

Interactivity and Immersion: Theoretical Approaches

Interactivity is a rich and oft-contested term, and it will be helpful to outline various approaches and definitions before considering its relationship to immersive theatre and audience experience. This chapter considers interactivity from the perspective of digital and multimedia performance, the theatrical event and computer games, concluding with a working definition that provides the framework for the following chapters' analysis of interactivity and immersion in relation to Punchdrunk. Chapter 3 proposes a methodology for analysing interactivity in immersive theatre with an extended case study of Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man*; Chap. 4 expands the discussion outside the walls of an immersive production to consider interactivity across a wider social and cultural canvas. I use a deliberately inclusive "multivalent model" of interactivity in which different, often overlapping, modes of interactivity can take place within, and with, a designed system.

Existing models of interactivity can be located in various academic contexts, adding to a longer body of work arguing for the importance of play to human experience (Huizinga 1950; McGonigal 2011). Studies of digital/computer games and analogue gaming have considered interactivity (Bramer 1983; Salen and Zimmerman 2004; Dovey and Kennedy 2006) as it is a defining feature of gaming (Crawford 2003a); but the field also contains studies that question assumptions regarding interactivity and player agency or control (Perron 2003; Newman 2004). This makes studies of interactivity in gaming particularly relevant to immersive theatre, where similar assumptions about audience agency/empowerment

might be made on the basis of an audience member's ability to engage with performers (O'Grady in Pitches and Popat 2011; Broadhurst and Machon 2012; White 2013). The overlap between gaming mechanics and performance is particularly relevant to digital and multimedia performance (Dixon 2007; Montola et al. 2009; Klich and Scheer 2012; Rose 2012). Wider social contexts also provide various models of interactivity, such as the theatrical event (Schani 2004) stressing the importance of social or civic connection, or multimedia advertising campaigns that seek to involve participants in the brand of a film or other media (Rose 2012), a means of interactivity with more explicitly commercial ends. This cultural context in particular requires critical engagement regarding the relationship between immersive experience and economic pressures (Alston 2012) or ethical boundaries (Ridout 2009). Scenography and design is also an important perspective on immersion (McKinney and Butterworth 2009: 192–195), as the sensory and aesthetic elements of much immersive work influence how a production is explored and experienced in the moment. The relationship between interactivity and scenographically immersive performance is an important element to Griffiths' "revered gaze" (2008), as it includes the effect of physically stepping into an immersive (scenographically rich, multisensory, other-worldly, etc.) space. All these perspectives allow immersive experience to be theorised as something that can be deliberately aimed for by makers. This in turn allows for enquiry into any potentially problematic aspects of the relationship between interactivity and immersion, particularly when it is seen to affect notions of audience agency.

INTRODUCTION(S) TO INTERACTIVITY

Digital and Multimedia Performance

Multimedia performance can be defined as a medium that includes both live and mediated elements, both the "real" and the "virtual." Klich and Scheer consider technology and aesthetics in multimedia performance, "tracking the kind of performance work that highlights the ways in which representational, largely audio-visual, media can activate new aesthetic potentials and new spectatorial experiences" (2012: 1). They define immersion as "the way multimedia creates a form of sensorial overload to exhaust the subjective experience of the object or event" (9) and propose two concepts of immersion: cognitive and sensory.

Cognitive immersion is related to brain activity. Sensory immersion is concerned with how a participant is engaged in the here and now of performance, making this the more relevant model for approaching immersive experience in theatre. Immersion and interactivity are not mutually exclusive in this context; nor do they guarantee each other. The purpose of immersion (when defined as sensory overload or exhaustion) is to place an audience member/participant within the world or the aesthetic of the work. Achieving this effect may not necessarily require them to engage with the work physically.

Packer and Jordan name five characteristics as an intrinsic part of computer-based multimedia: integration, interactivity, hypermedia, immersion and narrativity (2001: xxx). They consider interactivity “in terms of the extent to which spectators or users can *determine the structure of the work* through their own interactions with the work. This idea of a complex interactivity empowers the spectator or user not merely to experience the work in a more active way but to contribute to a re-iteration of the work in a modulated form” (2012: 8–9; my emphasis). Interactivity is associated with an audience not merely acting within the boundaries set by the work—going along with its rules—or completing the tasks a show allows or asks for, but changing the work, mattering to the completion of the work. An assumption of empowerment emerges through these considerations of interactivity and immersive experience. Technology and empowerment in embodied digital performance is further considered in Broadhurst and Machon (2006). The sensory overload described by Kilch and Scheer would seem to de-empower an audience member by overstimulation.

Dixon considers interactivity in four categories: navigation, participation, conversation and collaboration. These categories are defined by “the incremental levels of a user’s creative freedom they delineate [...] and are in no way relative to an individual artwork’s quality, originality, or impact” (2007: 564). *Navigation* is the simplest form of interaction, “epitomized by the single click of a mouse.” Surfing the web becomes a form of navigational interactivity as a user clicks through texts, pages and links. *Conversation* is a more “meaningful” level of interactivity: “dialogue ... is reciprocated and is subject to real interchange and exchange” (584). Such interaction might take place between the user and the hardware or software, or between users themselves. In conversational works “there is often a complex relationship or negotiation established between the user/audience and the work, which is reliant on such

issues as trust, cooperation, and openness” (585). *Collaboration* “comes about when the interactor becomes a major author or co-author of the artwork, experience, performance or narrative” (595). Although, as Dixon rightly states, these categories cannot be used to draw conclusions about the artistic merit of an individual work, this four-stage taxonomy of interactivity remains fundamentally hierarchical. The level of interactivity is defined not only by the role an audience member is invited to play in the work, but also by the effect they have on the final work. In the fourth category, *collaboration*, the artwork will be physically different (it will look, it will read, it will *be* different) because of the input it has received. There is an implicit value judgement in this hierarchical system that focuses on the role of the user. The more an audience member is able to influence and change a work, the greater the interactive experience, and the more rewarding for the player. Dixon defines most sensory installation environments (which might, via Kilch and Scheer, also be called immersive environments) as *participatory* rather than interactive: an audience may be able to operate a series of objects (for example) but an overall feeling of direct agency is limited. A direct correlation between interactivity and empowerment again becomes prominent in this theorisation of interactivity.

Dixon’s system is useful as graded and incremental means of defining interactivity. It also allows that different types of interactivity, even when separated into categories, might begin to blend into the other. A single work can exist across all four categories:

In installations where visitors’ walking or movement triggers sensors to activate planned events and programmed sequences and effects, it is arguable whether the primary interactive paradigm is, according to our continuum, navigation (the course the user takes), participation (users helping to bring to life the environment’s sensory features), conversation (a dialogue between the user and the computer) or collaboration (the user and computer creating art together). (2007: 583)

Although by definition the user’s input is a vital aspect of interactivity, immersive experience is something which must be accommodated or allowed for, rather than forced; it is useful to consider how interactivity might be crafted and designed as a means to lowering barriers to immersive experience, rather than implying that one “type” of interactivity is

going to provide the “better” results (whatever is meant by *better*). Any one of Dixon’s four types of interactivity might lead to immersive experience. Drawing on Dixon’s model, O’Grady suggests that “interactivity can function as both aesthetic principle and a political ideology. [...] Often, how one can interact is given priority over the *quality* and significance of the interactions taking place” (in Pitches and Popat 2011: 146; original emphasis). Dixon’s model is useful for considering the quality of interactivity in terms of defining how an audience member is able to affect the work; when considering how interactivity may lead to immersion the model becomes less useful, as the type of input an audience member has on the work will not necessarily be the aspect that opens up immersive experience.

There is a further reason to look elsewhere for a model of interactivity. Discussion of interactivity and immersive experience, particularly in reference to performance, is often related to new media and digital technology, especially performance using multimedia and/or virtual reality. Punchdrunk shows might not immediately call to mind the label multimedia, as this term generally refers to work that explicitly uses technology. With the exception of *It Felt Like A Kiss*, film does not tend to feature in Punchdrunk shows, at least as an explicit medium used as part of the work, as opposed a more general aesthetic of film genres (pulp/noir/detective/horror). In *The Crash of the Elysium*, the physically absent Doctor communicated with his audience via television screens, and Higgin has cited the difficulty of getting the televised segments to meld with the physical show in a way that would keep the audience engaged (in Machon 2013: 214–218). Digital technology is used to create technical effects, of course, and Punchdrunk shows are highly sophisticated in this sense. But the relationship between interactivity and immersion should be considered separately to the means of engagement with the technology used to create the experience. Feelings of immersion do not stem directly from the use of technology in the way virtual reality or multimedia performance seeks to create immersive experience. The goal of any technology used in a Punchdrunk production—and much immersive theatre—is to effectively disappear behind the effects this technology creates (lowering the initial barriers to immersion of accessibility), allowing for immersion in the world of the production created by technology and SFX, rather than forefronting an audience member’s relationship to, or within, the technology itself.

IMPROVISATORY THEATRE AND PERVERSIVE GAMING

Izzo (1997) emphasises interactivity as a form of theatre with historical antecedents, defining *interactive* performance as a form in which the actor conducts semi-improvised in-character conversations with passers-by. He describes the mindset of an interactive performer as being fully (emotionally, cognitively, imaginatively) immersed in the work, emphasising playfulness, flexibility and fluidity in the experience. Their performance, emotional journey and individual lines will alter depending on the response they receive from other actors and non-performing audience members (this type of interactivity occurs at the levels of *conversation* and *collaboration* as defined by Dixon). The negotiation of barriers to interactivity—overcoming reluctance with certain participants, for example—is very similar to the gradual process, on the spectator's side, of reaching a state of immersion in the performance. The audience member might even temporarily forget they are in (for example) a theme park and become fully engaged with the performer (who is also having an immersive experience as they perform). Though not a book about immersive theatre per se, Izzo's study considers interactive performance from the perspective of both makers/performers and spectators as a means to generate immersive experience in engagement. There is also a wider social consideration as Izzo suggests the form is deeply personally rewarding for a performer. Social aims of interactivity are also considered by O'Grady (2011), who compares contemporary interactive performance (such the pervasive games of Blast Theory) to Boal's Forum Theatre. There are many aesthetic and political differences of course, but the two forms do, also, share some similarities: in both, the invitation to engage with the content of the performance is integral to the form (146–175). The participant becomes an active co-creator of meaning and might become extremely engaged in what is going on, having an immersive experience in the work.

The performance form of pervasive gaming enables a further distinction to be made between interactive performance and immersive theatre. Montola, Stenros and Waern (in *Pervasive Games*: 2009) consider interactivity as a defining aspect of performative games and play. Unlike spatially immersive work where the performance is contained within defined walls of a building, pervasive games have either wide boundaries—city-wide, for instance—or no defined geographical limits at all. Players may become mentally immersed in the experience of the game

and must overcome barriers to become immersed, gradually becoming accustomed to the game's rules and/or losing themselves in the world or the mechanics of play. Pervasive gaming is not immersive theatre, but it may provide an immersive experience. Like urban exploration, "Seeing the backside of the city, from run-down industrial areas to shady alleys, is a physically immersive experience that conveys a strong feeling of *being there*" (85). Pervasive gaming may also have a wide or undefined temporal dimension, as well as a wide or undefined spatial one.

Some immersive theatre productions, including Punchdrunk's bigger shows, may have aspects that resemble pervasive gaming built into their structure or form, such as an emphasis on searching or exploration or the use of cryptic clues. These aspects may lead to people engaging with them as if they were pervasive games. *Emergent interaction* in pervasive gaming occurs when "playing pronia-inducing games in public spaces ... If the game design succeeds in instilling players with a feeling that it is safe to talk to anyone to try to enlist their help, the game world comes alive socially" (Montola et al. 2009: 123). The ideal, therefore, is for the game world to become blurred with real world: this occurs when "play is not limited temporally, social, or spatially" (122) and the resulting experience resembles psychological immersion or "flow." In much immersive theatre, hierarchies within the space are strictly defined, and there may be variously explicit or implicit rules about what is and is not allowed. Immersive experience is intense, fleeting and temporary; spatially, immersive theatre takes place within a strictly defined site (three hours in this building; three minutes in this room; three seconds of eye contact). This is opposite to pervasive gaming, which aims for the real world and game world to become blurred, both in content (Is that person part of the game or not?) and in form (What if I go over here? Is *this* allowed?). Both forms of theatre manipulate notions of boundaries and rules to create interactive and immersive effects.

Popat suggests that "in interactive artworks the power given to the audience is far greater, and they are made aware of its existence" (2006: 34). This distinction—the audience's awareness of the dynamics of power—is key to considering interactivity and immersion in immersive theatre. Interactive work makes the role the audience has to play. In immersive theatre, and particularly Punchdrunk's larger productions from *Faust* through to *The Drowned Man*, the way an audience member might actually affect the work is never overtly suggested. It might be implied in the moment of performance that one-on-one scenes are

dependent upon an audience member's input, and where an audience member goes will affect what they see, but they cannot actively influence anything that occurs in performance. Interactive work depends upon a negotiation of hierarchies of space and time and tends to emphasise playfulness; in immersive theatre, boundaries and rules regarding an audience's behaviour are generally non-negotiable. "For *interactive* theatre, participants are asked to bring their own experience and understanding to bear on the drama as it progresses and illusion is kept to a minimum" (O'Grady 2011: 172; my emphasis). For *immersive* theatre, participants are asked to lose themselves in the drama as it progresses and makers work towards the aim of keeping illusion to a maximum. Although it can be well made, tightly structured and carefully crafted, "Interactive performance is always incomplete" (168) relying on the input of audience members (however that input manifests) to make the experience whole. A piece of immersive theatre, while it may contain moments where types of interactivity might occur, is generally presented as a complete creation; a whole world the participant visits, or an all-encompassing scenography. Bartley's term "narrator-visitor" for members of a Punchdrunk audience (2013) emphasises the temporary nature of their experience and the power dynamics they have during it: a narrator-visitor is able to author their own experience, but only temporarily and in response to invitation.

SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF INTERACTIVITY: THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY AND THE THEATRICAL EVENT

Immersive experience is often framed in terms of individual journeys, but it also creates conversation and the urge to share afterwards. David Jubb described "the bar at the end of a Punchdrunk show" as the most exciting place to be during *The Masque of the Red Death*, it being a place of excitement and exchange where "everyone wants to share what happened to them" (in Gardner 2007: n.p.). A social aspect of immersive experience is brought about by a desire to compare what happened on different days or in different parts of the building. (This mode of interactivity is discussed further in Chap. 4 on fan communities.) However, one potentially problematic consequence of this social emphasis is the operationalising of immersion: the way, as suggested previously, audiences are invited to *experience* a world rather than to explicitly *interact* with

it suggests a top-down power dynamic with the potential for the commodification of experience. An aspiration for the creation of immersion, from a marketing perspective, is a one-way type of “interactivity” that goes from product to person.

Frank Rose (2011) considers interactivity between audiences and media with an emphasis on how it enhances marketing, branding and engagement between a product and its audience. He proposes that a new type of narrative is emerging that is non-linear and multimedia, characterised by interactive/participatory elements. The relationship between interactivity and immersion is a straightforward one of positive correlation: immersive experience allows for empowering participations with marketing. The creation of a fully immersive experience is a key way in which to engage fans with products. The fictional world of Pandora from Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009), for example, is cited as a fully immersive and detailed world that can be explored beyond the film, in games or print media. Interactivity becomes a means of enhancing engagement with a film/story/product, and multimedia is integral to this approach: interactivity is designed to occur across different media at the same time. The experience of interactivity is a social one, in that there is an emphasis on conversation between players: multiple people engaging with a product at the same time can—and should be encouraged to—communicate while doing so. Such uses of technology’s potential for immersion provide a useful context of some common discourses surrounding immersive theatre and performance that plays with notions of intimacy or individual experience. Rose’s emphasis on the revolutionary potential of interactive marketing campaigns risks an oversimplification of what new media can achieve. *Avatar* is cited as a major success in the art of filmmaking due to the level of detail that went into its three-dimensional worldbuilding. Its one-dimensional story and characters go unmentioned. The success of the interactive trailer/game *Why So Serious?* is defined in terms of the box office receipts for the film it advertised, *The Dark Knight* (2008). Interactivity with new media is framed as successful when it immerses players in a *product*: the creation of experiences that fans will want to talk about is the blurring of an experience into sellable content. The claims made for immersion in the context Rose celebrates require careful analysis. The ability to interact with a piece of art will not in itself make for an immersive experience, but it may not even be particularly desirable.

The marketing campaigns Rose describes were carefully crafted experiences designed to create an extension of pre-existing fictional worlds: barriers to immersion were lowered, clues were laid and rewards for them planted, and fans who put the effort into respond enjoyed a unique experience that later tied into the story of the films. The campaigns used interactivity to enable, and guide the players towards, immersive experience—with the ultimate goal of making the player (more) aware of a product or brand. The economic imperative behind the crafting of immersion in this way has drawn criticism in terms of Punchdrunk's commercial projects. Alston considers product placement and the question of sustainable arts funding in regard to Punchdrunk's *The Black Diamond*, proposing a critical approach in which “audience members might assume partial responsibility for recognising and responding to the control of art production at the institutional level” (2012: 193). This response to immersive product placement in effect requires an audience member to create their own barrier to immersive experience: the critical engagement required to be aware of wider economic and cultural contexts of product placement takes an audience member outside the world presented by the work. The relationship between interactivity and audience experience will be key to considering further issues of agency and immersive marketing. This book does not have the scope to consider interactivity in detail in these contexts, instead focusing on approaches to analyse immersion and interactivity in the moment of performance. However, overlaps between interactivity, immersive experience and commercial imperatives, when considered in the context of the kind of creative marketing Rose and Alston describe, reveal a possible interpretation of the purpose for creating experiences people will want to talk about afterwards. This is an increasingly prevalent trajectory of immersive practice that demands acknowledgement and further analysis.

The theatrical event is another lens to view the social potentials of interactivity. Schani considers what qualities constitute “eventness” in theatre, distinguishing event from performance through “the presence of concrete conditions, whose most important dimensions are time and place” (2004: 111) and interactivity between participants. The idea of reciprocity in the theatrical event provides a useful way of thinking about immersive experience and interactivity from the perspective of performer as well as audience member. It enables a reading of immersive productions that encapsulates multiple types of interactivity occurring within the walls of the building, as well as outside and beyond the moment of theatrical encounter—and the reciprocal relationship between all of these.

Schani proposes a model of dynamic interactivity that emphasises reciprocity between the moment of performance, the stage play itself and the wider cultural situation that surrounds it. The difference between performance event and theatrical event lies in these relationships between and among the people involved. The case studies in the following chapters contain various suggestions of reciprocity between participants and the shows, and (particularly in fan communities) between each other. Reading them for their “eventness” enables a further distinction to be made between the theatrical event and the marketing event, in terms of how they manipulate immersive experience, interactivity and agency.

The model of “eventness” is a continuum, not a binary: and one example of a space existing across and between social event and cultural event are Punchdrunk’s “decompression” areas. *The Masque of the Red Death*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Sleep No More* and *The Drowned Man* all contained a room in which the atmosphere could be notably different, louder and more relaxed and sociable. There could be music or other entertainers, a working bar and, most notably, masks need not to be worn. These spaces are the immersive theatre equivalent to an interval. Unlike a conventional interval they exist in space, rather than time: audience members are free to spend as long as they like in the interval space, provided they can find it. They offer a break from the intensity of the rest of the show and allow for movement between different kinds of interactivity (with the show as an audience member, to a more sociable kind) and behaviour (silence to talking, exploring to relaxing). These spaces can also be where the performance ends, or where the audience are led after the finale and permitted to remain. These “interval” spaces can be defined in terms of their relationship to immersive experience in the rest of the show, as they provide further boundaries in both time and space. They might also be framed in terms of providing a commercial aspect to the production (the drinks aren’t free); or perhaps they represent a return to the conventional rules and social dynamics of the “real” world, as opposed to the otherworldly dreamland of the show (after all, the drinks wouldn’t be free anywhere else either).

COMPUTER GAMES: A MULTIVALENT MODEL

Discourses around gaming reveal a history of social anxiety regarding the antisocial consequences of too much immersion. *Interactivity* can be used to suggest a more enriching or educational experience: a euphemism

employed to gloss over the negative connotations of becoming too immersed in a game. Products invoke *interactivity* to create a “veneer of respectability [...] Thus, we find certain companies preferring to consider themselves contributing to a world of ‘interactive entertainment’ [...] It follows that the products of an interactive entertainment industry are not games. Rather, they are ‘interactive fiction’ or ‘interactive narratives’” (Newman 2004: 7). Interactivity is invoked as a response to the fear of too much immersion: it is immersion’s socially acceptable opposite.

Newman emphasises the importance of “*player activity*” (16; original emphasis), arguing that games “may be characterised by a sense of ‘being there’, rather than controlling, manipulating or perhaps even ‘playing a game’” (17). Immersion is linked with a sense of control, and the interactive aspects of a game are designed to create and ensure this. A visible (i.e. clear, fair) system of challenge and reward are key, and it is important that the manner in which a gamer is immersed does not feel contrived. Crafting for immersive experience in theatre has some parallels with the challenge faced by game designers, particularly in reference to interactivity. Game designer Crawford states: “I have long maintained that interactivity is the essence of the gaming experience, and that the quality of the interaction determines the quality of the game” (2003a: 84). A more interactive game isn’t necessarily the one with the flashier graphics, but the game that responds the most to the player. What matters is that the player can affect the outcome. Crawford proposes a workload versus payoff model for determining the effectiveness of a game’s interactivity, which is very similar to the concept of challenge and skill alignment required to determine a state of psychological “flow.” The gamer does not wish to become aware of the interface as she plays, as this would break immersion: “For many video game designers, it is important to ensure that there is no explicit detachment and distance from the contents of the game” (Newman 2004: 17–18). Interactivity in gaming is designed to ensure immersion and challenge. Immersive theatre can also be designed to allow for this kind of engaged experience.

The difference between a game and simply *play* is that while a game has a way to win or to lose, play has no winning beyond what a player may understand the term to mean. Open-ended or “sandbox” games do not have explicit ways to win but gamers may aim for certain goals they set for themselves. The relationship between a player and the rule(s) of play are themselves a site for interactivity, or player-led modification or manipulation:

once the rules [of a game] have been deduced and overcome, videogames may lose their appeal and new challenges may be sought, either through (purchasing) new games or the imposition of new ludus rules. [...] Deducing, collating, and working within or around a game's rulesets represents a large part of the pleasure of videogame play and further highlights the active, participatory role of the player. (Newman 2004: 21–22)

This game-within-a-game mode of interactivity—interacting *with* the rules themselves—could also occur in immersive theatre, particularly in shows that give no explicit instruction to audience members beyond the vague assurance that “tonight, your bearing shapes your fate” (the audio introduction to *The Drowned Man*). Repeat attendees in particular may set themselves additional challenges, games or goals: applying their own ludus rules on top of, as well as, or even overwriting, the production's implicit suggested modes of engagement. A sister activity to deliberately creating additional ludus rules is accidentally breaking the implicit existing rules—and breaking this boundary may not necessarily break immersion. Alston (2016) describes how the “mistakes” of an errant immersive spectator, accidentally wandering far from a piece of work's prescribed or preferred course, paradoxically emphasises the centrality of the audience member's role in creating immersive aesthetics.

It follows that interactivity has several forms, only some of which might be anticipated by the game/theatre designer; a participant might interact in ways which have not been designed for. Murray argues that “*Agency and immersion are mutually reinforcing*. When we engage with an immersive world and it responds to us as we expect it to, revealing deeper levels of content, greater detail in its coverage, we become more deeply immersed” (2012: 102; original emphasis). Murray calls this the “active creation of belief.” Agency occurs when an interactor-player engages with an imaginary world and experiences a reciprocal response. For Crawford, reciprocity is also key to interactivity, fundamentally “A cyclic process in which two active agents alternately (and metaphorically) listen, think, and speak” (2003a: 76). By these definitions of interactivity, much immersive theatre may seem not very interactive at all.

The difference between games and puzzles provides a further distinction that is useful for considering interactivity and immersion in theatre. Puzzles are self-contained: they may enrich the feeling that play is occurring in a vast world; or stall or disrupt gameplay and add little to the overall experience, becoming redundant and defunct once completed.

Interactivity differentiates a game from a static puzzle. A player is able to control, or at least play a part in, a game's events. This kind of "active" interactivity is seen to allow for immersive experience by being linked to feelings of control and agency, a sensation of skill matching challenge. The assumption that there is an automatic correlation between interactivity and agency is under question in gaming studies—such assumptions should also be queried in regard to claims made by immersive or interactive theatre regarding audience agency or empowerment. Newman argues that discussing how interactive games are overlooks an even more fundamental point:

Videogames are highly complex, segmented arrangements of elements. Some of these elements may be seen to be highly "interactive," requiring considerable player participation and responding to player action, while others... appear to demand little or no direct player input or control, nor do they respond to attempts to exert influence. Yet, this is not to say that the player is not actively interrogating the material, exploring it for clues to aid forthcoming play or reading a presented narrative in order to make sense of part events or those yet to come. (2004: 27)

The player's movement between various levels or types of participation—going between passive watching and active strategising, for example—creates a rewarding video game experience: a movement into, and out of, and into again, various levels of engagement with a game. Interactivity requires a response from the gamer, and their input is necessary for the game to continue, progress, be completed; but this, in itself, does not guarantee immersion. This is a useful framing of interactivity that runs parallel with the definition of immersive experience as a temporary, fleeting, intense, necessarily temporary phenomenon that exists as a series of graded states, not as a felt/not-felt binary. The movement between levels of interactivity—in a Punchdrunk show, for example, this could be a movement between passive watching, emotional engagement with a piece of dance, active searching through rooms, getting lost, following someone—is what creates an immersive experience, not the sensation of interacting (or not) in itself.

The idea that an audience member moves between different modes of interactivity resolves an apparent contradiction in the relationship between interactivity and immersive experience. Interactivity is not required to be consistent. In fact, moving between modes of interactivity

might be more effective in allowing for immersive experience than suggesting an audience member/game player be fully in control of their own experience throughout. It may be helpful to draw a distinction between interactivity and activity. Writing from the perspective of interactive digital media design, Murray notes that interactivity is “a design term that is often used too loosely, and is sometimes confused with mere activity or potential actions” (2012: 426). If a game is defined by, or discussed primarily in terms of, the input and participation of the player, non-interactive cutscenes might be seen as problematic or annoying for a gamer, disrupting play. They are plain “activity,” which they cannot influence and therefore cannot become immersed in. By this logic, the most frustrating moments of an immersive theatre production would be when an audience member comes upon performers dancing a scene and are required to give them space, as this stops them from moving freely around or actively engaging with individual performers or parts of the set. Watching the scene becomes an activity that they have little control over. But of course, watching a dance scene from close up can be deeply rewarding, engaging, impressive, emotional, real: so a simplistic interactivity/activity model cannot provide straight answers to the question of what kind of engagement will lead to a more affecting experience of immersion in the work. The quality and significance of the ways an audience member/player might engage with a piece of work are integral to the effect it has, rather than any one mode of interactivity (or activity) being automatically the most effective. Rather than being simply dismissed as interruptions, cutscenes might be considered alongside level breaks, save points or restarts as pauses that punctuate gaming and affect its tempo or the overall rhythm. They are all part of a game’s structure, and these components combined with actual play make up the full experience of the game—not to mention their potential contributions to story, tone, atmosphere, worldbuilding. Movement between different modes of engagement, active exploring followed by a calmer minute of watching, makes for a richer experience than constant single level of activity or intensity. Just as video games are not all about interactivity, but contain movement between more and less interactive scenes, neither is immersive experience in theatre all about interactivity, but consists of movements across lowered barriers to immersion and into various (and varied) modes of engaging with performers or the performance space.

Salen and Zimmerman offer a four-mode taxonomy of interactivity:

- Mode 1: Cognitive interactivity; or interpretive participation
- Mode 2: Functional interactivity; or utilitarian participation
- Mode 3: Explicit interactivity; or participation with designed choices and procedures
- Mode 4: Beyond-the-object interactivity; cultural participation. (2004: 69)

This model incorporates the many definitions of interactivity that can be found across studies of both gaming and theatre rather than attempting to give a definitive, and therefore limiting, description of what interactivity can be. I have suggested already that Dixon's hierarchical continuum of interactivity (from navigation to collaboration) contains an implicit value judgement about the role of the user in regard to making meaning within the work. O'Grady points out that studies of interactivity in performance too often focus on the ways in which interactivity is possible, rather than on the "*quality or significance* of the interactions taking place" (146; original emphasis). The following chapters on interactivity use Salen and Zimmerman's system, drawing on its incorporation of "overlapping ways of understanding any moment of interactivity" (2004: 69) to consider quality and significance, not just interactivity *type*. Salen and Zimmerman point out that "*meaningful* play is tied not only to the concept of player action and system outcome, but also to a particular context in which the action occurs" (60; my emphasis). The four-mode system allows for imaginative/cognitive/sensory participation to be regarded as interactivity, as well as more explicit physical manifestations of interactivity (which all four of Dixon's modes resemble) and participation within a wider social context (as in the theatrical event).

IN(TERACTIVE) CONCLUSION

Interactivity—whatever is meant by it—does not, in itself, guarantee immersive experience. Certain modes or moments of interactivity may facilitate and/or allow for it more than others, being a way to lower barriers to immersive experience and draw an audience member into the work. Although interactive theatre and immersive theatre may be created to fulfil very different aims, interactivity is an aspect of immersive theatre, albeit it may take different forms and have different effects from show to show, and from person to person. Audience members might become imaginatively, functionally or explicitly engaged with a show—or some

combination of the three—at any one time, whether imagining worlds and stories from clues planted in an empty room; walking around, opening doors and exploring the space; sharing a drink with a performer in a one-on-one; or idly wondering how, on a more practical level, the whole thing was put together. *Interactivity* can also describe wider cultural participation, and in this mode immersive experience is, or can become, a social experience.

The following two chapters explore case studies from Punchdrunk to explore the complex relationship(s) between interactivity and immersive experience in more detail. Chapter 3 looks at interactivity and immersion in *The Drowned Man*, considering how it was constituted and performed, and the effects various mode of interactivity may have had on immersion. Chapter 4 considers the fourth mode in the model—beyond-the-object interactivity or cultural participation—beginning with *Faust* and *The Masque of the Red Death* and then, via *Sleep No More*, returning to *The Drowned Man*. Chapter 4 therefore traces a trajectory of the company's history and development in the near-decade between the earlier shows and their most recent productions, and this change in the company's status further informs how immersive experience is claimed to occur within their work, and who claims it.

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