deny. The feeling is different (even if only slightly) if the word is read aloud, and different still if the word is heard and not seen. The experience of the concept changes by the means in which the emotive is invoked, but it is still experienced. Despite the concepts' intangibility it is a thing, and its very thought can invoke an emotive response. The wave of a hand is also an ephemeral symbol that can be considered intangible, but its meaning as a salutation or form of greeting is undeniable. The manner the hand is waved in adds another layer of emotive power to the concept of greeting and may indicate the next desired reaction from the movement's receiver. Its translation from intangible action to tangible symbol is also an emotive response. The hand wave is a thing and its web of dependencies including who it derived from, the manner of its execution as well as its emotional valiance fills out a part of a score turning and intangible movement into a dramatic event.

I'd like to expound for a moment on my idea of the senses as haptic receptors of emotional elicitors. I will make the argument that ideas are first received through haptic

means. An idea must be translated, and this translation is achieved through the senses, most commonly sight or hearing. This could also help explain the physical reaction to specific affective or emotive ideas. Death, in its vast complexity, entails many somatic responses. These responses are enacted with or without physical proof. The idea elicits a response regardless of the subject. The more or less entangled a person is with the newly dead will also intensify or alter these physical responses and may even lead to a need for emotional release or a cathartic act. Certain affective markers may even be assigned to the memory of dead (a specific scent, fabric, activity, movement, sound, etc.). This all goes to reinforce that ideas and concepts are things and can be received through haptic means. When mixed with mirror neurons, the implementation of multiple levels of translation and navigation occurs. According to Hodder, "In general terms, recent work on mirror neurons suggests that we empathize with others and with things through embodied simulation" (130). This embodied simulation takes many forms in immersive events and aids in explaining how sight is translated into haptic means. Clare Press, Cecilia Heyes and James M Kilner clarify how mirror neurons work in their opinion piece "Learning to Understand Others Actions" in stating "when we observe someone else executing an action, we use our own motor system to generate a model of how we would perform that action to understand it" (458). It is in this internalizing of the other that new and different forms of translation, navigation and narration commence. Damasio takes this further stating "the body-sensing areas constitute a sort of theater where not only the 'actual' body states can be 'performed,' but varied assortments of 'false' body states can be enacted as well" (*Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* 117). It is in the translation from sight to somatic rehearsal, even without actual physical movement, where sight becomes haptic. As the brain dances along with the

performer, they receive communications and provoke feeling states present in the movements. While Julia Ritter searches for choreographic propositions in immersive theatre she misses the constant dance partner that is the audience/participant who have been matching the performer step for step and only stumble when put on the spot to preform by themselves.

The final step in the immersive narrative is to view the series of emotive events through Roland Barthes' conceptualization of structuralism as sentences. These sentences are then arranged in the functional memory to form a long sentence or discourse (*Image Music Text* 83). This discourse is the immersive event's narrative as deciphered by the left-brain interpreter, and its sentences are emotives. The audience/participant is close to what Jacques Rancière calls the emancipated spectator, described as "individuals plotting their own paths in the forest of things, acts and signs that confront or surround them" (*The Emancipated Spectator* 16). In this way the audience is challenging the opposition between viewing and acting, accomplishing both tasks simultaneously (*The Emancipated Spectator* 12-13). Clearly, a great deal of importance is placed upon the curation of the emotive. This is not to say that the curator is the schoolmaster that Rancière warns of, but rather a partner with the audience in the unraveling of a story. They are not narrating so much as leaving breadcrumbs along a path in hopes a range of individual conclusions are reached. In this, Lawrence Halprin's concept of score is pivotal. By providing a score, they are avoiding the 'stultifying' effects that Rancière warns of inherent in what he calls complete emancipation (271-91). As Katherine Profeta notes "the narrative is told by a putative spectator, responding to a friend who confronts her after the performance and asks, 'What did you just experience?'" (58 Dramaturgy in Motion: At Work on Dance and Movement Performance). The narrative is

solely the audience's construction, pieced together by clues and ques given by the performance. In many ways this retelling (whether aloud or to oneself) becomes the true performance and the event is simply a rehearsal.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation contains four chapters, each chapter will explore ways immersive techniques utilize the emotives in narrativization. The goal of this dissertation, after all, is to examine how the emotive narrative is/has been structured and put into use. These techniques are task-based movement and game, food as story, embodied advertising (activations) and the emotive narrative in the time of Corona Virus. Here I will look at how theatre makers are adopting immersive techniques and the emotive narrative to make theatre during this difficult period.

In the first chapter, I will attempt to tackle task-based movement and game. I look to explore the lineage of task-based movement to map how it functions as a vital tool in building an emotive narrative for immersive theatre. This technique both invites the audience into an active role and kinesthetically connects them to the performance. Anna Halprin, when asked where her work was leading, answered: "Making scores for an audience to perform" (Lepecki *Dance* 55), that is precisely what these immersive artists are looking to accomplish. To explore task-based movement, I will examine three of the forebearers of immersion: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer. Halprin, Forti, and Rainer's work provides a clear lineage to immersive theater and how it operates. Without the experiments in narrative,

movement, and audience participation conducted through these three luminaires' performances and workshops, the contemporary immersive theater might not exist. The construction of their pieces challenged the status quo and still do, motivating new artists and providing a bevy of exciting and provocative tools to those willing to pick up their mantle. Immersive performance is indebted to all three, most notably for their development and employment of affective triggers as a narrative tool through the use of task and game. To emphasize this idea, I will apply their uses of task and game to Third Rail Projects production *Confection* to paint a fuller picture of how the techniques were developed and are applied to contemporary immersion.

The next chapter will explore the immersive activation. Immersive activations are essentially embodied advertising and can be a powerful tool in joining an audience to a product or property. This chapter looks at the emotive narrative in terms of its use as an advertising tool for new media. This push toward commercial expansion of mediatized properties by adding a live element has led to the development of a multitude of new or reimagined forms for audience engagement and viewership. In all of these forms, the goal is an analogous relationship between the live experience and the mediated, neither serving as the precedent to the other. This is in opposition to traditional cultural uses of the live to supplement the mediated, as can be seen in a visit to theme parks like Disney and Universal Studios properties. It is in the embrace of this analogous relationship that both mediatized and live performances move forward, establishing new entanglements with their audience. To analyze how the activation functions, I will utilize a few large-scale activations from various San Diego Comic-Cons. The Comic-Con in San Diego has long been a launching pad for new film and television franchises. In the era of streaming entertainment, the landscape

has shifted, and the battle for market share has intensified, leading to a range of experiences taking possible fans into the world of the property. I will make use of two activations from years past, the first is 2018's *Castle Rock* activation, which took possible fans of the new Hulu series into scenes and moments of the show, allowing them to mimic the main character's journey before watching a single episode and the second is the *Blade Runner: 2049* activation from the year prior, which dropped fans onto a city street from the movie. Both these activations served to connect fans to a franchise and utilized the emotive narrative in different but effective ways.

The Third chapter will look at the emotive and storytelling power of food. Every meal has a narrative if given the proper attention and dinning can easily be theatrical and often, historically, was. At Next in Chicago, Illinois and Lost Spirts Distillery in Las Vegas, Nevada the food is the show. Both these venues serve boutique encounters through their culinary offering providing guests with an immersive experience. Utilizing taste, smell and texture as their primary communicative elements these experiences tell their stories with the lesser senses in mind. Much like the first chapter hinges on postmodern dance and its contributions to immersive theatre, this chapter takes in what can be considered postmodern cookery and how it is affecting the palate of consumers both culinarily and creatively. Here I also look outside fine dining at another food trend, that of the pop-up experience and theme park dining. Both these experiences are similar to activations in the way in which they wish to connect a consumer to a property, this time through food served in familiar locations.

The final chapter is the most immediate and explores how immersive theatre survived and still preformed in the era of social distancing and isolation that was the Covid 19 lockdowns. In this period, perhaps more than ever before, the emotive narrative became vital

as it allowed people a sense of connection and ritual. Though the venues largely changed, they were no more unconventional than those that many of the immersive pieces employed prior to the pandemic, just perhaps more familiar as all of these experiences were accessed from the audience/participants own home. Here we will look at The Under and their virtual reality production "Tempest", the Royal Shakespeare Company's "Dream" as well as Optika Moderna's augmented reality piece *Portaleza*. These productions embrace a society's need for connection while utilizing isolation as a tool to heighten the dramatic effect of their material. The idea of being alone together plays heavily into the construction of each piece. Though the apparatus of performance is different in each piece they label themselves not as AR or VR experiences but as immersive theatre. The sense of community and togetherness is built through the utilization of the emotive narrative.

There is no traditional conclusion to this thesis as this work is just beginning. At the end of the dissertation there is a short section titled what's next that that puts forth some next steps in using this tool and how it can be utilized from here. My hope is that the emotive narrative will become a tool utilized by both academics and practitioners. It has a wide range of potential and through each chapter I hope to give some insight as to how I use it while deconstructing experiences. This dissertation is a road map for future explorations of immersion not a closed vault. The only truly conclusive things about the immersive narrative are that it functions reliably in the way described above and when used well can create powerful and personal moments that will live within the audience/participant for life.

Task and its Immersive Power

Would You Like to Play a Game?

A small wooden box is handed to you and three fellow players. Each of you is given two simple options; you may keep the content of the box or share it with the other players who also wish to share. All the shared goods would then be compiled and distributed. Which do you choose? The contents of the boxes are not apparent, and there is risk involved with both choices. You could easily be dividing a windfall into fourths or keeping an empty box. At the end of the game, some will lose, and some will win, but more importantly you will have consigned yourself to the type of society you wish to create and experience its effects firsthand.

This game is a scene from Third Rail Projects *Confection* and leads to the grand question of the production, what type of society do you wish to build? Its effectiveness is based on the actualization of consequences for the audience's choices. To achieve this the production utilizes task-based movement that post-modern dancers pioneered in the 1960's and 70's.

The Recipe is Developed

I look to explore the lineage of this kind of movement to map how it functions as a vital tool in building an emotive narrative. Emotive or affective triggers form a narrative that the audience compiles into a thru-line of action or idea. These narratives are often non-linear, and they play with both temporality and spatiality. Because of their dependence upon the audience sensitivities, each audience member will have their own unique narrative outcome.

By engaging the audience through simplistic, shared and objective-based movement, the participatory nature of the form is highlighted. Even those choosing to abstain from the choreography are conscious of the implications of their actions (in this case to abstain is a conscious action). This technique not only invites the audience into a hands-on role during the action but also leaves them kinesthetically connected to the performance. When Anna Halprin was asked where her work was leading, she answered "Making scores for an audience to perform" (55 Lepecki *Dance*), and these immersive artists are looking to accomplish something similar. For a production to be immersive, the audience must be the grand arbiter of the experience, working with the affective map constructed by the production's creators. Third Rail Projects *Confection* performed at the Folger Library in Washington D.C. is a perfect illustration of this kind of narrative process.

To understand the construction of *Confection,* it is imperative to explore the history of task and game-based choreography. Three distinct and diverse artists pioneered this way of movement creation, exploring the outer limits of what is dance and how performance is constructed. Anna Halprin, Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer each developed and refined new definitions of dance and performance through their use of task-based movement. Each of the three did so in their own unique fashion, developing separate strains of performance from the same root idea. Ninotchka Bennahum and Bruce Robertson define task-based dance constructions as "a democratizing technique of improvisation and bioanatomical-environmental awareness" (17 *Radical Bodies: Anna Haplrin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York 1955-1972*). When applied to an audience, the environment the performance is taking place in morphs from a passive to an active space much like their initial role of audience morphs into a participatory mode. This redefining of

relationship ushers the audience/participant to a new understanding of the topic through their own mind and body. As the mind is engaged with learning new movements, the body is tasked with repeating well-known movements which are now receiving an unusual amount of attention (quotidian movements are perceived as new when they are intentionally performed for an audience). According to Halprin, the goal of this is that the audience participate "with the dancers in their discoveries, experience the sense of process along with the people who are inside it…The final editing, of course, lies with the audience" (81 *Radical Bodies: Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer in California and New York 1955-1972*). This is the model structure for most immersive performances and a succinct explanation of how the emotive narrative functions. The sense of immersion can only come in collaboration with the performers, and that includes the deciphering of the performance. In this way, each performance is individual and unique to the audience/participant. As Yannis Mallat, who heads Ubisoft Montreal and is a luminary in the world of narrative construction for video games noted "[t]he best stories in video games are the stories the player tells himself…In French we say 'son propre film'—the movie in his head" (Rose 57). This task allows the individual audience member to dissect every moment of a sequence and come to their own understanding of the event and how it fits into a larger narrative —in essence, to become the editor that Halprin proscribed the audience to be. The filmic terms applied to live events also fits into a larger conversation of the influence of The French New Wave and Federico Fellini's contribution to narrative at the time Halprin was deploying her theories. As on-screen narrative was placing its audience in the role of detective to assemble the narrative after the films ending, Halprin was looking to share construction during the event. Moving on from Halprin to Forti and Rainer's influence in this genealogy a few things become clearer.

First, the centralization of feeling (affect) as the generative center of work becomes apparent. Second, the diverse ways in which task-based construction can be deployed. And finally, the conversation and connection between pieces and artists. I will explore all three before leading into the examination of a contemporary piece that hinges on these artists works.

Before jumping into this exploration, I would like to take a moment to discuss the term score. This term has a long history with multiple meanings, depending on the medium it is being applied too. In this paper I mobilize it as theorized by Anna and Lawrence Halprin. Both often worked together, refining their work in tandem. In his book *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment*, Lawrence takes great care with the word score as it makes up the S in the RSVP cycle. To him score is "the process leading to performance" (2). To have an audience member enact a score would frame the audience member as performer: The process itself becomes the performance. This is perfectly in line with how Lawrence defines performance which is the P in RSVP. He is careful to note that performance is emergent and not prescribed, emphasizing that scores can be widely interpreted and achieved through various means (3). He reinforces this idea by calling into focus the "danger of becoming *goal-oriented*" (4). Goal orientation diminishes the effectiveness of a score by focusing on its finality. Scores instead should be a realm of possibilities and exploration, the product of a score being the experience of the score as it was unfolding in real time. This is not to say that score cannot accomplish anything, but that the way things are accomplished should not be prescribed; in this is also the idea of the power of not completing the goal. If experience is the measure of a score, then failure has equal value to success. Valuation is the V in RSVP and helps evaluate how scores are constructed. It is a constant process and leads to imperative questions like where and how

much control can and should be exhibited over a score. It is a delicate balance between control and chance that forms a usable score (7). R in RSVP simply stands for resources and those change depending on the score. In fact, the RSVP cycle can be done starting with any of its four elements and has no proper order. The mutability of the cycle is what makes it useful, and that mutability extends itself into the elements of the cycle as well. This explains the importance of the term for Halprin: it is an opening into the possible. It is a living organism that develops alongside the artist. Understanding score this way illuminates the work that will be discussed by Anna Halprin, Rainer and Forti.

Preheating the Oven

Halprin's techniques were long in development, starting with her work with Margarite H'Doubler in the late 1930's to early 1940's. "H'Doubler's dance pedagogy was explicitly concerned with anatomy, fostering a detailed awareness of the moving body, one's own and others', which connected felt sensation with externally visible bodily attitude" (16-17 Morse, Meredith. *Soft is Fast: Simone Forti in the 1960s and After*). This mixture of anatomical awareness and felt sensation is the power of a task-based sequence. By isolating everyday movements through task-based exercises the sensation or feeling of preforming that movement not only becomes clear but also amplified. It is through this amplification that the power of specific movements can be explored. When a movement is taught to an audience in an immersive performance this amplification becomes apparent through the sensation of completing the movement for the first time. This is likely a false sensation but opens the audience/participant to the exploration of movement for its sensorial triggers. This is not a precise mode of storytelling; it depends on the audience/participant to consciously generate

the experience in tandem with the performer. The outcomes for the audience may vary greatly, but that is one of both the dangers and excitements of immersive work. Richard Kostelanetz documents this in his notes that were later published in the article "The Discovery of Alternative Theater: Notes on Art Performances in New York City in the 1960s and 1970s", where Kostelanetz remarks of Rainer's *Carriage Directness* performed at the 69th Regiment Armory "I found this among the least spectacular of the performances in "Nine Evenings"…but many people, I should report, thought it among the best pieces in the series" (151-152). Though the audience is not explicitly given movement in this piece, they are directed as to where to look and who to follow by the movement of the performers. These physical symbols are complicated by the use of projected video and mechanical objects that are programed to move in timed sequences, the purpose of the objects and the video is to distract the audience's attention. In the piece only one performer would move at once, often taking an object or prop with them out of a grouping of like items and displacing it to a different quadrant of the stage. Each performer was given instructions through radio transmitter by either Rainer or Robert Morris (depending on the evening of the performance) as to where to move and what to do. The audience is subtly given the job of finding and remembering the performers as well as connecting the movement, projected video, mechanical components, and architectural pieces being moved into a narrative (the use of the word *beam* in the written score rather than *block* or rectangle indicates an architectural purpose for the piece). As the well-organized space descends into chaos the task of connecting movement and reasoning becomes more and more difficult. The experience, as Kostelanetz notes, is personal. This makes sense when juxtaposed with the title and driving theme of Rainer's autobiography *Feelings are Facts*. More on this later.

Diverting from Haplrin to one of the many dancers she influenced is difficult to avoid. Through her work and training, her influence is indelible on the artist she touched and can be mapped through her pupils in some ways easier than her own work. This is both symptomatic of her greatness and the minimalist aesthetic of both Forti and Rainer (as well as a slew of other luminaries including Robert Morris). Minimalism makes apparent the mechanics of the artist and through these mechanics perhaps their intention. This can be why it is sometimes easier to talk about Forti and Rainer in terms of Halprin rather than Halprin in her own right. Meredith Morse describes a meeting in 1962 between Rainer and Halprin to discuss Haplrin's methods. Morse summarizes this meeting by stating "Where Halprin's aim was to defeat stale, habitual movement, Rainer was interested in the systematization itself" (34). Both artists goals are clear in the statement, but Rainer's is more easily quantifiable. Morse reinforces this idea by noting "In the same year that Rainer's interview with Halprin was published, Rainer devised *Parts of Some Sextets* (1965), which relied upon a systematic mapping of activities" (34). This systematic mapping is of course again influenced by Halprin who, in the interview, claimed to have charted "every possible anatomical combination of movements" (Morse 34). This goes to show how entangled these artists are and how difficult a task it is to disentangle their lineage from one another. The flow of information and influence was constant. This is emphasized with Halprin's contact with John Cage and Merce Cunningham, where they exchanged not only ideas but also students and collaborators.

In studying Halprin's legacy (a legacy that is still far from complete), I think the most fascinating developments come in the use of her theories outside of what is commonly considered dance. By this I mean the work with her husband Lawrence Halprin. The

"Experiments in Environment" workshops, as described by Peter Merriman, "were designed to engage the participants in different practices and immerse them in diverse environments, emphasizing 'the action itself and the ways in which body movement is generator of both architecture and dance'. Events included a blindfolded sense perception walk in the city, the creation of a driftwood village on a beach near the Sea Ranch, and an 'Automobile' event designed to explore the 'kinetic environments' typical of a modern city" (435-436 "Architecture/dance: choreographing and inhabiting spaces with Anna and Lawrence Halprin"). Participants of this workshop varied from dancers to architects to students of both and were confronted with space in new ways. By encoding these confrontations in tasks, they allowed the participant the opportunity to experience space through their senses. To recall the discussion of the RSVP cycles from earlier, these tasks equate to scores. This becomes especially important for the traditionally deprioritized senses of hearing, touch, smell, and taste in terms of spatial relationships. The importance of enlivening the senses can be felt across a wide section of society at the time from the plastic arts to music, dance, theatre, and all forms of entertainment. In my estimation it is a driving force behind the American avant-garde's reaction to modernism and its dictum, through Harold Greenberg, of "eyesight alone" as the only sense necessary in the evaluation of art. Caroline A. Jones writes extensively about this in her critical analysis of Greenberg in *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses.* The term she coins for his wide-ranging influence is the Greenberg effect. I see Halprin's work as a wonderful multidisciplinary reaction to this Greenberg effect. The tasks given the participants in the Halprin's summer 1966 workshop are not so different than a typical immersive theatre scenario. Merriman goes

on to describe the second “Experiment in Environment” summer workshop held for architects and dancers in 1968:

> “The event opened with activities developed from the 1966 summer workshop which were designed to help participants develop an awareness of themselves and their ‘interaction with the environment’. In blindfolded awareness walks participants were forced to trust others, encounter their environments in non-visual ways, and develop ‘direct experience of the kinesthetic sense in space’. Participants undertook movement sessions, they learned about notation, they built a driftwood village at Sea Ranch, and they stripped naked in an outdoor work- shop in Kentfield. In the ‘City map’ event on the opening day, all of the participants were given a personal ‘score’ which instructed them to perform tasks at sites across San Francisco at different times during the day, as well as to adopt a ‘general attitude’ of openness and awareness to ‘sounds, smells, textures, tactility, spaces, confining elements, heights ... your own sense of movement around you, your encounters with people & the environment AND YOUR FEELINGS!’. The workshop participants moved independently and on different ‘tracks’ through the city, but they all came together at 3pm in Union Square, where at the first strike of a near-by clock they had been instructed to rise and face the sun” (436-437).

If the opening event to the workshop was reperformed today it would doubtless be considered a seminal movement in immersive theatre. It’s coding as a workshop and the restriction of the participants to dancers and architects are perhaps the largest differences between an immersive performance and a training tool. The Halprin’s expectation in how the experience is to be used also comes into question in this hypothetical.? The Halprin’s had

a distinct goal in their workshops and developed their methodology with that in mind. The instructions given for *Sleep No More* (Punchdrunk's iconic immersive piece being performed in multiple cities since 2009) are very reminiscent of those given in *City Map*, with the audience participant invited to experience the McKittrick Hotel. While in an elevator being taken to the beginning of the experience, the only spoken scene of the evening takes place. In this literal elevator speech, the performer fully indicates the activation of the senses by telling the audience/participants that they are free to touch, taste, and smell whatever we wish and that "fortune favors the bold." In performance, Anna Halprin's goals were secondary to experience. She wished to invite the audience to be a collaborator but not force them into direct participation. In the interview quoted earlier and catalogued in André Lepecki's *Dance*, Halprin shows a great sensitivity to the audience and how they are perceiving the work. She claims that without their "reaction I think we would have gotten stuck in our own indulgent way of just doing our own exploration, forgetting that the audience is who you are preforming for" (54). Her performances were in concert with her audience and the reciprocating nature of affect in performer and audience took precedence. That doesn't mean Halprin was looking for a symbiotic relationship with the audience as she later states that her goal was to make the audience "Emotionally insecure" (*Dance* 54). This insecurity can be seen as priming of the emotive narrative, opening the audience up to receive, and be affectively triggered. It is difficult to read about the workshops and not see a direct line to immersive theatre. This leads to the next two artist in the purposed lineage: Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer.

The Mixing Bowl

Simone Forti takes this next step, inviting and sometimes requiring the audiences' participation for a piece to be actualized. Forti, as mentioned earlier, was a student of Anna Halprin, attending multiple workshops on her storied dance deck. Her and Robert Morris, her husband at the time, made the move from San Francisco to New York City where both made use of the techniques explored in Halprin's workshops. *Forti's Five Dance Constructions and Some Other Things* (1960-61) shows the influence of Halprin on both her and Morris who built the pieces needed for the dances. Virginia Spivey shows the relation and influence on Morris of both Halprin and Forti in her article "The Minimal Presence of Simone Forti." Not only does she clarify the relation between *Five Dance Constructions and Some Other Things* and Morris' famed "Plywood Show" but also makes distinct inroads to what Forti's exploration of minimalism meant for movement. According to Spivey "Forti had sought a choreographic method that would strike a balance between the absolute control of ballet choreography and the freedom of pure improvisation…her solution was to assign specific tasks, use props, and set certain limits for performers to negotiate according to their particular physical abilities" (13). These tasks and props often invited the audience to perform. *Rollers*, *Huddle* and *Herding* are particularly important to this investigation. *Rollers,* which first premiered at the Rubens Gallery in 1960, consisted of two boxes built upon castors, each box measuring 1'6" wide by 2' long by 1' deep. These boxes each had three 6' long ropes attached. In *Handbook in Motion* Forti describes the dance as "Two performers, each sitting in one of the boxes, improvise a duet of vocal sounds while six members of the audience pull on the ropes, giving the singers a ride. The three ropes fastened to the boxes seem to create a situation of instability, and in no time the boxes are careening wildly. For the singers in the boxes, this produces an excitement bordering on fear, which automatically becomes an

element in their performance" (44). Still technically audience members, after its initial performance as noted by Wendy Perron in *Radical Bodies,* Forti would ask "people she knew, rather than random audience members, to pull the boxes" (107) due to safety concerns. The two separate tasks, pulling the boxes and singing a song, in the dance construction combine. Each influencing the other. In its initial run, before known quantities were tasked with pulling the boxes, the opportunity for chance was incredible. The task of pulling the boxes itself presents a great deal of challenge, especially if the three pullers are unacquainted. Communication and the fluid seeding of leadership would dictate direction and turning while speed creates another level of agreement. Without agreement of some form the box would remain stationary. These negotiations would be constant throughout the piece. To add further difficult, if the video of 2016 Forti retrospective "Here it comes" at the Vleeshal in the Netherlands is an accurate document of performance, the communication between the pullers was nonverbal requiring them to take physical cues from the rope as to where to go. This coupled with the affect on the singer of the movement and how it subsequently influenced the song creates yet another level of audience investigation. If the song alters due to how the roller box is pulled, the pullers can then play with manipulating the duet sonically through their movements. This is added to by the sound the casters create as the boxes roll. This empowers the audience past Halprin's suggested role of the audience as editor and thrusts them into the creation process. When chosen at random, as they initially where, those audience/participants experienced a performance in a unique and different way. They were active in the creation of the piece not only in the mechanical movement but also in the composition of the improvised duet. Knowing that in subsequent performances the pullers were known to the singers diminishes some of the improvisational power of the piece as well

as its interactive nature. Its initial performance is critical to immersive theater in that often built into a performance is the audiences' ability to manipulate it. While it is understandable that Forti shied away from that aspect of the piece due to safety concerns, it is also disappointing. I do not wish to understate the danger of the initial performance for the singers in the boxes. The opportunity for major injury was great and audiences can be incredibly unpredictable. At the same time, I would like to emphasize the excitement and bravery in Forti's initial choice. From a dramaturgical standpoint, she shifted the conflict from between the sounds of danger and safety to the sounds of mechanical movement. Perhaps the second option is what she ultimately intended, but there is something intoxicating about the emotive and affect exploration of the first.

Both *Huddle* and *Herding* are more closely aligned to the Halprin's goal of spatial exploration. Both pieces also straddle the line between task and game-based choreography. *Huddle*, as described by Spivey, is a construction which "six or seven performers used their bodies to form a circular web by bending forward and weaving their arms around each other's waists and shoulders. The dance began when one person disengaged from the group and started to climb over the structure using foot and handholds formed by bodies of other participants" (13). Forti adds "The piece has also been formed in such a way that, as it ended, each of the performers found six other people from the audience to get a second-generation huddle going, until six were happening simultaneously" (59 *Handbook in Motion*). In this way, the piece resists ending and is not brought to an end by the completion of the task but by a predetermined amount of time. As Forti notes "Ten minutes is good" (59). Spivey also notes that second generation huddles continued through the following pieces. (14). In its initial iteration, the dance construction is task-based. I am determining this due to the trained

nature of its initial performers, who know they can complete the task and have encountered it before. Knowing what makes good hand and foot holds makes a good climber. Once rehearsed the performer understands the shapes, adjustments and balance needed to both complete and aid the task. Performing the task is the solitary goal. Meredith Morse speaks of the experience of watching *Huddle*, "one is struck by its quiet effectiveness: performers do not speak during the performance, yet they seem to know, as a group, when someone is about to climb. Each person in the cluster accommodates the shifting weight of the person climbing, supporting the pressure of his or her foot or hand, and making room as he or she climbs down on the other side" (92 *Soft is Fast: Simone Forti in the 1960s and After*). These rehearsed huddles must have presented a marked difference from what came next. In the secondary huddles the focus would change from practiced precision to inexact exploration. As the audience forms huddles, only the pervious performer has an understanding of the structure needed to complete the task. The audience is then playing a game of adjustment and balance to climb and allow for climbing. As a game it is not required that the task is completed for the piece to be experienced. If the secondary group continually fails, their tactile experience of space enhances because of the multitude of various body positions and constructions attempted. This includes internal struggle as well as the non-verbal bodily communication. The game forces the audience/participant to evaluate their own relationship to themselves and each other. How to use and change the shapes of their bodies and join other shapes in architectural ways to aid completion becomes the goal of the game. There is a fine line between game and task, the differentiation becomes the need for completion. A game need not be completed to be enjoyed while a task feels unfulfilled when left incomplete. It is no coincidence that *Huddle* premiered at the same time as Forti's *From*

Instructions. This piece gave two performers contrasting goals which made it impossible for the performers to complete their given tasks. Forti took this juxtaposition further and had a second huddle begin during this piece. The audience witnessing the two pieces are watching the physical conflict produced by goals that cannot be accomplished while at the same time seeing the benefit and ease of the physical harmony necessary to complete the task of *Huddle*.

Herding too operates between game and task. In this construction, six performers are tasked with moving the audience form one location in the room to another and then to yet another. They do this by individually asking audience members if they would mind "moving this way" (67 Forti). Forti notes that by the third move the "audience was getting resentful" (67). Spivey is less kind in her assessment and describes the game by saying "Here, the dancers played with the audience by gathering everyone together, then forcing them to move back and forth through the loft until they became irritated" (14). In Forti's version the audience is only subjected to three moves that perfectly positions them to witness the next piece. Spivey simply notes that by the time the irritation set in they were in place. If the task of the game was to affect the audience or to get them in place becomes the question born out of these two descriptions. Not that those two goals are diametrically opposed. The fact that the game accomplished both is what is important to continue the flow of the evening. Morse analyzes the piece with an eye for its historic placement and humor stating "In *Herding*, Forti uses conventions related to those of Happenings to associate externalized pressures applied to bodies with social pressures applied to persons who are not in a position (conventionally rather than literally so) to say no. Forti imagines the intangible of the social in strictly material terms through a literal "herding," as animals may be subject to" (93 *Soft is Fast:*

Simone Forti in the 1960s and After). This forces the audience to move under duress which is then mixed with the tactic of continual motion which disallows the audience/participant to become settled in the space. This sense of being settled in a space is key to proscenium theatre where distance between performer and performance is more than geographic placement but the juxtaposition between comfort (the house) and conflict (the stage). This piece was placed before *See-Saw*, which focused on the bodily movements necessary to balance upon a seesaw like contraption built by Robert Morris. Though the majority of the piece saw the performers shifting balance to accommodate for each other, according to Yvonne Rainer who performed the piece with Morris, Forti built in a dramatic ending. "The piece had a climax, the outcome in rehearsal of Simone's throwing a jacket on the floor and ordering me to 'Perform that!' at which I had a screaming fit on my end of the see-saw (don't ask why) while Bob read an art magazine to himself at the end" (196 *Feelings are Facts*). This again shows a use of juxtaposition in the frustration of the audience being moved into place during *Herding* and the frustration of a performer forced to consistently manipulate their balance for an elongated time. The audience transformed into a participant and performer in *Herding* with the affective goal of the piece mirrored in the performance of Rainer in *Seesaw*, the piece they were ultimately being herded too. This piece also relates back to the Halprin's interest in environmental architecture in multiple ways. It forces the audience to traverse a space repeatedly and each time come to terms with how the space changes due to their heightening feelings of irritation. Much like *City Map* was about how the city felt *Herding* is about how the gallery feels and subsequently how it makes the audience/participant feel. The environmental aspect of the piece is reinforced through the title with, as Morse points out, its animalistic illusion. "For Forti, affect was the connective

tissue between past times and spaces and those of the present…The affective content of a work was literally a "moving," in both the sense of such temporal crossings and of feeling" (117 *Soft is Fast: Simone Forti in the 1960s and After*). This is the heart of *Herding*, connecting through affect the audience to Forti's past as they experience arts future. In moving in space, they are also moving in time, physically and metaphorically. They are not just moving across a studio floor but moving to the state of mind needed to experience *See-Saw* in the way Forti wishes it to be seen. This cross spatial-temporal drive could also be seen as a blending of John Cage and Halprin's influence. Cage's influence in this case being the depersonalization he championed that centralized the audience in his theatre pieces. Taking this sense of depersonalization to an extreme that would serve to redefine dance and cement the post-modern era is Yvonne Rainer.

Rainer is the final of the three artists being explored in this piece and is the most difficult to categorize. Her influence is on par with Halprin and Forti, but rather than a structural influence on immersive theatre, her impact is more spiritual. Her use of movement separated her out from the other two artists previously explored but it is her process and the intent of her pieces that bleed into the soul of immersive theatre. Sally Banes characterizes Rainer's landmark work, Trio A, by noting that "The dance is a kind of catalogue of movement possibilities and combinations for the human body" (47). She does this, according to Banes by removing the objects from the dance but retaining the workmanlike attitude of task performance. (44). This use of task, not as a motivator or plot device but as a way of being, is what I'd like to call attention to. This final use of task as quotidian organizer and spiritual attunement bridges these artists' work from the 1960's and 70's into today's immersive market. Rainer's notes "On Dance for Ten People and 12 Mattresses Called *Parts*

of Some Sextets" as catalogued and edited by André Lepecki includes a statement that I see as the driving goal of immersive performance "The challenge might be defined as how to move in the spaces between theatrical bloat with its burden of dramatic psychological 'meaning'- and- the imagery and atmospheric effects of the nondramatic, nonverbal theatre (i.e. dancing and some 'Happenings')- and- theatre of spectator participation and/or assault" (48 Dance). The blending of these three separate goals is the meeting place of immersive events. Rainer intrinsically understood the balance between the three ideas and triangulates within their nexus. She goes on to claim that this dance was to feel as if it went nowhere. She reinforces that with the image of a treadmill (48). This dance, much like Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, was to give the audience the feeling of being static. It did so by emphasizing the great amount of work need to remain static. The dance itself is anything but static as Rainer describes the piece she claims, "*Sextets* contained a gamut of moves form 'dancey' to simple hauling of mattresses and hurling of bodies upon them while my voice intoned a reading of excerpts from the eighteenth-century diary of William Bentley, a New England Minister" (261-262 *Feelings are Facts*). To evoke the feeling of stasis took an immense amount of labor. The juxtaposition of disparate movements, sounds and images is reminiscent of the Futurist's goal of alogical presentation. Michael Kirby explains this idea by stating "If a thing is experienced for its own sake rather than for its reference and implications, it may be considered to be concrete: it is 'there' rather than referring to something that is not there… it maximizes the sensory dimensions and minimizes or eliminates the intellectual aspects" (20-21 *Futurist Performance*). For Rainer the movements were to be just "there". "Its repetition of actions, its length, its relentlessness, its inconsequential ebb and flow all combined to produce an effect of nothing happening" (51 Work 1961-73). This full and tedious nothing is

life: The ritual grind of a daily routine, the unacknowledged absurdity of social norms, the Sisyphean existence that goes unchallenged as it is simply accepted into the mechanisms of being. The elements Rainer combines in her work reinforce an ineffable nothing that is everything. All of human actuality lives in the movements Rainer compiles, but they become overwhelming because of their relentless ordinariness. Perhaps it is too far a swing to say that life is both overwhelming and nothing though the two seemingly opposing positions combine to create a truth Rainer, I believe, is aiming at here; that life is overwhelmingly nothing.

Carrie Lambert-Beatty refers to this technique that brings into focus the "overwhelming nothingness" as "recuperative attention". She defines this as "attention given to the pedestrian and ordinary in order to restore or reveal value" (103 Being Watched). The value of everyday life, movement, and the body becomes a major question and theme running through Rainer's work. Lambert-Beatty emphasizes this point by turning attention to how Rainer used blinking houselights and sometimes sustained lighting on the audience during "Sextets" to restore the audiences' focus on the whole of the production and not the sum of its parts. In this way Rainer is pushing the audience into something that is far from ordinary, an observation of whole systems at work. Enforcing this wider view pushes the observer to make sense of the nonsensical. They become responsible for dissecting each individual element of the production and must immerse themselves into the creator's mind to make meaning of what was transpiring. This is an exhausting endeavor as Lambert-Beatty sites Jill Johnston's experience to expose, "nothing matters, too much anyway, because everything matters" (105). Though this statement may seem reductive it is the full weight of the quotidian and its inherent intricacy that the observer is struck. How does one wrestle with the enormous complexity and energy required to achieve the ordinary? The focus and

strength required to simply exist becomes heroic when the mechanisms of living are exposed, especially when they might seem utterly pointless, like lugging a mattress from place to place.

Through *Feelings are Facts* she often speaks of her choreographic process which was greatly concerned with the unrecognizability of movement and the lengths she went to in order to disrupt the recognizable. This effort was made to allow the audience to see the movement new and judge it by its own merits. With *The Mind is a Muscle, Part* 1 which contained the iconic Trio *A* she tested the limits of alogical construction, assaulting the audience with sound through the hurling of three-foot wooden slats from an above loft. Rainer recounts that "During one performance a man in the first row picked up a slat, placed a large white handkerchief on one end and waved it around in a gesture of capitulation" (269-270 *Feelings are Facts*). What is important to note here is how she is using different elements to confuse and enact different senses. In doing so she is breaking the idea of narrative as a linear concept and reframing narrative to be an assemblage in the audience's own perception. This feeling of assemblage disguises the inordinate effort required to complete the dance. This is by design. In hiding the dance's effort through constant shifting and the limiting of repetitive movement "the personal disappears into the general" (Banes 50). Sally Banes goes on to remark of the dance "The role of the artist's hand, a stamp of personal style or idiosyncrasy, fades" (50). The fading of the artist's "stamp" is precisely what allows the audience into the dance. It is not a voyeuristic event, but one where the audience must step into roles that dance had previously denied, that of meaning maker.

Not only does this reinforce her connection to alogical construction but this also has direct roots to how Halprin wished the audience to act as editor of a performance. Rainer

takes it a step further as the audience must now act as director as well as editor, picking what to remember and prioritize in each moment. Does the movement take precedence over the sound or the sound the movement? Is it there a clear connection between the movement and sound? Is there a reason for the repetition and does the sound act as some sort of repetitive pallet cleanser? The audience is immediately put to work and must stay engaged with the piece long after the performers have moved on from it. She is creating an emotive narrative. "[I]t finally dawned on me that I did not want intermittent movement 'invention' but changes in static relationships of objects and people, which brought into the realm of 'tableau' and 'task' rather than 'dance'" (83 Work 1963-72). This push into the exploration of static relationships though multiple senses in juxtaposition and seeming opposition is revolutionary because of the way Rainer frames the multiple elements as unapologetically desperate. Unlike Brecht's Epic Theatre where the elements that created the illusion of storytelling were deliberately visible to reinforce the inauthenticity of the art in the hope to reinforce the moral or meaning of the story over its emotional resonance, Rainer's work evoked an emotional impact because so much of life is disparate and seemingly random. The only way for an audience to process the work was to feel their way through it. It is these qualities that Rainer passes along to immersive performance. Her explorations serve as a testing ground for affective story telling. This combined with her methods which help stretch the boundaries of what an audience can expect in performance put her in direct contact with the immersive turn of contemporary theatre.

The Bake

Third Rail Projects *Confection* takes much from all three artist's work. The production is separated into nine scenes. Each of these scenes is complete on its own, telling a distinct story. The length of each of these pieces vary from a few moments to about fifteen-minutes. The audience is divided into four groups and each group experiences the scenes in a different order. Only the first and final two scenes are witnessed by the entire audience at the same time. Here, once again, we see Anna Halprin's influence and her idea of the audience as editor. Depending on the group the audience member is placed in, their experience of the production and how they process the scenes could vary greatly. The opening scene sets the parameters of the production including subtly training the audience to take direction and react to the performers in space. As the audience is moved through multiple spaces throughout the performance this is important to the mechanics of the show. In a very real way, the audience is herded from one scene to the next. The repetition of the herding works in multiplicity as it not only trains the audience to move in response to the performers but also gives the audience a sense of status. In the opening scene the performers make multiple passes in front and behind the audience putting a different spin on Forti's herding game. This herding also functions as a status game that both casts and initiates the audience to the production and its time period (the late1700- early 1800's). Other guidelines are more direct, like the virtue of not speaking unless being spoken to and the warning that you may be separated from those with whom you are familiar. Each scene is unique and is communicated through different means including dance, language, and game. This first scene has the audience standing shoulder to shoulder around the long, luxurious wooden tables of the Folger Library's storied reading room. On the tables in various poses are the performers, each moving with refined grace around each other and the stacks of books from which they are

reading. It is in this formation that the audience is given these rules while subsequently watching the performers break them. Rules such as respecting the furniture the performers are standing, sitting and jumping upon and not damaging the books as they each rip a page from a book and finally no eating as they pop that ripped page into their mouths and slowly chew. The rules are for the audience, not the performers; this is clear. We are subordinate to them, and we live in their world. While I focus on the physical herding that the performers are doing, this mental herding is just as exacting. While Forti elevated the audience with the game, working off their frustration as means to transition into the next piece, Third Rail takes a different tack. Status becomes the main arbiter of rules. Those with power need to follow fewer rules and can choose to break them at will with little consequence. Those without, in this moment the audience, are victim to the full weight of consequences for their violation. This theme is constant throughout, and the few moments of elevation of audience status are horrific and morally challenging. Here we begin our exploration of Halprin, Rainer and Forti's lineage in this work.

Each subsequent scene is unique and is communicated through different means. Some scenes are communicated through dance, some through language, and others are game-based and dependent on audience participation. Some scenes are quiet and subtly underscored; some are loud and boisterous. Because the production can be experienced in multiple formations, I will explore the scenes independently rather than try to adhere to any particular track. In this way, I feel I can avoid the misinterpretation that there would be a "right" way to experience the production. I feel this approach honors both the productions creators as well as Halprin's' vision of the audience as editor.

The first scene I wish to explore takes place in an intimate room where a dressing table and mirror are festooned with undecorated pastries and cakes. A single performer enters the space in a corset and petticoat, she wears no make-up and is without a wig, unlike her appearance in previous scenes. She silently operates through the scene, sitting in front of the mirror and inspecting her face. Eventually, she picks up a pastry bag with a burnt sienna buttercream and begins applying it in little fleurets around the cake; once completed she puts the cake down and applies some of the buttercream to a dish. She now uses the buttercream as rouge on herself, carefully painting her cheeks. She then picks up a thick red royal icing and dots the cake, after finishing the cake she dots the plate and paints her lips in the vibrant red. Finally, she takes a strainer and pours powdered sugar over the cake. She then dips a powder puff into the strainer and powders her face. From here she attaches a wig to her head that was previously settled next to a croquembouche and mimics the pastrie's towering cylindrical shape. She then looks at herself in the mirror, stands, and leaves.

This simple scene carries an incredible commentary on luxury and gender. The woman in the scene, like the cake, is to be decorated and devoured. The labor involved in the decoration and what is being decorated is of no matter as long as the final product looks delectable. The age-old maxim "you eat with your eyes" quickly comes to mind as the viewer is witnessing the performer's transformation from one state to the next. This maxim has been explored scientifically by Akira Muto, Pradeep Lal, Deepak Ailani, Gembu Abe, Mari Itoh and Koichi Kawakami who utilized neural imaging on zebrafish to monitor the hypothalamic feeding center. The zebrafish's neural network is similar to humans, and, like humans, they have to depend upon sight as the primary recognition function for food discrimination. Their results were conclusive that the hypothalamus is activated at the sight of prey through the

optic receptors. Hunger and survival mechanisms are primed through the eye. As the audience watches the performer transform, she becomes more enticing than when she entered. The cost of this enticement is her whole self, being no more than another tasty delight for a group to consume. Later in the evening, the audience is asked: "when does a body cease to be a body and become a thing to be consumed?" Here is where they answered the question as the performer is reduced to prey due to the hypothalamic functions of the audience, covered in icing and powdered sugar.

Again, task and quotidian movement are the center of the scene. The re-evaluation of the application of make-up is both thrilling and heartbreaking. This task that many audience members participated in prior to the production is brought center stage and begs the question "who is the ritual for?" This is not to say that make up is necessarily an enslaving technique, but it does beg evaluation. Who do we prettify ourselves for and why? This of course extends well past make up users and implicates all who dressed specially for the production. By exploring this task through theatrical means the very un-ordinariness of it comes into question. This is very much in line with what Rainer was pushing toward, as she remarks about *Trio A* "dealt with seeing difficulty by dint of its continual and unremitting revelation of gestural detail" (68 Work 1961-73). Watching the precision of both cake and human decoration syntheses the two in order to draw out the unnecessary and ridiculousness of both. Without seeing the performer's difficulty and care, the quotidian nature of the action could easily be dismissed. When juxtaposed with the cake the actions become unsettling.

The next few scenes work in concert, though they can be experienced in multiple orders. In one scene, a man gives a monologue about the human historical cost of sugar. Next to him stands a Caucasian man, shirtless and wearing a skirt. Throughout the production, this

shirtless man is the representation of women and slaves. He is often forced to undress and submit himself to the other performers. He is mute as only the aristocrats are permitted to speak. He is a maligned dance partner in another scene, often pushed to the ground during an elaborate waltz. This scene ends with him being forced onto a plate and covered with a heavy silver lid. The final scene to examine of this trio is a quick dressing scene, where an aristocratic woman barks orders at audience members to help her into her elaborate costume. Unlike the icing scene, this is not about the performer; it is about the status of the audience. Here task again takes center stage, but in a new way being called upon to expertly execute a task that you may never have previously attempted. This included lacing a corset, buttoning a dress, and affixing an elaborate wig. The scene hinges upon the audience members inability to execute these tasks with any skill. This leads to the aristocrats taunting and verbally chiding the audience members throughout the scene as she is forced to take over the task and complete it herself. While the scene is played for laughs its very seriousness is inescapable. The punishments she remarks to meted out on the unable servants were incredibly serious and real. The audience's ability to laugh comes from the distancing afforded in production where they understand that the consequence of failing the task is mitigated by the status they hold outside the production. Still in this moment they are ridiculed for their lack of skill in the simple task of getting dressed.

This quick scene precedes being taken up to a balcony to watch the next while other audience members are welcomed below around a table. The performer who takes the audience to the rafters is the one whom we have seen abused all evening. There is no doubt here about the class distribution of the audience. These three scenes work together to highlight the human cost of indulgence. The indignities and exclusion in all three are

shocking and disturbing, especially paired with the beautifully modeled pastries that decorate every corner and hallway of the playing space. These scenes are essential to the main idea of the piece because they show the ills of society. How can society be made better without honestly confronting the things that hinder its development? In this trio, the audience is forced to examine their relationship with class and labor. How cognizant are we of where what we enjoy originates and how it is produced? These lingering questions will motivate the production's finale and lead to a productive ending.

Finally, I would like to focus on three scenes where task and game-based work is most utilized as the primary narrative tool. The linage of task and game-based work I believe is important to understanding these scenes because of its revolutionary roots in the work of Anna Halprin, Simone Forti, and Yvonne Rainer. These tools would build immediate temporary societies as seen in the Halprin's "Experiments in Environment" workshops and Forti's *Huddle*. Without their work, *Confection* would not be possible.

The first of these scenes employed a score utilizing a constant flow of language (in this case a rapid-fire Spanish), task-based audience participation, and a call and return style chorus of “oohs” and “awes”. The performer helps seat the audience at a large round table with a fork, knife, plate, and napkin set before them. The performer never pauses his speech as he flows around the table tucking napkins into the collars of the audiences clothing. The speech is as fluid as his movements as he also balances a headdress that calls upon the image of the Carmen Miranda. Once he makes his way to his place at the table, he teaches a quick dance to the audience using the silverware and the plate. The fork and knife are raised in the air and rubbed on each other three times making a scratching metallic noise, this is followed by quickly plunging of the utensils onto the metal plate producing a percussive noise. The

plates are then passed from left to right. The utensils bottom end are then used to create a rhythmic drum role by being banged upon the table while the performer either restarts the sequence or presents two cloche covered dishes which he proudly announces while unveiling and then moves to a buffet behind one edge of the table. As each dish is uncovered, he leads the audience in an a communal “ooh” or “aww” to finish the sequence. After a couple rounds the performer introduces a new red plate that he immediately refers to as “muy feo.” The game begins again, but this time before more delicacies are unveiled the audience member who has the red plate in front of them is removed from the game. This is accomplished by the performer, as over dramatically as possible, grabbing the audience members napkin out from their neck and placing it on their head like a Catholic nun’s habit. In a sea of faux tears, he then removed the plate and utensils and had the audience member put their hands in a position of prayer. They are now removed from the game. The plates unveiled also increase in size with each round. The game then continues each time with more and more red plates until only one audience member is left. The final platter is wheeled and unveiled for a single audience member; this is the climax of the game. Under the final cloche is an adult human in the position of a suckling pig, replete with an apple in his mouth. The scene uses game-based choreography to highlight the inequality of the era along with the ease to which people would lose their status and thus their seat at the table. The aggressive game-based choreography combined with the performers constant vocal script creates a cacophony of sound that reinforces the forceful nature of the scene. The participatory elements centralizes’ the audience in the scene. The consequences of the game are experienced directly by the audience. This scene draws upon both Forti’s and Rainer’s work. From Forti comes the game-based audience participation which is central to the action of the scene. The game is

controlled by the performer, but it is the participants who enact the choreography and divine the meaning of the game. The audience is forced to confront questions of temporality and economy ultimately asking themselves "is the contemporary world that far from the colonial?" The parallels are implied but never explicitly exposed. Like *Huddle*, the lesson is in the game and for the players. The composition of the scenes score is suggestive of Rainer's work. Its grating sound, re-evaluated mundane movements, and rearranging of props in space are all hallmarks of Rainer's pieces. The banging of the silverware is reminiscent of the *Trio A'*s wood slats and the constant speech in an archaic form of a language foreign to most of the audience is a twist on the use of William Bentley's diaries in *Sextets*. Most importantly it is the feeling of the piece that take center stage. The piece, through its game, set up the idea of exclusion and loss and plays upon each audience members fear of those two outcomes. The final climax of the human meal trussed up like a pig is also evocative of the human cost of opulence. It is in this way the affective triggers are used to centralize the emotive power of the scene.

The next two scenes to be explored work together. The first of which takes place somewhere in the middle of the program depending on grouping. In it a performer tells the story of a new society being built. This story is juxtaposed with the introduction of a very simple game titled "keep or share." A small wooden box is handed to four audience members, and they are given the option of keeping the context of the box or sharing it with whoever else is willing to share. Everyone starts with the box behind their back and then at the count of three either brings it to their chest to keep or holds it out to share. The boxes themselves contain varying amounts of jellybeans. Each round one box holds a lot of beans, one some, one a little and one none. It is possible that the shares or the keepers come up

empty or with very little. The story continues to be told about the hoarding of resources and the communal push to survive as another group plays. The game continues until each audience member has played a round. The story doesn't end but comes to a question that was being answered through the game itself, "what kind of society do you wish to build?" This game is echoed in the final scene of the play. In this scene the entire audience has been sat at a long table and passes heavy metal dishes covered with a cloche from one end to the other. The passing ends when each audience member has a dish in front of them. Each cloche and dish is the exact same size. The audience then watches a final dance of decadence that leads into performer bows. When they exit the final scene begins. The light come up and each audience member is seated with dishes in front of them covered in cloches. No instructions are given. As the audience members beginning to remove the cloches, they find varying amounts of confections on the plate. Some dishes contain extravagant cakes, a croque-en-boche, meringues, and macarons others contain a small bit of brownie or a few macarons and for the least lucky their plate is empty. Here the audience is faced again with the game "keep or share" but this time without a moderator. The question from the end of the pervious scene comes back in to play and the audience chooses the society it wishes to build. The motive for keeping or sharing is never discussed, and people are free to leave whenever they wish. There is silverware and extra plates in the middle of the table, but no one encourages any outcome. The last act the audience preforms is creating the world they wish to live in, if only for a moment. This game and its use most closely align with Forti's *Huddle*, in that the audience is introduced to the game through the mediation of performance and later charged with playing the game on their own, much like the second-generation huddles. It also has antecedents in the Halprin's architectural workshop, most closely aligned with the

constructing of the driftwood village. Both tasks are about building society and deal with a variety of space, from physical to temporal to economic. It is this final scene that gives the production its climax, and the genre of the piece becomes dependent on the society the audience wishes to build at its conclusion.

Through the hour-long piece, the audience of *Confection* is asked to re-evaluate their values and beliefs. Confronted with cruelty, subjugation, and inequality all in the name of decadence puts the willing in a space to examine how society functions. The most startling revelation of the piece is the simplicity of changing society. One small choice can mean the difference between famine and feast. This calls into question how much of our entertainment is based on famine. The idea of exclusivity is often more valuable than the object itself. Due to its extremely limited run and small audience size, fifty people per performance, *Confection* itself functions within the economy of exclusivity, selling out each performance soon after the run was announced. Coupled with the relatively high-ticket price, being in the audience of *Confection* alone was the beginning of a new society of some means. I point this out to emphasize that *Confection* was building a society long before the audience was tasked with the assignment.

Whether the recipe of *Confection* built a better society for its audience members or is only a sweet memory, it gave its audience the tools to evaluate how we order society. It was an introspective piece looking to enlighten society's chefs, not burn society down in a forgotten oven. It showed that the ingredients for every society are ultimately the same, but it’s in the way they are folded together and the care to which they are watched and handled that make a difference. A watched pot may never boil, but an unwatched oven will burn.

Halprin, Forti and Rainer's work provides a clear linage to immersive theatre and how it operates. The experiments in narrative, movement and audience participation conducted through their performances and workshops offer an enlightening precedent to contemporary immersive theatre. The construction of their pieces challenged the status quo and still do, motivating new artists and providing a bevy of interesting and provocative tools to those willing to pick up their mantel. Immersive performance is indebted to all three, most especially for their development and employment of affective triggers as a narrative tool.

Media and Memory

Stay Classy, San Diego

If asked to imagine San Diego in July, numerous images may soar to the front of your mind. Images of waves crashing on the palm tree-lined beaches, scenes from the film *Top Gun* and its sequel, visits to its world-famous zoo or Gaslamp district, incredible Mexican food, California's first city, the Mission, and the easiest meteorologist gig in the country. However, for some, July in San Diego means one thing: Orcs running amuck through the Gaslamp while multiple Doctor Who's and a few crew members of the USS Enterprise try to secure tables for lunch while numerous Jedi and Batman villains wait in line for Hall H while all grasping swag bags brimming over with new fantasy and science fiction novels, comic books, pins, Funko Pops, movie and video game posters, and whatever collectible they were allowed to purchase. In other words, July in San Diego means Comic-Con. While Comic-Con is a celebration of popular culture, it is also a launching pad for new properties in film and television. A number of major studios have chosen to take advantage of the eager crowds to help give their products a head start. In recent years, the conventional thought about how to approach this has changed from handing out free memorabilia such as tee shirts and posters to providing an actual experience in the property's world. This type of advertising is referred to as the immersive activation.

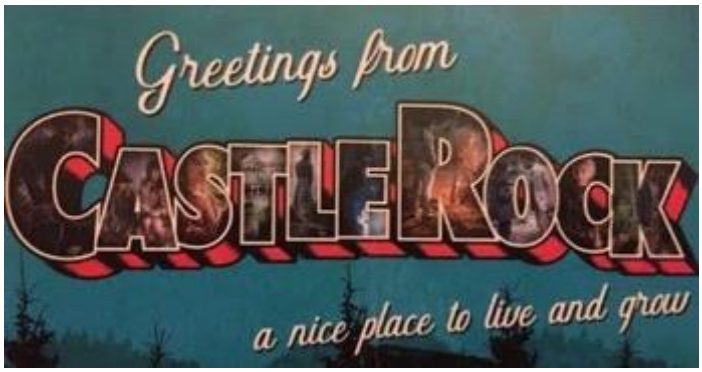
The immersive activation is the focus of this chapter. The goal of the activation is an analogous relationship between the live experience and the mediated, neither serving as the precedent to the other. This is counter to traditional cultural uses of the live to supplement the mediated, as can be seen in a visit to theme parks like Disney and Universal Studios properties. In embracing this analogous relationship, both mediatized and live performances

move forward, establishing new entanglements with their audience. In many ways, I will take up the torch of Phillip Auslander and "will argue against intrinsic opposition (of live and mediated forms) and in favor of a view that both emphasizes the mutual dependence of the live and the mediatized and challenges the traditional assumption that the live precedes the mediatized" (11 *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*). The clearest example of this analogous relationship exists in the immersive activation. An immersive activation is a live-action event where the spectator is tasked with both the moniker of audience and participant. There are moments of instruction and narrativization that require the skills and toolset developed over time by the traditional theatre audience. This includes critical listening, following of visual and aural cues, and understanding theatrical tropes and decorum. These activations also require a level of participation. Though the quantity and details of the participation changes depending on the activation, the participant will be expected to perform certain actions to ensure the narrative moves forward. Because of this dual existence, oscillating between participant and audience members for the remainder of the piece, I will refer to them as audience/participants (A/ P).

The activation is always paired with a larger property, as mentioned earlier. Because of this, it has become a common tool at fan conventions for television networks and streaming services to start the audience-building process for new programming. These activations allow a would-be audience member to have an experience inside the world of a show in hopes that it translates to viewership and social media promotion. They also have market value in researching audience response and connectivity to a property prior to its premiere. Many of the companies that create these activations boast the variety of information obtained during them, including social analytics and engagement metrics.

It Depends: The Analogous Relationship Between the *Castle Rock* Activation and Hulu Series

One such immersive activation from the 2018 Comic-Con in San Diego showcased Hulu's then-upcoming program *Castle Rock*. The show itself is a singular independent 10-episode narrative placed in the much larger entanglements of Stephan King's novels, films, and television series. The story of *Castle Rock* is an original property by Sam Shaw and Dustin Thomason positioned in a larger world teeming with King's past work. Many of the characters, events referenced, and general themes of the series are grafted from King's novels, short stories, and other media properties. The very title is a reference to an invented town in Maine where King has set multiple stories. While following the protagonist of the



series, Henry Deaver, through his journey of reconciling his past and uncovering the mystery of his new client, fans of King are constantly bombarded with images, references, and scenes from King's multiple worlds. Ian Holder defines entanglements "as the dialectic of dependence and dependency" (*Entangled: an Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* 89). The series and the activation are both dependent on King's writings and the audience's knowledge of King's writings. In this, King's past writings also become dependent on the series for their reinvigoration. The series' success is dependent on both these dependencies branching to further dependencies such as the audience that perpetuates King's popularity, the audience of the show's executive producer, J.J. Abrams (whose

properties include *Lost,* the reboot of *Star Trek,* and the continuance of the *Star Wars* saga), and the audience of horror/sci-fi television in general. Many of these dependencies reside in what Aleida Assmann refers to as functional memory. Assmann states, "functional memory draws a flexible and hence productive boundary between, on one side, chosen, interpreted, and appropriated elements- that is those that are attached to the configuration of story- and on the other side, the amorphous mass of unattached elements" (125 *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*). It is in functional memory that entanglements are stored, and dependencies created. As Assmann continues her evaluation of functional memory she finds it "consists of vital recollections that emerge from a process of selection, connection, and meaningful configuration…In functional memory, unstructured, unconnected fragments are invested with perspective and relevance; they enter into connections, configurations, compositions of meaning" (127). Not only are the entanglements stored, but through the functional memory they are connected into a narrative to produce meaning. These entanglements are used to lure fans of the author's prodigious body of work both into the world of the show and the activation. The activation immersed audience/participants into scenes of a show they had not yet watched, in a location that would only become relevant through the program's narrative. In essence, it wove together familiar tropes from King's multiple worlds into a haunted house-like experience with many unexplained elements from the show, in the promise that these elements would become clear in the viewing of the program, thus through functional memory, these elements included many emotive triggers that the characters of the show would experience in the course of the narrative making the activation dependent on the program.

Beyond the functional memory the body is also affected through emotives. As Alenda Chang states in her article "Environmental Remediation" "…our bodies are also environments through which some things pass, while others linger." In the body of the audience/participant, it is the reverberations of these emotive sentences that linger. From here, the live event is merged with the series through the slow uncovering of individual emotive sentences experienced but not contextualized in the activation. Through both body and memory, the series is fused with the activation into a singular experience for the audience/participants.

I liken the creation of this experience to how Greg Siegel claims the large screen video display (LSVD) works at sports stadiums and other venues "by inducing and sustaining a mode of spectating practice characterized by the dynamic oscillation between immediate and mediated views" ("Double Vision: Large Screen Video Display and Live Sports Spectacle" 50). In the immersive activation, the immediate view would be the streamed program that is mediated through memory of the lived experience of the audience/participant. Though live and mediated are not happening simultaneously, the audience/participant becomes a spectator oscillating between memory and media. It is here the emotive narrative, through the contextualization offered by the show becomes an analogous experience. These oscillations between the emotive narrative of the activation and the series creates an analogous experience through immediacy. "Immediacy privileges a seamless connection to our media so that they fluidly integrate with our bodies and our surroundings" (7), according to Jason Farman in *Mobile Interface Theory*. This could also be considered remediation through Chang's work as she states, "remediation generally cleaves to the rhetoric and logic of immediacy—improving or reforming prior media by allowing even better or more direct

access to the real." As the series touches upon moments of the activation, the emotive narrative resurfaces fusing the mediated to the body creating immediacy within the audience/participant. This specific immediacy is created through the haptic use of the senses utilized in the emotive narrative.

In the following section we will walk through both the activation and the series together. In that I do not mean to infer that I will summarize the series (though some summarization may be necessary for context), but rather I will relate the emotive sentences of the activation to the events referred to in the series. Here, I follow Laura Marks' intention "to restore a flow between the haptic and the optical that our culture is currently lacking (xiii). In restoring that it will become clear how the series and the activation are analogous in the audiences/participant's body. To do this I will place moments from the activation (the haptic) side-by-side to moments in the series (the optical). I know this is stretching Marks' idea slightly, but the intent remains the same. We will travel through the activation in linear time in an effort to reduce confusion and, in the best way possible, extend my sensorial experience to you the reader. I will pause frequently to explore the emotive sentence being experienced in activation and what it is referring to in the series. This will take away from the immersed experience of the activation but mimic how the structure of the activation and the structure of the series operates.

Walking Through Castle Rock

The activation starts before the audience/participant finds the event's entrance queue. In the middle of the sprawling fountain of San Diego's Children's park stands three incongruent objects wholly out of place and in alarming juxtaposition. The first is the figure of a young child dressed for cold weather and floating slightly above the waterline. Within close visual range of the boy is a sign welcoming people to Castle Rock and intoning that it is "A nice place to live and grow." These first two objects immediately displace the audience/participant, spatially and temporally. The spatial realignment from San Diego, California, to Castle Rock, Maine, is simple enough, enacted through the signal of the literal sign. Also enacted through this sign is a relocation into the series. This begins the process of placing the audience/participant in the series itself. A further realignment is also being enacted through the child. The child's clothing indicates a spatial dissonance as it contrasts with the mid-ninety's Fahrenheit heat that San Diego experienced throughout Comic-Con weekend. The clothing is less specific than the literal sign but works together with the sign to begin an emotive sentence. This emotive sentence includes a temporal shift from summer to winter, repositioning the audience/participant in both time and space. In addition to concrete narrative elements, the emotive sentence contains multiple affective elements to attach to the audience/participant's memory. These elements provide the mood and tone of the series. This

includes the supernatural suggestion of a child floating above the water, the muted colors, well-weathered sign, isolation, and distance between objects. All of this signals the danger the audience/participant will encounter if they proceed with their journey. The final of these three objects is a grey sedan plunging hood-first into the fountain. This object is on the opposite side of the fountain from the other two and is clearly meant to be visually separated from the child and the sign. How the car ended up in the fountain is a mystery, as there are no roads above the fountain that could account for the steep angle of its entry. As more time is spent visually exploring the car, it becomes clear that it is not wrecked where its hood has hit the bottom of the fountain but seems to pass through the fountain. In fact, it seems that the sedan has been dropped into this reality through another and is on its way to a third.

The car, the child, and the sign are all encountered in the series' first episode. The car is the first of these three objects that the audience will encounter. It is owned by the warden of Shawshank prison, whom the audience is quickly introduced to before watching him leave his home to a commit a visually gruesome suicide that plunges the sedan off a cliff and into a lake far below. The angle of the sedan at impact, and the sedan itself, will be very familiar to any who wandered by the Children's park during the activation's run. This event and image serves as the inciting incident of both the series and the activation. The Castle Rock Bed and Breakfast that the audience/participant will access at the official beginning of the activation is the warden's former home. Next, the sign is used to signal the movement of the show's protagonist, Henry Deaver (played by Andre Holland), from Texas, where he is a death row defense attorney, to the township of Castle Rock. His transference from one location to another is no different from those who experienced the activation, meaning he ends one scene in Texas and, through the use of a very similar sign, is transported to Castle Rock. This

swift spatial relocation is a well-used trope in visual storytelling, both on screen and stage, and effectively moves the audience with the character into the next scene. Finally, it is revealed that the child is, in fact, a younger version of the protagonist who is lost in the snowy woods surrounding Castle Rock standing on an iced-over lake and wearing the exact clothing as the image floating above the fountain. The protagonist's difference in age between the present and the flashback is 27 years (a number specifically chosen for its reference to *IT* and the antagonist of that story's cycle of terror, which occurs every 27 years in the nearby town of Derry).

Moving from the fountain into the queue for the activation, a few more actants are introduced. The first of these is a key to the Castle Rock Bed and Breakfast, which exists both in the series as well as the activation. To obtain this key the audience/participant must sign a series of waivers containing content and safety warnings. Before each episode of the series, a written content warning appears on the screen. The similarity in the priming for both series viewer and activation participant is significant in that it is a ritualized action that must be consented to physically and mentally before beginning the experience. Mimicking this precursory action is yet another gesture blending both activation and series. While waiting, the audience/participant is surrounded in a corridor papered with missing child posters. These posters refer to Henry Deaver and describe his dress and length of time missing, a total of

eleven days. What happened during these eleven lost days is a major question in the series and is not addressed until the season's final episode. As for the missing child's clothing, the description perfectly matches the levitating figure in the fountain from earlier.

As the audience/participant reaches the front of the line, they are introduced to the Bed and Breakfast as well as their hosts, Lilith and Gordon. Each audience/participant has a quick conversation with each character, but long enough to know something is not right.

Both Gordon and Lilith are new to Castle Rock. At first, they seem overly enthusiastic and obnoxiously nice, but soon the cracks begin to show. Gordon often pauses for a long duration as if he sees something in audience/participant's eyes, then corrects himself and returns to a plastic enthusiasm. These pauses are felt by Lilith, who stops her conversation and nervously watches Gordon until he recovers. She often apologizes for him and mentions how they moved to Castle Rock to escape the stress of their previous life. The small talk Gordon makes is loaded with references to King's wider universe, asking audience/participants if they came to town to see where the boy was discovered near the railroad tracks (a reference to King's short story *The Body*, later made into the film *Stand By Me*) or where the dog that went on a killing spree lived (*Cujo*) or perhaps where the strangler

did his business (*The Dark Half*). Throughout the interaction, Lilith and Gordon's characters consistently touch the audience/participant in non-threatening but noticeable ways. This is to reinforce the memory of the interaction through haptic means. The characters of Gordon and Lilith also make an appearance in the series, buying the old warden of Shawshank's house, made available through his untimely death, and turning it into the bed and breakfast at which the audience/participant is now a guest. The façade of the B&B is exact to the one in the series. The B&B does not appear until well into the series, but temporal displacement is a major theme of the show as well as the activation. Time is anything but linear in Castle Rock and is, as Marks asserts of digital media and body, "mutually enfolded in material processes" (xxi). The representation of time from the missing posters to the jump to the Bed and Breakfast is malleable and dependent on material markers for reference. The most tangible of these markers is the use of the audience/participant's cellular phone to snap pictures of them with Lilith and Gordon upon their arrival at the Bed and Breakfast. This clearly places them in the present, while the signs are dated 1991.

After the meet and greet, the front door is opened, and the audience/participants are led to the lobby of the B&B. Here the audience/participants are assigned rooms and told the rules of their stay; to follow all directions, stay together,

and do not lose their key. During this interlude, a little bit of time is allotted to explore the space. Every countertop and wall is covered by something that will either be part of the series or comes from a different King property. This includes a real-estate mailer from Molly Strand (Portrayed by Melanie Lynskey,) who sells Gordon and Lilith the Bed and Breakfast, a typewriter with paper sticking out with the repeated line "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" (a reference to *The Shining*) and a copy of *IT*. The typewriter is of particular interest; not only is there a character named after the troubled antagonist of *The Shining*, who is later revealed to be his niece, "the shining" or "touch" (depending on the King property being referenced) plays an integral part in the plot of the series. It is revealed early on that the realtor we are introduced to through her mailer, which was located next to the typewriter, has a version of this "touch". She can not only hear thoughts but feelings and emotions. The paintings on the walls have significance, too, as they are all expressionist portraits of the character known on the show as The Kid (portrayed by Bill Skarsgård). These portraits play a major role in Gordon and Lilith's story arc in the series, inspiring Gordon to murder. Though it is never explained how this transaction occurs, Gordon has a telepathic communication with one of them. Throughout the series The Kid, the show's antagonist, has multiple interactions with characters inspiring them to enact their worst impulses. Henry's discovery of the paintings in the B&B's basement in an episode leads to Lilith and Gordon trying to kill him. The oddities and uneasiness of the activation's Gordon can be explained through this information as the series and the paintings work together to establish the context of his interactions.

At this point, it is already clear how the series and the activation work to reify each other and form a singular experience through emotive sentences. Each emotive sentence

folds into and permeates through the series. The next event fully joins the audience/participant to the characters in the series and King's worlds in general. As I had mentioned the audience/participants are sorted into rooms in the B&B. The audience/participants are instructed to open the doors simultaneously and enter their personal rooms. Each room is a small, confined space with a door opposite the entrance. As the audience/participant enters the room, the door behind them swings shut. The door in front is locked. A dim light illuminates the small room. Each room is themed after a different King property that in some way appears in *Castle Rock*, this may include red balloons and the storm drain from *IT*, the Raquel Welch poster from *The Shawshank Redemption*, or an avatar of the small child recently witnessed floating over the fountain outside. From here, how the room is utilized in the narrative is uniform. The lights fail, the audience/participant is plunged into darkness. Sound starts to fill the space. The individual sounds are distinct to the room the audience/participant is in; balloons popping and Pennywise's voice in the *IT* room or prison alarms and inmates rioting in *The Shawshank Redemption* room. The sound rises to a dizzying crescendo mixing environmental noises with speech and an ominous underscore. Straining to disentangle the sounds becomes maddening as the volume climbs to deafening levels. As it reaches its climax, a light begins to pulse, speeding to a menacing strobing. This strobe effect is localized in each room, the *IT* room, for example, comes from the storm drain, and *The Shawshank Redemption* room comes from behind the poster. Once the sequence has reached its frenzied climax the door flings open and drops the

audience/participants into a space that can only be described as threateningly ethereal, illuminated by the headlights of a grey sedan plunging through the roof. This is the warden's car again, or at least the portion that is not in the fountain outside. The ceiling is projected upon with a green-blue swirling light that indicates our place as beneath the water, time frozen as the car is stuck mid-plunge. The audience/participant has gone through a "thinny," a term used in King's works to indicate a place where the edges of a world have grown thin, and one can pass into another world.

Much of the plot of the series revolves around a "thinny". As a child, Henry Deaver is plagued by the sound it makes, and his adopted preacher father believes they are the voice of God. He takes his young son, Henry, as we see him floating over the fountain in San Diego into the woods to find the source. He continually fails to discover it, and the sound drives him mad. He decides to kill his family as he believes they are keeping him from this communion with God. Henry, resolved to save himself, pushes his father off a cliff and disappears only to reappear on the ice eleven days later. At this time The Kid is caught by the warden and taken to be held secretly in solitary confinement under Shawshank prison. Henry disappears through a "thinny" and The Kid appears through one. This "thinny" plays a role in

the climax of the series as well, as it is the site of The Kid and Henrys' final confrontation. The audience/participant has disappeared from their reality through a "thinny" and has been transported to Castle Rock. This "thinny" offers the audience/participant what Laura Marks points out existential phenomenology also offers. "Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology is constituted in mutual acts of perception, such that the world's look upon me, while it challenges any notion that I might exist separately from it, is not out to annihilate me. This in turn allows us to identify and negotiate with particular opportunities not for shattering, but for becoming" (54). Becoming from this point forward is the goal of the activation and the journey of the series. The audience/participant is being driven through a world, by a world into a new understanding of the world. Their perception is consistently challenged from here to the end of the experience.

Hurried from this room by an avatar of the boy in the fountain, the audience/participant is led to a tight room with a bathtub in the center. In the bathtub is an array of mannequin parts. A man who looks and is dressed like Gordon, the B&B owner, cleans the mannequin parts while talking about how he did not want to commit the "act". The audience/participant is never told what that "act" is but from the tightness of the room and intensity of the speech, it is clear it was dark and violent. This is a reenactment of a scene from the series. In the series, Gordon is talking to himself, but the activation makes use of the audience/participant's presence and Gordon delivers the lines directly to them with ominous effect. As he begins to threaten those in the room, a new door is thrown open, and the audience/participant beckoned to follow a woman in a red coat.

This coat becomes an important costume in the show as it is how Molly Strand is recognized both in the show's present and in flashbacks. The character leads the audience/participant through a hallway of mannequins whose heads rotate to follow their progress. One child mannequin is present, wearing a child's version of Molly's costume. Again, this refers to Molly's function in the narrative. She is the continual savior of Henry. She leads the audience/participant to a long and dark hallway and disappears down it. As the audience/participant follows her down the hallway its walls close in. The walls and ceiling are made with fabric and inflated, so the audience/participant is smothered and isolated. It is loud with the sound of rushing air and the screams of other audience/participants. The suffocating walls must be pushed through. This takes a decent amount of effort due to how tightly the inflated fabric presses against the audience/participant's body. This hallway mimics the emotional state of Henry as he is kidnapped and locked in a tight soundproof room. When viewing the series, it is at this moment that it becomes clear that while traversing the hallway, the audience/participant is becoming Henry.

Once the hallway is negotiated, the audience/participants find themselves at a prison, witnessing a lethal injection. This is Henry's first scene in the series. This is once again deliberate to enfold the audience/participant's journey with Henry's. This enfolding of the live event and the series is also experienced on the way out of the activation. The audience/participant passes a bank of security monitors. Some of the monitors show the rooms of the activation, while others display footage of a mass shooting from the series.

This mass shooting is displayed in the series by following the shooter from one room to another on security monitors.

The physical activation ends here, but the experience does not. Through viewing the series, it becomes clear that the structure of the activation (skipping form location to location, forward and backward in time) is mimicking Ruth Deaver's (portrayed by Sissy Spacek) sense of reality. Ruth's thought process is corrupted by dementia and requires the placement of triggering totems to tell the difference between memory and her lived reality. She utilizes chess pieces as her keys to the world telling her what is happening in real time and what is simply the repetition of memory. If she opens a space where she has placed a chess piece and it is missing, she knows she is trapped in a memory. That momentary warning about losing the key in the B&B's lobby is of extreme importance as it is the audience/participant's tether to reality, their reality before they crossed worlds. The key you were told to hang onto acts like these chess pieces to ground the audience/participant in their reality despite being plunged into *Castle Rock*'s.

Due to its dismissal of an intermediary party or avatar, this bodily remediation surpasses the ability to envelop an audience/participant contained in other transmedial endeavors, such as computer and video games. Using the hotel key as the tether to reality allows for an escape from the activation/embedded self. Navigating the activation often involved the audience/participant's hands and the key was commonly stashed in a pocket or bag. This removed the key from the audience participants sight and out of haptic interaction. In essence the keys tangible metaphor for reality transcends the literary into an actual binding talisman. This talismans invisibility affected the functional memory in different ways than the constant reminder of the third-party avatar utilized in computer games, leaving the

participant with a different affective experience. Video games doubtlessly have great affective power and utilize the body similarly to immersive experiences, but they also have distancing agents built into the architecture of how they operate. For instance, the off or power button is the most powerful tool of a frustrated gamer. The power button for a consul or computer has nothing to do with an individual game and is a neutral party to the experience of that machine and what it can offer. The key is the off button in the Castle Rock activation, but it is far from neutral. It is a reminder of the "other" reality, the one lived and accessible on the other side of the screen. It is a door you have passed through. Once opened, the door can never truly be closed. The power can never be turned off; the experience is yours or perhaps that of another you but one that lives in you regardless.

The *Castle Rock* activation was painstakingly crafted so that every detail embellished the series' world and remained through emotive sentences within the active memory of the audience/participant. This points to significant strides in immediacy and the remediation of the body. This remediation enfolds the series into the activation and forms yet another becoming; that of the human body into the series. No further tools for immediacy are needed as remediation has conjoined the live with the mediated; the oscillation between the two is internal. Bert States uses the metaphor of the binocular when describing phenomenology's task of seeing both the sign and the image at the same time. He goes on to note that they can only be separated after the event of experience (*Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* 8). This is true of the activation and the series as they have reached the analogous relationship that Phillip Auslander strived to theorize.

Do Convention Goers Dream of Electric Sheep

Castle Rock's activation is not anomalous; many other creative properties and their studios have attempted to connect an audience to an upcoming film or television show through an activation. It is fair to say that most are not as detailed or effective as Castle Rock's, but they are plentiful tools for advertising and worth evaluating. San Diego (SDCC) and New York Comic-Con (NYCC), as well as the South-by-Southwest Festival (SXSW) in Austin, Texas, have become known for these experiences. Many activations are created for very small audiences, but large media write-ups, such as HBO's 2017 Westworld Experience, which whisked away a few lucky ticket holders to the world of the show. Their time there consisted of psychological evaluations to find if the participant was a white hat or a black hat, holding their symbolic film nature before being released into a recreation of the saloon from the show for conversation and puzzle solving plied by alcohol, not the uninhibited debauchery of the actual park goers in the series. Unfortunately, live human actors are a poor substitute for the automata in the show and severely limit the true scale of moral questioning available to the parkgoers featured in the series. This activation was repeated at both NYCC and SXSW. Its extremely limited audience was mostly journalists, bloggers, and influencers to ensure maximum coverage. Because of this, most participants went into the activations looking to its disparate parts to write about, but few allowed themselves to experience the piece as an event unto itself. This is possibly the most written about and publicized activation in history and was created to be so, garnishing articles in trade magazines and newspapers, as well as segments on multiple television networks, both local and national. While its success in getting the word out about the upcoming show is undeniable, it is hard to gauge the individual impact it had on its participants.

Prior to the Westworld activation, its creator CampfireNYC, worked on another large-scale activation created to support a different property where robots break bad, Bladerunner 2049. This experience was built for a mass audience to reintroduce a dormant franchise and was advertised as a virtual reality ride in a spinner (the flying cars used in the world of the film). Once through a line that could range hours depending on the time of day a person joined and included the signing of multiple release forms and identification checks, the visitor had a wristband applied. This wristband was the acts as the ticket to the event. Then they were shuffled into a room with concept art for the new film while waiting for their experience to begin. For fans of the franchise the drawings could be exciting glimpses into the films next installment, but for the uninitiated they were simply wall dressing neither calling attention to their presence nor offering offering explaination of what they depicted. Once let into the virtual reality (VR) theatre, guests sat in chairs that would link to their virtual reality goggles and headphones and vibrate and respond to the VR video. The experience was to be a VR ride along through a dystopian future in Los Angeles that turns into a chase after a rogue replicant (robot) that ends in a fiery crash. As the experience comes to a close the guests are told to remove their virtual reality goggles. As they do so, they discover the front wall of the virtual reality theatre where they began their journey has been removed, and just beyond the room's frame lays the burning spinner. It is surrounded by firefighters and police officers being deluged by rain, a stark contrast to the sunny ninety-degree San Diego summer weather

that was experienced in line while waiting for entrance to the activation. The fire is quickly taken care of, and as the guests enter into the scene, police ask if they saw where the replicant had escaped. From here, guests are free to explore a street scene cut straight from the world of Blade Runner. Large neon signs hang in all directions as a light rain falls, and the bass of electronic music is heard pounding from the nightclub at the end of the ally way. A noodle stand with a chef more interested in talking to patrons about what they saw then cooking occupies the entire right side of the ally. The street is occupied with as many locals (actors dressed out of the world of Blade Runner) as guests, all of whom have their own characters and are interested in the crash for their own reasons. Police also patrol the street, looking for the replicant. Occasionally they will apprehend a guest and pull them over to an identification scanner. If the scanner claims them to be a replicant, all the locals will treat them as an outcast, ridiculing them until they make their way to the exit through the nightclub. There is also a great deal of movie props from both the original film and the new installment scattered around the street in fake storefronts for guests to gawk at.

Eugenie Brinkema's idea of the fold of a filmic affect comes into play here. In entering the activation, after the VR intervention, which was essentially a clever sleight of hand into the world of *Blade Runner*, the audience/participant is launched into something in-between the film and themselves, a liminoid space, a shared place made for close reading through physical (somatic) exploration. A fold (in Brinkema's terming) is recollecting and

re-creating the film for the audience/participant as they live a moment in the world where it takes place (38). This fold is delicate and well-constructed. Its recollections are in the shop windows, reverberating the franchise's past while actors on set create new memories of the franchise. Brinkema's fold isn't far from Erin Manning's intervals which I use heavily in later chapters. Both fold and interval stemming from Deluzian beginnings. The main difference is that Brinkema's ideas are solely cinematic. As I am exploring cinematic properties, I will honor her framework while exploring this. The moment the VR goggles are removed, the audience/participant enters this fold. The fold is a moment, reverberating but not progressing. It contains movement and life, action and drama but does not in any way advance. To borrow a phrase from Walt Whitman, it contains multitudes, but they are multitudes to be uncovered without utility. Mastering the fold leads to no mastery at all but a sense of completion in a moment that can never be completed. All that can be said is that the audience/participant is there. This becomes especially provocative when considering Brinkema's definition of mise-en-scene as "fundamentally a logic of presence" (44). In the case of a filmic activation, the audience/participant is present in the event. They are inherently part of the form that becomes the fold of the film. This is the point of the activation, as discussed earlier in the Castle Rock segment. The entwining of audience/participant and film into this fold breeds a new sense of ownership to the franchise as it is not watched or read but it is lived, if only for a moment.

For Brinkema, the exploration of affect in film must come with an "'ana-':…'initial forgetting'"(38). The audience/participant here stands in for Brinkema's gesture toward an ana-theoreticality reading of affect and form. They become the means to speak back to theoretical models and have the power to change the models through their encounter (44-45).

This is due to the audience/participant's status as an uninitiated body thrust into a filmic moment. There was no warning that more would occur after the VR segment, and the audience/participant must acclimate to the world they are in, learn its rules and customs and inhabit the fold until they exit. Even if one wanted to avoid the fold, no exit was clearly marked, and an audience/participant would be forced to interact to find a way out. I understand I am making a leap by assuming that conscience forgetting and forced acclimation are similar, but I do not mean in the initial process in which they occur. Here I am focusing how the mind and body would ideally work afterward. The forced acclimation starts from a blank slate and fills to function in the world; the forgetting is immediate and easy. It is an act of survival as the audience/participants effortlessly read the affects to learn how to begin to operate in the new world. This is not to say that they are perfect and can operate in the fold seamlessly, but as they spend time learning and testing, they normalize their reality to the fold and reverberate with it. Where Brinkema's theory becomes incredibly complex for one watching a film, it is simple for one stepping into a film's fold.

Nothing is resolved on the street, and the activation serves as an amuse-bouche to the upcoming film, but it did generate a great deal of excitement for a long-dormant property. The activation's final act had its guests enter a nightclub door flanked by two window go-go dancers performing in shadow on ariel silks. After the first two acts, the excitement of what this third room would hold was palpable. With guests audibly conjecturing at what could top what they already experienced. Most of them would be disappointed upon entering. It was a plain black room with a choice of cold udon noodles on one side and bar serving shots of Jonny Walker Red, Black, and Blue Label on the other. Many quickly grabbed a bite and a drink and left; some took advantage of the unending supply of Blue Label Scotch which sold

for twenty-five dollars a shot around the convention and made merry before exiting. Johnny Walker sponsored both the movie and the activation, so it is no surprise they were featured in both, but the unwieldy way in which it was handled was a bit shocking, given how sophisticated the first two acts of the activation were. It is this centrality of the audience/participant through the first two parts of this activation that ignites such vast disappointment in its conclusion. As Birkmena points out, "It is only fitting to follow the logic of the fold into one that upsets a reading method that has only ever looked for presence and so often only found what it knew it would see" (46). Here the capitalist edge of the movie franchise is shown in full force as the audience/participant is plied with precisely what they are selling, not a dystopian movie perse but a brand of scotch they hope to be associated with one of the movie's actors. I say "actors" to clarify that the association of Johnny Walker with the character Rick Deckard is not the goal of the advertising but with the man portraying Deckard, Harrison Ford. Affectively selling a beverage by intimating that robots like it would be comical, but all allusions are dropped here, and the message is clear Harrison Ford likes Johnny Walker, and so should you. It's the kind of abrupt and unsatisfying ending that leads and audience/participant to need a drink. All this said the bulk of the activation was captivating and visually stunning. It easily accomplished its goal of bringing attention to the movie release and was popular enough to resurface at SXSW later that year.

In the last decade, activations have become convention staples, and the vast majority of them have been less than successful or memorable. The task of connecting an audience to a property is not effortless, and without a great deal of planning and thought it is easy to fall through the cracks. As a consummate convention goer, I can attest to having swag from multiple miscarried properties handed out at the end of activations that failed to connect to

both myself and a larger viewing audience. Shows buried deep in the original's queue of Amazon Prime or Hulu or simply canceled off of network television before completing a season. This doesn't diminish the power of the activation but displays what a valuable tool it can be to both connect and enhance a viewer's experience. Frank Rose calls the process "narrative thinking," which is analogous to design thinking which he defines as "a five-step process—*empathize* with the user, *define* the problem, *ideate* around it, *prototype* a solution, *test* it and then start over if necessary" (15 The Sea We Swim: How Stories Work in a Data Driven World). While Rose writes authoritatively on immersion, he is often doing so from a marketing standpoint. This makes failure, which is baked into design thinking as a satisfying outcome, acceptable, but from a performance view connecting with an audience at its most pure level starts at first contact with a product or property. A failed activation is not only a turn-off because it does not connect to an audience, but rather has affectively marked the audience that experienced the activation to reject the product. While I agree with Rose on many facets of immersion, especially the brain's contribution on assembling the experience after the activation is completed, his coining of narrative thinking and the narrative turn in which he claims we now live is performatively flawed. Performance creates strong negative and positive bonds and is just as likely to sink a project as bolstering it if done poorly.

The ability to physically connect an audience to a series opens up new lines of exploration in materiality, narrative and the functions of memory in media. As Frank Rose notes, "immersiveness is what blurs the line, not just between story and game, but between story and marketing, storyteller and audience, illusion and reality" (15 The Art of Immersion). As techniques refine and audiences become more adept at seeking out these multidimensional experiences for their media consumption, the opportunities seem limited

only by budget and imagination (resources the studios producing these activations seem to have in spades). These explorations may be able to further conjoin properties entirely, fulfilling the goals of transmedia practitioners[1], opening both entertainment and theatrical industries up to new and undreamt-of potentials.

[11] Here I am referencing Henry Jenkins March 21, 2017 blog post "Transmedia Storytelling 101" . In it he lays out the tenets for transmedia storytelling. This is a space where the activation could fit but I would argue that because this activation was made in service of the series and cannot be understood without it, the series would still remain an Ur-text.

Chewing the Scenery: Immersive Dining

As the sugary peanut sauce crashed upon the tongue and the precisely chopped spears of nut mixed with the pillowy corn crust under the pressure of my molars, the memory of Cracker Jack sprang to mind. Looking at the dish, with its perfectly centered piece of chilled beef swimming in a still but reflective brown sauce surrounded by shards of peanut points and crushed fresh popcorn in a small circular pie crust, the childhood treat is the last thing one would imagine. It looks, and to be perfectly analytical, is a wonderful take on a Thai dish, neutered by the lack of ubiquitous peppers that give so much character to Thai cuisine, but it is not. It is Cracker Jack. Well, it's not literally Cracker Jack, but it is Cracker Jack, nonetheless. To drive this dish's very Cracker Jack-ness home to the diner, it is plated on a box of Cracker Jack with a hole cut into it where its little transparent plastic plate lets the imbiber peek at actual Cracker Jack below the plate. At the very least, it is imposter Cracker Jack. Moreover, to be completely truthful, it tastes much better than Cracker Jack ever could taste. It is devoid of the burnt sugar aftertaste, the cloying sweetness, and the shelf-induced staleness that can occur in Cracker Jack. It is a mythical perfect Cracker Jack that has a perfectly tender piece of beef surrounded by beautiful green leaves of Thai basil. Green is usually a color to avoid in Cracker Jack, but the basil provides just enough anise flavor to mellow the sweetness of the peanut sauce and makes a perfect bite.

The delight of Cracker Jack and all it stands for flushes my memory as the flavors mix and mingle. Sitting in the right field stands of Angel Stadium (in a time when stadiums had identities outside corporate sponsors), screaming in my shrill prepubescent intonation for attention from my favorite player, number 15, the big fish, who might favor me with a look or better yet a ball if I raised my voice in adulation loud enough. My children screaming that

damned Steve Goodman song "Go Cubs Go" that my father-in-law taught them to celebrate his favorite team. John Fogerty begging for his chance to play in "Centerfield." Searching the box for a decoder ring, miniature baseball card, or temporary tattoo that I would shoddily apply to my upper arm using the condensation droplets around whoever's beverage was closest to me. Finding large, fused clumps of Cracker Jack, breaking the chunks and clusters into bitesize pieces, and dropping them back into the box for later. The crack of the bat as a ball careens from it toward the outfield fence. The whine of my brother telling me to share. The chiding of my mother to the same effect. The thrill of a home run. That good pain in the hands that tells you when you hit a ball solidly. The whip of air around your face as you slide into second. The red dust in your eyes. The sound of fireworks as a ball exits the park. Like a curve ball, all of it races toward me before falling out of sight.

As I begin to swallow, I find my tongue searching between my teeth for stuck bits of toffee, and I must remind myself that this was not actual Cracker Jack. My body responded in the rehearsed way, even though I had not eaten Cracker Jack in what must be a decade. Though popular with my children, the mix of toffee, peanut, and popcorn has lost favor with me due to its cloying sweetness and the havoc it wreaks on my dental work. Also, changing its packaging from a box to a bag removed the nostalgic imperative that drives so many of my adult decisions for comfort and pleasure. It is funny how much memory depends upon little things like how a product is packaged.

A burst of laughter exits my body. I catch myself so as not to disturb any other diners' experience. I cannot help but continue to giggle. One of the servers in the room's doorway catches my chuckle and politely smiles as if to say laughing is okay. At Next, the restaurant where this little culinary scene occurred, all reactions are encouraged.

Next is a Michelin starred restaurant, earning the honor in 2020 and holding it still. It is connected physically to the owner and culinary pioneer Chef Grant Achatz's other culinary endeavors; the three Michelin starred Alinea (his flagship offering), Roister, Aviary, St. Cloud Supper Club, and Speakeasy. Each of these establishments has its own culinary identity and separate kitchens though they live in the same building in the Fulton Market district of Chicago. A place once known for its meat packing plants and the smell of discarded fish parts slowly rotting now boasts the city's most exciting restaurants and fine dining establishments. This neighborhood renaissance is overwhelmingly due to Achatz and the opening of his first offering Alinea where he not only set out to reimagine fine dining in America but redefine how we eat. It would be easy to get lost in Achatz's story as he worked through some of the most consequential chiefs' kitchens in modern history before setting out to make a name for himself in the city where he first began his journey. Kristin Hunt does a fantastic job cataloging and describing his journey to the culinary apex upon which he now stands. Next was Achatz's second offering after Alinea. A place where he took the theatricality, he had harnessed around his dishes in Alinea and applied it to an entire evening of dining to tell a story. What story? Well, that changes every three or four months, as does the restaurant's menu, design, and décor. These meals are also sold through ticketing, and at the end of each meal, the patron is given a menu not unlike a playbill on the way out of the theatre to help keep the piece fresh for days to come in the mind of the diner.

The connection between dining and theatre is in no way new. The idea of theatrical dishes used for entertainment dates back centuries, from tales of meat being carved, colored, and shaped like fruits to nursery rhymes of four and twenty blackbirds escaping from a pie. I am not making an argument about the theatricality of food, as I feel it is a well-accepted idea.

The historical record shows the theatrical implementation of food, especially in ritualized ceremonies. Much of this is still practiced; presenting elaborate cakes for birthdays and weddings is one obvious example. The arguments against using foods for entertainment are numerous and ancient, dating well back to the Greeks. Neither of these discussions are pools in which I wish to swim. Instead, I will examine how chefs use food to create immersive experiences for their patrons that go beyond the theatrical potential of individual dishes but start to incorporate the entire dining experience. These immersive meals work under the same narrative system discussed earlier. They utilize taste and smell as their primary contact points, while the texture, appearance, and aural affects are tertiary.

A well-thought-through meal and performance have much in common in the theoretical sense, and it is here that I wish to start the exploration. Considering Peggy Phelan's argument that performance only has life in the present, we can see the connection clearly. A meal follows this rule to a dramatic extent in that to be experienced, it must be devoured (no single bite can be experienced the same way twice). Once a meal is done, it can only be relived or revived through other media or other mediums and, as Phelan points out about performance, then becomes something else. As Carolyn Korsmeyer states, "because food does not last but spoils, because it not only nourishes but poisons, eating is a small exercise in mortality…food succumbs to time—as do we ourselves. This perhaps is the final reflection that tasting prompts: not just that it is pleasurable but that it fades so quickly" (Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy 145). Much like performance, it is in a disappearance that a meal is experienced. Unfortunately, it would be disingenuous to stop there. A clean definition would do little justice to the complex dishes and experiences being developed by these chefs and serves more as a punchline than proof. Consider the hypothesis

that these meals live in one of Erin Manning's intervals, continually cueing the consumer as to how it is to be experienced, and the consumer decides on how to lead/follow the meal and, therefore, the Chef's instruction. This turns the meal into choreography and the consumer into the Chef's dancing partner. A tango of consumption. Add to this Rebecca Schneider's pointed questions on performance art from her essay "What Happened; or, Finishing Live," "what if 'finishing' is endlessly incomplete, with resonances circulating like orature, in a complex network of cross-live, cross-temporal, cross-reference?" (99). The meal is never finished; it communicates with its consumer through memory. As the memory refines the meal and structures its meaning, the flavors strengthen, and the experience continues. The more one returns to the memory of a dish, the more the dish refines and reveals. As it ages, the spectacle of the dish falls away, and its core attraction comes to the forefront. Alternatively, perhaps its spectacle was its core attraction, and that became the focal point of the dish or meal. A great meal is never done. Perhaps this is why we judge dishes against each other and hold the memories of family meals and recipes so dear. The meal, as it ages, holds the memory.

To take the argument that food is performance further, I will introduce Chef Heston Blumenthal to the conversation, who, along with chef Thomas Keller of the French Laundry and Chef Ferran Adria of El Bulli, are considered the forbears of modernist cuisine. This designation is not only due to reputation but also because they literally wrote modernist cuisine's manifesto, "Statement on the 'New Cookery." The fourth point in this manifesto includes the statement, "The act of eating engages all the senses as well as the mind. Preparing and serving food could therefore be the most complex and comprehensive of the performing arts" (Ferran et al.). This point lived for years on the website for Blumenthal's

signature restaurant and is reiterated in multiple cookbooks he has released. Here Blumenthal disregards the question of if his menus are a performance, accepting their performativity as a fact, and instead pursues if they are the most complex and comprehensive of the performing arts. I cannot fault the bravado of such a towering artist and only wish to observe that his statement leaves no doubt that food is performative in his mind.

I am careful not to make an aesthetic judgment here as the arguments about whether food can be art range wildly and genuinely do not matter in appreciating an immersive experience. If an immersive experience is an art is an entire area ripe for evaluation. The question to be asked is, does the dish under interrogation take its consumer on an affective journey through its components, and how? If it does, and I believe it does, then it follows that a meal can be as immersive as any other event. While food is often a component of immersion, the meal as the immersive vehicle is the focus of this chapter.

In a sense, immersive dining can be considered post-modern cookery if modern cookery is to be noted by its use of theatricality in preparation and presentation. The leap here is that for modernism, a dish is an experience, while in post-modernist cookery, a dish is an experience of something specific (time, place, a feeling) which leads to a larger thing. While a menu of modernist cuisine is finely curated, it is not curated to an imagined endpoint as a post-modern meal would be. If the definitions seem shaky, well, they are. The break between anything and its post-period is always messy and hard to define initially. We seem to be in a culinary liminoid period where chefs like Taylor Persh, whose *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* experience I will talk about later, consider modernism to be the pushing of the technology and techniques of cooking to its very edges and see their job as a post-modern cook to be developing experience freed from any bounds of expectations, including those of

plating and silverware. (Personal interview, April 2022) Here the diner's experience and imagination are ignited through the senses to follow the journey laid before them, each course acting as a scene. Some of these experiences, such as Persh's, embrace the theatrical and even break the menu into acts, while others still try to reserve the fine dining protocols and serve in the traditional course formats. That the Chef is engaging the senses is not in question, as exampled earlier in the quote by Blumenthal; instead, the question is how? The importance of the senses to Blumenthal is well illustrated in the crest of arms he chose upon being made an Officer of the British Empire. The crest includes a sprig of lavender (scent), hands (touch), lyres (sound), an apple (taste), and a magnifying glass (sight). Though the crest is antidotal, he treats it as a recipe for who he is as well as his outlook on cooking. Everything in the crest is well-considered and has multiple meanings; the apple, for example, stands not only for taste but "the spirit of scientific inquiry (think Newton and gravity), both close observation and creativity, nonlinear thinking" (https://thefatduck.co.uk/discover-more). This multisensory consideration defines modern cookery, and its pointed use establishes its post-modern break.

What Happens in the Maelstrom…

The classic adventure science fiction novel by Jules Vern *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* ends with harpooner Ned Land, the story's narrator Professor Aronnax, and his assistant Conseil escaping the Nautilus in a skiff as it disappears into the famed Mosktraumen, a violent whirlpool off the coast of Norway. The Lost Spirits Distillery in Las Vegas, Nevada, picks at the threads of this ending and has guests board the Nautilus as captives of the infamous Captain Nemo in the form of their much-lauded Chef Taylor Persh.

Before launching into the experience of Chef Persh's meal, it might be fruitful to acknowledge the forebears of this kind of experience briefly. Reaching back to prohibition America, the establishment of underground supper clubs proved stunningly popular due to their illicit mixture of cocktails, fine American cuisine, and jazz. As prohibition ended, many underground supper clubs continued to thrive above board. Though it is not within this project's scope to detail all the names and variations of these clubs, many big band legends such as Tony Bennet, Tommy Dorsey, and Louis Armstrong were known to perform there. Relics from this era endure in memory by the names of the Rainbow Room, the Copacabana, and El Morocco in New York. Even divorced from their supper club beginnings, the names persist in pop culture memory. The hidden and illegal nature of supper club beginnings also sparked a rebirth that proliferated through the 1990s and early 2000s. Chefs looking to make names for themselves and build an audience for their cuisine would run underground clubs from people's homes, apartments, rented furniture stores, and any other venue that would allow for a special evening or monthly rental. The ability to keep mobile and hidden was paramount for these dining clubs and added to their mystique. Some clubs promised illegal or difficult-to-source ingredients; others operated on themes. The histories of individual establishments are difficult to track and even more challenging to verify other than to say that there is enough reported to know that they existed and operated to a certain amount of success. Some of them still operate, and instructions on applying for an invitation to these dinners can be found in articles on Eater and Thrillist. Offspring of these clubs include pop-up restaurants, which have led to a new generation of Chef and culinary thinking in the 2010s (including Ludo Lefebvre, whom Chef Persh worked under), and ghost kitchens which came

into popularity during the Covid-19 pandemic and gave voice to chefs attempting a take-out or delivery experience of their cuisine.

Upon entering Lost Spirits Distillery, the diner is led to the Nautilus' galley for a welcome cocktail featuring house-distilled pineapple rum and pineapple juice. The cocktail is potent and sweet, but the long galley way with swaying chandeliers, velvet captain chairs in neat bays of four around port hole windows with humanoid fish swimming past truly set the scene. Here the diners are told to wait until the dining room is open. As each diner arrives, they are welcomed and sat in a bay, brought a welcome drink, and left to watch the ocean floor go by through the bay's porthole. This interlude is not uncomfortable by any means. The apparatus that swings the chandeliers and causes a constant stream of different hand-painted fish to pass the port hole is a beautiful application of classic theatre technology with modern automation. Before too long, the guests are taken back into the dining room, party by party. They are greeted by name and sat at a long wooden table with multiple candelabras. The debris of past candles burnt through remains in pools and piles on the table, some of which reach up the stem and to the wax pan of the new and freshly lit taper. Once everyone is sat, it is here that we are informed of our plight as captives.

Like Land, Aronnax, and Conseil, we can never leave the Nautilus but will be treated and cared for with all the attention and grace that our Nemo can muster. In front of each dinner is a water glass, a teacup, a napkin rolled and held tight by a silver snake, a place card balanced on a crystal pineapple, and a menu on a wooden plate. The pineapple in the welcome drink and on the table, we are told, symbolizes hospitality. This is counterbalanced by the visual metaphor of the unblemished napkin tightly coiled in a snake's grasp. In the novel, Aronnax spends much of his captivity quite taken with Nemo and his charm. Even

when Nemo has exposed himself as a violent and vengeful man, Aronnax still has difficulty pulling away from the charismatic Captain. As the napkin is loosed from the silver snake and laid upon the diner's lap, we lose sight of the snake's grip and slowly succumb to its hold. The menu, when opened, is broken into four parts. These parts will comprise the meal.

Part I: The Underwater Forest

During the opening part of the meal, we are put into the place of Prof. Aronnax and treated to the wonders and joys of our prison. We are introduced to a mixologist who has devised the cocktails for the evening, Alex Velez. Much like Nemo walks Aronnax through the inner workings of the Nautilus, Velez takes us through the process he used to turn navy rum into champagne. As Velez speaks, Chef Persh begins sabering off the cork of the champagne bottles and filling the teacups in front of each diner. The creation of the drink is a long and labor-intensive process that includes altering the chemical makeup of the rum through the addition of milk fats and other trade secrets he would not share but produces a light and bubbly liquid that dances on the palate. He would share the estimated time to make this spirit, which he appraises to be around 16 hours a bottle. Its notes contain intense flavors of vanilla, subtle oak, and raisin, all cleaned by acidic effervescence. It is an amazing product and dangerous as the one thing it does not taste of is alcohol, though it boasts an incredibly high 120 proof. It is a champagne that can be lit aflame. Much like Nemo's Chef could create just about anything out of seaweed, Velez is a master of spirits and can transform them at his Captain's command. In the book, the chef's ability to transform seaweed is necessary to suit Captain Nemo's wish to stay off land completely and be autonomous from all nation's governments. Velez's job does not stop with this themed meal at Lost Spirits Distillery but extends to creating all the cocktails served through the distillery's other events and offerings

and advising on new spirits. Like the chef in the novel, Velez has only one base ingredient to work with: rum. This limitation does not seem to hinder his ability to create, as he revels in the possible.

This rum-based champagne drink is a prime example of what Kristin Hunt terms mimetic food, which in its simplest definition, is food manipulated to represent that which it is not. Hunt expands on this quite a bit, adding that "[I]n many cases, mimesis does not deceive. Rather, it delights or confounds us precisely because the representation is incomplete" (*Alimentary Performances: Mimesis, Theatricality and Cuisine* 10). It is that the food lives in a liminal state between what it is and what it is meant to be that gives the food item interest and complexity. It is not that the rum was turned into champagne but that it was neither rum nor champagne, and yet somehow, both made it extraordinary. The complexity of the substance, its whimsy, and its rarity all contained emotive triggers that alerted each diner to how the dinner would commence. Like all immersive productions, the journey would be individual, but these first few moments would act as priming for the event and aid in unfolding the immersive narrative. In describing mimetic meals, Hunt turns to Augusto Boal and his theories from *Theatre of the Oppressed* of theater as change, ending with the phrase "it is becoming, not being" (28). I wholeheartedly agree with this course and wish to further this exploration by applying Giles Deleuze's idea of becoming to cuisine as a theatrical act. To do so, I must first make clear that challenging the shackles of representational thought makes mimetic dishes complex. Hunt also sees this as a necessary step, "Culinary mimesis, as a multisensory phenomenon that involves examination at close range and in detail rather than a willing suspension of disbelief at a distance as in, for instance, realist proscenium theatre, relies upon this incompleteness to engage the eater in active meaning-making" (10).

The phrase "active meaning-making" is the fulcrum between fine dining and theatre and where I believe cuisine turns immersive. Examining each dish as one examines a scene in a play and how it interacts or subverts the previous and subsequent dish provides a narrative. Each ingredient is an actor in the scene, and the plating is akin to scenography, as the much-used maxim reminds "we eat with our eyes." When considering the role of service as stage crew and stage managers of a dining experience, the parallels coalesce, and the line between dining and theatre blurs.

The labor involved in the rum-champagne or rum-pagne or whatever the concoction's eventual proper name will be is another point that bears examination. The captives are consuming not only a luxurious invention, but hours of intensive labor by the teacup full. It is fair to say that a cup never goes empty during this meal. Bottle after bottle is sabered while captives talk and slosh the precious liquid from side to side. Each drop that falls from the side of the glass represents concentrated care and commitment to an ideal sloppily sundered upon the table to be soaked up by the pressed white napkins of the servers. The power play between Chef and diner, Nemo and captives, is complicated here as it will be throughout the meal. The prisoners are free to waste their captors' labor but are not free (at least in this play space). Consuming is much more than simply eating and drinking; in an immersive space, all is consumed to create the narrative after the event. To a certain extent, labor, culture, fantasy, self, and trust are also on the menu in each case study.

The first composed dish of the evening, the amuse-bouche, was a macaron cocktail. This dish comprised two dime-sized macarons plated upon a tall wooden stand covered with a glass cloche. The macarons looked innocent enough, but upon the cloche unveiling, Chef Persh warned that they packed a punch and contained as much uncooked alcohol as a shot of

navy rum. The texture of the macaron was perfect, with the slight crunch of its shell followed by a satisfying chew. The interior flavor exploded with rum. A burning sensation of alcohol coated the tongue, numbing it almost like an anesthetic. The second macaron carried no flavor as the lingering burn of overproof alcohol deadened the tastebuds, and the nostrils were full of the scent of astringent alcohol and a hint of lime. It served as a purely technical exploration of expertise. It is said that macarons are to be judged solely on texture, and here the Chef has set up a way for us to do just that. In temporarily deadening the pallet, she has taken the enjoyment of the macaron down to its base element, its texture. If the texture is off, there is no flavor here to hide behind. With this amuse-bouche, Chef Persh looked not to delight the pallet but to prove her technical superiority. She, like Nemo, is a master at what she does and is not to be questioned. If a chef's credentials can be instantly qualified, hers were with this macaron. The use of alcohol to lessen inhibitions must also be recognized in this dish. The Chef's power over her diners is both metaphorical and chemical. The diner does have the choice to not partake in the course, but through social pressure, etiquette, and the trail of emotive prompts leading to this decision, it is an unlikely choice. The diner, much like the food, succumbs to the will of the Chef and allows itself to be manipulated. In this case, I dare say, the food required much more persuasion than the diners.

Service itself was an intricate dance aboard our Nautilus, following some fine dining protocols, such as having all the dishes of a course touch the table at the same time while eschewing others, like the direction from which service flowed (traditionally serving new dishes to the left of the diner while clearing plates to the right). The ritual of service developed always put crew between pairs of diners, so depending on where one was sitting, service could be performed from the right or left, as would clearing; this also gave way to a

feeling of always being watched. The crew was silent unless spoken to, monitoring the proceeding dishes and reactions and refilling champagne glasses and water cups. Silverware, when needed, would be brought out to accompany the dish for which it was meant to be used. Throughout the meal, very few of the sixteen courses required silverware. Before service, the crew would disappear into the kitchen with the Chef, where muffled yelling could be heard. These interludes would always end with a loud and reverberating "Yes, Chef!" before the crew reentered the dining room. Through this, an air of enthusiastic capitulation was fostered both in the service staff and the served.

The subsequent four courses under the moniker of the underwater forest are each unique and luxurious. The first is a perfectly poached quail egg covered in Osetra gold caviar served in a Fabergé egg. The Chef explicitly provided directions on how to eat each dish. First, the Fabergé egg had to be opened, revealing in its center a quail egg covered in caviar. The Chef referred to this dish as eggs in eggs in eggs, which was an absolute decadent success. Opulence and luxury are the rewards for obedience on this Nemo's Nautilus. A riff on baklava came next, where the nut filling was replaced with honeyed chicken, strawberry rum jam, and more caviar. This dish was less successful than the previous one as it failed to be reminiscent of baklava. It was similar to the Greek and Turkish treat in its syrupy sweetness, but its texture became soggy under all the heavy jam and honey syrup, and the tenderness of the chicken only compounded the textural dilemma. The caviar was buried in the dish, and its usual salt-forward thrust could not propel it to the forefront of the taste buds. The crispy filo dough that assembles the layers of traditional baklava was present but so saturated that it lost all individuality. As a singular dish, it was a failure in an ambitious menu that comprised very few, but as a storytelling beat, this ill-manipulated dish shares much with

the diners at the table who are slowly bending to the will of their captor, Chef Parsh, as Aronnax did to Nemo. The over-saturated and unrecognizable baklava might be a term applied to all that feasted around the tables, downing cup after cup of high-proof rum champagne and caviar-laden dishes. The meal was quickly redeemed from here with an eel salad open-faced sandwich. Here tuna was replaced with a barbequed eel to make a sweeter and more umami-focused version of a classic tuna salad. Served on a thin slice of rye and topped with black sesame, the open-faced sandwich floated somewhere between a classic American dish and sushi. Its flavor profile, texture, and smell were calling upon both food genres, evoking memories from both. A truly liminal or at least liminoid sandwich for those who doubt food can be a religious experience (here, I would evoke the use of food in religious rituals such as Christian transubstantiation, but that is for another day). The final dish in this part of the meal again called upon pure decadence, as the menu labeled it a "Foie Pillow." The pillow, evocative of comfort, was made of puffed potato and filled with a semi-tart blueberry compote on top of a generous layer of foie gras. The sublime balance of the dish could not be underestimated as the puffed pillow crunched into the sweet and tart blueberry and unctuous, slightly metallic liver.

What is more astonishing than the dish is how readily the diners follow Chef Persh's instructions on eating the dish by picking up the pillow with your index figure and thumb and biting it in half as the flavors change on the second bite. The table moves in near unison to the initial bite; the diners become subtly aware of the Chef's control over them, and some giggle while others shift uncomfortably in their seat. The flavors do change with the second bite, bringing the sweetness forward and pushing the textural crunch to the back of the experience. Most importantly, the diners are now following the Captain without question,

just as Prof. Aronnax finds himself doing throughout the majority of the novel the dinner is based.

Part II: The Devilfish and Part III: Some Days Ashore

The next two parts of the meal follow the same formula with opulent presentations, ingredients, and rum-filled pastry. This repetition is part and parcel of immersion and is a series of becomings in the Deleuzian sense. This is to say that each course takes its consumer into a flow of experience; these experiences are dictated by what is put in front of the consumer, as well as the virtual plane of possibility that is not presented to the consumer. (Colebrook 2). The variety of dishes within the repetition of the formula highlights the becomings as each renders a differing actual and virtual within the same constraints. This can only be clear through memory as it reduces difference through time, revealing the actual and the virtual for what they are or could have been.

The diner here is both free to enjoy a luxurious meal and a captive audience to a tyrannical captain whose every invention is to be savored. The lines between reality and fantasy blur and merge in constant flux. Transformations are never stable and complete but continue to proliferate. The emotive map created by this menu is difficult to discern in time with the meal, as is always true of immersive experiences. The contestant fluctuation of states overwhelms and confounds. This experience is only clarified through the lens of memory after its conclusion.

Part II was the seafood portion of the meal, highlighting an octopus tentacle served on a miniature sword (this is a callback to the devilfish who attack the Nautilus in the novel). The tentacle is lanced into its base in such a way as to sit upright upon the sword allowing for the end of its perfectly grilled arm to wave as it was set upon the table, giving the tentacle the

appearance of life as it is set in front of the diner. The sword's base is mounted into a specially designed holder, allowing it to be removed. The sword itself is unnecessarily sharp at its point and along both edges, allowing it to easily cut the lip of the dinner if they became too brave in approaching the tentacle. This bit of danger in the meal is undercut by the Beatle's "Octopuses Garden" as musical accompaniment, which provides a darkly humorous touch to the entire ordeal. As most dinners finish their tentacle unscathed, some nick their mouth, adding the taste of blood to the sweet seafood flesh. This seems only appropriate as, in the novel, the only known casualties on the Nautilus are victims of the devilfish attacks.

Next, uni is served on a plate whose center contains a mold of the Chef's mouth and tongue. The uni is placed directly on the tongue, and no silverware is provided. The only way to experience the dish is to apply the mouth directly to the plate and suck the salty uni from the Chef's mouth. This course is entirely about self-subjugation to the Chef. The open-mouth kiss required to imbibe the dish adds an entirely emotional flavor to the course. The mushy texture of the uni and cold, hard ceramic tongue add the unexpected element of a, perhaps, unwanted kiss. The intentionality behind this decision to have the dish served from the Chef's literal mouth is undeniable, and the reaction it garners around the table varies greatly, but no one flat-out refuses the kiss, if for no other reason than sheer etiquette. A few less provocative offerings follow the uni dish: a course of buttered and garlicked escargot, a spiral-cut truffled scallop, and a whole fried and stuffed shrimp head to be eaten in a single bite.

The final dish listed for this part of the evening is whale. Here Chef Persh launches into a monologue detailing the lengths she has attempted to journey to procure whale meat. The main issue with finding whale meat in Las Vegas, Nevada, is that it is illegal to buy and

consume in the United States. She details some less-than-legal channels for procurement that still proved inaccessible, and so the whale meat was replaced with a food that is said to contain a similar texture and flavor structure, A5 Kobe beef sourced from the famed Kagoshima farms seared and served rare. Kagoshima farm's beef is much lauded and difficult to procure due to its rarity caused by the animals' extreme care to yield such meat. This was a delectable bite whose treatment allowed for the flavors of the famed cattle's grass diet, rich fat, and naturally tender flesh to be experienced in its purest form. Just as Nemo rewards his captives with delights for good behavior and their willing self-suppression, so does Chef Persh. How much of the Chef's efforts in acquiring the illicit product for her guests are fact or fantasy is inconsequential; what is in play here is the affective nudge of doing something morally questionable. It is the want to taste whale meat despite its protected status, to take dominion over the sea and its creatures as Nemo did, regardless of the ecological impact that the diners are confronted. The dark recesses of the diner peek from the corners of consciousness to play in this fantasy of ascendency. You start the meal as a captive, but in devouring the creatures put before you gain command. With every bite becoming more like Nemo himself, bent on control at any cost, even your moral center. To examine this in Hegelian terms as filtered through Remo Bodei's analysis of his master-slave relationship, "what is at stake is the attainment of self-consciousness through a process of recognition, that is, detachment from the mirror-like dependence on the consciousness of another, a master in whose consciousness we are reflected" (Bodei 34). In placing ourselves willing in a captive/captor arraignment, we have navigated a headspace that has allowed for a great deal of self-evaluation and discovery, some perhaps pleasurable and some on the other end of the spectrum. The moral implications far surpass a momentary walk on the wild side, uncovering

a more profound yearning for dominion. Control is an almost laughable prospect in most people's lives in any true sense. The Neo-liberal fantasies that fuel Las Vegas, Nevada, where the dinner is taking place, could fill a volume larger than one of the resorts on its famed strip but all lead to the same end, control. Whether it is control over one's finical future, sexual partners, or gustatory choices, every billboard on the highway for miles before arrival into the city dangles the idea of having control over some aspect of existence. The idea of control itself may not exist in any tangible way, depending on the philosopher chosen to view it from, regardless that is what Las Vegas is selling, and it would not be the first time someone sold a fantasy.

Part III of the meal was less adventurous than the previous two until its finale. It starts with a mai tai in a sculpted oversized parrot head cup and another boozy pastry (this time a doughnut). Though whimsical, it would be difficult to call this course original or inspiring based on what has come before it. The repetition here is not by accident, but the dinners like Prof. Aronnax are meant to start feeling the novelty of the dinner waning. With the moral provocations of the previous courses completed, a return to stasis, albeit a new stasis, as no repetition is ever truly the same, is necessary. The following dish reinforces this theme with quail, which is delicious but mimics the flavor profile and preparation of the chicken baklava from earlier. As Prof. Aronnax, Land, and Conseil dined on seaweeds day and night, the repetition in the description of the dishes throughout the novel builds from a fascination with the new and unique to everything onboard, becoming stale and claustrophobic. The candles continue to drip onto the table, the wax forms ever-enlarging mounds, servers stand behind the diners as they eat, glasses never empty, and the room grows small.

As the kingdom of the sea reduces to the prison of a cell within the submarine, a breaking point is reached and punctuated with a moment of witnessed violence, though we are not witnessing Chef Persh butchering the entire crew of an attacking rival restaurant as Prof. Aronnax observed Nemo do to an attacking warship; instead the diners are treated to a theatrical interlude where a perfectly roasted pig head is paraded around the room by two servers who stop after circling the table by a section of the wall that is revealed to be a curtain. Behind the curtain stands the Chef with butcher implements in hand, standing at a carving station. The curtain is drawn, lights and music highlight the savage scene as the Chef goes to work, and the next course is carved and plated before our eyes. The carving is an intricate and exaggerated dance of barbarity. Its task-like nature adds to the cruelty, as the Chef's focus and smoothness allow the diners to know this is not her first carving. This dance combines all the intricate movements that the diners witnessed during service. The task-centric choreography hides itself by accomplishing its goals, but in this ritualistic carving, the diners realize they are no more regarded than the pig head.

Three cuts of pork from the pig's head: its inner cheek, outer cheek, and jowl with accompanying sauces of garlic, basil, and raspberry are served. Service starts with the outer cheek, as it contains the least amount of fat, then the inner and finishes with the jowl, which is by and large the fattest piece. This is the most rustic of the dishes, and a pisco sour-like cocktail made with a strong astringent like rum is served to help cleanse the diner's palates of the lingering fats that cling and coat the interior of the mouth between bites. This dish, in many ways, is about what is left behind and what we do to clean ourselves of it. The drink is not off-putting but also more meant for utility than pleasure. The lingering fat itself is not problematic, other than its deadening effect on the tastebuds to what comes next. As the pork

is to be seen as a product of violence, is it right to wash away its lingering effect? Is it noble to sit with coated senses and suffer the affects of trauma? These are all the questions the diners face as they are given choices on how to proceed. Chef Persh recommends sipping the drink after every bite as Nemo swears off the wicked world of men. In the end, both the choice and the journey are personal.

The final bite of this course is ingenious and meant to cleanse the palate thoroughly but also intoxicate the diner; it is a tiny slice of gelatin pie. This pie measures less than a quarter inch in width and a half inch in length. Its minuscule dimensions are incredibly deceptive as its contents are that of an entire mai tai, including its total volume of alcohol. This little bite is a gift like those that Nemo presented to Prof. Aronnax to continue attaining his allegiance and mailability. It solves the problem of the previous dish, much as Nemo's gifts were to soften the reaction to his previous action. Suppose one hung less upon the Chef's recommendations, suffered the violence of their sustenance, and did not cleanse their palate after the last dish. In that case, the sweetness of the mai tai becomes more apparent, and its astringent qualities become secondary and somewhat pleasant. On the other hand, an obedient captive would be met with a robust and very alcohol-forward dish, complete with the intense burning that high-proof liquors produce on the tongue. This turns the pain of subservience into a literal experience, complete with a temporary deadening of the tastebuds as the alcohol filters its way off the palate. As we enter the meal's final phase, this gift is novel, exciting, and appreciated for its technical brilliance but not as endearing as the Chefs' previous inventions. Its capacity to cause pain is alarming and some outright squeals are heard as diners manage the dish. Most diners who made an audible reaction followed it up

with a genial giggle, but the Chef made her point, and the affective punch of her pie was felt with the force of a torpedo upon the palate.

Part IV: The Coral Realm

The final act of the meal is dessert, and it is here where the Chefs' and mixologists' technical skills take center stage. Half a ceramic sea urchin sits on a vented wooden tray with a shallow white ramekin in the center. In the ramekin is a small piece of seared uni atop a crème brulee whose standard fowl egg custard has been replaced in true Nautilus fashion with uni, which is often referred to as urchin roe (though this is a common misnomer as it is the animal's reproductive organs including its ovaries and testicles). Next to the uni brulee is a small mug with a concoction that Velez refers to as liver con leche. Finally, a small scallop shell-shaped spoon is laid across a plank. Once the tray is rested in front of the diner, another server with a large kettle full of hot coffee comes along and pours the coffee into the base of the tray. This activates pieces of dry ice hidden by the slats and causes a coffee-scented fog to arise from the tray that visually mimics the fog that rolls in off the bays of the locations where sea urchin is harvested around the pacific. The scent of coffee is a nod to traditional desert service, but as it dissipates, the alchemy of the dishes presented to the diners becomes apparent.

First, we shall explore the liver con leche, whose name is misleading as there is no milk in its ingredients but a mixture of foie gras and rum that is exceptionally creamy and sweet. It is closest related to an exceptionally luxurious egg nog. Its velvety texture is provided by the emulsified fats in the foie gras, and its depth of flavor ranges from the umami undertones of the liver to the vanilla notes and delightful sweetness of the rum that brightens the cocktail but never becomes cloying. It is art in a glass. Its aroma is

overpowered by the coffee mist, providing a slight latte feeling to the cocktail. The more the coffee scent dissipates, the more the complexity of the liver con leche's flavor unfolds. The earthy sweetness of the foie gras blends with the vanilla of the rum and the slight metallic undertones that the liver is known to carry. Despite being a combination of liver and alcohol, the liquid is light and frothy. It soothingly coats the tongue after the burning of the mai tai pie and is bizarrely comforting, despite being a genuinely new beverage for its imbibers. It is undeniably affectively full, but I am drawing a blank trying to fit the cocktail in the narrative. To be served such an exciting and revolutionary concoction is rare, and it is easy to see its value as a spectacle in terms of the meal. However, as far as forwarding the narrative, that to this point did not allow many loose ends, it is puzzling, to say the least. As each immersive journey is personal, it is possible that some other Jules Verne fan attending the diner found great relevance in the dish that I am yet to or may never connect with, but that is always a risk in preparing immersive narratives.

Next comes the uni crème brûlée, whose sugar crack top perfectly balanced the fresh sea flavor of the uni custard. The salt sea was front and center in the dish, accentuated by a well-seared piece of uni delicately laid atop the sugar shell. This mixture of sweet and savory, salt and sugar, can describe Aronnax's time on the Nautilus. His excitement at the wonders Nemo presented allowed him to overlook the atrocities the man had and could enact. A rhythm was developed in this repetition. If we are in a constant state of becoming, we are also consistently losing ourselves and remaking ourselves as a "repetition which includes the difference between two words and inscribes that difference at the heart of a poetic Idea (original emphasis)" (Deleuze 21). Deleuze establishes rhyme in this passage but expands quickly past as langue (even the same word repeated) is never the same. At its heart,

the two protagonists of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, Land and Aronnax, are opposites. Land is straightforward with a strong sense of self and morality, while Aronnax, though learned, is more morally flexible if ends justify his means and much less sure of himself in the world. The true conflict comes in convincing Aronnax that it is time to leave the Nautilus behind and escape. Land succeeds and is often the protagonist in stage and film versions of the story while disappearing for large sections of the novel. The salt of the uni and the sweetness of the land fight it out in the mouth of the diner, and ultimately, the sugar prevails as it should in a dessert course. Much like the battle of morals and will between Land and Aronnax, we are the poetic idea always between who we were and who we will be.

The meal is then ended in a traditional French manner with a trio of mignardise served in a multi-tier wooden box that opened, revealing an ornately colored singular chocolate on each tier. The chocolates are as unique as the rest of the meal; the first is a mixture of bonita and dark chocolate, the second a dark chocolate dipped soft shell crab, and the final a mixture of seaweed and milk chocolate. Under each chocolate was a zoomed-in print of Hokusai's shunga ukiyo-e (spring woodblock) from the Edo period, *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*, which is often noted as a forerunner of tentacle hentai or erotica. The devouring of the chocolates reveals the sexual joining of the sea monster and a human. This image of pleasure and mutual satisfaction brought about through conjoining with a monster is also theatrically relevant at the end of this journey; instead of running from Nemo as Prof. Aronnax eventually did, we have seen the journey through to its end. This is not the first time food has been sexualized in this meal. Earlier the uni served on the mold of the Chef's mouth and tongue acted as a forceful introduction to this theme. The licking of salty uni from the cold plaster lips could set the diners up to see themselves as the mollusk-like creature in the

woodblock feeding at the fisherman's wife's nether region. The act of revealing the image by consuming the chocolate delicately placed to cover the sexual scene allows the diner to discover the illustration and themselves in it. Another reflection of self, ripe for recognition as Hegel might see it. It also nods to the pleasure of both consuming and being consumed, which in this case is highly sexualized but also attends to the Neo-Liberal fantasies of a job well done. As Kyla Wazana Tompkins points out, "eating functions as a metalanguage for genital pleasure and sexual desire" (5). These two explicitly sexual moments stand-alone until the sensuality of the ingredients served through the evening and the seduction of service are considered. Plate after plate of aphrodisiacs and luxuries have been placed in front of the diner as gifts for submission to their captor. This end course is not a mistake but a culmination of onboarding for devotion to the Captain in all realms.

Finally, the Chef asks if the diners trust her and feel adventurous; those that do line up near the pig head, which remains upon the carving station. She begins with deft agility to carve more portions of meat from the head, careful not to reveal where morsels are retrieved. As she hands them out with tweezers, she explains where they derive. The first is the pig oyster taken from its temple, a succulent and prized piece usually saved for the Chef's consumption. The second would have been more difficult for most to digest without the deception. This salty, fatty fragment was easily the meal's highlight for all who dared try it. This piece, of course, was the pig's eye. The shock value of what was consumed subsides quickly as most dinners realize that the parts of the animal, they would usually avoid are also their favorite of the evening. There is an educational element to this portion of the evening, mimicking the opening of the Nautilus' side so the captives could glimpse the bottom of the sea floor.

This final interlude is as close as the meal comes to addressing the underlying colonial aspect of both Verne's novel and how food has progressed through the centuries around the world. Bits from the pig head contrast the luxurious ingredients that begin the meal, and though Ned Land in the novel revels in the wild game pigs he hunts, it is not their heads he butchers to take back to the submarine with him. Ending a fine dining experience with offal goes beyond a test of the Chef's skills. It reaches into the culinary history of exclusion, where these cuts were what was left for much of the population to create sustenance. Relatively new culinary traditions like American barbecue sprung from the need to create palatable food from unpalatable ingredients (at least in the view of the upper classes). Much of what is viewed as comfort foods come from these traditions, which often originate in slavery. While Nemo is of undefined origin (at least until Verne's sequel, *The Mysterious Island*), we know of his anti-colonial sentiment and wish to live apart from the world and all its nations. His crew is not of a singular source but is described as having varied (often European) features. While the meal does little to address this most interesting element of the novel, it does exist in certain choices and can be read into the evening as the ethnically diverse service staff and guests join in serving and consuming the outside world course after course. To Chef Persh's credit, this meal, for all its overindulgence, does not fall victim to some of the more insidious trends in food culture, as pointed out by Kyla Wazana Tompkins in her book *Racial Indigestions*, such as presenting any of the dishes as containing foreign flavors that can be mastered through consumption or subscribing to "local" or organic foodways or other eco nativist formations (2). Of course, this small badge of honor is overshadowed by the larger, looming question that overindulgence as entertainment presents; what of the level of social inequity championed by such meals? Not to mention the multiple

discourses alluded to, such as obesity, diabetes, and hunger. All of these exist in the context of this meal and deserve further examination, but as it does not pertain to the immersive elements (at least not until much deeper into the remembering/reliving process), I feel safe though not satisfied leaving the conversation there.

After the final bite, allegiance to this Nemo is complete, and the meal is ended with a final strong drink of navy rum and sherry. A toast is made, and all are led from the dining room back into the belly of the ship and left to wander around the other literary-based spaces that Lost Spirits Las Vegas has developed. The captives are in bondage no more, but the story of their evening is just beginning to form as they discuss the meal on the way out.

Time Traveling without a DeLorean…

Next's "World's Fair" menu allowed diners to culinarily travel back to the spectacles of the World's Fairs of the past through modernist gastronomic techniques. Each of the ten courses concentrated on different aspects of the fair: a different pavilion, an event that occurred, or an invention that was showcased. The meal began with a concentration on Chicago, home to the restaurant and arguably America's most significant World Fair, the 1893 Columbian Exposition. From this 1893 fair came Cracker Jack, Aunt Jemima pancake mix, the Ferris wheel, Wrigley chewing gum, Pabst Blue Ribbon, the automatic dishwasher, spray paint, and the popularizing of electricity through the illuminated city or the White City as it came to be known. Unlike the previous exploration of Lost Spirits *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, where each dish led to the next, and the diner could almost be considered Aristotelian in its form, Next's offerings are more self-contained. While each dish works toward the theme, they are not following a scripted narrative. This is no less theatrical than *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea's* dishes but functions in a more episodic format. This is not

surprising as fine dining menus, at their best, are episodic journeys. Achatz's intervention into fine dining is the participatory elements in dishes and tableside preparations that turn the audience into participants (or, to bring back a pair I rely on heavily while discussing immersive experiences, audience/participant). "Any choice the diner makes serves the dish's purpose here; success, failure, and everything in between each became an interesting new performance of eating" (Hunt 73). As Hunt explains, Achatz dishes are a theatrical no-lose situation, and every choice the audience/participant makes serves the performance and overall immersive narrative. Here the dishes provide a sense of participation that surpasses typical dining etiquette. They invite improvisations, challenge impulses, and play with the diner in the most actorly sense. This, combined with Achatz's fidelity to a theme, makes Next unique in the fine dining landscape and is where it transcends the boundaries into the theatrical.

The first two dishes of Next's World's Fair menu start the diner planted firmly in the 1893 World's Fair. The first is named "Tesla's Egg" and is modeled after the image of Tesla's alternating current (A/C) generator, which powered the White City. To help give the appearance of this giant and iconic piece of electrical engineering, multiple plates (a charger, dinner, salad plate) are stacked upon each other with a square folded napkin between the charger and dinner plate to suggest a gear. Atop these plates is a round tureen with its handles perfectly centered, dissecting the square napkin. In the tureen is a copper-leafed pom soufflé surrounded by a mushroom foam. A spoon is set alongside the dish so the diner may crack the soufflé and enjoy its caviar center. As the soufflé is cracked, it moves and spins in the foam imitating the center of the generator as it produces current. The wait staff quickly gives instructions on how to eat the dish and its historical background and is careful not to linger to

avoid interrupting the diner's exploration of the dish. It is hard not to play with the spinning soufflé as the dish is spooned, and play is a significant facet of Achatz's food. The circuit between Chef, service, and patron is vital as all three work harmoniously to create the experience that will become the dish. The following course is titled "Notable Food Unveilings of 1893" and includes the cracker jack play that begins this chapter and two other food inventions from this World's Fair. The two other bites included in this course are a Vienna sausage miniature hotdog, as the Chicago-style hotdog premiered here, and a beer-battered snow crab, as it was here that Pabst gained its blue-ribbon status. All three are served on a topographical map of Chicago. This course was straightforward in its delight as each bite came with a historical antidote, like the hotdog being developed because a sausage seller was tired of losing money on white gloves he would give people so they could handle the hot sausage. The solution was to plate the meat in a much cheaper bun. An iconic American food staple was born through this simple, economical solution. Paying homage to the gloves, the bun of Next's hotdog is cut into the shape of a hand. In order to give the dish the feel of the original snap of a perfect sausage casing, a sliver of daikon radish is hidden in the bun. The hotdog is set in a paper liner, calling upon how it is popularly served by street vendors and ballparks across the country. Hunt refers to this kind of dish as "[B]oth a reenactment and a revision" (77). In scaling the hotdog to a fifth of its size, several issues arise that Achazt answers through how he re-envisions the dish. The radish, for instance, provides the snap that the sausage casing cannot due to its size reduction. The snap is vital to the texture of the wiener and is often seen as the mark of a well-made sausage. Achatz revises the classic American hotdog in another way by replacing classic yellow mustard with hot Chinese mustard giving a spicy note that blends with the daikon radish flavor. The third

and final bite is the beer-battered crab. It is plated on a crushed Pabst can, and the bite is first the sweet sea meat of the crab balanced perfectly by the hoppy notes of the beer. This was the first American-brewed beer to win an award at a World's Fair and sent a message to the brewing institutions of the world that America was on its way, much in the same way the judgment of Paris did for the California wine industry in the mid-1970s. These three iconic foods and all they represent are embedded into American culture. It would be astounding to sit through an hour of prime-time network content and not see a beer commercial or go to a sporting event that did not have hotdogs or Cracker Jack in America. These foods are also synonymous with patriotic celebrations and often feature special cans, bottles, boxes, or wrapping designs to celebrate specific holidays.

From Chicago, the diners are transported forty years further back in time and four thousand miles east to the Crystal Palace in London, England, for the 1851 World's Fair. Here they are served "English High Tea." This tea contains no tea but is a playful take on chicken soup. A server places a teacup before the diner and drops two chicken fat cubes into the cup. A sachet full of dehydrated vegetables sits in the cup; the sachet is made of potato starch and will dissolve once soaked and heated with liquid. The liquid, a rich chicken bone broth, is poured from a piping hot teapot. A luxurious chicken soup is created as a teaspoon mixes the broth with the fat and vegetables. A biscuit is paired with the "tea" in the British tradition. This biscuit contains a shortbread base but is covered in foie gras, shaped into an intricate design, and gold leafed. The playfulness of the dish is undeniable; it is memetic two ways as both tea service and chicken soup. Being two things perfectly, but neither of those things ultimately is the very essence of Next. This dish is both fantasy and reality. The very act of sipping the soup from the ornate teacup is kinesthetically confusing. The very

quotidian action of drinking tea is confused by the soup, and the expectation of tea being contained in the cup is difficult to overcome. The biscuit is less out of place as the foie gras pairs beautifully with the shortbread and makes for a slightly sweet bite with a satisfying crunch. As Hunt describes, Achatz "pushes beyond imitation to the creation of something new" (78-79). That something new is the diner's experience while enjoying the dish. Achatz presses the friction between the kinesthetic triggers of drinking tea and the affective triggers of chicken soup. Whether the diner ever reconciles the two is inconsequential, as their ongoing journey with the dish is what matters. As the immersive narrative takes hold, the acts of reinvention that occur during the course become apparent, as does its connection to 1850's England and the golden age of Queen Victoria's rule, fueled by the industrial revolution. Just as the diners are making sense of the teacup soup, England, at the time of the World's Fair, is seeing the results of their push to mechanize and the new materials, building processes, and inventions of the time.

The meal continues in this manner, jumping from World's Fair to World's Fair with inventive dishes that invite the diner to become an audience/participant and play with their food. Some dishes include spectacles like a bright LED bulb that backlights the "Edison Bulb" dish, served on a piece of clear acrylic, so the squid and nam prik glow. Then comes "Take Your Medicine," which is a riff on the false medical claims surrounding things like cod oil at the World's Fair. Miracle cures for what ails you have far from disappeared from society, and this dish reminds the diner of the power of belief and the will to find an easy solution. Next comes "The Chicken Exhibition," which references Paris' Exposition Universelle but veers toward homage to Auguste Escoffier, who single-handedly changed fine dining by having food plated in the kitchen. Though Eiffel and his tower were the stars

of this fair, it was Escoffier's innovations that upper-class attendees brought back to their home countries, starting a revolution in how dinner was served. This dish was a riff on the jellied chicken supreme created by Escoffier, which would have a layer of jellied foie gras between the chicken breast and skin. Here Achatz layers in a tarragon jelly instead of the goose liver but keeps the rest of the dish intact, including a classic perigord black truffle. This dish was followed by a visit to the Danish pavilion for the "Lammenkod Smorrebrod" an open-faced lamb and pickled beet sandwich. The star of this dish was the lavender scent produced by bringing over a large, warm, fur-lined bag that contained and maintained the scent throughout the course. The bag's contents were inedible, but as the bag was unzipped (the zipper being another innovation from the 1893 World's Fair), the scent of lavender engulfed the entire table.

The final savory dish of the evening paid tribute to the executive Chef of Next, Ed Tinoco's heritage, and upbringing, "Imperial Palace Pavilion, Flushing NY, Worlds Fair 1965". Though Tinoco was born long after the fair, he is a Flushing native, and this course takes into account one of Flushing's longest-standing reminders of its World Fair. This pavilion marks a critical historical point in the United States' relationship with Japan, which was still viewed as "a defeated nation" (Emerging from the Shadows: Japan Pavilion Promotional Materials at the 1964/65 New York World's Fair 467). Here the country took the opportunity to showcase itself as a technological and economic player in all aspects, from automotive to textile and petrochemical, while also showcasing cultural aspects and cuisine that would soon become commonplace in urban locals. As Dr. Walters points out at the end of her piece on the Japanese Pavilion, "Ironically, as Americans toured a Fair that predicted a future led by the strength of American industry, the reality was one outlined with in the

confines of the Japan Pavilion" (472). The influence of Japanese culture and cuisine on the American palate cannot be understated. The American obsession with umami flavors in the last twenty years might be traced back to the miso paste and black bean curd marinated dishes served in the Japan Pavilion during the fair.

Chef Tinoco's dish celebrating this turning point and monument to his childhood home collaborates with the diner interestingly. Playing with the idea of time, the dish, which is a perfectly cooked wagyu short rib, is plated at the top of a large dish, and around it, completing a circle, are seven different accompaniments that range from sauces to chilies and pickled vegetables. The server mentions that the dish functions like a clock. One can work their way around the clock in any way they desire, but with each bite, the short rib that stands in for the Imperial Palace diminishes. To enjoy the Palace is to destroy it, slowly perhaps, even thoughtfully, but the act of destruction through time is clear. A warm, soft boa bun is served alongside the short rib on a separate plate to buttress the dish. A diner can also accompany elements around the dish with the bun, carrying their flavor uninterrupted. The rate and sequence of destruction are the diners to control, but destruction is guaranteed. The final dishes of the evening are the "High Striker" and "Centennial Wheel," both serving as dessert courses full of spectacle. "High Striker" features a hammer used to shatter a freeze-dried merengue and play a miniature version of the carnival game that comes to the table with the dessert. The satisfying crack of meringue matches the joy of ringing the striker's bell with a hard hit. It is a dish that elicits giggles and calls to mind the all-American image of winning a prize for a sweetheart at a local fair. The cracked chocolate meringue mixes with a light pine nut ice cream where its silky bitter sweetness evaporates off the tongue leaving behind an earthy savory element and a sliver of strawberry.

The "Centennial Wheel" is a mignardise collection that comes to the table plated on different plateaus of a two-foot diameter toy Ferris wheel. These include a play on a taffy apple, a rhubarb cotton candy, a funnel cake, and chewing gum. Again, here we see Americana interspersed with innovations from World's Fairs. The taffy apple and funnel cake are actual, though gourmet, representations of what the menu promises. These delightful fair staples bring memories of childhood, fun, and perhaps the bravado of challenging carnival rides after a belly full of sweets. Machine-spun cotton candy debuted at the 1904 fair as Fairy Floss, but here Next gives the classic treat a midwestern spin by flavoring it with rhubarb. The chewing gum is a marshmallow wrapped in a gelatin sheet to flavor it, referencing Wrigley's 1893 debut. This dish serves as a farewell and sets the diner off toward the rest of their evening. It is not heavy or challenging like some of the dishes of the evening but playful and reminiscent, even of memories the diner might not have. The 1893 World's Fair established Chicago as a city to reckon with, rebuilt after the tragedy of the 1871 fire. It gained the moniker the windy city, not because of the great gusts that blow off lake Michigan but because of what it can boast. The Fair helped make good on these claims. The World's Fair was a proving ground for Chicago. The choice of this theme is no accident: "Obviously, with us going through a pandemic and into a hopefully now a better time, our creative process was on how we can showcase that through food, we felt that with us trying to recreate ourselves with and bring new technology in a way with new concepts, the World's Fair was the perfect theme" (Ed Tinoco in an interview with Tom Barnas WGN). This menu is as much about moving forward as exploring the past, immersing the diner as an active participant in the process. The destruction of the old and the creation of the new go hand in hand.

Next offers a sanitized view of the various world fairs explored on their menu. The history of world fairs and their exhibits is problematic, to say the least. The book *Fair America* describes the midway plaisance of the 1893 Colombian Exposition as "an array of exotic shows from faraway places, including Algerian women doing the *danse du ventre* (original emphasis), or belly dance, and some native villages, where mostly white fairgoers could take comfort in observing the so-called primitive and savage races work and play in social Darwinian setting that seemed to validate current ideas about racial hierarchies" (Rydell 35). Scenes like this might give new meaning to the white city moniker. Though it is easy to joke about from a comfy chair in the future, the damage incurred through these fair midway offerings is a pure tragedy of which we still see the repercussions today. According to Bridget R. Cooks, the 1893 Colombian Exposition was where American journalism coalesced what white and black behavior was and how to identify it (Fixing Race: Visual representation of African Americans at the World's Colombian Exposition, Chicago, 1893 97-98). The essentialism that these tropes depended on was then reinforced by what was offered on the midway and what was sanctioned to be displayed by the fair board, which held no seat for an African American representative. The lack of representation caused a call for a boycott from Ida B. Wells and the arrangement of a special day by Fredrick Douglass highlighting African American excellence. While this is not the focus of this chapter, it is essential to point out that the optimistic and glowing versions of the fairs served plate after plate at Next are ones of imagination and idealization. This does not take away from Chef Achazt's and Tinoco's goals, but if we are to fulfill their wish and build a better future, perhaps it would be wise to remember the divots of the past. In eating one's way through

history, even a highly curated history, the marvels of innovation and excitement for what lies ahead bubble forth. All that's left is to ask what is next.

Pop-ups and Valiant Failures…

So far, I have concentrated on fine dining as the vehicle for immersive experiences in dining. This is because it is in this realm where diners are most accepting of challenging dishes. Both experiences explored above are prepaid ticketed events, providing another layer of insulation against failure. Both events also sell out months in advance, proving that there is a market for these experiences, but the diner must know they are consenting to this type of experience before enjoying it. In this section, I wish to briefly look at a few other attempts at immersive dining; some have been successful pop-up restaurants, while others suffered due to the mismanagement of consumer expectations.

The majority of the immersive pop-up restaurants all run under the same idea: take an existing popular franchise with a food component and actualize that previously factious location. The nostalgic bliss of walking into an actualized version of Sponge Bob Square Pants' workplace, the Krusty Krab or Friends' meeting place Central Perk is undeniable. Though enjoying an espresso at Central Perk with one's set of friends while lounging on an overstuffed rust-colored couch could be gratifying, the quality of the coffee is secondary at best. An espresso from Central Perk does little more than act as a prop in the overall experience. That can also be said for a Krabby Patty at the Krusty Krab or a burger and shake at the Max (the restaurant that was actualized in the long-running and wildly popular Saved by The Bell immersive experience). Though the immersive narrative is effective in all these situations, the gastronomic element plays a different role here. Eating or drinking is just what is done in these locations and the items served are what is consumed; their taste and quality

may alter the perception of the location but does little to effect the overall outcome of the experience. If the espresso at Central Perk is terrible, that means that Monica, Chandler, Ross, Joey, Phoebe, and Rachel were loyal to their local coffee shop or perhaps too lazy to find a new meeting place. The worst that can be said is that they did not know good coffee. This would not negate a single plotline or change any character's relationship from the show; in fact, it may provide a deeper dive into the character's psychology than the show could on its own. What if a Krabby Patty was obscenely terrible, and the Krusty Krab customers came back to support the idiosyncratic grill master with an extraordinarily optimistic outlook on life, much like Sponge Bob viewers did week after week? If the expense and ticket are the safety net for fine dining, then the fan property protects the pop-up. The setting and its fidelity to its on-screen counterpart give the pop-up its most affective elements. Imbibing is simply the activity that bonds the audience with the property they are attempting to immerse themselves in.

The food here plays an essential role in ritual transubstantiation. In eating a burger at the Max, an audience/participant lives a high school experience they only fantasized about in their youth. The ritual conjoins them with the characters and whatever fantasy version of themselves would have engaged with the crew of Bayside High School. They exist somewhere between their authentic self and the virtual perception of their fantasy made real by partaking in the same ritual the characters of Saved By The Bell did after school: a meal at the Max. Whether this transubstantiation ritual is life-altering or anticlimactic is personal and impossible to predict. However, the ability to join with beloved characters and worlds through food provides exciting opportunities for fans and creators. The pop-up restaurant provides this opportunity, and food becomes the bridge between worlds.

Now I would like to examine an experiment in immersion without the consent provided by a specific ticket or iconic location. What makes this experiment interesting is that it had the monetary and creative power of Disney behind it and was framed into the Star Wars universe. When Disneyland unveiled its new immersive world, Star Wars Galaxies Edge, it included a highly themed restaurant named Docking Bay 7. Aside from the blue milk that makes an appearance in the original film and many cameos in subsequent sequels, prequels, and spinoffs, there is no iconic Star Wars food. The creative powers behind the eatery had carte blanche when developing what their intergalactic cuisine would be (this experiment has further evolved into the meals for their three-day all-inclusive immersive experience Galactic Star Cruiser which is connected to their Disney World version of Batuu, the planet the outpost that the guests are visiting is located, and includes a stop at Docking Bay 7 for a meal). The menu featured exotic-sounding meats referencing locations and animals from the Star Wars universe in dishes like fried Endorian tip-yip, braised shaak roast, smoked kaadu ribs, Yobshrimp noodle salad, and oi-oi puff. The menu items were matched with pictures and brief descriptions to help identify the actual ingredients of the dishes for those who have dietary restrictions or are less adventurous. Despite this step, the menu was a source of confusion for many park guests and led to a series of changes in its presentation in a relatively short period. The flavor profiles of the dishes have not been modified during the menu alterations, which is critical to note as it means the disconnect had to do simply with Disney's Imagineers having too much faith in their guest's willingness to immerse themselves in the property. Culinarily the dishes contain some wild juxtapositions mixing the flavor profiles of multiple cultures and types of food to create a cuisine that is unique to Batuu. Examples of this are the fried Endorian tip-yip and the smoked kaadu ribs. The fried

Endorian tip-yip is a boneless fried chicken breast butchered into a rectangle atop a mashed potato and roasted vegetable mixture with a green herb gravy. The chicken is well-roasted, lightly breaded, and fried for a crisp exterior and moist interior. Texturally it is different from a traditional fried chicken because of its high moisture content and low surface area for frying. Without knowing the origin of the protein, it would be challenging to deduce past a white meat fowl. This is no mistake and adds to the exotic feel of the dish. The mashed potatoes, too, had a different flavor profile than expected; the potato was silky, chopped roasted vegetables (peas and cubed carrots) folded into the potato puree gave it texture, an occasional crunch, and sweetness. Finally, the gravy was lighter than expected and herb-forward (parsley in particular) while maintaining enough chicken fat heft to pull the sweetness of the potato mixture and the savory chicken into alignment. Growing up on Star Wars, it is not hard to imagine a group of fluffy Ewoks frying up tip-yip over their home fires of Endor while singing "yub nub" as they do in *Return of the Jedi*. The smoked kaadu ribs are a Chinese-style sticky pork rib served with a tangy German-style cabbage slaw and a sweet blueberry cornbread muffin. While the preparation of each item is less inventive than the fried tip-yip it is the combination of blaukraut (a traditional German red cabbage dish) with char sui ribs (traditional southern Chinese barbeque) and classic American cornbread with a blueberry twist that makes this dish unique. This strategy of combining different cultural cuisines can be seen through much of the menu, with the occasional reinvention, as seen with the fried tip-yip. These dishes fall into what Hunt calls incorporative eating, "a dynamic process of representation in which sensory experience and intellectual engagement combine" (41). There is joy in dissecting differences, which this form of immersive dining provides. How do familiar flavors in unfamiliar combinations form a new culinary outlook to

encapsulate a time long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away? The idea of eating unknown beasts, prepared in the same fashion as the fuzzy fan-favorite heroes of my youth, is exciting regardless of my age or level of grounding. While these dishes are not sticking their neck under the culinary guillotine the way Next or Lost spirit's dishes might, they walk a line between mass appeal and adventurous combinations in a manner most theme park eateries shun.

The mass appeal of the dishes is hard to doubt and accounts for both their longevity and the construction of a cookbook detailing each dish's preparation and fantasy origins. What is fascinating is the revisions to the titles of the dishes over Docking Bay 7's first year open. Because this land aimed to be a fully immersive experience with cast members using Batuu-specific slang and greetings, the menu was presented with fantasy "in universe" named dishes to keep the immersion alive through the meal. "In universe" is the term Disney Imagineers use to describe themed elements. This lasted approximately six weeks before Disney bowed to the fear of customer confusion and included the protein in the dish's name, changing the smoked kaadu ribs to smoked kaadu pork ribs and the fried Endorian tip-yip to fried Endorian chicken tip-yip. As the year went on, Disney chose to clarify the menu, further dropping the "in universe" names completely and retitling the smoked kaadu pork ribs, simply smoked pork ribs, and the fried Endorian chicken tip-yip as fried chicken. While those basking in the immersive elements of the new land mourned the loss of ordering food "in universe," many saw it as a prophetic kowtowing that would lead to a more extensive loss of "in universe" elements. They were proved right over time as cast members stopped using the jolting "Bright suns" greeting while entering the land, and other "in universe" details evaporated. Many Disney Park-related blogs have archived complaints by Disney fans who

begrudged the immersive elements of Galaxies Edge and referred to the prename-changed dishes as not being real food. These same fans hailed the name changes claiming Galaxy's Edge will finally have edible food. Here again, I reiterate that the severed dishes did not change during this time; only their titles did. The forced immersion of "in universe" names proved so noisome to certain guests that they doubted their value as edible commodities. When looking at flavor perception and expectation, Hester Blumenthal ran into similar problems early in his career. Hunt writes, "Contemplating diner responses to his early dishes, he discovered that descriptions on the menu, the context of the foods presentation, and the creation of expectation before the diner encounters a dish all impact the ultimate ability of a dish not only to please but to communicate ideas" (44). In not priming guests for an immersive meal in any way, the guests had no means to process the menu and were left confused. Many of the blog posts against the theming are anger filled and aggressive, revealing that the "in universe" details left them confused about what to do. The meal could not communicate because the menu and the details of getting to the restaurant left the guest emotionally and intellectually strained. A challenging meal would not positively add to their experience but only further frustrate them. From this lens, it is easy to see why Disney made the difficult and costly decision to change its menu item names from the whimsical "braised shaak roast" to "pot roast."

The Foil Swan

Dining provides a unique opportunity for the immersive artist. In creating a menu, a chef can take their diners anywhere, to any time or place. With this power, a chef can transform his restaurant and his guests; this transformation or becoming is what immersion is based upon. This has become clear while looking at fine dining experiences, one utilizing an

Aristotelian arc for its meal coming to a climactic end while the other charted a more episodic approach. Both seized upon the affective power of food and its component elements to create an immersive narrative. In looking at pop-up restaurants, we found food as a transubstantial marker between the individual and the concept they wish to align. In these conditions, the food is ritualized, and its affective power is in its consumption. The immersive narratives formed at a pop-up restaurant hinge upon this act of consumption as this brings the fan into the realm of the characters they are emulating. Furthermore, looking at the shifting menu of Star Wars Galaxy's Edge's Docking Bay 7, we see a cautionary tale of what happens when an audience is not primed for an immersive meal.

Underlying these case studies are serious questions about economic inequality, lack of diversity, and colonial legacies. Some of which I have attempted to address, while others I have left well alone till now. The target audiences of these experiences all seem to fall into similar economic ability and class standing brackets. This puts a shade over whether these are proper experiences for exploration due to their lack of accessibility. Some of this can be reasoned away due to the cost and the production value involved, but that is a less-than-satisfying answer. While it is not shocking that television and movie studios funding the pop-ups and events would choose properties with well-proven fan bases, it is disappointing that properties with more diversity are not given similar treatments. Why producers have seen "Friends" and "Saved by the Bell" to be safer properties to build pop-up experiences around than equally loved and deserving 1990's sitcoms like "Living Single" and "A Different World" whose fan base is strong but hold lesser ratings in syndication is not difficult to understand. What is difficult to understand is why no truly diverse property has been championed with a pop-up treatment in America. While this question hangs in the air,

another arises, what is the cost to commune with your nostalgia and who can afford it? Here, I am not looking to answer these difficult questions but to shine a light on their existence. As these experiences continue to develop and manifest, further diversity in the properties being explored and the fan bases being served would propel immersion through cuisine into new and exciting configurations. This would be an economic boon and avoid stagnation as the offerings, and the forms become codified.

The power of food as an immersive conveyer is undeniable. It can function in a multiplicity of ways connecting a diner through memory to their past, their imagination, or each other. Each of these case studies makes the affective power of food apparent and how it can be harnessed to tell a story and create an immersive experience.

Immersed in Covid; or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Isolation

The global pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus has given rise to many efforts to create immersive theatre under lockdown constraints. A wide variety of techniques have been explored for their value in removing a participant from their lockdown reality to a virtual world to accomplish this goal. As Antonin Artaud implores, "All our ideas about life must be revised in a period when nothing any longer adheres to life" (8). In this explosion of creativity, the goal of immersing an audience member into a differing reality, even for a short period, became heroic acts of art. To explore this period of technological and theatrical advancement against the hefty weight of the pandemic, I will turn to Gilles Deleuze and his theories on the virtual and actual. To Deleuze, this is a false dichotomy. Neither exists. There is no actual without the virtual power of becoming, and as a thing is never finished, there is no virtual as all life is virtual due to being in a constant state of becoming. Alternatively, "each actual thing maintains its own virtual power. What something is (actually) is also its power to become (virtually)" (Colebrook 98). The virtual is actual and real if not always directly tangible. As immersive artists searched through their theatrical toolboxes to create for this unique period in history, this idea of becoming took center stage. Live productions, replete with their lavish sets and multitudes of spectacle, could no longer be the norm, and were replaced with focused experiences accessible through various technologies to immerse the audience/participant in their own home. Without the control and intimacy that immersive productions rely upon to matriculate an audience through a narrative, how do immersive creators construct productions? The answer has been the rapid development of technological toolboxes that allowed for ambitious work. Here the immersive narrative is more focused, sometimes to the detriment of the overall production, as the ability to simulate through

multiple affects is diminished. As there is no normative form of immersive narrative, the success or failure of these Covid-era productions lies in their ability to affect the audience toward a hoped-for outcome.

For this exploration, I will be looking at three separate pieces of Covid theatre, each utilizing differing technology in production. All the pieces required reliable internet access, which during the pandemic proved itself to be a necessary public utility and not the luxury it was previously thought to be. The first piece I will delve into is "The Under Presents: The Tempest." This piece had the most significant barrier to entry as it required an Oculus head and handsets. It is also of interest because the piece exists entirely in virtual reality. The defining goals of this production was the building of community and communal storytelling. This required the swift building of a virtual community as well as exploiting the technology of the virtual reality equipment for what was possible.

Next, I will explore the Royal Shakespeare Company's "Dream". This ambitious production only required a lap or desktop computer for the audience/participants, but the production was a multimillion-dollar undertaking with oodles of high-tech equipment and a multitude of elements. It weaved together a full orchestral score (prerecorded due to Covid's interference), live actors, motion capture technology, video game technology, camera work, and parts of Shakespeare's text. This production was well underway before the pandemic hit but changed its presentation from in-person to internet-based. Though the shortest on participation between the three productions, their focus was on the technology being exploited and how that technology can further the theatrical experience. The RSC and their Artistic Director Gregory Doran have previously used similar technologies to aid in bringing to life Ariel's transmission into freedom in their 2016 production of "The Tempest." What

does the mix of live and mediated mean to the future of production? This is one of the significant questions that arises out of this piece.

The final production I will be investigating is Optika Moderna's "Portaleza". This production had a lower barrier to entry than “The Tempest” but required slightly more technology from the audience/participant in the form of a smartphone and a desk or laptop computer. This was then supplemented with a mailed package containing: instructions for the production, a "hypnocular" viewer to be constructed by the participant, a mat covered in celestial art nouveau drawings, and a sealed envelope to be opened during the production. This production's focus was personal; to emphasize this point the audience/participant never interacted with another human being but was sent communication through an automated text reply. The letter that arrived advised the audience/participant to experience it alone, preferably at dusk. The isolation and mood of this piece is where it excelled in creating a truly personal experience.

In investigating this period of theatrical innovation, it is impossible to avoid the effects that lockdown and mandated isolation had on these productions' development as well as their audience. Covid-19's interruption of the theatrical status quo extended far beyond the physical barrier of gathering together. The constant reiteration of isolation necessary to combat the disease created an alternate reality of masked faces and plexiglass mazes. Grocery runs looked more like zombie survival movies with parties striving to keep recommended distances while unmasked invaders belligerently blew through the store threatening everyone's safety. This, mixed with decidedly differing messaging from federal, state, and local authorities, increased the stress and terror of an already threatening disease. The affect of the disease stretched through its virtual presence to create a complex

relationship that was reinforced by the ambiguity of asymptomatic carriers. Like Schrodinger's famed cat the disease could both exist and not exist in any given body. The presence of symptoms demanded a test for reassurance as a sneeze could be the harbinger of a deadly illness or simply allergies which became overly sensitive to the pollen while in lockdown. I bring this into the discussion to aid in viewing the gap between the real and virtual world. Covid brought into full view a merging of the virtual worlds purported by media and the actual events of living. Worlds became fundamentally shaped by political stances, widening the gap between individual coexistent realities. An individual's actual was another's virtual. As the independent worlds folded upon themselves projecting danger filled landscapes or absurdly subservient sheep-people (the term sheeple is often banded about by this sect of humanity in place of actual wit) the worlds grew ever further apart.

Each one of these productions represents a virtual world, but when the actual world is far from recognizable, what does virtual even mean? Society's previous notion of actual has exited pursued by a virus, and now the actual only exists with the aid of the virtual. The absence of the actual here is the point. The dichotomy between the two worlds (actual and virtual) no longer functioned. This is as Deleuze philosophized, where the actual is virtual in that it is in a constant state of becoming. To a certain extent, this dichotomy is still broken as the notion of "building back better" takes political precedence. It is as if we are in a time when we have acknowledged the virtual possibilities but crave the steady ground of an actual that can never be attained. This might go far in explaining the malaise surrounding the reentry into society as well as vaccine holdouts whose virtual world where the virus is not deadly or not real is infinitely more appealing than the current moment. This is the state of the audience/participant as they eagerly look for ways to escape or perhaps control a world

when they no longer recognize their own. Perhaps the easiest way to gain control over a world is to simply travel to a new one and start over (Elon Musk, Richard Branson, and Jeff Bezos' push to colonize Mars aside); the craving for immersive entertainment in this time may be motivated by the want to transverse seemingly controllable worlds. As the relationship between society and the individual becomes uncomfortably complex the simplicity of a new world with straightforward rules and predetermined functions that are directed toward a singular purpose can be horribly appealing. Immersion during covid is not about immersing the audience but about redefining what Erin Manning coins as relationscapes with technology. It is through technology that these worlds can exist and provide shelter from the complexity of the actual by submerging oneself in the complexity of the virtual.

Simply put, a relationscape is the articulation of movement between two things creating a topological experience. Things here are broadly defined and can range from tangible to intangible, and often in her philosophizing, falls between those two binaries. Viewing immersion through the framework of relationscapes can be helpful in establishing how each production moves its audience/participant both mentally and physically through space and time. An example of this would be a computer mouse. By itself, the mouse accomplishes nothing, but when joined with another thing such as a human hand, a computer menu can be navigated. Neither the arm nor the mouse is effective at this task on their own, but in the joining of the two, a new relationscape is formed, one that is not quite human and not quite technological but is, in fact, both. Manning refers to this relationship as "immanent movement, still-moving" (9). Both the hand and the mouse have infinite possibilities when

moving together, reacting to each other and from each other.[2] The symbiosis of the two create a new object that is neither hand nor mouse but something in-between. It is this in-betweeness that marks the relation and its endless malleability.

It is important to note that immersive pieces of this era are not concentrating on leading the audience in a narrative through affective breadcrumbs as they had in the past, but instead are attempting to cognitively detach audience/participants from the quotidian uses of technology that have become prevalent during this period. In doing so, they enable technological interfaces to be redefined so that they can create a new relationship divorced from the pandemic itself. In this time of plague, immersion has been a tool of detachment and separation from the world. This differs significantly from pre-pandemic times when the techniques of immersion were concentrated upon enlivening the senses to the world around them. This turn to technology is made through necessity but carries with it some interesting side effects. First, each production must search for the means to diminish the physical distance between the audience/participant and the production. Second, the sense of smell and taste have a lessened role in these productions. These two senses are often gatekeepers in immersive events due to their ability to quickly reorder an audience/participants experience of a world. In concentrating on secondary senses and devaluing the visual and aural creators had a key to affectively opening their audience/participants to new experiences. Finally, the technology itself takes a starring role as it either enlivens or inhibits the world of the

[2] Manning reinforces this idea by noting, "What must be sought is neither a total becoming nor a fixed identity: the dynamic equilibrium between identity and individuation is metastable" (11). As the use of technology becomes an inseparable component to everyday tasks the stability of individuation decreases causing a blending. The body and technology become extensions of each other, neither working without the other.

production. Dependence on technology has long been a part of theatre, but here if the technology fails the show can't go on.

Along with Deleuze and Manning, the final framework I will be using to explore these immersive pieces comes from Yi-Fu Tuan. Tuan sees place as a sense of safety, while space indicates freedom. According to Tuan, "we are attached to one and long for the other" (3 Space and Place). Much like in Deleuze's linking of virtual and actual, Tuan's notions of space and place rub against each other and lead to further parsing of the human experience, or more accurately, how humans experience. In looking at the place and its meaning during a pandemic, it is easy to see the negative side of safety. Tuan theorizes, "Freedom implies space; it means having the power and enough room to act" (52). The lack of expansive space during the pandemic can reinforce the psychic impotence that the pandemic caused. He further emphasizes the importance of space: "In the act of moving space and its attributes are directly experienced. An immobile person will have difficulty mastering even primitive ideas of abstract space, for such ideas develop out of movement—out of the direct experiencing of space through movement" (52). With the ability to directly experience freedom through spatial discovery removed from the human lexicon, the virtual world becomes imperative in surviving with a sense of self. I use the idea of "a sense of self" while fully understanding that the self is an ever-evolving thing, always becoming. In that becoming, there are notes of recognizability that anchor an individual to a core of beliefs about what comprises them (even if these beliefs are wildly inaccurate). Self or my conception of self could be considered a place (as defined in Tuan's philosophy) providing the safety for further exploration of space. The utter confinement and shrinking of the pandemic world led to a longing for space and, as Tuan understands, freedom. This is easily seen in the booming

housing and travel markets that have emerged as the pandemic recedes. It is in-between virtual and actual, place and space that immersion exists. Technology enters the picture here and confirms its true importance in surviving this time. "A tool or machine", according to Tuan, "enlarges a person's world when he feels it to be a direct extension of his corporeal powers" (53). Immersion during the pandemic could only exist in an audience/participants' place. In extending that place through technological means, space can then act as intimacy replacing older models of immersive theatre where space was exploited to ensure isolation through expansiveness. Previously, large warehouses were often employed with numerous rooms, nooks, and passages. These spaces were created to give the exploring audience/participant a sense of isolation. Other measures were also employed to ensure isolation, such as the requirement that audience/participants wear masks entirely hiding the audience/participants face, forced separation of parties at entry, and the command that they remain silent throughout the experience. Crafting isolation through space became part of the art of large-scale immersive theatres. With space at a premium, the very feeling of space becomes spectacle itself. As Manning finds, "Space becomes a container for experience" (165), but when that space is well explored, how can space be reconfigured and manipulated to allow for new experience without the affective weight of its previous designation. The technology used to enlarge the world becomes the next hurdle for the creator of these experiences. I call it a hurdle because the smartphone, wifi, and computer became vital to economic health during the pandemic. The use of these items to glimpse an outside world that could not be grasped became unremarkable during the height of the virus. Some companies utilized even virtual reality headsets like the Oculus to improve interaction during meetings. Meet in VR, Connect2, MeetingRoom, Dream, VSpatial, and Glue are the most

popular types of these VR applications. This would include the creation of an avatar body which would allow for hand movements through the handsets as well as movements such as sitting and standing to be noted through its multiple head and handset sensors. In such virtual offices, the piéce de résistance was the conference room itself, usually a large space often with a table surrounded by human-esq avatars and lined with windows sporting a view that the company's actual conference room could not dream of employing. Employers could choose to make this virtual meeting room a desert island or a pod in space with the click of a button. This virtual place would be as confining as the real thing, allowing participants to view coworker's movements while preventing such pandemic pastimes as continually checking one's e-mail or doom scrolling the internet. This reinforces Manning's assertion that space is abstract (165). To infuse that with Tuan's ideas would restate the phrase as "freedom is abstract." I find that difficult to argue against.

“A Full Poor Cell” on the Oculus

"The Under Presents: The Tempest" is the first production we will put under the microscope of Deleuze, Manning, and Tuan to find how it functions in the pandemic world. The production is a VR performance experienced through the Ocular rift head and handsets. Because of this, the production's world-building is closest to what can be expected in a pre-pandemic piece of immersive theatre. Its run time is a scant forty minutes, but its use of community as a binding element is what makes it noteworthy. It combines conventional theater with multiple participatory elements and replaces the voyeuristic delight of the proscenium with active storytelling requiring the audience to take on a myriad of different

roles throughout the performance. This is especially effective during a global pandemic where the idea of touching a stranger is tinged with risk. As a masked and floating avatar, the audience/participant is free to take upon any role (regardless of gender or species association) required for the action of the story to continue. A few elements of the production are incredibly provocative from the get-go. First, the fact that the avatars are masked as a mechanic of the production. This acts to ease the audience/participants into the production's world through its replication of the pandemic world. Much like the actuality of the pandemic world, the masks in the production are customizable depending on experience in the world of The Under, which has a multitude of offerings other than "The Tempest". To have a differing mask takes a bit of exploration and effort but is highly achievable. This echo of reality may be an accidental by-product of how the world progressed during the development of the production but is a happy accident at the very least as it helps prime the audience/participants in a multitude of fashions. The most important signifier of the mask is an audience/participant's fluency in navigating the world of The Under. Those with anything but the base mask, granted through the introduction, understand the process of how movement and action take place in this virtual world. In essence, it signals a comprehension of the world and its function. This is a valuable tool for the audience/participants and the host of the production, that the audience/participant will meet quickly after the beginning of the show.

Speaking of how the world of the production functions: when the audience/participant enters The Under's application, an introduction sequence is triggered. This sequence primes the audience/participant for the production by teaching them how movement works in the world of the application. The sequence also serves to introduce the audience/participants to Ariel (Prospero's enslaved spirit that helps perform his magic). As Manning states, "digital

technology can foreground previously untapped dimensions of the moving body, creating a body that is sensually emergent" (63). A "sensually emergent" body is the goal of the priming that is about to be described. I foreground this idea to point to its vital importance to the success of the production. This "sensually emergent" body is being built from the moment the application that houses the production is accessed. By pressing the trigger button on the handset multiple times, the audience/participants' hands grow from amorphous droplets of liquid to dripping humanoid appendages. This initial action helps the audience participant enter the "interval."[3] The movement that is required to form an interval can be done in a multitude of timestamps. Therefore, the term interval is helpful because it assigns temporality to movement or rather allows movement to dictate time. Central to the function of the interval is repetition.[4] In starting the experience with repetition, the interval is created, and the audience/participant is taught how time will function inside the application. When this is juxtaposed to the pandemic world where time seems endless and out of control entering The Under's interval is oddly comforting. In this case, the interval gives the illusion of control. The virtual interval is created in movement, but control is never truly in the user's hands like all else in a virtual world. This point is reinforced with the next set of actions when two golden rings appear floating toward the audience/participant at eye level; these rings attach to the audience/participant's wrists by pressing a side trigger on the handset while motioning toward them. In this action of binding, the avatar's hands transform from dripping liquid to

[3] This term is used by Manning to describe “duration expressed in movement.” (17).

[4] “Repetition is at the heart of the interval…This repetition takes place within the virtual potential that is translated into an actual movement” (Manning 25). The continual interaction between body and machine is what is important here. As the machine lures the body toward movement the body responds, and the cycle begins again. In this case the machine is the oculus rift, but it is not hard to see this interaction with play out between a multitude of everyday platforms. The reassignment of virtual movement to control pad functions on video games or keystrokes as language are other examples of this.

solid matter in this virtual world. These rings mimic the way Ariel is bound in Shakespeare's original text and introduces the audience/participant to a major theme of the play, using others for personal gain. At this time, the audience/participant is taught how movement occurs in this world. Movement can be achieved through multiple means in this world; first, a participant can simply walk from location to location if enough space is available where the audience/participant is running the application. Second, the joystick on the left of the handset can be used to move the avatar forward while the joystick on the right allows for the avatar to pan from side to side, finally, by holding the A button on either handset, the audience/participant can physically pull the landscape they want to enter toward them. At this point, the audience/participant is told through onscreen instruction to pull themselves toward a rock in the distance with what appears to be a swirling golden mask. Here the audience/participant can pick up their mask, apply it to their avatar and begin their journey to The Under, the virtual realm that hosts the production. If the audience/participant has completed certain puzzles or experiences in The Under, they can change the mask's appearance before applying it using the handsets trigger, which causes the avatar hand to snap. Each snap changes the mask's design. These different mask designs serve as a reward for completing activities and a reminder of the time the audience/participant spent in the application.

With the priming complete, the paradox of digital technology can be explored. According to Manning, "moving -with the software means learning to move the software…choreography becomes determined by the software, which qualitatively limits what a body can do" (65). On the surface, this statement seems to deny the digital body a place of study and importance due to its lack of agency, but the reality of production is that

all bodies have limitations. Learning the limits of a body does not diminish one's ability to use it as an expressive tool. On the contrary, understanding and exploiting the body's limits is both highly theatrical and relentlessly expressive. If the body is, as Deleuze postures, always becoming, then so is the digital body. This constant moving forward is not hampered by limitation but instead enlivened by it. To push further into Deleuze's work with Felix Guattari, the virtual body may be considered a plane of transcendence that can be logically dissected for its available concepts and affects. Software may share quite a bit with moral philosophies in that freedom can be found in restriction. The Under's priming of the audience/participant in using their software serves to focus the audience/participant toward what is possible in the software's use.

The world of The Under contains two buildings and multiple parked cars in a barren desert-like setting. One of the two buildings is a classic-looking movie theater complete with a large marquee announcing the "The Tempest" with a box office out front, the other a large concrete-looking building with a solitary door that gives off a speakeasy vibe. This is the other offering in this digital world, and while worth exploring, does not have the theatrical solidifying of "The Tempest". Once at the box office, the audience/participant can choose a show time and purchase tickets. This simple action evokes a surprising normality that has otherwise been absent during pandemic times. There is even a person-shaped avatar in the box office to give this virtual world a sense of the real or actual. This nod toward the process of purchasing tickets in the actual goes a long way to setting the mood and feeling of the production. Unlike the other offerings in The Under, which often involve solving puzzles to uncover, this is straightforward and adhering to the process of attending an event. This choice is a hyper-theatrical bit of world-building and shuns the usual process of purchasing goods

within an application. The affect of this choice paired with the normalization of the process of moving in the world, has primed the audience/participant, blurring the lines between the virtual and the actual. As Manning states, "Relation cannot be foretold: it must be experienced" (41). This is compounded by the idea that "Relations are inseparable from affective tone" (Manning 40). The building of relation is what this priming is all about. In the priming, a bevy of information has been departed unto the audience/participant, the least of which is the actual mechanics of the world. The blending of worlds is this sequence's true gesture. By the moment the ticket is purchased and the sequence ends, the audience/participant is established into the world and explores its dimensions in an embodied fashion.[5] The audience/participant is left after purchase on the cusp of the unfathomable searching for the edges of this created reality. At this juncture, the audience/participant is instructed to come back at showtime or to feel free to explore the other offerings of The Under, meaning the adjacent building.

As showtime nears, a counter appears and tics away seconds until the audience/participants' time arrives. Time in this realm, at this point, is absolute, but the feeling that this is simply procedural soon slips away as the counter hits zero and nothing happens. The audience participants are left in a void where a counter announces they are out of time, yet time continues to flow. This affect of the margin is brief, lasting only a few moments but long enough to register as an event in the production. An event requires action and a sense of completion. In Manning's view, it "is as much vibration as action" (38) never

[5] "The elasticity of the relation is perceptible in its affective margin, in the emergence of the unknowable where what is felt stretches and contracts in a propulsion of experience toward the unfathomable" (Manning 41). The margin in this moment is expansive as the gap between is brought into full view. Now and then, here and there, me and my avatar are simultaneously exposed. Each distinct but extending into the other, existing as hybrids.

fully realized and always almost perishing. Manning gets dangerously close to Peggy Phelan's theory of performance as disappearance but abates as in her view if performance were to disappear, then it would be a displacement. As movement is Manning's main point of interrogation, movement never disappears but continues, transforms, reemerges, and dissolves. Movement is always present even in the depths of stillness. The event occurs and continues to occur as the promise of almost perishing motivates it to its next phase. "The event of movement moving is a quasi-virtual experience: actual because all steps actually take place, virtual because all the micro perceptions of pastness and futurity are enveloped in the becoming moment" (Manning 38). In combining Gilles Deleuze's ideas on becoming with Alfred Whiteheads' definition of events, Manning joins the virtual and the actual in true symbiosis. This intervention, if reverse-engineered, describes the audience/participant who is moving in an actual world to move in a virtual world toward becoming.

Before too long has past the audience/participant is transported into an elegant theatre lobby that would not be out of place on Broadway or in the West End. This lobby is filled with puzzles that participants can come upon and solve. Other patrons also appear in the lobby and will join the audience/participant throughout the production. The lobby is much more than a holding cell. Through casual exploration, the audience/participant can find small components that help enrich the overall narrative; an example of this is bits of the storm that sets off the story's narrative can be seen by picking up bottles and looking at their contents. This prelude to production again plays with time and the idea of events in the narrative.[6] Here the events of the shipwreck that strands or will strand or has stranded Antonio,

[6] "Events do not perish into nothingness. Like memories they can be reactivated" (Manning 39). Reactivation here is not recalling but actively recreating the moment in movement. This means that it will never be the same twice though it is twice behaved. It is a restoration not a duplication of movement. This fits Richard Schechner definition of performance. The audience is always a performer in an immersive event.

Sebastian, Ferdinand, and Gonzalo, and a few other characters who do not make an appearance in this version of The Tempest can be witnessed and re-witnessed through peering into bottles of virtual liquid. When the bottle is held to the participants face, the liquid begins to move and shows fragments of time, including a swirling storm and ships in the waves. Different bottles contain different angles and moments of the storm. Some contain a ship that is being torn apart in the weather, others the aftermath of bodies clinging to wreckage. If the audience/participant moves while peering through the bottle, the angle, view, and experience changes. Even if the scene is fundamentally the same, the position of the bottle when picked up in combination with the audience/participant's own orientation alters its viewing. This, too, is as Manning theorizes: "To reactivate an event is not to recreate the same movement again but to invent a new movement that calls forth a certain array of recognizable elastic points" (39). Each bottle can be considered one of the points, and each time a bottle is viewed it creates a new point. Viewing the same bottle multiple times, according to Manning, creates a pastness. Manning describes this pastness as being virtually populated with events, but when the whole is virtual, and the pastness is in service of a narrative, I would intervene with the possibility that this pastness is being populated through a sense of virtual tangibility. This would involve creating the actual from the virtual, which is a service artist of all ilks are quite familiar.

A chime in the lobby warns of the show beginning, and the participants are immediately transported to a rocky cliff with a fire pit and a large *skene* house in the background. The instantaneousness of the transportation is essential to note as this will occur multiple times during the production. This instant loss of control paired with the inability to communicate verbally in this world clues the audience/participants into their role as

functionaries in another's grand narrative. This reinforces the initial priming for movement where golden ring bracelets bind the audience/participant to achieve solid form. Solidity is service, and space is granted but not given. It can always be shifted or altered to serve a purpose in the virtual world. The experiential subversiveness of this production is revealed in how it sublimates its audience/participants. They must accept and function within the created barriers of this virtual world while always cognizant of the world's creation and limitations. The subversiveness comes in taking off the headset and carrying this understanding of world-building into the actual.

The audience/participants are invited to explore the world and are also introduced to the host, who will guide them through the experience. The host's avatar includes long grey hair, Birkenstock-like sandals, and casual clothing. This, mixed with the host's calm demeanor and subtle control of this virtual world, is reminiscent of a college professor. These design choices are no accident and hint at who a modern-day Prospero would likely be. Though they never identify themselves in the role of Prospero, enough elastic points are presented to affectively make that connection. One of these points exists in how the host introduces the play by gathering everyone around the campfire and starting a lecture on how one of the purposes of theatre is to bring people together. This lecture uses a bit of history and a fair amount of proselytizing to set the scene, establish the world, and cement the host's status in this world.

Next, the host asks the audience/participants to hold hands. Hand holding can be accomplished by pressing the same trigger button used to pick up objects in the world. This request would seem quotidian in normal times, but even the illusion of touching a stranger mid-pandemic carries a sense of danger. This danger is amplified due to the erasure of the

line between the virtual and the actual that the production has achieved. As the audience/participants find trust in this world of masked avatars, they arrange themselves into a circle of virtual handholding, and the journey begins. The virtual fire flickers and crackles as the host leads the audience/participants through some of Shakespeare's text, but it quickly becomes clear that the host's main job is to cast the audience/participants as characters in the Tempest and coach them through the physical and emotional journey of the characters. The production makes full use of the Oculus' ability to track movement through the head and handsets turning the audience/participants' avatars into amateur mimes. As the body moves it reorganizes space twofold; once in the actual world where the flesh exists and once in the virtual through an avatar. This duality harkens another between the consciousness of the actual space and the digital space. The mind is aware of both realms and is navigating between both bodies and spaces. [7] The lack of speech in the presentation gives the host the ability to choreograph the scenes, thus controlling the dialogue. This leads to a coached presentational retelling of the story that is further enhanced by the ability of the host to make things appear and disappear. As Manning indicates, "Thought here is not strictly of the mind but of the body-becoming" (6), as the audience/participants move into emotionally charged poses, the affect of the scene overcomes them, allowing them to experience the character's story in new, personal, and intimate ways. The host's control of the situation is never in question, and each scene is only completed when the audience/participants create the required tableaus to the host's satisfaction. These tableaus are fluid and subject to a constant folding of intervals, each interval emerging from the last and disappearing into the next. The

[7] “Space and the body are in a continuous shifting dialogue” (Manning 18).

folding is constant as form is negated.[8] Each scene spirals and sputters, fold upon fold building and destroying, clawing deeper into the narrative as bodies move apart together, testing the elasticity of the almost but never lingering. The first scene the host wishes to take the audience/participants through is the storm. To accomplish this, the host transports three of the audience/participants to the balcony of the skene house, their avatars fitted with sailor hats. The host then gives hectic instructions on how to act out the storm, indicating the strength of the wind, the crashing of the waves, ordering the strikes of lightning and booming thunder. The host as Prospero narrates the scene while ordering other audience/participants to swing lights around, becoming the bearers of lightning as the sailors fecklessly flail about above. At this moment, the audience/participants have willfully become Prospero's playthings, mimicking the sprites and spirits that populate the original text. The scene ends with the audience/participants being transported back around the campfire and taught to use the trigger button to snap as a show of appreciation for each participant's performance. Snapping is the only feedback available in the production. This gives the appearance of agency to the audience/participants while effectively removing all but one option for approval and none for dissent. This will, most likely, not occur to the audience/participant until later.[9]

The training is over, and the retelling of "The Tempest" begins in earnest with Prospero dropping a large bundle of sticks into the fire, waving his hand over them, and making them turn into a boat as the fire transforms into a tumultuous sea. Magic in this

[8] “Folding undoes the finality of form. Form becomes a folding-into, a force-toward that is a threshold, a becoming-spiral, a becoming-turn, a becoming-triangle” (Manning 33).

[9] "We know what we've felt when we are no longer in the feeling" (Manning 46).

virtual realm is always predicated by movement. This aids in emphasizing movement as control. Control is nebulous in this world as the audience/participants seem to be continually guided and under control of another but are occasionally given autonomous tasks. This autonomy is violently removed as scenes and terrain change without warning. These quick changes can be seen as a movement against the interval. This violent removal of relation is incredibly jarring, stranding the audience/participant in the unknown and unmoving. This, of course, is the point of these quick and shuddering transitions. In keeping the audience/participants in states of discovery, the sense of space becomes overwhelming and isolating. This makes the host's interventions welcome, despite the diminished freedom that the audience/participants incur. From here, the storm grows and envelops the participants who watch as lightning crashes fire down upon the small ship. As the ship burns and breaks, the participants are once again transported, this time to the middle of the ocean, surrounded by debris. Here Ariel appears as a giant controlling the sea and sky. As the audience/participants bob in the wild and wasteful ocean, space and place come into opposition. The unrealness of the situation undercuts its affective power as the fear of drowning it looks to reference is diminished without the sensation of a liquid on the skin. The drive to keep the avatar’s head above water is more influenced by sightline than survival. This misstep in world-building can be attributed to the lack of causal efficacy. Manning repurposes this term by Alfred Whitehead to account for "the stage of perception that refers to the immanent relationality of all experience" (54). While floating, the audience/participants are denied any sense of intimacy and immediacy, causing disruptions in the world, including its experience of time through durational movement. As Manning notes in post-encephalitic patients, when casual efficacy is removed, "there's nowhere to go but

still" (55). This stillness is deadly to an emotive narrative as nothing is being received, the very lack of affect begins removing the audience/participant from the production despite being surrounded by it. This affective glitch does not last long but serves so show how delicate immersion can be.

Again, the participants are transported, this time to a stone villa. Causal efficacy is restored, and the interval is reinstated through tasks. The audience/participants are given time to explore the grand villa and bring the host two objects of their choosing. The number of objects is not symbolic, but a nod to the functionality of the programming as two items are all an audience/participant's avatar can carry comfortably at any given time. The host has fun with the difficulty of transporting multiple items later in the story, but for now, it is the items that are important, not the avatar's compacity to carry them. In the villa, the host appears in a robe, further relating them to their alter-ego Prospero. As the audience/participants assemble with their items in hand, the host begins to explain their significance. He does this without a discernable order going from item to item and weaving them into the larger narrative. One item at a time, the story begins to clarify. It is important to note that the host does not take both items from the audience/participant in a sequence but goes from one avatar to the next, constructing the story in front of the audience. He takes time to feel and play with the virtual objects as if through habit. These objects are endowed, not just with story beats but with personal relevance. As he removes each object, he makes a point to thank the audience/participant for returning it to him. The final two objects he takes from the audience/participants are his book and staff. In these objects lies his power. These are the two objects that he will ultimately surrender to reenter society at the end of the story. Through this method, the participants are given the backstory of how Prospero ended up on this island

with his daughter Miranda. This ends with Prospero proclaiming the story is too sad, and the participants are whisked back to the campfire where time has progressed, and it is night. Virtual marshmallows on sticks are provided for roasting, and an untitled intermission occurs with the host claiming he needs to use the little boy's room. This intermission allows the audience/participants to interact with each other and the environment. The marshmallows take on a special importance and can become engulfed in flames if not carefully watched. This seems a less then settle metaphor for virtual worlds whose constant evolution can only be ushered through meticulous care and attention. The audience/participants can even virtually eat the marshmallow by positioning them close to their masks. This effect is commenced with the disappearance of the marshmallow and a violent scarfing sound effect. These two mechanics in relation allow for the enactment of the audience/participant's sense of smell and taste. As the virtual marshmallow is imbibed, the memory of roasting and ingesting marshmallows over an open fire consumes the audience/participant. Here again, the virtual folds into the actual and the actual reciprocates, producing a sensation to highlight the virtual. This dance between the virtual and the actual is interrupted during this sequence by the host's struggles in the bathroom. This does not add to the story or the understanding of the virtual world but serves as a reminder of the true state of the actual world, replete with jokes about the rarity of toilet tissue. The community, calm, and joy of the virtual world are broken by the realities of the actual. The host reappears, and the audience/participants are led in a hokey-pokey-esque happy dance to cheer Prospero so that the story may continue. Again, it is movement in the virtual world that propels the story forward, reconnecting the audience/participants to the mechanics of the virtual.

At the height of the appreciation snaps for the dance the audience/participants are again transported, this time to a clearing in the woods. Here the host tasks the audience/participants in place of Ferdinand with collecting wood. Unlike Ferdinand, they are not vying for the love of the host's daughter, in fact, there is no daughter present. This sequence is physically fascinating as only one object can be held firmly in each hand, but the amount of lumber to gather is seemingly infinite. This involves a balancing act where the audience/participant dances with the lumber—balancing it carefully between the avatar hand and avatar body while learning the world's physics. Bending and crouching to pick up more wood adds complication to the process and enhances the world's complexity. The gravity of the virtual, much like the actual, often wins, resulting in the dropping of a pile of wood. This physical puzzle is engrossing, and each audience/participant can be seen shifting and exploring their capability to complete the task. Moving with the virtual wood is a constant rebalancing act and can become physically taxing. The pile of collected wood grows as the audience/participants' experiments in movement prove more and more successful. Once the pile of virtual wood is deemed high enough, the audience/participants are asked directly for volunteers to play the roles of Miranda and Ferdinand. Here the host adorns the chosen Miranda in a flowery crown and the audience/participants are led through the courting scene. While this begins awkwardly, the audience/participants work hard with the host to embody their roles and explore intimacy in the virtual world. This starts reasonably small with an exploration of touching each other's hands and then holding hands; this progresses to caressing each other's masked faced and then testing to see if a virtual hug and be accomplished. As their masks begin to inch toward each other to experiment with a virtual kiss the scene is interrupted by the host in the guise of Prospero. Using Shakespeare's text, he

dresses down and threatens Ferdinand. At the climax of this scene, the audience/participants are then transported to a different part of the island where a huge banquet is awaiting their arrival. All the audience/participants are cast in the roles of Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio without it being ever being specified who is who. They are instructed by the host to eat the food and enjoy the massive digital spread. The mechanics of eating are the same as they were with the marshmallows, but the enjoyment is diminished. Each piece of devoured virtual food seems to subtlety replenish itself, and while hoisting huge slabs of virtual meat in the air is initially exciting, it does lose its luster rather quickly. The food disappears in massive hunks when brought toward the mask, but the despair of gluttony is what the audience/participants are experiencing. The meal is joyless and flavorless. The food at the table, unlike the marshmallows, is built to bore. It signals its fakeness through its lack of detail, its textural deficiencies, and solid color schemes without the variations that light and shadow provide. The marshmallows were a celebration of memory's power to enact the senses, but this food keeps the audience/participant in the synthetic moment piling through the feast to progress the story. As the audience/participants trouble through their gustatory task, the sky darkens, and Ariel appears in the giant menacing form from the beginning of the production. Swords are readily available around the table, daring the audience/participants to take arms against the immense and imposing being. After the first audience/participant wields a weapon, the rest quickly follow until all the avatars are pointing swords at the invading creature. The giant's rage is swift, he responds to this development by casting a spell causing the feast to disappear. Next, he turns his attention toward the audience/participants, whose swords drop from their hands, too heavy to be lifted. As the audience/participants struggle to grasp a sword again, they face questions about the distance

between the virtual and the actual. Is the sword's current condition stuck to the ground intended? Is this a glitch in the programming? Is there a way to lift the weapon again? As it is practiced in the actual, magic is an art of deception where seeming accidents help produce the most awe-inspiring effects. The answer soon becomes apparent as the host in the guise of Ariel launches into the character's monologue from scene iii, act III of Shakespeare's text. The sky now swirls, and the feeling of danger rises with Ariel's voice which is digitally augmented and enhanced to maximize its affective menace. At the highest moment of tension, the host breaks character and starts to talk about the immensity of the feast. Soon and without warning, the audience/participants have transported again.

This time the audience/participants are taken to an odd, enclosed room filled with natural elements and tasked with helping the island heal as their presence on the island is what has damaged it. This involves numerous activities, from picking up debris to magically healing trees through a sequence of movements over them. All this is done in service of Miranda and Ferdinand's coming nuptials. Once the room is restored, audience/participants are cast in various roles, including as the officiant and the Gods who drop in to bless the wedding (Juno, Artemis, etc). The audience/participants who previously portrayed Ferdinand and Miranda reprise their roles as the host leads them through several physical and emotional reactions. The audience/participant portraying the officiant is tasked with the comical job of physicalizing each milestone of a marriage ceremony. The ceremony ends, of course, with the action that was denied the young lovers previously. As their masks inch toward one another, nothing interrupts the moment, allowing the romantic tension to come to a satisfying fruition. The image of the masks touching in a virtual kiss is allowed to hang in the air a moment before the audience/participants are transported back to the campfire. Here Prospero

speaks some closing words, including those the character is famous for, and a quick but enjoyable dance party by the flames commences. During this celebration in movement, the world takes upon a psychedelic color scheme. This is the first time we have seen the hosts magic in what the production has utilized as the world outside and around the story. This small spectacle points to a blending between previously separated worlds. This blending is a precursor to the bleed between the virtual and the actual world that has occurred to explore the narrative. The dance party allows for a final feeling of community before being dispatched into the lonely world of pandemic living. Finally, we are told the magic words to say into the fire to end the experience. As the audience/participants are given a moment to enact this last act of magic, they are made aware that no one in the virtual world can hear them. The silence rings as the words are spoken, and they are transported back to the lobby and allowed to exit at their own pace.

Having worked through the entire experience of "The Under Presents: The Tempest" utilizing Manning's ideas, I think it is appropriate here to rub against her thoughts that downplay technology's ability to access virtuality. Virtuality can be triggered by a body remade in the folding of digital technology. The nexus between the body isn't so much bridged but continually folded so that perception is constantly catching up to the almost now and projecting possible digital futures. This projection is the pre-acceleration of the virtual in a virtual space. As Manning notes, "technology must become capable of actively *making* sense such that it creates new sensing bodies in movement" (72). That is where the Oculus excels, and the production maximizes the effects possible with the provided restricted digital body. This is accomplished through reframing the lack of body and leg sensors as an opportunity to reimagine movement as pure duration. This occurs every time the

audience/participant manipulates time and space by pulling the landscape toward themselves to arrive at a desired point. Manning theorizes the potentiality of The Under through her creation of the technogenetic body, but falls short on considering its immediate affective effectiveness, resigning the technology to an if not when. Virtual, if you will, not actual. It is evident through the evaluation of this production that affect is the building blocks of its narrative. There must be a folding of the actual and virtual body for this to be possible where "the affective tone's residue lingers, provoking adjacent forms of experience" (Manning 74). These forms of experience in a virtual world must be virtual but their adjacency to the actual is what carries their affective power. The folding between virtual and actual produces the immediacy that immersion depends upon. This immediacy brings the virtual into the actual through time. The nowness of the virtual moment folds the elements into a current reality that is just as real as any other reality. The key being that it is happening in the moment, this removes onus of parsing the virtual from the actual out of the audience/participants purview and reorients them to the task at hand, even if that task is simply existing.

While I believe that "The Under Presents: The Tempest" successfully created an immersive experience through technology, other companies have been less successful with considerably more resources. Manning's technogenetic body, which she writes about in future tense, is here but difficult to achieve. Like any well-thought-through immersive experience, the illusion of agency and intimacy are required to fold experience into the interval toward a becoming or in this case a body-becoming. During this period of pandemic, technology has been the salve against the limits of quarantine, but its ability to distract rather than transform has been the focus. Technology has been more utilized to project a body into stasis than allow for transmutation. The immersive narrative always results in change or

becoming; the depth of this change depends on the creator's success in utilizing affect to trigger emotion and embed a narrative in the audience/participants causing them to become aware of their state of becoming. In piecing together an experience through the senses, the audience/participant is made aware of the evolution of their own thought and is faced with the groundlessness of existence.

Rude Mechanicals Rendered Mechanically

England's Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) needs no introduction and is well respected for the quality of their work, with nearing a century of theatrical innovation while utilizing classic texts. It is this reputation and the promise of quality that made their announcement of "Dream" so exciting. The advertisements for the production were full of potential, inviting the audience to "explore the future of theatre in a virtual forest" (RSC 2021). The reality of the production is that it is more a test than an actual finished product. While the questions they are looking to address have to do with involving the audience through a bevy of new technology live, the production itself is built to run regardless of the audience. "Dream" is marketed as an immersive experience but due to its construction is short on meaningful interaction. The production is a combination of traditional theatre and digital technologies: game engines, motion capture, and digital music enabled through movement recorded by a full orchestra. The narrative follows Puck (EM Williams) through the forest meeting with many of the fairies mentioned in Shakespeare's classic play. Puck's mission is to gather the help of the other fairies to halt the ecological destruction of the forest. The forest is voiced by Nick Cave, a famed Australian musician who is credited with the

popularity of Gothic rock in England and Australia. This bit of celebrity adds to the draw of the production, but Cave's very light use is lambasted in nearly every review. The production also utilizes Shakespeare's verse, though often chopped and rearranged. The real star of the production is the real-time motion capture technology that allows the virtual world and its characters to exist. The audience is just that and relegated to the personal proscenium of the computer screen while waiting eagerly for an opportunity to interact.

The production begins with Williams inviting the audience into the studio, where the production is to commence. The audience follows them down a hallway until Williams is replaced with an avatar of Puck, made from slick digital river rocks and assembled into a stone skeleton. This serves as the priming for this experience and while it does introduce the digital world, it is much more interested in the digitization of the world than the virtual possibility of connection and intimacy through technology. The Unreal Engine that is utilized for this is no secret to avid gamers who have been playing first-person adventures on this technology for over twenty years. From the engine's inception, it has been a technological wonder announcing advancements in player immersion through the real-time creation of the digital landscape as the player moves through it. This means the appearance of an object can change with variations of light, color, and texture as the player proceeds around them, just as they do in the actual world. This shifting of perception of an object is important to establishing an object as an affective force, especially in a digital landscape. This shifting also invokes a multitude of dimensions such as mass and weight that helps bring the virtual object to actual life. Once the virtual object and the actual object have been folded together through perception it can harness an affective force. This affective force is the objects

objectness.[10] The objects solidity is secondary to it affect which is harnessed in relation to the audience. This relational power causes micro affects in the audience as the object reinforces its presence through the shifting of perception. As perception changes so does the relation to the audience thus unleashing new affects. Objects gain their objectness through perception in digital environments. When a player is unleashed in a well-built digital world utilizing this gaming engine, a sense of agency is invoked through the world's ability to transform as the player moves through it. Unfortunately, the RSC does not use the technology in a first-person interactive mode, and the best parts of the production feel most like video game cut-scenes, those pesky pauses in the action where narrative can be inserted into an otherwise autonomous seeming world. The fairies in this production are fantastic digital puppets being controlled in real-time by actors. While the performance of these puppets is almost expected in the digital world, the question-and-answer section after the show reveals the true magic of the fantastical beings. Watching Cobweb (Maggie Bain), whose virtual avatar is a giant eye with web-like lashes that seem to grab at Puck, walk the audience through how the digital puppet worked was far more astonishing than the puppets presentation. The after-show revelations on how the production was created are far more entertaining than the production itself. This is most likely why the question-and-answer section began immediately after the narrative was completed on the same digital platform and in the same space as the production. This mandatory inclusion of the question-and-answer section to the whole of the production nods toward an acknowledgment that the production did not deliver upon its promise and instead points the audience toward a future where the technology will be able to accommodate what "Dream" had advertised. This gesture toward the futurity of production

[10] "The objectness of the object is how it is felt relationally, rather than simply its actual matter-form" (Manning 81).

utilizing this technology may be exciting, but the production's failure to harness the technology and satisfy the enthusiasm of its audience to roam with Puck through the forest or, better yet discover the forest for themselves is disenchanting. Immersion hinges upon trust, which can be argued is an element of intimacy. In failing to deliver upon the promise of their first foray into the world of immersion, the RSC has eroded its audience's trust. Its failure may be one of advertising, but all production staffs realize that every object created by the production team in service of the production speaks for the production as a whole.

As far as the interactive promise of the show is concerned, the audience is invited to help guide the digital Puck's way through the forest as fireflies. This ability is not open to the audience throughout the entire production but is turned on when Puck asks for guidance to find their way. To light the firefly, one must only click on their computer's mouse or trackpad. This would have been more impressive if this technology was a bit more reliable, but as it stood, the audience often did not know which point of light was theirs, and the engine did not reliably allow for a singular light to travel quickly so that an audience member could find their light in motion. This made the lighting of Puck's way more gimmick than interactive interlude or necessary narrative device. I find the difficulty that this caused to be the most immersive bit of this production as many directors and lighting designers often quip, actors can never find their light. The frustration this caused in the audience, who paid a premium for the right to interact in the digital world, is palpable in the production reviews. Manning warns, "what we virtually feel must become actually sensed" (86), but the production was devoid of inspired feeling denying its audience the ability to sense. Though it is fair to assume the RSC's intention with this production was not to infuriate its audience, the effect of the failure to functionally gesture to any attempt to fold the audience into the

virtual through any relational means did just that. This is not to say that the casting of the audience in a genuinely participatory manner as fireflies could not have had real immersive power. Manning turns to Brian Massumi to theorize how perception functions within the interval in virtual situations. Massumi reminds us that "eyes never take in a scene at one go. They rove over objects, detecting edge. The gaze must pass and repass to hold the edge, because edge is actually in continual variation, constantly stuck between light and shadow which in any given instant blur its value" ("The Ideal Streak" 2006). As the hand connects with the mouse to produce a guiding light for Puck, the edge comes into view. The distance between virtual and actual can then be bridged and folded into each other to form an interval in which Puck and the firefly move together through the forest relying upon the other in reciprocal becomings. This idyllic outcome can only occur if the audience/participant can recognize its avatar. In seeing their virtual body, the edge between actual and virtual can be bridged, allowing the audience/participant to feel Puck's world through movement. The fluttering of the light and lunging of the arm could find fluidity in the interval joining to provide the promised experience. This, of course, did not happen and the audience was left with a frustrating mechanic that led to a lackluster experience. Instead of becoming part of the production, the difficulty in finding the audience/participant's individual firefly pointed out how far from the actual proceedings they were. The failure of technology in theatre is always a danger as it can call attention to the seams of a piece. What is fascinating about this production is that the edge unintentionally comes sharply into focus and the divide becomes emphasized, and that chasm was much too great to traverse. This is unsurprising as "visual consistency is of variational return" (Massumi 2006). This would be a side note and not a

driving point if the edge between virtual and actual, human and machine, was not the setting of the entire final act of the production.

Moving to the use of sound in this production, one of the more provocative advertising aspects was the promise of an orchestra responding to the characters. The way in which this was delivered was essentially by turning the studio space into a giant theremin; wherever the actor moved, a new sound would be produced, and the quality of the movement could potentially alter the sound. It is unclear how much of the production utilized this technology compared to simply replaying an orchestral recording, but certain moments of fluttering limbs brought the technology to attention as movement changed the overlaying soundscape.[11] As the movement creates music, the relation between the movement and music is brought into sharp focus. The affective force not only has the ability to translate into feeling but also to cause more movement. This is adding another dimension to that force where the continuation of movement produces more music and thus renders additional affective force. As a theatrical technique, this technology's effectiveness is diminished due to its prescriptive qualities, but as an immersive technology, this could be incredibly effective in bringing cognition to the relationship between movement and sound. Sound is always produced through movement and movement always contains sound. The interest in the technology comes with wanting to play with it and the personal worlds that can be explored through it.

The last quarter of this production is easily the most entertaining as the digital world is bisected by the real, and a camera pulls back to show the motion capture actors in front of their digital creations. From this point forward there is no more audience interaction and the

[11] "Music is never background: it is the intensive connective tissue for the physical transcendental" (Manning 126).

focus shifts, centering the audience on the edge of the actual and virtual. This look behind the curtain is highly theatrical and dizzyingly beautiful as Puck's impossible leaps across the land to giant rocks are revealed to be the work of four ensemble members holding Williams up and passing them across a small sound stage from one black box to another. The choreography becomes spectacle, and the digital and actual conjoin in a multidimensional dance of travel. Here the edge works in the production's favor; as the audience switches between the digital and actual body, a blurring occurs where both are seen as one. As the two worlds move in synchronicity, only one is registered by the audience. This is a truly remarkable sequence and the only place in the production in which the audience is genuinely invited in as a co-creator. While they have no agency over the narrative, flickering the visual plane between the virtual and the actual creates a unique and individual experience. Each audience member's version of this sequence will vary, but the process will create an affectively potent product. The interval here is threefold, integrating the digital, the actual, and the cinematic. The cinematic is the movement of the camera that is acting as the audiences' eye. The camera's movement is the audience's movement becoming the audience's avatar in the production's world.[12] All three worlds are uniquely separate but in the mind of the viewer are combined as a single organism where the actor, its double and the documenter are in synchronous harmony creating a moment. The audience's perception again is the active force combining and arranging the elements into a narrative cohesion. The actor is separate from its digital doubling which is fractionally behind the actor's movements and always playing catch up. The camera helps hide this lag by adding movement and providing

[12] "…the interval is nonetheless active in the watching: it is a virtual event in which the spectator unwittingly participates. We do not actually see the interval, but we do feel its force as it infolds into the perception of movement moving" (Manning 114).

a singular focus on either the actor or its digital double. All three work to enable synchronization to the audience whose perception ultimately determines the success of the piece.

The production ends with the restoration of the forest, this is achieved through reentry into the digital world and the disassembling of Puck. The final moments of "Dream" are ones of imagined folding, the audience holding the image of William's in their motion-capture suit as only Puck is shown. Memory activates and projects Williams' movements as Pucks provide the actual. The roles of the virtual and actual fold in a new manner, displacing past definitions of actual and virtual and challenging the audience to accept the virtual as actual while the actual is a projection of a possible virtual. This sequence is, perhaps, more cinematic than theatrical in that it evokes a different kind of perception, one more akin to the cinematic mind steeped in the virtuals of film. The camera intentionally becomes the audience's eye, resulting in the viewer reframing their experience from the theatrical to the cinematic. The briefness of the sequence undercuts the affective force of the switch resulting in an unsatisfying end but dwelling upon the possibility of the moment reveals the potentiality to harness the cinematic in an oppositional folding with the theatrical challenging their individuation and creating new rhythms of affective power.

Bows follow, and the production crew and actors are quickly assembled into the production space along with the directors for a question-and-answer session. Questions come in from all over the globe, most covering the usual theatre talkback fair (i.e., "Was it difficult to memorize the lines?", "How much time did it take to rehearse?" etc.). It is during this talkback that the actors explain how they manipulated the digital puppets. This is academically fascinating, and during this section, it is revealed that this production is serving

as a very well-funded test of new technology that is hoped to be integrated into future productions. They also mention the number of the audience members, 7000, and their shock at being able to play to such a sizeable virtual crowd. This is interesting because the unseen audience is purely a faceless number to the performers who were faceless digital beings to the audience. The reciprocality of the relationscape built on anonymity is fascinating but not unheard of; if Manning's theories hold true, things are constantly entering into relation without knowing it. Where Manning states that two are always necessary to form a relationscape, she never indicates that the two must be cognitively aware of each other. Our bodies are constantly shifting and adjusting in motion due to unacknowledged affects. It becomes clear through the talkback that this technology was never meant to have an interactive element, and its addition was seen as a neat addendum. This explains its lifeless realization but also acts as barrier for the audience to grasp the promise of what was presented. If what is advertised is failed does it have value as capital? While I do not wish to address the Marxist implications of this statement, nor is that the focus of this project, I feel it is important to acknowledge that the production's pricing did monetize the immersive element bringing with it an expectation of delivery and exposing the immersive element to the harsh realities of capitalist judgment. Did the product do as it promised for the price paid? Unfortunately, the answer is no.

A Most Rare Vision

Optika Moderna's "Portaleza" is the last piece we will examine. This performance could be experienced at any time of day or night, subject to the convenience of the spectator.

It is recommended in the instructions that it is experienced in a dark space, during dusk as that is when the veil between realities is thinnest and that the experience not be interrupted. This is the first titillating clue as to what is in store for the audience/participant, a crossing of the veil between the living and the dead. Manning looks at the relationality of place through topology. "Topology refers to a continuity of transformation that alters the figure, bringing to fore not the coordinates of form but the experience of it" (165). Folding into the experience of the veil, the literal edge between life and death is not only provocative but an idea full of affective force. Before the performance begins, the "hypnoculars" that came in the mail with the rest of the necessary accouterment for the production need to be constructed. The inside of this viewing apparatus is simply reflective, while the outside is covered in art nouveau celestial glyphs.[13] The introduction of a viewing device to help see other realms of existence is a trademark of the company, and each production beings under the auspice of an eye exam. This examination aims to attune the audience/participant's vision to make the unseen world visible. The production begins with booking an optician's appointment, which signals the sending of all the materials. The wait and anticipation of the materials is part of this theatrical experience, mimicking the mode of life that the pandemic produced, one steeped in waiting. When the materials arrive, they come with the aforementioned instructions, "hypnocular" components, a small sealed envelope, and a large celestial map in an art nouveau style matching the exterior of the "hypnoculars".

The creation of the "hypnoculars" is a relational symphony. Not only is the audience/participant welcomed into the production with their creation, the "hypnoculars" become an integral part of the production's execution. In the act of construction, the

[13] "…we know one space from another not primarily by the way in which our bodies *create* that space but by the ways we *inhabit* or *enter* it" (Manning 165 original emphases).

audience/participant is in a dance with the world beyond the veil. Belief and skepticism go out the window as the task becomes the goal. The steps of the dance are being discovered in real-time. The interval is formed, as time can only be measured in terms of construction. The audience/participant manipulates the materials, and the materials guide the hands of the audience/participant. The folding intensifies as the "hypnoculars" begin to take shape. The affective force of the object is undeniable. The reflective interior is closer to a shiny mylar than it is to a mirror. This obscured and blurred reflection offers a great deal of interest. As the hands manipulate the side panels, the mind is set to reflect upon the veil and why its reflection would be blurred. Perhaps the veil cannot be glimpsed directly, or perhaps it is a poor reflection of the current world. The mind spirals with the fold as the hands continue to dance; a new relation is built before the last ends. The dance continues as the object is completed; ideas take physical form and replace the composed materials. How the "hypnoculars" pierce the veil is unclear, but the possibilities surpass the logical. Belief in the device's power is complete. This tool will work; the audience/participant's satisfaction is directly correlated to their part in its construction. It is not a foreign tool but one that bears the audience/participant's fingerprint. Their toil fuels the folding.

In looking through the "hypnoculars," the actual is reflected upon the edges of the field of vision. Reality and its blurred double join at the edge of the device. As Mussami insisted, the gaze passes and repasses, but the edge remains visible; the actual shifts continually obscuring itself and creating a new reality. It is impossible to hold precisely where the theatre (vision) and its double (reflection) meet. Artaud and his ideas of cruelty are mussed out with this contraption. It follows his dictums on sensual experience replacing the literary while also creating a langue between gesture and thought. "The theatre, not confined

to a fixed language and form, not only destroys false shadows but prepares the way for a new generation of shadows, around which assembles the true spectacle of life" (12). Between light and shadow, virtual and actual, the "hypnoculars" present a promise of transference. This transference would not only be of the augmented body (augmented by the use of the device) but of understanding itself. The accomplishment of this promise is secondary to the excitement of the idea of transversal breeds. The risk of failure is diminished in the spark of success. The shadow cannot hold its form under intense illumination but must blur and shift. The interval renews, expands and collapses during this process but the preacceleration and affective force continues to expand in multiplicity.

Once all is constructed and the initial exploration of the "hypnoculars" complete, the instructions lead the audience/participant to a web portal to continue the experience. This portal is simplistic and triggers an automated text cue which will act as an intermediary sending links to begin the experience. The audience/participant is also asked to write a note to the person they wish to contact on an envelope explicitly instructed to keep sealed until told otherwise. The message can be anything the audience/participant wishes as long as it is meant for one who has exited this realm of existence and, in the production's view, crossed the veil into a new one. This note, combined with the "hypnoculars," begins to bring the performance into shape. These are the tools with which the audience/participant will communicate with their loved one. The note is to be handwritten; this helps personalize both the message and the words it contains. The act of creating lines in ink is unarguably more elegant and affective than the tapping of keys. It also serves to remove technology from certain tasks like written communication so it can be redefined by the production later in terms of its visual communication. The separation of the smartphone from texting works to

function as the production desires and not as the audience/participant has become accustomed. Communication here is (as Deleuze and Guttari theorize it) a collected assemblage. In using a multitude of communication tools to accomplish a singular goal, this idea of an assemblage is realized. Unbeknownst to the audience/participant, this idea will also be reinforced visually through the video they are imminently going to experience. These elements of assemblage act as 'blocks of becoming' (Deluze and Guattari 1987: 277). An exchange begins through text, and the audience/participant is ordered to send an e-mail with a picture of the message they were asked to compose and wished to pass on to a loved one. This introduces another form of communication into the productions mix and allows the production's characters to contact the audience participant through e-mail after the productions close. Next, the instructions ask that the audience/participant text "vision" with the first initial of the person whom they wished to contact. Doing as instructed, the audience/participant is then greeted with the message "Initializing:Portaleza%?[Message to "?"], the ? would be replaced in the message based upon the initial the audience/participant typed. For example, my message was to my mother whose first initial was m, so my message read "Initializing:Portaleza%M[Message to "M"]. Doing this leads the audience/participant to a series of videos to be experienced on a smart phone through the "hypnoculars". The videos are an assemblage and change from surreal to expressionist to camp with little warning. They feature intentionally sloppy modern dance set against the techno score in an industrial setting, a more rhythmic dance in a more ethereal setting, and jump scares by a demonic figure who is never properly introduced. As Colebrook summarizes Deleuze's idea, "Language becomes a flow, list, voice or series of affects that do not so much 'say' or 'mean' as *produce* a passage from noise to word, from sound to sense" (114). The videos can be occasionally cringe-

worthy (the tying of the message to balloons and watching it float away), but each part of this assemblage works within the topology of the veil. The coordinates are not physical places but affective images. Manning reminds us that "To think topologically is to think beyond preexistant coordinates" (166). Sound also enters the fray as the video's soundscape shifts and changes, sometimes reinforcing the action, while other times completely unconnected to it. Deleuze insists that language 'stutters' and the combination of the soundscape with the video and the "hypnocular" help emphasize these stutters as vital parts of the audience/participant's message's journey. While repetition is featured in much of the soundscape, it is repetition with a difference. This difference comes through its pairing with video and a third element I've yet to address, the physical condition of the audience/participant. The process of putting the phone on the mat and watching through the "hypnoculars" proved daunting for me as the physical position was painful to hold for a long period. As the video intensified, so did the aching in my neck. Whenever sonic or visual interest weaned, physical pain anchored me to the actual world, reminding me of my physical place and placement while also reinforcing the importance of what I was attempting to accomplish through the physical cost required to achieve it. Because of the major role it played in the production it can only be assumed that the discomfort was intended as a physical consequence of crossing the veil. Communication is sometimes painful, and the physical position of the audience/participant staring straight down into the veil from an immobilized seated position helps reinforce this through physical affect. This discomfort becomes a block of becoming that is added to the assemblage of the video. The video soon "glitches" into a matrix-like aesthetic that allows the audience/participants to see into this other plane of existence. It ends with a return to this matrix-like script and the notification

that the message is sent. The audience/participant is then asked to "Imagine" that the envelope they were asked to write their note on is a response from the loved one. This is the last act of the event. In opening the envelope, the audience/participant receives a card with a generic platitude meant to comfort. Perhaps the largest issue with "Portaleza" is its push toward intended feeling negating the full force of affect for its potential events.

The three productions analyzed here pushed the envelope of what can be accomplished theatrically and served as a sort of balm against the panic and confusion of the pandemic. Their success in their stated goals is immaterial to how they advanced the practice of immersion during a difficult time when many of the theatre's traditions were inaccessible. Each of these productions had to begin with pulling or lifting their audience out of an immersed state caused by the virus. That does not indicate removal of the virus from the audience/participant's psyche as that would be impossible, but the envelopment of the audience/participant into a different world where the virus is not centralized. Being immersed in a production does not negate the myriad of daily tasks and worries that preexist that production but indicates a state of unique focus on the moment at hand. This focus is maintained through the proliferation of affects that are being formed into a narrative. Immersion is durational and can only last if focus is maintained. As discussed earlier, this harkens back to the immediacy necessary for immersion to exist. In short, immediacy breeds intimacy. The productions had to consider how to create the feeling of intimacy required to shift their audience/participants' focus and incorporate them into each production. The mystery of what is coming in the mail in "Portaleza" or the visible countdown to beginning in "The Tempest" are examples of how this was accomplished. This was no small feat and required the development or redefinition of technology to accomplish. I find it necessary here

to follow Samuel Coleridge's example and share in the artist's delight of creation. The results of these productions are much less than the sum of their parts; especially when these parts point specifically to what is to come. The return to traditional theatre post covid will be marked with celebration, but Covid's impact will be immediately noticeable upon the audience's first encounter with a strange body constricting them on each side of a packed auditorium. I fear their findings upon return will mirror Soren Kierkegaard's (as Constantin Constantius- or the other way around) findings upon attempting to relive a particularly wonderful evening. The result of which will be the nagging affect that it is not the same. Manning ends her book with the thought that "Relationscapes are propositions for future thinking" (228). Utilizing this framing, I will assert that the use of technology as theatrical means is the result of future thinking in the present.

What's Next

By understanding the emotive narrative and its component parts, the world of immersion and immersive techniques can be opened to creators with less resources or civic mined projects. One of the greatest limitations in producing immersive events under the previously understood models were the massive resources needed to build and control environments for audiences to explore. Many of the experiences detailed in this dissertation are subject to the largeness of the genre and this way of operating. In boiling down how immersion works in the brain to its component parts immersion can be achieved through more careful curation and less opulence. While the system I have theorized is far from simple in its current form, from a practical standpoint it can be summarized into a few steps. This opening up of immersion to a larger pool of creators is one of many hoped for outcomes of this work.

The practical uses of this technique in economic terms are enormous. Advertisers strive to connect with the public to build personalized experiences with them. If utilized well, the bridge between consumer and product can easily be narrowed. If done with enough expertise the consumer may not even be cognizant of why they have a newfound affinity for a certain product. If this is a possible and probable use outside of theatre of this technique it is not my immediate concern. While there is money to be made in its utilization, I am also trepidatious of its use as it cheapens the form, making consumers wary of immersions uses.

Another area of inquiry that is a continual theme hanging around the edges of this dissertation is the idea of sensorial equity: In essence, who gets to have these kinds of immersive experiences. At the moment, they are often attached to luxury brands through sponsorships such as Porsche, Gucci, and Johnny Walker. Many of them are cost prohibitive

for a singular attendance and require multiple experiences to achieve an understanding of their intended narrative. Punchdrunk, who is arguably the largest creator of immersive theatre worldwide, operates in this fashion. Their general size and lavishness mixed with an air of exclusivity are reasoned as the cause for their high barrier to entry. This is clearly an issue for numerous rationales, but brings a fundamental inequity to light: where and what is the body of the economically disenfranchised allowed to experience? I would be negligent to omit that this is a concern in traditional theatre as well, but in the new growing world of immersion seemingly no one is creating for those whose economic means are lesser. While the simple answer may hinge on economic structures, the shifting of the senses and sensorial world of the economically disadvantaged would be a fertile ground for study. Those who come of age in dense urban neighborhoods might find different sounds soothing or energizing than their suburban counterparts. Utilizing the way, the emotive narrative functions, it could be possible to find the ways in which bodies in society are disrupted from their ability to translate affects and isolated into cycles, including cycles of poverty. If emotives systems can be built in ways to bring audience/participants into stories that they effectively tell themselves, why couldn't the same be true for larger societal structures. The body is consistently reacting and interpreting its reality, while maxims insist change comes from within, perhaps it can be triggered from without using cleverly conceived emotive webs. The future of this work is wide open, and the immersive narrative can prove to be a powerful tool in both examining societal inequity and correcting issues caused there in.

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