Immersive horror performance as a site of contested identity and authenticity

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the subject of live horror entertainment and commercial scare attractions. It positions these works as a significant component of immersive performance that represents a window into the pre-occupation of the contemporary audience's preoccupation with identity and authenticity. It brings together scholarship from performance, film, literature, psychology and tourism studies alongside the small existing scholarship on the topic. The thesis argues that identity and authenticity are part of the appeal of performing in scare attractions, creating a form of subculture; that the spectatorship of scare attractions is inherently heterogenous and reflexive; that the spectator is in control of the management of their experience, and they engage in ongoing evaluation of their affective responses as a means of digesting the event at both individual and social levels. This evaluation is determined by several potential factors which are identified in the thesis. It argues that audiences may be manipulated by fear and other forms of affect into a sense of community, or that they may experience a sense of "purity" at events that take place in the body. Finally, I argue that in scare attractions, audiences test their attitude towards mortality not only via perceived threats but via a relationship with the uncanny. It positions immersive horror and other similar commercial events as an important, yet broadly overlooked, site of study within performance studies and argues that it offers a new perspective towards the study of immersive theatre.

For those who wish to be kind, those who wish to understand, and those who believe the two are not in in conflict.

And for my mum, who spent her last months furious she wouldn't be alive to see this. It's alright, mother. I'm ok and I did it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin with thanks to my amazing supervisor, Dr Caroline Radcliffe, for her steadfast support, her encouragement, her belief, and her ongoing feedback. This has been a very long process and so it has been essential to have support throughout that has been consistent, giving, and resilient to so many obstacles. In addition, I would like to thank my co-supervisees, Dr Gianna Bouchard and Dr Paul Geary, and my tutor Dr David Pattie for invaluable contributions at various stages in my journey.

I would like to thank all my family and friends, in particular my father Joe and my late mum Angela. This would not be possible without them, as is the case with so much in my life, and their belief in me is behind everything I do.

Thanks also to Jason, Bex, and everyone else in the industry who has contributed to my journey around this strange, spooky subject and industry.

Contents:

‘The worst one is coming up.
Next is the Magic Mirror Gate:
Atreyu has to face his true self’.

The Neverending Story

(Wolfgang Petersen &

Herman Weigel, after Michael Ende)

Introduction

In this thesis I will define the multifaceted interactions between identity and live horror performances and argue that affective performances such as horror are a site of identity affirmation and conflict. It will highlight live horror performances as being particularly pertinent to the current social, political, and economic moment within the UK, the United States and New Zealand (and potentially beyond, but this is the terrain of case studies) owing to the distinct menu of spectatorships the form offers. I assert that this pertinence is a result of immersive horror's complex relationship with authenticity, which mirrors the contemporary moment's fixation with perceptual versus material reality. While all live horror performance forms will be considered to some extent within the thesis, there is a particular emphasis on commercial *scare attractions*, also known as *haunted attractions*, which sit within the performance remit of immersive and/or participatory theatre, and the case studies I use from outside of these are also themselves participatory or immersive in varying degrees. I frame horror performance, especially scare attractions, as sites of content creation made up of three distinct groups: those responsible for producing the entertainment content of the events/performances, those who perform it, and those who spectate it. I make the argument that all three parties actively create and consume these performances and do so in such a way that is sometimes determined by, sometimes reflective of, and sometimes deeply challenging to, their sense of personal or communal identity. This is enhanced further when it is considered that those three "groups" may also exist within one person: the participant who themself produces, performs, and spectates an internal experience in response to the show taking place around them and their affective responses to it. Enveloping all these dynamics are the relationships of individuals, art, capitalism, and contemporary culture to authenticity. Scare attractions are fabricated environments in which people attempt to locate sensations that feel "real" even as they are contrived. These seemingly "real" sensations can be used to validate or challenge different forms of self and communal actualisation.

A central argument in the thesis emphasises and expands the well-established heterogeneity of horror spectatorship.[1] There are several factors that determine the site of consumption in live horror. This thesis asserts that identity paradigms are among these factors and are determinants of how consumers engage with horror events. These may include the desire for community membership, the individual's perceived relationships within peer groups, the cultural background of those involved, the ways in which the consumers wish to perceive themselves internally and externally, and the universal relationship with death and humanity. The immersive horror performance plays out in the minds and bodies of both actors and spectators simultaneously as well as the material space between them, with every individual involved in the event not necessarily experiencing the same reality or finding authenticity in the same elements of performance – if at all. Each chapter of this thesis will draw upon one of these identity paradigm forms, which will in turn lead to the discussion of different aspects of perceived authenticity within those paradigms.

The field of scare attractions has been limited in its scope up to this point from an academic perspective, with a first upcoming collection on the subject, *Fright Nights: Live Horror Events,* due in 2025 from Edinburgh University Press. Prior to this Madelon Hoedt, Mathias Clasen and Adam Alston are among those who have referred to scare attractions within scholarship.[2] Hoedt has focused on introducing the genre, as in her 2020 piece *HAUNTco* which details the *Hauntcon* event in New Orleans observing that 'Lacking a formal history, a major component of haunt culture is based around oral storytelling, sharing best and worst scares, discussing the building of a prop or a makeup effect, with both small and mid-size events putting a lot of effort into the creation of their own theatrical sets and set pieces'.[3] I will develop Hoedt's idea there is a 'haunt culture' in Chapter One. She has also argued that control is a core element of scare attractions, a notion I agree with and will expand upon in chapters two and three of this thesis, referring to her work. Early empirical work on scare attraction reception

[1] Clasen, Mathias; Andersen, Marc; Schjoedt, Uffe, "Adrenaline junkies and white-knucklers: A quantitative study of fear management in haunted house visitors," *Poetics (Amsterdam)* 73 (2019): 61-71.
[2] These scholars will all be discussed widely within the thesis and have contributed multiple relevant documents
[3] Hoedt, Madelon, HAuNTco. *Irish Gothic Journal,* (18) (2020): 296-299.

has come from the Recreational Horror Lab at the University of Aarhus, Denmark under a team led by Mathias Clasen. Clasen and his associates have found that 'enjoyment (of scare attractions) is related to forms of arousal dynamics that are "just right". These findings shed light on how fear and enjoyment can coexist in recreational horror'.[4] It is Hoedt's discussion of control within scare attractions that perhaps is most pertinent as a starting point. Hoedt's argument that horror attractions involve significant audience agency, and a harnessing of perceived control away from fictional threats, is a reason haunts provide opportunities for spectators to reflect on perceptions of reality and the self. This point is not directly observed in her essay, and the reception of scare attractions as a field of study has mostly involved the empirical studies of the Recreational Horror Lab. I will be operating in parallel to these scholars, expanding the body of knowledge surrounding scare attractions and synthesising multiple fields of study to forge an argument that scare attractions are an important source of knowledge regarding the contemporary consumer and spectator. Since the field of study remains relatively barren, this will also involve the generation of some original terminology and vocabulary, as well as the incorporation of vocabulary that is common to the industry into scholarship.

This thesis aims to isolate and analyse an area of performance that has been generally overlooked and identify why it might be viewed as an essential melting pot of contemporary issues in performance, hospitality and beyond. It aims to pull together scholarship in tourism and immersive theatre, two domains that are strongly aligned but that have not been subject to high levels of comparison. It is part of an ongoing exploration of the importance of live horror performance beyond its historical elements. and is intended to contribute to contemporary debates surrounding the place of authenticity and identity in entertainment, and how prone to manipulation by commercial processes these phenomena are.

[4] Andersen, Marc Malmdorf; Schjoedt, Uffe; Price, Henry; Rosas, Fernando E.: Scrivner, Coltan; Clasen, Mathias "Playing With Fear: A Field Study in Recreational Horror", *Psychological science*, 2020-12, Vol.31 (12) (2020), p.1497-1510

The starting point for the multiple fields of scholarship needed to form a robust study of scare attractions will be horror reception theory. The history of horror on stage has been examined in significant detail by academics including Richard Hand and Roxana Stuart. Hand has published a sequence of books on the history of horror theatre, especially on the Grand Guignol and its influences in the rest of Europe and beyond.[5] Also subject to examination has been the history of ghost plays, both past and present.[6] As such, live horror within observational scripted traditional theatre is far from an anomaly in the public consciousness, even if it is not the first association of the genre and does not possess the prominence of the horror film. The history of horror on stage has been covered in detail, but less so the spectatorship of it. This is why while many elements of the thesis also apply to observational horror theatre plays, the focus of the majority of this study, outside of Chapter Five, will be on the less-covered terrain of commercial scare attractions and other types of comparably interactive performances.

Superficially, one might define horror reception by an assumed rationale of evoking forms of telos. It aims to 'generate fear, shock or disgust (or a combination of these), alongside associated states such as dread or suspense', and is therefore notable for being a genre that, unlike most, defines itself primarily in terms of the effect it wishes to produce in its spectators.[7] *Tooth Fairy* produced at Knott's Berry Farm's *Knott's Scary Farm* event in 2016, viewable in full online,[8] demonstrates hallmarks of both appeals to telos (disgust, fear, surprise) and the postmodern condition (the work is parodic and subverts the expectations of the fantasy horror genre), oscillating between the two, appealing to both spectatorships, and thus apparently locating it within the domain of what might be described as metamodernism. The Recreational Horror Lab's valuable approach to horror reception has also centred around telos, a dynamic which I will both expand upon and critique. A focus on telos is insufficient to encompass the range of horror fandom and consumption. I hope to expand on that range with each

[5] Hand, R. & Wilson, M. *Grand-Guignolesque: Classic and Contemporary Horror Theatre*. (University of Exeter Publishing. Exeter. 2022): 1.
[6] Jones, Kelly, "Authorized absence: Theatrical representations of authorship in three contemporary ghost plays," *Studies in theatre and performance*, Vol.32 (2) (2012): 165-177
[7] Reyes, *Horror: A Literary Introduction*: 7
[8] Sharp Productions (Youtube Video) "Tooth Fairy Maze at Knott's Scary Farm 2017" (Sept 2017): (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvNHB04pdbE)

individual chapter of this thesis. A working hypothesis I will test is the idea that what we fear and what we consume in the genre that represents fear, is informative about how we perceive ourselves and how we perceive the interactions we have.

Hand also emphasises Grand Guignol's use of the "Scottish shower" – the tendency to follow thriller works with short performances of lowbrow comedy, intermingling horror with laughs and to heighten a sense of an irreverent atmosphere. The two affective genres often align to Mikhael Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, the *Tooth Fairy* example being an effective demonstration of this. Bakhtin's carnivalesque captures the spirit of a dynamic where inversions from the norm are used to create a sense of chaos and authority is subverted, the profane becomes sacred and everything is acknowledged as fragmentary and arbitrary. To apply the idea of the carnivalesque to scare attractions is something that could be a thesis of itself. I have chosen not to include it within this thesis as I did not want to prioritise one form of spectatorship above others in a thesis which emphasises the heterogeneity of horror viewing. Nevertheless, such analysis of scare attractions using a paradigm of Bakhtin's carnivalesque would be a valuable contribution to the field.

For the purposes of this thesis the word 'identity' refers to self-actualisation, amid observations that self-actualisation is a significant paradigm within the 'individualism that is part of modernization', and increasingly the notion of identity has 'become emotionally charged'.[9] Acquiring and sustaining a notion of stable self, that is affirmed 'may involve two referencing processes: (i) reference to an internalized self-representation depending on autobiographical memories; (ii) reference to environments feed-back resulting from our engagement in actions'.[10] The individual generates a sense of self from both internal reflection and external engagement. Immersive performance is a stimulatory environment that suits testing or renegotiating this affirmation. It provides opportunities for both internal self-representation such as

[9] Coulmas, *Identity: A Very Short Introduction*: 128.
[10] Bulteau, Samuell Malo, Roman; Holland, Zoé; Sauvaget, Anne, "The update of self-identity: Importance of assessing autobiographical memory in major depressive disorder," *Wileys interdisciplinary reviews. Cognitive Science* 14 (3) (2023): 2

finding oneself to be scared and determining one's reaction to that sensation; and opportunities for external self-representation such as attempting to show no fear despite feeling anxious.

Live immersive recreational horror may be superficially confusing; however, it provides several opportunities for a person to play, not least by providing a physical space that is entirely separated from the everyday and in which non-normative actions occur. It has been shown within tourism studies that those who leave their everyday routine environment for recreational purposes to exist in an alternative space may explore means by which they can be liberated from social norms and instead test the boundaries of themselves and their usual behaviour.[11] This can allow for the potential renegotiation of identity in a safe alternative reality and apply to the environment of immersive theatre in much the way it may apply to the alternative reality of a foreign destination. [12] Horror performance, as much as any other, with its embrace of the taboo, the private and the carnivalesque, lends itself to an environment to act out and find an even more concentrated version – in comparison to vacations - of a new 'liminality and perceived freedom from usual constraints', that occurs amid reductions of restraint against indulgent purchases and behaviours,[13] in which consequently 'impulsive behaviours and irrational decisions—during the holiday' are facilitated.[14] In vacations this has largely been associated with higher spending, but in horror these forces might equally bring the consumer/spectator into playing out liberated behaviours and engaging in different or hidden elements of the perceived self.

[11] Uriely Natam; Ram, Yael; Malach-Pines, Ayala, "Psychoanalytic sociology of deviant tourist behavior," *Annals of Tourism Research* 38(3) (2011): 1051–1069.; Wan Lisa C.; Hui Michael K, Qiu Yao, "Tourist misbehavior: Psychological closeness to fellow consumers and informal social control," *Tourism Management* 83 (2021), 104258.
[12] Harris, Lloyd C, & Magrizos, Solon,""Souvenir Shopping is for Schmucks!": Exploring Tourists' Deviant Behavior Through the Items They Bring Back." *Journal of Travel Research* 62 (2) (2023)
[13] Mukhopadhyay, Anirban & Johar, Gita Venkataramani, "Indulgence as self-reward for prior shopping restraint: A justification-based mechanism," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 19 (3) (2009): 343.
[14] Sun, Wanting; Chien, P. Monica; Pappu, Ravi, "Responses to Compatriot Tourist Misbehavior: The Importance of Social Identity, Emotions, and Misbehavior Type", *Journal of Travel Research* 00 (0): 2.

Singelis separated the concept of self-construal identity into two aspects: independent and interdependent.[15] Those who have a tendency towards independent self-construal are prone to form their self-actualisation based on autonomy and individuality, while those who are driven towards interdependent self-construal are prone to form self-actualisation based on group alignment.[16] Thus, affiliation and autonomy are two separate identity motivators.[17] As such in an environment in which one is affectively stimulated within a group, it passes that some spectators will likely form their responses and self-construction based on their internal, or independent, responses; while others will do so based on their membership of the group they are in. It also follows that some participants will likely be considerably more aware than others of the fact they are being watched as much as they are watching. Identity, as derived from Singelis' definitions and relating to both the independent and interdependent elements, and how it manifests within scare attractions will be returned to throughout the thesis by synthesising these core ideas alongside those of immersive theatre, most notably, Machon's (syn)aesthetics and White's invitation. Both internal and external elements of identity will be focused upon, with chapters two and four, in particular, addressing the former and chapter three the latter.

Alongside identity as a major cultural paradigm in today's western society is authenticity. This can be described as the notion of being, or containing characteristics that are 'real, reliable, trustworthy, original, first hand, true in substance, and prototypical, as opposed to copied, reproduced or done the same way as an original' and this is of direct relevance to the appeal of commercial visitor attractions.[18] While often used colloquially as if it is a self-evident concept, authenticity is 'a complex concept that simultaneously includes philosophical, psychological and spiritual aspects' and just because somewhere is understood to be fictive, that does not mean authenticity may not be found or perceived by consumers there.[19] Authenticity might be prized, but it may be

[15] Singelis, Theodore M., "The Measurement of Independent and Interdependent Self-Construals," *Personalty and Social Psychology Bulletin* 20 (5) (1994)
[16] Cross, Susan E.; Hardin, Erin E.; Gercek-Swing, Berna, "The What, How, Why, and Where of Self-Construal," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15 (2) (2011): 142-179 (summarised on 144)
[17] Lawendowski & Besta, "Is participation in music festivals a self-expansion opportunity?": under "self-construals and self-expansion."
[18] Ram, Björk & Weidenfeld, "Authenticity and place attachment of major visitor attractions,": 111
[19] Ibid.: 112

located in sundry ways. For this reason, the rise in authenticity discourse has sometimes been associated with the end of postmodernism, including in the scholarship surrounding tourism and commercial events. Edward Docx was one of the first proponents of the end of postmodernism and proposed the 'Age of Authenticism' as a monicker for the post-postmodern age, claiming 'If the problem for the postmodernists was that the modernists had been telling them what to do, then the problem for the present generation is the opposite: nobody has been telling us what to do. If we tune in carefully, we can detect this growing desire for authenticity all around us'.[20] It is part of this growing desire that has led to authenticity being a major focus of tourism and performance scholarship in the last decade, in manners that have not been entirely brought together with performance scholarship.

Our conversations and cultural bubbles are bursting today with conversations of the real, the authentic, and what these words mean, and this includes performance studies. Daniel Schulze has identified authenticity as a key analytical framework in today's performance culture, and both made compelling arguments that we cannot analyse today's spectator without acknowledging their demand for forms of 'realness'.[21]

There is one particularly ironic dynamic about the contemporary obsession with authenticity – or perhaps it is the driving force – that it is possible to deceive people rather easily in matters of authenticity. This is the starting point of Alice Sherwood's *Authenticity: Reclaiming Reality in a Counterfeit Culture*: that there is a prevailing awareness of falsehood leading to mistrust, with Sherwood citing a first authenticity which is objective, outwardly facing and verifiable predicated on materiality. The second authenticity is personal, subjective, inward facing, invisible and unverifiable, predicated on sensation. [22] As the first authenticity has rescinded from view and prominence, arguably ever since modernist thought began to be replaced with postmodern thought, the concept of personal authenticity has become increasingly prominent in contemporary culture.

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[20] Docx, Edward. (2011). "Postmodernism is dead", *Prospect:* Available at: https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/essays/49336/postmodernism-is-dead

[21]Schulze, Daniel. *Authenticity in Contemporary Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017): Introductory chapter.

[22] Sherwood, Alice. *Authenticity: Reclaiming Reality in a Counterfeit Culture* (Mudlark, Dublin. 2022): 5.

Live horror performances offer a simultaneously authentic and inauthentic experience. They are inauthentic in that the threats to the audience that are simulated are not genuine threats, yet the sensations felt in the body, the affective responses associated with horror, are legitimate corporeal responses that play directly on the felt truth of the body – the sweat, shock, survival instinct, panic, hairs on end, goosebumps – are all real. This is an authenticity that ties scare attractions to similar dynamics to those discussed above in academia surrounding tourist events.

Immersive theatre and horror have an overlapping and curious history. Perhaps the most prominent immersive theatre company of the Twenty-First Century, *Punchdrunk*, have produced several productions that may be described as horror-adjacent and employ horror techniques, without producing any/many which are overtly advertised as horror.[23] This is perhaps a distillation of the relationship between immersive theatre as part of academic discourse, and immersive theatre's commercial past and present, along with horror's parallel, as a genre, to commercial immersive theatre. Colloquially commercial immersive theatre is perceived as an inherently less worthy iteration of immersive theatre in much the way that horror is perceived as inherently less worthy as a genre within film, literature and even theatre, historically shunned as a serious topic of study until relatively recently. *Punchdrunk* attract significant scholarly attention owing to their prominence and popularity in the contemporary immersive theatre scene. Their work is often horror aligned, as demonstrated in shows such as *Masque of the Red Death* and *It Felt Like a Kiss*. One notable factor, however, of *Punchdrunk* shows is a tendency to diminish the shared viewing experience. Notoriously *Punchdrunk* shows often require audiences to don masks and other anonymising features such as gowns. This arguably veers the show significantly away from alignment to the scare attraction and indicates that the company wish to lower the impact of other viewers' responses and presence for each individual viewer. As this thesis will repeatedly emphasize, the mutuality of experience is a key part of scare attraction spectatorship - indeed, participatory theatre spectatorship. It is

[23] *And Darkness Descended* (2011) and *Tunnel 228* (2009) are examples of horror-adjacent *Punchdrunk* productions.

for this reason the thesis does not discuss *Punchdrunk* as much as might, perhaps, be expected, and for which the horror-adjacency of *Punchdrunk* – despite borrowing from the genre in terms of iconography and storytelling – distances itself from the spectator experiences of almost all horror formats beyond literature.

Josephine Machon states that a large amount of the appeal of immersive theatre is the 'desire for sentient contact with other humans'.[24] These other humans include both, potentially, other audience members and the performers. Horror provides the template for visceral moments of contact between human and human, sparking intense feelings. Adam Alston is another prominent author of immersive theatre scholarship who makes claims about an inherently narcissistic component to immersive theatre, aligning it also to individualism and contemporary neoliberal capitalism in what almost appears to be an apologia for immersive theatre.[25]

If immersive theatre does successfully create the opportunity to focus on the individual and provide a forum for narcissistic tendencies, then as Turnbull suggests, there is a possibility for the spectator to forge a notion of their 'ideal self in the context of a safe environment'.[26] Given that self-expression 'is addictive and triggers reward systems in the brain in a manner akin to food and sex',[27] then the expression of an idealised version of the self is likely to be an intoxicating experience - even more intoxicating if a consumer can become convinced that their idealised self is the 'authentic' one instead of the more mundane version they perceive themselves as in their regular institutionalised life.

In *Authenticity and Contemporary Performance,* Daniel Schulze draws on previous scholarship about immersive theatre to draw a series of conclusions about the condition of the contemporary public's yearning for a version of authenticity; about the nature of

[24] Machon, J *Immersive Theatres*: 25
[25] Alston, Adam, "Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value," *Performance Research* 18 (2)*:* 130.
[26] Turnbull, Olivia, "It's All about You: Immersive Theatre and Social Networking", JCDE, 4(1): 154.
[27] Tamir, Diana I, & Mitchell, Jason P., "Disclosing information about the self is intrinsically rewarding," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences - PNAS, 2012-05*, 109 (21): 8038-43.

theatre that is generated to cater to that yearning; and why such authenticity is desired in the first place. Such authenticity is usually located by scholars in the realm of affect and is often described in modes that prioritise the pre-cognitive and certainly the pre-lingual. Meanwhile the genre of live horror, which owes its very name to a pre-cognitive subconscious response (after the Latin word *horrere*, meaning *to tremble/shudder)* has in terms of scholarship been previously relegated to the peripheries of academia outside of attention paid to some of its historic formats. [28]

I will be taking a broadly metamodern approach to this thesis, returning to the core concepts as initially described by Vermeulen and Van Den Akker since they intimately relate to authenticity and identity within modern culture.[29] Metamodernism has been previously explored, in immersive contemporary performance by Daniel Schulze in his text *Authenticity in Modern Performance,*[30] and in the horror film via Steve Jones' *The Metamodern Slasher Film*. Both texts emphasise increased priorities to the modern viewer in sincerity and internal experience along with optimism in the face of hardship.[31] Metamodernism is one term proposed as the post-postmodern condition and which features many elements that align with the experiential, the immersive and affect. In the commercial scare attraction these feelings manifest as what may be seen a form of spectatorial 'sensory narcissism', a term devised by Keren Zaointz, in which visceral responses are self-perceived as complex, cathartic and temporarily satisfying.[32] Schulze identifies that one of the primary dynamics of the metamodern condition is the complex relationship of spectators with authenticity. In a society in which trust in the external world is at a particularly low point, language surrounding the authentic can interact with language of self-actualisation.[33] Thus the metamodern condition can be said among other things to represent a world in which self-actualisation is interpreted as both fixed and important**,** since it is tied to a concept of "finding the real you" or "I'm

[28] Reyes, Xavier, *Horror: A Literary History* (British Library, London. 2016)*:* 14.
[29] Vermeulen and Van Den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of aesthetics & culture* 2 (1), p.5677
[30] Szhulze, Daniel. (2017) *Authenticity in Modern Performance*
[31] Jones, Steve. *The Metamodern Slasher Film* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh. 2024)
[32] Zaiontz, Keren, "Narcissistic Spectatorship in Immersive and One-On-One Performance," *Theatre Journal*. 66 (3) (2014): 405
[33] Leigh, Thomas W.; Peters, Cara; Shelton, Jeremy, "The Consumer Quest for Authenticity: The Multiplicity of Meanings Within the MG Subculture of Consumption," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. 34 (4) (2006): 491.

learning to be true to myself", with such notions treated as almost self-evident goals. Acknowledging but putting aside that there are implications of these ideas outside the scope of this paper, this thesis will call on metamodern frameworks in relating the expanding 'experience' industry of live immersive horror.

Over the last twenty years, and increasing over in the last ten particularly, several differing models and paradigms have been suggested that relate to the contemporary consumer's relationship to reality and the self. Pine and Gilmore used the term "Experience Economy" to describe the development of consumerism from one that focused on experiences rather than on services; this detailed the notion that value can be added to a service by increased personalisation, duration, sensory stimulation and intentionally memorable – all words and phrases later associated with immersive and participatory theatre forms. While some have seen 9/11 as the trigger into a new phase of spectatorship and consumerism, others argued the perceived superficiality of the 00s and the burgeoning reality TV age as one in which human beings were more prone to seek forms of 'reality' and then be let down – even at times when they actually found it.[34] Scare attractions are clearly situated in the experience economy and will be referred to as such several times in this thesis.

When I refer within the thesis to the Experience Economy, I am keen to emphasise the influence of the Disney theme parks to that concept. Pine and Gilmore write extensively on the influences of Disney to the modern experience-focused consumer. I would also like to underscore the importance of Disney theme park "imagineering" to the modern scare attraction. Many scare attraction producers are openly enthusiasts of, and influenced by, Disney – and the Haunted Mansion especially. Disney theme parks' use of liminal space in their queue structures is a clear herald of how such spaces are now regularly designed. In the case of the Haunted Mansion, spectators witness the mansion from outside, make the transgressive choice to join the queue, progress through a (now interactive) outside queue, enter a graveyard, walk into

[34] B. Joseph Pine II and James H, Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Competing for Customer Time, Attention and Money*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019): 8

an outer room with a simple parlour trick with a portrait, witness the infamous "stretching room" preshow, enter a new indoor queue and only then enter their "doom buggy" vehicles for the actual ride, each stage accompanied by fewer and fewer people until the buggies only hold room for two or three people. This process of stage-by-stage entry into a new environment that now feels far removed from the crowded theme park is an exemplary use of several tools used commonly by scare producers and of the way in which the experience economy sells a focus on the self via mechanised means. A similar feature is evident in the Tower of Terror attraction in which Disney invested in creating a large, detailed, elaborate hotel lobby replicated in real size for what is only a brief exposure to guests purely for the affective impact this would provide in between one outdoor queue structure and the preshow. This serves to enhance the experience and turning a very conventional amusement park drop-tower attraction into a memorable family-unifying experience. This will be paralleled in my subsequent descriptions of the *Manormortis* scare attraction as an archetypal case study of the genre.

In contemporary life, it has been observed that many humans are involved in 'almost desperate struggle and search for human connection and for something that is felt to be genuine and lasting'.[35] This is nothing new, it is acknowledged, but what is contemporary is a paradigm shift that has made that struggle for human connection more urgent, resulting in a shift away from postmodernism as a prevailing philosophy in everyday life on account of the fundamental uncertainties that pervade it. The nature as to whether this paradigm shift has occurred, and if so the terminology to use for the new contemporary condition, has been described in various forms.[36] However, one predominant term now appears to be 'Metamodernism' as initially proposed by Vermoulen and Van Den Akker in 2010 in the paper *Notes on Metamodernism*. This is also the term used to explore this idea by both Andy Lavender in his *Performance in the Twenty-First Century: Theatres of Engagement*, and Adam Alston in *Beyond Immersive theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation*,[37] both prominent texts which

[35] Shulze, *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre*: 1.
[36] Ibid.: 3
[37] Lavender, A. *Performance in the Twenty-First Century: Theatres of Engagement (*London: Routledge, 2016); Alston, Adam, *Beyond Immersive Theatre,* (Palgrave Macmillan, London. 2019)

attempt to address the rapidly growing circuit of immersive, intimate and participatory performances. There has already, therefore, been an established link between metamodernism and immersive theatre that I will tie more intrinsically within this thesis.

The first chapter of this thesis will explore the identities of those who produce horror, particularly those who perform it and subsequently project horror as part of their identity. Self-actualisation in the contemporary world primarily takes place against a backdrop of individuals operating within institutions and organisations, and the labour involved in scare entertainment is no different. The development of self 'is a continuous process that may often go unnoticed or unremarked, just operating as part of the everyday background hum of organizational life'.[38] Scare entertainment is both ludic and commercial environment providing the possibility to create exploitative environments due to what has been termed 'sacrificial labour',[39] and there is an industry grey area between subculture and commerce in scare entertainment. This may create, as often in modern commerce a 'labour market (that) often demands that individuals sacrifice stability, time, and often wages in order to gain experience that…engender self-exploitation … as organizations benefit from the work of volunteers, unpaid interns, independent contractors and other(s) … individuals engaged in such sacrifices or 'hope labour' find it important to their sense of self to have benefited from the exchange''.[40] Industries with a ludic component and an attached subculture such as scare performing have the potential to exploit this and this will provide the foundation of chapter one.

The second chapter of the thesis will explore how curated fantastical encounters may be used to assert senses of familial group identity and cultural tradition via mutual experience. One of the closest aligned works to this study is Lawendowski and Besta's 2020 paper around communal identity at music festivals, which overlaps with scare

[38] Alvesson, Mats & Willmott, Hugh, "Identity Regulation as Organizational Control: Producing the Appropriate Individual," *Journal of Management Studies* 39 (5) (2002): 643.
[39] Andrew Ross, "The political economy of amateurism," *Television & New Media* 10 (2009): 136–137.
[40] Monahan, Tori. & Fisher, Jill A., "Sacrificial Labour: Social Inequality, Identity Work, and the Damaging Pursuit of Elusive Futures," *Work, Employment and Soci*ety 34 (3) (2020): 442.

entertainment as both involve fragmentary communities forming around a shared interest for the purposes of exchanging affective experiences. Their empirical study showed that 'participants who experienced changes in self-construct related to self-growth and self-development from their participation in a music festival used music to facilitate self-awareness and social relatedness'.[41] It is the social relatedness element of this that will be interrogated in this chapter and more broadly applied away from music and instead in alternative areas of affect such as those triggered internally and in terms of social exchanges, in what I call fantastical curated encounters, of which scare entertainment is one.

The third chapter will explore how spectators may impose their own individual agency onto an immersive horror performance to author their own experience and internally determine how they evaluate their performance. Immersive theatre provides the opportunity for audiences to temporarily project themselves in an 'ideal self' or challenge themselves against an 'alternative self' in an environment constructed for the purpose, with this being tied to – to some degree – an argued rise in narcissism and need for agency associated with the era of social networks.[42] Coulmas claims that 'identities have become a matter of negotiating and, as the need to do so arises, renegotiating your place, your purpose, and your presentation in everyday life', feels increasingly important.[43] Scare attractions are an immersive framework for such potential renegotiation and assertion of agency, and this will be explored within this chapter. That such a trait is found in commercial performance specifically aligns with Zygmunt Bauman's concept of the individualised society. He argues that 'the conditions in which human individuals construct their individual existence and which decide the range and the consequences of their choices retreat (or are removed) beyond the limit of their conscious influence' are a core component of this. Scare attractions give the chance to interrogate an environment in which there is the façade of reduced choices (victimhood) but which provide a contrived possibility of a greater range of agency. In this way they are a game set up to evoke a sense of fighting against control in a

[41] Lawendowski, Rafał & Besta, Tomasz, "Is participation in music festivals a self-expansion opportunity? Identity, self-perception, and the importance of music's functions," *Musicae Scientiae* 24(2) (2020): 206.
[42] Turnbull, Olivia, "It's All about You: Immersive Theatre and Social Networking," *JCDE* 4(1) (2016): 154.
[43] Coulmas, Florian, *Identity: A Very Short Introduction*, (Ox Uni Press, 2019): 128.

neoliberal environment. What spectators can do with this control and how marketers position themselves to feel it is another theme of this chapter.

The fourth chapter of the thesis will explore how spectators may take a radical approach to staging their own performance within their body via the extreme scare attraction (ESA). These niche events, often notorious and controversial, will be explored in terms of intimacy – with others and the self - and as a means of seeking authenticity through bodily responses. Scholarship within identity has addressed the relationship between the present and future self. To maintain a strong sense of self, the contemporary individual 'must reconcile themselves to present conditions of identity incoherence, dedicating themselves instead to fabricating visions of coherent and desired future selves'.[44] Instead of this need to project a desired future self, the ESA (and possibly scare attractions in general) markets an opportunity for participants to recalibrate their understanding and potency of their current selves. It can promise this by emphasising the inherent resilience of the participant's own body and mind, staging that demonstration or resilience with their own body as the performance location. By doing this the ESA offers the staging of the participant's own suffering and stimulation as a means of experiencing something via viscerally intense lived experience that is felt as 'real' and thus potentially revealing the perceived 'real' self.

It has been shown that participation in folkloric celebrations reinforces close relational connections and sense of shared identity to other participants, especially when there is a perceived synchrony between the participants.[45] The use of folklore brings about the possibility of a sense of felt authenticity. As a viewer's perception of authenticity increases regarding an encounter, the greater their perceived possibility of a discovery of meaning/connection with these communities, and through them of oneself.[46] Consequently, the fifth chapter of the thesis will identify how culture and

[44] Monahan & Fisher "Sacrificial Labour: Social Inequality, Identity Work, and the Damaging Pursuit of Elusive Futures": 452

[45] Rufi, Sergi; Wlodarczyk, Anna; Páez, Darío; Javaloy, Federico, "Flow and Emotional Experience in Spirituality: Differences in Interactive and Coactive Collective Rituals," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 56(4) (2016): 373-393.

[46] Ram, Yael; Björk, Peter; Weidenfeld, Adi, "Authenticity and place attachment of major visitor attractions," *Tourism Management* 52 (2016): 110-122

society may be found within immersive horror performance through the interrogation of the subgenre of folk horror. Folk horror provides the opportunity for artists and audience to have a conversation surrounding in-groups and out-groups, especially via the affective power of nostalgia, as well as the creation of a mutual community that may be established over the course of a performance.

The final chapter of the thesis looks at how live immersive horror negotiates the relationship between the individual and their own mortality, how this is represented in the immersive horror genre, including how object vivification is usually an effective means of evoking a crisis of the self and a source of visceral horror in a live environment. This directly calls upon the notion of an existential authenticity, proposed by Yi, Lin, Jin, and Luo in which individuals feel free to engage with their true selves; something that comes about from a 'confrontation-derived awareness of self and surroundings',[47] and which is the wider experience of 'confronting alienation'.[48] For such 'philosophical discussion of the self in context and a reflection of how true one is to oneself', it may help to provide an environment of alterreality rather than hyperreality - drawing on Canavan and McCamley's model of modernities and authenticity. Such an alternative reality would allow spectators (tourists in the scholarship) to choose their preferred cues from presented alternative realities. [49] The possibility of the scare attraction being such an alterreality - a location of potential confrontation-derived awareness - and the use of deliberately alienating human-like characters such as clowns and dummies, will be interrogated in this chapter.

Methodology within this thesis will include my own experience and insider knowledge as a producer, director, writer, and performer in scare attractions. This will partially come from the concept of autoethnographic insider experience described by Tony Adams, Stacy Jones and Carolyn Ellis as an effective qualitative research tool

[47]Yi, Xiaoli; Lin, Vera Shansan; Jin, Wenmin; Luo, Qiujo, "The Authenticity of Heritage Sites, Tourists' Quest for Existential Authenticity, and Destination Loyalty," *Journal of Travel Research* 56 (8) (2017): 1032-1048.
[48] Xue, Lan; Manuel-Navarrete, David; Buzinde, Christine N., "Theorizing the concept of alienation in tourism studies," *Annals of Tourism Research* 44 (2014): 186-199.
[49] Canavan, Brendan & McCamley, Claire, "Negotiating authenticity: Three modernities". *Annals of Tourism Research* 88 (2021): 9 (Fig. 1.) https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103185

derived from my own industry experiences.[50] I will review material from multiple academic areas to expand into elements of speculative quantitative analysis. Each chapter has its own paradigm and so will have its own literary framework, however common to all will be contemporary academia about horror, with a particular emphasis on theatre; of wider immersive and participatory theatre; and of the chief thesis paradigms of identity and authenticity. As such I will begin with a brief literary review in each of these areas, along with the underpinning theoretical positioning of this work as aligning with a post-postmodern, specifically metamodern, conception of why authenticity and identity is relevant within performance and consumption.

According to Herr and Anderson, this thesis is one (1) on the continuum of insider and outsider relationship in which a researcher studies their own practice, albeit this relates to industry practice I have observed rather than personal artistry I have generated. Since I have taken roles from the perspective of director, performer, spectator and author at various times, I have experienced the industry from different lenses of reality (as described by Patricia Hill Collins), and this will be considered throughout the thesis. My positioning will, since I am aware of a degree of potential bias in the outcomes and results of the thesis resulting from this positioning,[51] always seek to maintain a firm grasp of theory from outside the scare attraction industry in order to create a proxy outsider perspective. It is ironic in a thesis about authenticity to acknowledge that 'Constructivist and postmodern notions of truth and reality make for a much more complex understanding of the 'truths' insiders and outsiders uncover'.[52] Indeed part of this thesis will involve the positioning of anyone participating in live horror performance as an author of their own interpretation or reality, this must include myself – however as a participant in so many different elements of the process from creator to consumer – I will cover as many lenses as possible.

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[50] Adams, Tony E.; Jones, Stacy Holman; Ellis, Carolyn, *Autoethnography* (Oxford University Press: Oxford. 2014): 21.

[51] Wendy E. Rowe Edited by: David Coghlan & Mary Brydon-Miller Book Title: *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research Chapter Title*: "Positionality" (2014)

[52] Sharan B. Merriam, Juanita Johnson-Bailey , Ming-Yeh Lee , Youngwha Kee , Gabo Ntseane & Mazanah Muhamad (2001) Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20:5: 414

For some of this thesis I use my own experience as a source. I have worked as a producer, performer, and director in commercial immersive horror entertainment for 15 years as of the time of publication. I value my time in both the rehearsal room, in the (corn)field, in the producer's room and in conversation with my industry peers and believe this experience and area of study is of significant value as a scholarly contribution. One area in which I consider this to be particularly important is in projected audience behaviours. This thesis does not use audience data in is primary findings, though it will use data that does. Nor does this thesis use extensive phenomenological examples, though in some instances it will use personal experiences of my traversing or producing a scare attraction for the purpose of explaining the mechanics of the event. It is, however, predicated on discussing audience behaviour and heterogenous spectatorship. I consider it necessary to engage in a combination of baseline speculation, based on both my own extensive experiences and robust theoretical underpinnings, to discuss potential audience behavioural and viewing patterns. This is positioned in an interpretation of what Dwyer and Buckle refer to as "the space between", in which personhood as a researcher and analysis interact amid qualitative research.[53] I write in terms of potential, however where I do so it is based on informal viewership experiences of my own and of collective experiences of those with whom I've worked.

[53] Sonya Corbin Dwyer & Jennifer L. Buckle, International Journal of Qualitative Methods 2009, 8(1): p61

CHAPTER 1: An Enthusiastic ProleSCAREeat:

Scareacting as a manifestation of a subcultural idyll and the commodification of ludic activity

This chapter will explore the personal and communal identities of "scareactors'" and how the communities they form interact with the industry in which they congregate, play and perform. Scareactors (sometimes given the additional capitalisation of "ScareActors") is an industry-standard term used to refer to those who perform roles within scare attractions. Since scareacting has seasonal patterns, most notably involving work around Halloween, scareactors will often congregate for a set period each year (varying from six weeks down to a few days), work intensely, and then disperse. The performance practice conducted by scareactors is consequently referred to as 'scareacting'. This chapter will provide analysis of interactive and immersive environments that sit within the definition of scare attractions drawn from Hoedt, a definition explored in greater detail elsewhere in this thesis.[54] Consistent with Hoedt's definition, the terms involved do not relate to performances in horror plays.

This chapter asserts that scareacting may be described as a subculture, sitting within the definition of the term from Herzog, Mitchell & Soccio as 'social groups organized around shared interests and practices', usually in a transient dynamic and based on 'voluntary, informal, and organic affiliations…perceived to deviate from the normative standards of the dominant culture as this is variously defined'.[55] Subcultures, of which several exist surrounding the aesthetics and celebration of the horror genre, may be perceived as sites of various forms of deviance, ensuring that horror is an ideal realm in which to engage in subcultural play as the genre provides lots of opportunity to present deviancy in a variety of guises.[56] Scareacting is a horror-based subculture in which individuals congregate to engage in collective ludic play via scaring others. Members of the subculture therefore require specifically curated spatiotemporal

[1] "(A) venue designed to frighten its audience" without any accompanying claim to be haunted by actual ghosts but are instead openly rooted in fiction. As derived from Madelon Hoedt, 'Keeping a Distance: The Joy of Haunted Attractions', *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* 7 (2009): 36.
[55] Herzog, A. Mitchell, J & Soccio, L: "Introduction/Issue 2: Interrogating Subcultures", *InVisible Culture,* no. 2, (1999), https://doi.org/10.47761/494a02f6.382146d5
[56] Williams, Patrick, *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011)

environments to perform within; and audiences to perform to; to execute their chosen form of play. These spatiotemporal environments and audiences are provided by the producers and marketers of the scare attractions.

My methodology in this chapter will be to interrogate the subculture of scareacting as a hobby, then as a form of labour, before evaluating the tensions between these two dynamics. This will include references to case studies from the industry and an evaluation of the 2017 movie *Spookers*, a feature length ethnographic film that presents a community of performers in a New Zealand scare attraction. The editorial voice of *Spookers* will act as a demonstration of the subcultural idyll that I propose exists commonly within scare acting communities. Where appropriate I will also incorporate my own experiences. I will also draw on scholarship relating to consumerism, theories surrounding play, and studies into subcultures and ludic communities to frame scare attractions as sites of ludic activity in a consumer environment, explore the role the subcultural idyll has within these dynamics, and how subcultural capital, as conceived by Sarah Thornton, may be 'weaponised' by marketers as a mechanism of exploitation.[57]

Over the course of this chapter, I argue for the existence of what I call *subcultural idyll.* This refers to a phenomenon by which a subculture appeals, in presentation or perception, to both internal members and wider society as a community that offers a utopian sense of identity affirmation and communitas. I propose that the idyll is, to an extent, a piece of corporate mythology sold to harness the ludic play of subculture participants as a form of mechanised labour for profit. This dynamic may be seen as a trade of sorts between marketers and hobbyists with the provision of a platform for affirmative play on one side and the acceptance of relative economic and labour-derived exploitation on the other. Dynamics that have developed in scare attractions in the last twenty years relating to this grey area are also beginning to manifest in other areas of performance, most notably the expanding immersive theatre genre. Therefore, there is a potential that in the future a large sector of the performance and entertainment

[57] The conception of subcultural capital as used in this chapter is based on Sarah Thornton's *Club Cultures*. Cambridge: Polity Press, (1995)

industries risks becoming trapped in an exploitative volunteerism due to these grey areas between hobbyism and work.

Playing Acting, Playing Horror: The Hobby of Scareacting

Horror has long maintained popularity as a genre across art forms despite the relatively low esteem in which the genre has historically been held within literature, film scholarship and journalism.[58] Neil-Martin describes the genre within film as 'frequently regarded...as the runt of the cinema family' evoking Kim Newman and even goes as far as using the word 'distain' to describe perspective of the genre from scholars prior to the 2000s.[59] This has, however, meant that the resilience of the genre is a testament to its commercial viability. Despite, perhaps even partially because of, horror's status as a lowbrow form of entertainment it nevertheless encourages passionate following and enthusiasm.

One of the arguable reasons for the dependable popularity of horror is its multifaceted nature, offering elements to a wide variety of spectators and spectatorship types. Horror is often described less as a genre and more as a collection of characteristics. Neil Martin summarises Cherry and Newton defining the genre as follows:

> The primary aims of the horror film are to frighten, shock, horrify, and disgust using a variety of visual and auditory leitmotifs and devices including reference to the supernatural, the abnormal, to mutilation, blood, gore, the infliction of pain, death, deformity, putrefaction, darkness, invasion, mustation (sic), extreme instability, and the unknown.[60]

The above frames horror as a catch-all hybrid collection of associated ideas, feelings, situational elements, and tropes. Alongside these come the collected cultural morass of character tropes and individual characters that are part of the horror vocabulary.

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[58] Cherry, Brigid, *Horror*. (London: Routledge. 2009) includes this in her introduction; Newman, Kim, *Nightmare movies: Horror on screen since the 1960s*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011): a continuing theme of the early stages of the book,.

[59] Neil-Martin. G, "(Why) Do You Like Scary Movies? A review of the Empirical Research on Psychological Responses to Horror Films" *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019): Under 'Horror: An Introduction'

[60] Ibid.: 2

Vampires, zombies, werewolves, and other character types each have a wealth of cultural associations and are subgenres in their own right, with their own fandoms. This hybridity of horror has a distinct impact on the way in which the fandom, expression, and centring of identities around horror manifests. Given the uniquely wide range of characteristics that define horror, there is unlikely to ever be a central aspect of the genre around which a fandom can singly coalesce. Horror and horror imagery provides a particularly wide array of means by which people can perform the expression of their identity via their clothing and carriage in the manner Bennett and Booth described since horror and the gothic can provide several semiotic tropes to draw on as well as a more generalised aesthetic.[61]

Acting possesses an inherent ludic component that makes it an enjoyable activity which many perceive as play.[62] Ludic activity is also inherent to the consumption of horror films and paraphernalia.[63] Adam Hart's *Monstrous Forms: Moving Image Horror Across Media* contains a chapter subtitled *How we Watch/Play/Browse horror*, a title that highlights the difficulty with describing how horror is spectated/interpreted due to the individualised nature of its reception and in this chapter Hart frames horror spectatorship as requiring a 'fundamentally ludic understanding…(consisting of the)…acting "entanglement" of the horror gamer on a spectrum of interactivity'.[64] Due to the presence of inherent play and identity expression in both horror and in acting, it therefore follows that performing in scare attraction events can produce enjoyable play opportunities and fun forms of interactive, participatory consumption.

[61] Bennett, Lucy; Booth, Paul J, "Performance and Performativity in Fandom." *Transformative works and cultures* 18 (2015): An Editorial summarizing the events of the eponymous symposium on this subject.
[62] Kendrick, Lynne, "Apaidicaesthetic: an analysis of games in the ludic pedagogy of Philippe Gaulier," *Theatre, dance and performance training*, 2 (1) (2011): 72-85; Pinchbeck, Dan, "Story and Recall in First-Person Shooters" *International journal of computer games technology*, 2008 (2008): 1-7.
[63] Rehak, Bob, "Transmedia space battles: reference materials and miniatures wargames in 1970s Star Trek fandom," *Science fiction film and television* 9 (3) (2016): 325-345
[64] Hart, Adam. *Monstrous Forms: Moving Image Horror Across Media* (Oxford university Press, Oxford. 2020)

Most early conceptions of play such as those by Huizinga describe play as an oppositional force to work,[65] the antithesis of efficiency and thus an activity that is hedonistic or for its own sake and is considered the centre of playfulness.[66] This is traceable back to Huizinga's modernistic approach to isolating and separating work and leisure with productivity being idealised in the former and thus the latter being dismissible as inconsequential. Entertainment service-scapes such as comic-con, escape rooms, historic re-enactment and theme parks are environments in which spaces become sanctioned for individuals to play and they choose what aspects of that space to emphasise their attention of, play with, and the mode of interaction making them subject to a form of democratisation.[67] Scare attractions are likewise an entertainment service-scape, but one that provides a service with strong two-way dynamics: both the performers and the audience are engaging in a form of play simultaneously, playing in different ways and taking on different roles in parallel to each other. Thrills created by making other people scared, or in other ways affected, are deeply satisfying, indeed cathartic, and most who have worked in a horror attraction can recall moments of memorable scares in which they elucidated drastic or humorous responses from spectators; conversations surrounding such things are a key part of the collaboration and communal environment of working in a scare attraction and become a form of myth making within green rooms, woven into the narratives of both performer experiences and the history of specific mazes and subgroups.

The notion of the ludic community has been described in contexts such as cosplay,[68] steampunk,[69] historic re-enactment, and the Burning Man and Mountain Man festival gatherings.[70] Ludic community will be defined here as group play which

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[65] Huizinga, Johan, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Modern Culture, (*London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. (1949)

[66] Holbrook, Morris B.; Chestnut, Robert W; Olivia, Terece A; Greenleaf, Eric A, "Play as a Consumption Experience: The Roles of Emotions, Performance and Personality in the Enjoyment of Games," *Journal of Consumer Research* 11 (2), (1984): 729-39.

[67] Kozinets, Robert V.; Sherry Jr. John F.; Storm, Diana; Duhache, Adam; Nuttavuthisit, Krittinee; DeBerry-Spence, Benét, "Ludic Agency and Retail Spectacle" *Journal of Consumer Research* 31 (3), (2004): 658-72.

[68] Seregina, Anastasia & Weijo, Henri, "Play at Any Cost: How Cosplayers Produce and Sustain Their Ludic Communal Consumption Experiences", *Journal of Consumer Research* 44 (1) (2017): 139-159.

[69] Nally, Claire, *Steampunk: Gender, Subculture and the Neo-Victorian (*New York: Bloomsbury. 2019)

[70] Kozinets, Robert V,"Can Consumers Escape the Market? Emancipatory Illuminations from Burning Man," *Journal of Consumer Research* 28 (1), (2002): 20-38; Belk, Russell W. & Costa, Janeen Arnold, "The Mountain Man Myth: A Contemporary Consuming Fantasy," *Journal of Consumer Research* 25 (3) (1998): 218-240.

manifests as group consumption amid the observations that 'consumers often develop lasting social ties with fellow community members and make the communal cause central to their identities' in the manner in which Kates describes subculture.[71] Seregina & Weijo summarise the processes of these events as 'communal engagements…highly enjoyable for consumers. More specifically, ludic consumption, or play, is considered inherent to many communal consumption experiences'.[72] Scholarship is therefore united in perceiving a ludic community as members of the subculture who engage in parallel experiences and as a consequence of the consumption involved in these experiences emerge with a sense of closeness and their sense of identity validated.

Within scholarship surrounding other hobbies that similarly combine a lifestyle component with a marketable output, there are observable examples such as the communities found in cosplay,[73] steampunk,[74] and historic re-enactment. In these communities, as with scareacting, play is seldom facilitated by group-members but instead by a third party who provides a venue that acts as a spatiotemporal environment for that play. This facilitator may be a hobbyist but is often a marketer who can curate this ludic spatiotemporal environment further and subsequently commodify the result of this play by presenting it as a form of entertainment to outside non-hobbyist audiences. This has potential to create problematic tension between labour elements and play elements of the same activity. I argue that, because of this tension, scare attractions and equivalent events can be perceived as a hybrid economy, still emerging as a commercial form, that may be perceived as taking advantage of those who perform within scare attractions via the commodification of play.

Ludic communities sometimes struggle to find suitable platforms for their play owing to various obstacles to that play. An example of how these obstacles arise is seen in cosplay, a ludic community in which hobbyists craft costumes drawn from various popular media and then wear the costumes in a curated spatiotemporal environment -

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[71] Kates, Steven M, "The Protean Quality of Subcultural Consumption: An Ethnographic Account of Gay Consumers," *Journal of Consumer Research* 29 (3), (2002): 383-399.; Shouten, John W. & McAlexander, James H, "Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New York Bikers," *Journal of Consumer Research,* 22 (1) (1995): 43-61

[72] Seregina & Weijo, "Play at Any Cost": 139.

[73] Seregina & Weijo, "Play at Any Cost": 140.

[74] Nally, *Steampunk:* 42.

usually Comic-con or other genre convention.[75] Cosplay has a certain alignment to scareacting in that both draw from popular genre, both involve dressing up in significant detail, both feature a level of performing, and both involve being spectated in costume.

To reach play, cosplay involves two stages, both of which require competency. The first component consists of a solitary activity in which skill is required to create the costume. This is a necessary aspect of the hobby required to consequently step into the ludic space. The second component is a performative activity that takes place inside the ludic space. The first of these activities, the craft, has the potential to be both time-consuming and costly as well as being inherently solitary.[76] This often results in cosplay firstly being dominated by middle class individuals with mid-level cultural capital,[77] and secondly becoming so riddled with inter-hobby competitiveness that a sense of community becomes hard to maintain: the community-forming potential of the subculture becomes lost in service of the final spatiotemporal delivery where hobbyists compete for the limited amount of exposure that becomes the endgame of the hobby.[78] In the contemporary cosplay scene this would include social media attention and photography for magazines and conventions. This exposure can bring financial gains but also the exposure itself acts as capital in the form of attention and personal validation.

In contrast to how cosplaying interacts with economy, scare attraction performers are paid directly for their labour. Scare attraction producers will, in most cases, provide makeup, costume, training and the habitat for the performer and will not expect performers to generate their own audience. This, in addition to the direct payment, means that scare entertainment producers are providing several of the items that act as a barrier to entry into the cosplay hobby. In return, however, they expect labour – including potentially additional unpaid labour as will be seen below – and the

[75] Gunnells, Jen, "A Jedi Like My Father before Me," Social Identity and the New York Comic Con, *Transformative Wolds and Cultures,* 3 (3) (2009)
[76] Ritzer, George, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption, (*Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Oaks/Sage. 1999)
[77] Sherry, John F. (1998), *Servicescapes: The Concept of Place in Contemporary Markets, (*Chicago: NTC Business Books. 1998)
[78] Gunnells, "A Jedi Like My Father before Me"

often-inconvenient labour conditions laid out later in the chapter. On the one hand, this dynamic contrast to other hobbies makes scare acting more available to those from a more disadvantaged economic background; on the other hand, this dynamic might easily be seen by some as exploitative.

In one way then, when it comes to the scare acting ludic community, the problems that become manifest in ludic communities like cosplay are removed because marketers do the 'craft' portion of the play for the hobbyist. Unlike cosplay there is no cultivating period, no solitary activity necessary where the scareactor must become adept at crafting costumes or applying detailed makeup. Plenty of scareactors do this for enjoyment and play, but it is not necessary for their participation in the industry. Marketers remove significant barriers to entry for the scareactor, resulting in the removal of financial and time obstacles, and with them elements of in-hobby competitiveness. By comparing the activity of scareacting to an equivalent ludic community, it is possible to see that the professionalization of the hobby does perform some positive mechanisms for the scareactors by removing economic, time and practical barriers to entry and appearing, at least initially, a more open-armed, more working-class community less prone to hyper-competitiveness.

People in the Western world often use their clothing and carriage to express their identities in a performative manner.[79] Often, this expression of identity is manifest in relationship to a particular popular property. Examples of this that have been observed by scholars include the superhero genre,[80] celebrity culture,[81] and popular media.[82] People with similar interests and preferred means of expression often come together into temporary communities. In the contemporary moment this is particularly common, as noted by Human & Robins, who comment that, 'These days we witness a proliferation of hyper-transient experimental communities that are built on the freedom to choose to

[79] Gunnells, J. (2009) "A Jedi Like My Father Before Me"
[80] Kirkpatrick, Ellen, "Towards New Horizons: Cosplay (Re)Imagined through the Superhero Genre, Authenticity, and Transformation," *Transformative works and cultures* 18 (2015)
[81] Van Zoonen, Liesbet, "Imagining the Fan Democracy". *European Journal of Communication* 19 (1): 39-52.
[82] Arsel, Zeynep & Thompson, Craig J., "Demythologizing Consumption Practices: How Consumers Protect Their Field-Dependent Identity Investments from Devaluing Marketplace Myths," *Journal of Consumer Research* 25 (3), (2011) pp791-806

belong and the freedom to terminate membership at short notice'.[83] These groups are marked out by seeming to benefit from the fruits of a community but without a long-term commitment.[84]

Scareacting involves such a transient formation of a temporary community. Due to the seasonal nature of scare attractions, scareacting is an activity that often lasts for between four and eight weeks in the Autumn and in other pods of seasonal holidays according to the local cultural calendar. Rehearsals typically will take place early in the season, lasting for one to three days, then performances will begin. Often the calendar will begin with weekend-only performances, becoming daily as time goes on with longer hours and more intense shifts during the week of Halloween. This increasing intensity with time is particularly effective in lubricating social ties. Also, call-times in scare attractions are often very early due to the amount of makeup and costume preparation required, meaning that despite the tendency of the individual shift for the scareactor being spent in relative isolation, extensive socialisation does take place before shifts. Socialisation also takes place after shifts, with stories shared of the evening's events.

The above events of an evening of scareacting closely parallel the process of Victor Turner's description of rituals: a separation phase- a liminal phase- and a reincorporation phase.[85] The green room processes can be seen to parallel the notion of separation: separation from both regular society and – via grotesque costume and makeup – the expression of self. The journey into and performance within the scare attraction (the shift itself) aligns with the liminal phase. Both the sacred stage-space within the scare attraction (externally) and the act of acquiring the affective experience of being a scareactor (internally) become the liminoid space in this parallel, the place whereby the transformation from outsider to community member takes place. The spectators - other outsiders – are processed through as the audience, conveniently continuously available for the inductee to scare. The continual audience and the

[83] Human, Oliver & Robins, Steven, "FIFA 2010 and the elusive spirit of communitas: A return to Victor Turner (with some differences)," *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 34:1-2 (2011): 38-50
[84] Bauman, Zygmunt. *Community:* Seeing safety *in an* insecure *world. (*London: Polity Press. 2001)
[85] Turner, Victor, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play,* (London: PAJ Publications. 1982) Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process: Structure and anti-structure*. (London: Routledge and Paul. 1974)

scareactor's relationship to them emphasises and reiterates the outsider-ness of the audience – and thus the scareacting inductee's newfound community member-ness. At the end of the shift there is then the reincorporation back into the group in the form of post-performance socialising.

Scareacting represents a ludic activity with each subgroup forming a transient ludic community that may last only as long as the performance season but that often expands over years into an alternative kinship structure: a self-perceived 'family'.

Scare Attractions as a Type of Work

Labour Intensity

As a result of the above dynamics, scareacting may be framed as a hobby. However, the horror performance industry is exceptionally commercial: sitting within the experience economy and the fruits of the work of scareactors are inherently commercial. Not only this, but the operations of scare attractions are especially mechanised in nature, with scare maze design akin to a form of production line, in which batched audience members are processed down a single path to have a predetermined sequence of encounters. For instance, when operating at full capacity the *Pasaje Del Terror* in Blackpool, England employs up to ten performers inside its maze. These performers stay in one location on their own as groups of six to eight guests arrive roughly once every six minutes. The performance lasts a matter of seconds and performers then reset ready for the next group. In this way the operations of *Pasaje Del Terror* show traits of a conveyor belt, spectators moving down to different scenes/sections where their interaction with the performer adds a new mini-experience to the uber-experience of the attraction. It is the experience economy distilled into its most efficient deployment: a fast-food experience in which the performers are the machines of production.

By way of introduction to the idea of scareacting as labour, I will begin with an anecdote that details the most exhausting piece of scare acting I undertook as a performer.

One Halloween season evening, I performed the role of Baron Samedi in an outdoor Voodoo themed attraction. I lasted one shift playing the part before requesting to be moved to a different role. The duration of the shift was over 5 hours in a cornfield in what was mostly heavy rain. I was part of the climax of the scare maze, one of two actors in a clearing within the corn. The other actor was playing the New Orleans folkloric figure Delphine LaLaurie and took the spoken aspect of the scene. As each group of 20 guests arrived, I had to crouch down behind a small cart for two minutes while the actress spoke her part and 'summoned' me. On the cue I had to stand up, manually start an old farm chainsaw (with the chain removed) via string-pull technique, shout, and chase the group away through the cornfield. This happened roughly every 10 minutes for the duration of the evening. By the end of the evening my back was in agony, I was exhausted, soaking wet, freezing cold, bereft of voice, and had endured multiple minor injuries.

Stressful, distinct, aesthetically unpleasant, and painful manual labour of this kind is not unusual in these environments. Scareacting in most attractions evokes a mechanised conveyor-belt system of either batched or continuous audience member groups. Scareactors are generally expected to deliver high-energy content to a group of spectators for a short duration in a themed environment, dispatching audiences onwards down the scare maze to the next scene and then resetting the scene and preparing for further audience members. The turnaround between performances will vary but the marketer will have generally made the attempt to keep it as brief as possible in the name of efficiency. The job is fast-paced and draining.

When viewed purely as labour, scare performing has many traits that are undesirable and potentially hazardous. The following list summarises some of the conditions that, to varying extents, are commonly present within the industry, and within which performers might be expected to operate:

- Extremely loud noise conditions.[86]
- Extreme darkness.[87]
- Spending work-hours in relative isolation.
- Performing while in physical constraint or discomfort.[88]
- Performing in outdoor conditions, often in cold Autumn night-time environments.[89]
- Repeatedly wearing the same costume on multiple consecutive days without washing, potentially still wet and/or muddy.[90]
- Repeated sudden exertion, such as sprinting or jumping.[91]
- Surrounded by trip and bump hazards with a reasonable likelihood of minor injury.
- Continuous shouting or screaming.[92]

If one was to look at scareacting purely as a job, it is a highly demanding, intense, and difficult job with high risk, little reward, and often with short-term negative impact on wellbeing. Most of those venues named above engage in risk-assessments for their performances and are aware of the demands of the labour; however, this is not true of all venues, and maintenance of safety-related procedures at lower-profile venues is often lax. Most scareactors undertaking professional work sign a disclaimer as part of their contract at the beginning of a sequence of work that includes reference to risk assessments and some of the demands of the labour.

As labour, scareacting involves difficult work in what is always at least uncomfortable conditions and may constitute an actively hazardous environment. This

[86] Sharp Productions, "Fright Fest 2022 at Six Flags Magic Mountain – Valencia, California", YouTube Video, Sept 22, 2022, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DU2mfQy1IF4).
[87] Blackout, "Blackout Haunted House – Halloween 2012", YouTube Video, Sept 25, 2012, (Blackout Haunted House - Halloween 2012 (youtube.com))
[88] Kings Island, "Remembering the Horrors of FearFest – 50th Anniversary Archives", YouTube Video, Sept 23, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJb0N64O6kw
[89] Attractions 360, "Field of Screams Halloween Haunt 2020 Highlights – America's Haunted Attraction", YouTube Video, Oct 24, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5foQhfYAm4
[90] Luke Farmer, "THE UK'S MOST INTENSE HORROR EXPERIENCE| FEARFEST EVIL |VLOG, Oct 13, 2008; (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nO-uQhCE6iM)
[91] Nightmare at the Doll House, "Nightmare at the Doll House Scare Cam!!!", Dec 12, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DaZVfAsnBM&t=205s
[92] ThemeParkHD, "[4K] "Urgent Scare" Maze Walkthrough Scarowinds 2019 Haunted House", Oct 11, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRJhdUJnAFs

work is undergone for usually low/minimum salary. Framed in this way, scareacting might intuitively be perceived as less desirable than some other comparably low-paying jobs, and yet the work maintains in relatively high demand, with producers of attractions generally finding little difficulty in attracting workers. This indicates that somewhere in the gap between labour and hobby there may be a selling-point within the subculture of scareacting performers to even the less-desirable aspects of the work.

One rationale for scareactors tolerating the conditions of labour that they do might be found in analysing the dynamics of hazing. This would explain their tendency towards community forming, as well as the limited effect that the negative aspects of the job have on their desire to take part. Hazing is a form of initiation that is undergone as a form of entry ritual, or process, to become accepted into an informal group membership and acts as a rite of passage.[93] Initiation rituals are often accompanied by mutually experienced pain or violence as outlined by Johnson's comparative analysis of hazing rituals, and have a 'robust but poorly understood' relationship to the development of a sense of fellowship and belonging among those who experience the pain together.[94] Such a dynamic may also be seen in spectatorship groups visiting scare attractions who experience fear events collectively – a point I will return to in another chapter. However, it may also apply to those performing in discomforting circumstances and undergoing scare attractions' poor labour conditions as described above.

Early academic studies into hazing conducted in a cultural environment in which it was common practice found that hazing events did indeed build up social bonds and that social cohesion could be increased by mutual suffering.[95] Data in some more contemporary studies have argued the opposite and critiqued the earlier studies as assumptive.[96] Hazing rituals have also been found to build up a long-term sense of

[93] Hoover, N. (1999) "*National Survey: Initiation rites and athletics for NCAA sports teams*."
[94] Johnson, Jay, "Through the Liminal: A Comparative Analysis of Communitas and Rites of Passage in Sport Hazing and Initiations." *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens De Sociologie* 36(3), (2011):199–227.
[95] Baumeister, Roy F. & Leary, Mark R., "The need to belong: Desire of interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation." *Psychological Bulletin* 117 (1995): 497-523
[96] Van Raalte. Judy L.; Cornelius Allen E.; Linder, Darwyn E.; Brewer. Britton W "The relationship between hazing and team cohesion," *Journal of Sport Behaviour*. 30 (4) (200&): 491-507.

mistrust in leadership.[97] Regardless of tangible output, however, it is commonly perceived across different cultural institutions that hazing rituals and mutually experienced suffering create positive sensations in terms of group indoctrination, sense of earning one's place, and community.[98] The presence of this belief and its widespread nature demonstrates culturally-perceived value if not actual value.

I would argue that a key relevance of the above studies is that they all referred to hazing within the context of the military: a highly hierarchical social environment in which the hazing is undergone very clearly at the behest of those higher in the hierarchy. Indeed, hazing itself as a term is generally used only when referring to sports, fraternal orders, military and the police.[99] Hazing is 'predicated on a strict hierarchical structure, exemplified by the paramilitary and sport'.[100] In subcultures, however, where hierarchies tend to be perceived as being inverted or flattened, and a core part of the philosophy of the group is to escape hegemonic cultural structures, the framing of rituals as being the result of a rigid hierarchy might be ignored out of a commitment to the notion of community, seen instead as a shared experience willingly undergone.

This makes the experience not quite within the boundaries of the term 'hazing' as described above, but an equivalent dynamic of shared rituals of suffering causing a sense of belonging and fellowship…only with the upper echelons of the hierarchy (the marketer) far less visible and thus ignored by the participants than compared to the rigid hierarchies of hazing rituals.

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[97] Aronson. Elliot & Mills, Judson, "The effect of severity of initiation on liking for a group," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 5 (1959):177-181.

[98] Ingraham, Larry H. & Manning, Frederick, J., "The Boys in the Barracks. Observations on American Military Life". *Philadelphia Institute for Study of Human Issues* (1984)

[99] Johnson, Jay, "From the sidelines: The role of the coach in effecting team unity and cohesion," *The Journal of Coaching Education* 2 (1): 1-28.

[100] Nuwer, Hank*, Wrongs of Passage: Fraternities, Sororities, Hazing, and Binge Drinking* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 1999). *How sportswriters contribute to a hazing culture in athletics*. J. Johnson and M. Holman, eds., Making the Team: Inside the World of Sport Initiations and Hazing. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press. 1999); Waldron, Jennifer J., & Kowalski, Christopher, L., *Crossing the Line: Rites of Passage*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2009)

As a result of this dynamic, in some environments the poor labour conditions associated with scareacting may be seen as rites of passage from the perspective of participants, and thus sharing stories of having undergone them becomes both a badge of honour and a tool of community forming – sharing stories of hardship is a means of building kinship within some subcultures and there is an intimate connection between resilience and social bonding.[101] There is a possibility even that the notion of communitas as proposed by Victor Turner, in which 'human beings come together (individuated, freed and fully themselves), stripped of the attributes of structure' may be an informal goal of these rituals, despite the realities being one of remaining within the hierarchy of a commercial endeavour.[102] The risks become considered an inherent part of the responsibility of scare performing and a core part of the job.

Tiers of Scare Attraction Labour

To evaluate the conditions under which scare attraction workers perform it is necessary to address how scare attractions broadly operate in terms of professionalism and structure. As stated above, I argue that the subcultural idyll is a central selling point, an origin myth of sorts, of scareacting derived from a hobby-industry that initially is predicated on pure volunteerism. This is increasingly detached from the realities of an industry that is becoming more mechanised in operations, particularly at the higher end of the industry. Nevertheless, scareacting experiences are not necessarily like each other, and not all haunts operate to similar levels of commerciality. A sliding scale is required to describe events that overlap between the professional and the ludic.

I propose a three-stage model of spatiotemporal ludic environments to position the haunt industry in terms of scale and relationship to labour. I present this with a particular opening for scholars looking at other communities of this nature and their

[101] Hwahng, Sel J.; Allen, Bennett; Zadoretzky, Cathy; Barber, Hannah; McKnight, Courtney; Des Jarlais, Don, "Alternative Kinship structures, resilience and social support among immigrant trans Latinas in the USA," *Culture, Health and Sexuality* 21 (1) (2019): 1-15

[102] Kubicek, Katrina; McNeeley, Milese ; Holloway, Ian W.; Weiss, George; Kipke, Michele D, ""It's Like Our Own Little World"" Resilience as a Factor in Participating in the Ballroom Community Subculture**,"** *AIDS and behavior* 17 (4) (2013):1524-1539

industrial operations to discover and analyse parallels in the expanding experience sector.

Backyard Haunts

In some instances, hobbyism and volunteerism does not solely come from those who perform live horror, but also from those who construct and market the scare mazes. Since, in these instances, the purpose of the entire scare entertainment process – from conception to execution – is mutually agreed to be hobbyism and thus predicated on volunteerism, then there is the least amount of dissonance between hobbyist labour and commodification in these environments. The term *backyard haunt* is informally used within the industry to describe these events. The etymology refers to the literal notion of a hobbyist, historically an American Halloween enthusiast, creating a horror-play environment in their back yard for their own enjoyment and/or the local community, though the term now has a wider use. I would prefer to be specific in defining *backyard haunt* for the purposes of this chapter as referring to any of these scare mazes in which the very conception of all parts of the scare maze are derived from hobbyism, not exclusively the performance. Typically, these events will not operate for the purpose of commercial profit, but instead operate on goodwill and community participation in a manner akin to the following case study.

The relatively small Missouri town of Lawson plays host to the annual *Lawson Chamber of Horrors*.[103] The scare attraction features one scare maze, which changes slightly each year, and is arranged in conjunction with the local Chamber of Commerce. Scareactors from within the community and from nearby St Louis work voluntarily. In interview, RG, one of the regular organisers of the event, stated that all work on the attraction comes as a labour of love from organisers and that while money coming in goes towards the coverage of costs for the event, the only additional output beyond investment towards the next events comes in the form of three $1,500 scholarships given to local High School students for which all locals youths may apply.

[103] Facebook, *Lawson Chamber of Horrors*, https://www.facebook.com/lawsonchamberofhorrors/

Lawson Chamber of Horrors is a typical example of a backyard haunt that has grown from individual hobbyism into a community event, but without ever shifting away from its origins in volunteerism at all phases, and without becoming overtly commercial. These are scare attractions developed, produced, and performed exclusively as an act of ludic enthusiasm and/or community engagement.

Fully Commercial Haunts

There are eleven locations worldwide among the *Dungeons* series of attractions, of which six are in the United Kingdom. Unlike many scare attractions, these haunts operate for extended seasons or year-round and employ a semi-permanent employment pool of contracted scareactors. These attractions are landmark tourist sites in their respective locations and marketed as such. They are owned by *Merlin Entertainments*, a subsidiary of a multinational consortium, with annual revenue of £1.7bn.[104] Managers at *Dungeons* attractions are expected to maintain a specific series of company values among performers, and the emphasis is on a consistent high-quality product: an interactive spooky family tour into a historic version of the location that combines local folklore with creative license.

Each Dungeon attraction is an example of what I term *fully commercial haunt*, a direct opposite to the *backyard haunt*. By *fully commercial haunt*, I refer to an openly professional endeavour operated by a business or individual with a profit motive, and one where the incentives presented to the scareactor for their work are largely only financial. Pay rates at the different Dungeons locations are subject to local variation, with it being of particular note that the York, Edinburgh and London versions of the Dungeon attractions pay their actors an Equity minimum wage, while employees at the other UK attractions earn less to differing degrees. This may align with the relative proportion of the actors in those attractions being members of Equity, the actors' union.

The Ludic-Professional Space

[104] Merlin Entertainments, 2018, https://www.merlinentertainments.biz/media/1438/merlin-preliminary-results-2018-rns-final-1.pdf

Farmageddon in Ormskirk, Merseyside is a scare attraction that operates annually during the Halloween season. A popular community event, it is located at a farm: *Farmer Ted's*. *Farmer Ted's* is a permanent farm park that has diversified from its core business into tourism in a manner often found within agriculture sites in the UK. Other examples of farms in the UK which have diversified firstly into farm parks and subsequently into scare attraction seasonal businesses include *Scare Kingdom Scream Park* in Lancashire, *Farm of Terror* in Greater Manchester, *Screamfest* in Staffordshire, and *Tulley's Schocktober Fest* in West Sussex. The labour managements of these locations are all typical of what I will term The Ludic-Professional Space.

Rather than recruiting professional actors via an audition or application process, who would generally be members of the Equity union and expect treatment in line with Equity guidelines, *Farmageddon* draws a significant proportion of its performers from the youth community – local schools, hobby groups and clubs. The work is advertised as paid, but also as fun and community-focused, offering friendship-making opportunities and the experience of performing to an audience. Many performers return season upon season with the pattern sometimes only being broken when performers leave the area – often by going to university. These dynamics are like those seen in the *Spookers* documentary, which will subsequently be explored in this chapter.

Payment in these environments is generally provided but limited. Most often performers are paid using the minimum wage for each age bracket and according to the hours of operation, rather than the hours in which performers are expected to be present and, most notably, rehearsals are unpaid. As such, while there is payment for the labour of performers in *Farmageddon* and other such environments this compensation is much lower than that which would be expected from those adhering to Equity guidelines and, arguably, lower than would be tolerated by workers who were not expecting and receiving considerable auxiliary benefits, most notably those that are associated with ludic community play.

The Ludic-Professional space therefore constitutes the grey area that exists between receiving some payment for performance, but this payment representing only a portion of what the performer gains from the performance, since it comes in addition

to any cultural capital and play that the worker receives. As a result, the Ludic-Professional space may cover elements such as unpaid rehearsals, unpaid early arrivals, or the general expectation that auxiliary skills – such as makeup application – are infused into the 'performance' work in exchange for subcultural capital and buying into the subcultural idyll of *communitas* and an escapist kinship group.

More than a Game: "Family" and the Subcultural Idyll

I propose the term *subcultural idyll* in this document to refer to a dynamic that manifests within scareacting, and by extension other subcultures, whereby actual and perceived benefits of belonging to a subcultural group become mythologised as an assumed truth within that subculture. There may be little recourse as to whether these benefits are genuine. The subcultural idyll is a utopian vision of the hobby. One that facilitates the more idealised notions of communitas as proposed by Turner, and in which any individual who feels a sense of alienation or ostracisation by the hegemonic systems of culture can find a place as a valued and affirmed member of a new society or alternative kinship structure. Communitas is a dynamic in which according to Turner,

> …human beings come together (individuated, freed and fully themselves) stripped of the attributes of structure (the identities, statuses that mediate their relations in ordinary realities and confront one another directly and equally) in a situation of anti-structure.[105]

The claims made by Turner here contain within them an idyllic conceit of self-affirmation, removal of hierarchical structure and escape from the ordinary. The idealised notions engendered by community activity have also been claimed to create new collective environments fully separated from the universal cultural hegemony in which the activity is otherwise situated,

> Within playful, liminoid leisure activities, participants become members of "communitas" - social entities temporarily detached from social structures or institutions.[106]

[105] Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Proces*

[106] Lugosi, Peter, "Queer consumption and commercial hospitality: Communitas, myth and the production of

Turner – here paraphrased by Lugosi - emphasises liminality as the optimal setting for communitas. Scareacting contains the expression of liminality plentifully; in the green room as discussed above, in taking on the identities and forms of grotesque and taboo entities, in the makeup chair, in pre- and post-performance rituals. The grotesque nature of scareacting provides a canvas for the felt sensation of, ' … (reaching) into the depths of a common humanity, realising dimensions of it that lived structures have suppressed or refused'.[107] Order is subverted by the uncanny and grotesque and can be felt as radical and a form of entry into a new system of reality … even while the scareactor is merely acting within a popular commercial event. In this way acting is simultaneously radical and mainstream, the sensation of breaking away from system or structure while operating entirely within it.

Community can be thought of as a series of ideological constructs, mobilised and contested through the production of space.[108] Hobbyists gain much by perceiving that the space provided is theirs, and therefore may perceive their hobby locale as a community. It feels like it belongs to them while they are there. This is incorrect in terms of ownership, and in terms of the financial fruits of the labour that take place in the space, but it is a crucial part of their willing and usually enthusiastic participation in performance work. In scareacting the scare maze acts as the sacred liminoid space where the "family" is forged. The subcultural idyll being created being one that uses Moran et al.'s concept of community by generating an ideological myth regarding the ownership of the communal space. The geographic space of the activity is an economically owned property, generating capital for the producer; however, the moment the space is not perceived as owned, or a mere geographic entity, and is instead read as a ludic space that belongs to "the hobby" then a community may be formed within it and see themselves as the communal "owners" of the ludic space. This perceptual sleight-of-hand is part of the subcultural idyll.

liminoid space," *Int. Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 27 2/3 (2007): 166.

[107] Kapferer,Bruce, "Crisis and Communitas: Victor Turner and Social process," *Anthropology Today* 35 (5) (2019): 1-3.

[108] Moran, Leslie; Skeggs, Beverley; Tyrer, Paul; Corteen, Karen, "Property, boundary, exclusion: making sense of hetero-violence in safer places," *Social and Cultural Geography* 2 (2001): 402-420

Spookers: Manifesting and Propagandising the Subcultural Idyll

One of the key frames of reference in this chapter is the documentary film *Spookers*.[109] The film presents the day-to-day operations of a scare attraction of the same name in Kingseat, New Zealand.[110] Within the documentary, the editorial focus is the scareactor experience, and especially the emphasis of the group as a community, with a summary of the directorial perspective coming from the reviewer who writes,

> Most of the scare actors have other "day jobs" and families to take care of; some suffer from mental health issues or other medical issues; some have tragic stories from their home life. What unifies all the employees is their love for Spookers, many stating in interviews that it's a real family where they feel accepted more there than anywhere else.[111]

This review largely sums up the takeaways the average viewer acquires from watching the film. These core takeaways, written by a casual reviewer, are that the Spookers scareacting community provides:

- A real family away from their other families.
- A feeling of being accepted unlike they experience elsewhere.
- A removal from everyday life.

In addition, it implies that all these take place in the spatiotemporal environment provided for them by the location. Thus, by extension the owner/marketer is central to dynamics I have observed and experienced within the industry, and the paradigms of ludic community discussed in this chapter. Each of these claims aligns with the concept of communitas and sell scareacting as a manifestation of the subcultural idyll.

The narrative of the documentary serves to portray the lives of the performers as enriched by their experiences at the Spookers attraction. This enrichment is not framed as simple enjoyment but strongly emphasises identity validation and the ability the

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[109] Habicht, F, dir. *Spookers* (Auckland: Madman Productions, 2017), Feature Film.
[110] For the purposes of the chapter the italicised *Spookers* refers to the documentary film, while the unitalicised Spookers will be used to refer to the location.
[111] Guest Editorial, "Reel Review: Spookers", Morbidly Beautiful, Nov 2017, https://morbidlybeautiful.com/reel-review-spookers/

spatiotemporal environment of scare attractions possesses to present an authentic self, or fragment of self that is otherwise hidden in "normal" life outside of the scare attraction and surrounding ludic community. For example, in the introductory stage of the film, actor David says in interview:

> The beauty of working at Spookers is that you can be whoever the hell you want to be and express yourself like - I'm in a wedding dress - I would never wear this… (normally)… obviously … but tonight I'm a zombie bride. Can you be a zombie bride at your work?[112]

David is portrayed throughout, via his zombie bride persona, as exploring gender expression and identity. Also, the viewer is introduced to actress Juneen who plays a possessed, institutionalised woman. It is implied that her involvement in Spookers functions as a form of therapeutic activity for her. The documentary includes footage from the attraction, while voiceover plays traumatic personal recollections of caring for her mentally ill and suicidal mother, claiming:

> I do try to incorporate some of that stuff of what I've seen into what I do. People might think that it's just a story but it's not a story. Our family had to live through that, and it was terrifying.[113]

The way this claim is edited clearly implies that Juneen experiences positive health benefits and wellbeing from her work at Spookers, specifically assuaging long term mental health problems. The claims made here are implied and anecdotal, with no overt tangible evidence presented for the community, nevertheless this sense of a spatiotemporal environment and play coming together to provide a forum for recovery, self-actualisation and self-improvement is the lasting message from the documentary. The claim of self-actualisation is made by David as, 'Here at Spookers, you're allowed to be a freak … I think freak is a good thing. Someone that's different, expresses themselves, isn't ashamed. To say or do whatever they please. Yeah, that's what a freak is.'[114] With this statement, David is shown to embrace a sense of self and community simultaneously, reclaiming the concept of being a 'freak', but also by allowing him to

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[112] Habicht, Florian, Director. 2017. Spookers. Madman Productions. (https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6m0f6l: 00:26)
[113] Habicht, 2017. (https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6m0f6l: 29:27)
[114] Habicht, 2017. (https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6lxn2j: 30:05)

define what that 'freak'-ness means. He is shown to be authoring himself via the terminology of horror, in an environment of horror, and in a community defined by horror. Spookers is also portrayed as being accepting of all lifestyles, also affirming cultural identity: Maori performers are shown engaging in a ritual haka before the beginning of an evening's opening. Also, performers are filmed rallying together to support a young performer learning he is HIV positive. These dynamics are presented unquestioningly as unstaged and an accurate reflection of individual actualisation being supported by a loving and supportive community.

The editorial implication of *Spookers* is that scareacting is a positive, communal and therapeutic activity that acts as an escape valve for non-normative behaviours and/or identities. The image that best portrays this occurs towards the end of the film when performer Huia monologues over the top of footage of him in a bed where he is joined by all the other Spookers performers.[115] Here the notion of 'family' is presented unambiguously and while class allusions are not an overt focus of the film, it is observable that each of the performers also appear to hail from working class backgrounds, with the unspoken implication that Spookers' owners, while running a business, function as replacement parental figures and their running of the business is an act of positive community engagement, facilitating troubled members of society to find themselves and live productive lives. That this seems to go uncommented upon is perhaps significant as there is much to unpick in this topic, but perhaps not surprising in the current moment where, 'it has become...difficult to talk productively about class at precisely the time when the conversation appears to be so needed'.[116] Potential dissonance across class lines is not a part of the documentary, despite portraying a functioning business in which most employees are of low socioeconomic background and the marketers own a very large estate that acts as the location of the work.

The way the *Spookers* documentary frames scareacting aligns with community members I have encountered throughout my time working in scare entertainment. It has certainly been my personal experience that those who seek out scare performing do so as a form of personal escape or catharsis, with many non-normative identities and

[115] Habicht, 2017. (https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6lxn2j: 25:31)
[116] Tomlin, Liz, "Why we still need to talk about class", *Studies in Theatre and Performance,* 40 (3) (2020): 251.

mental health issues represented. It has also been my experience that over time, many scare entertainment environments come to perceive themselves as a community, or even "family" – colloquial concepts like that of communitas. The scareacting subculture idyll, as presented in *Spookers* and beyond, creates an internal lore or popular myth within the lifestyle that it provides therapeutic or affirmative benefits; as a result, it is framed as a haven for those who feel ostracised or unwanted by mainstream society. This mirrors commentary surrounding rave culture of the 90s;[117] and among goth subculture within the 2000s.[118] However, in the instance of scare attraction performers there is the additional dynamic whereby these largely anecdotal claims are harnessed as part of a neoliberal model as used as the basis for labour.

Tomlin argues that, 'When cultural attention is paid to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, they are too often located as receivers and beneficiaries of someone else's idea of culture, rather than as agents who are granted the capacity and resources to become taste-makers and artistic leaders in ways that might change, or even threaten, the status quo; In the case of the subcultural idyll, as presented in Spookers, we see instances where the implication is that working class performers are having their agency granted to them by a benevolent set of parental figures – the owners. Once again, the workers are seen as a form of beneficiary, the recipients of supposed permission from above to actualise an identity and community. While proponents of the grey-area of ludic/labour relations might propose that this is a means of reconciling the needs of different members of societal hierarchies, it nevertheless still serves to reinforce that hierarchy: the weaponisation of play, and eventually identity, as a means of keeping the ProleSCAREAT quiet.

Subcultural Capital: Weaponising the Subcultural Idyll

[117] Hutson, Scott R., "The Rave: Spiritual healing in Modern western subcultures", *Anthropological Quarterly* 73(1) (2001): 35-49

[118] du Plessis, Michael & Chapman, Kathleen, "Queercore: The Distinct Identities of Subculture," (Special Issue: `Queer Utilities: Textual Studies, Theory, Pedagogy, Praxis), *College Literature* 24(1) (1997): 45.

Subcultures may be perceived in a range of manners, among which exists a mechanism for 'processes of meaning-making'.[119] The meaning that is made in a hobby location is largely determined by how the space is perceived. As such, when the space is privately owned, then the producers may find it in their interests for their labour to perceive the space as a community-shared ludic space in which they fight for subcultural capital, rather than simply a place of work that happens to sometimes be enjoyable.

Ehrenreich argues that while Turner discusses the ecstatic and unruly in his concept of communitas, 'the central thing about a culture are its hierarchies and rules', even in communities of the 'other' there are rules and hierarchies, just different ones than those that exist out of hegemonic society'.[120] Here Ehrenreich employs a significant critique of the more utopian perspectives of communitas. Indeed, even in Turner's concept, 'the thrills of communities had to be 'liminal' or marginal…otherwise social breakdown might ensue'.[121] In the case of scare entertainment, the thrills often involve taboo, unspoken and liminal experiences such as scaring other people, getting others to lose body functions, and act out in manners that would not befit everyday life. To perform this act within a community produces the opportunity for a subculture that has hierarchies and rules that feel far from the hegemonic pattern, despite existing within it.

The *Spookers* documentary provides an argument for an idyllic, affirmative lifestyle available in the scare attraction performance subculture, and this is visibly echoed within the industry and supporting communities. On social media, Facebook pages such as *Haunters Hangout*, with 41,000 online members,[122] witness community members from around the world discussing the fun available to those in the industry. In the dressing rooms of locations like *Farmageddon*, to the selling points of industry events like *ScareCon* and *TransWorld*,[123] the implied claims of therapeutic outcomes for

[119] Patrick Williams, J. *The Death and Resurrection of Deviance*. Chapter 6. (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014): 109.
[120] Ehrenreich, Barbara, *Dancing in the* streets: A *history of collective joy.* (New York: Metropolitan Books. 2006): 10
[121] Ibid. 11
[122] Haunters Hangout, 2023, https://hauntershangout.org
[123] ScareCon and Transworld are two of the largest scare attraction specific events in the UK and the USA respectively. The former takes place at a different venue each year, while the latter takes place in St Louis.

community members are propagated. Marketers meanwhile have primarily financial incentives and have no obligation to fulfill these outcomes. Nevertheless the 'affirmation and therapy' mythology provides marketers with a framework for increasing output and maximizing profit. These potential benefits gained by marketers, industrial fruits of labour from play, include:

- Gaining cheap or free performance labour due to employment of those engaged in ludic activities from which the marketer receives profit. This includes unpaid rehearsals, a dynamic particularly rife in scare attraction performance.
- Gaining cheap or free construction/preparatory labour due to the promise of future ludic activities from which the marketer receives profit.
- Gaining goodwill from workers as regards the deployment of workers in hazardous environments, since those workers accept the hazards as a part of the subculture.
- Gaining cheap or free labour of any kind in trade for subcultural capital, including progression up a real or perceived subcultural hierarchy within companies. Often Scare Attraction companies require temporary further roles of responsibility – individual attraction producers, assistant producers – and these roles provide subcultural capital and potentially increased payment.

The idea of subcultural capital was proposed by Sarah Thornton in 1995 as an adaptation of Pierre Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital.[124] He identified that recognition, admiration, status or prestige may be granted to individuals or subgroups within the borders of a subculture based on characteristics, knowledge or forms of practice.[125] This is capital that is meaningful within the subculture but has little to no value outside of the subculture. This capital is usually predicated on a hierarchy, albeit one removed from the hegemonic hierarchies of society. The bestowing of the subcultural capital flows top down, with the top of the hierarchy able to provide greater status and admiration than the bottom, however Thornton, 'introduced the notion of

[124] Thornton, *Club Cultures*.
[125] Bourdieu, Pierre *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* (London: Routledge. 1973)

subcultural capital, which enables and explanation of the mechanisms of forming alternate hierarchies within subcultures and young taste cultures'.[126]

In the case of scare performance, the top of the hierarchical structure is the marketer. The marketer is in possession of not just financial earnings for the performers but of the ability to give awards beyond this, tangibly meaningless to those outside the hobby but highly important to those within:

- More prominent performance roles.
- Working in higher status areas (such as those with 'cool' mechanisms, or part of recognizable franchises)
- Greater creative freedom
- (unpaid) production credits
- The opportunity to rise within a production role hierarchy.

The latter of these may eventually turn into increased income from labour, but only after several arbitrary boundaries, beneficial to the marketer, have been passed through that offer only culture-specific prestige. While hierarchical differentiation is a core part of Bourdieu's work, his 'empirical investigations focus almost exclusively on how high-status, broadly-valuable cultural resources fuel the social reproduction of domination' while 'Bourdieu pays only fleeting attention to other processes through which non-dominant cultural orientations and practices are transformed into field resources.' [127] the critiques of cultural capital that Thornton draws upon are represented by autonomous hierarchies and dynamics that are not necessarily driven by central societal hegemonies and do not necessarily deal in forms of capital that are recognized within wider society. Class and class struggle was central to many early studies pertaining to subculture,[128] and it manifests in Thornton's work accordingly. However, what has perhaps been overlooked is how localized and unaligned to the 'real

[126] Prokůpková, Vendula, "The Role of Fanzines in the (Re)production of Subcultural Capital. The Authenticity, Taste and Performance of "Coolness" in the Zines of the Subculture of Czech White Power Skinheads in the 1990s," *Forum Historiae* 14 (1) (2020): 104.
[127] Lo, Ming-Cheng Miriam, "Conceptualizing "unrecognized cultural currency": Bourdieu and everyday resistance among the dominated "*Theory and society*, 44 (2) (2015): 126.
[128] This was typical of the approach taken by those associated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) who generally framed subcultures exclusively as a form of resistance to hegemony.

world' of standard hierarchies some subcultural dynamics can be. Subculture provides the opportunity for hierarchy to re-form anew according to the skills, dedication, and knowledge within the subculture. But the acquisition of subculture by marketers threatens this potential and returns the dynamics of subcultural hierarchy not only to ones driven by capital, but a series of hierarchies surrounding each company, whereby one may rise to the top of one subcultural group, only to have to return to the bottom of another when changing environment.

Early studies in subculture had a significant emphasis on class-based exploitation and the frequency of exploitative dynamics with sociologists such as Cohen and Jefferson focusing heavily on a 'collective response to the material and situated experience of their class'.[129] In some instances, I propose that rather than subculture acting as a form of escape for those in lower classes of society – an escape that has been described as fundamentally socially necessary that these subcultures may become a terrain of oppression in and of themselves,[130] by marketers dangling the opportunity to attain subcultural capital in order to acquire unpaid labour or labour that is willing to work enthusiastically undesirable, physically demanding or hazardous environments. The execution of unpaid work is by nature exploitative when done in a profit-making environment. While entirely charitable and openly volunteer based haunts exist, such as the *Lawson Chamber of Horrors* in St Louis, Missouri which functions to support local school scholarships, often there will be a grey are between some form of volunteerism being encouraged by a purely capital-driven marketer. The most frequent manifestation within the industry of this dynamic is the unpaid rehearsal, along with the unpaid hair, makeup and costuming periods that leave performers, even in relatively rigorous environments, only paid for formal hours of operation despite being on-site and preparing for their labour for much longer than this. The implication being that this unpaid time is a combination of recreation and the provision by the marketer of objects and items of play.

Jensen argues that while society has a hierarchical structure of its own,

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[129] Hall, Stuart and Jefferson, Tony, *Resistance* through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain (London: Routledge 1991 [1975]) :47.
[130] Muggleton, David*, Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (Oxford: Berg. 2000)

subcultures have their own forms of social strata and these strata can become sites themselves of oppression, domination or manipulation.[131] In the case of scare attractions, instances of suffering or oppression can be viewed in the cases of performing under high-stress conditions and in some cases executing unpaid work in potentially dangerous environments.

Jensen describes subcultures as being driven by alternative means of acquiring capital beyond hegemonic social and economic factors.[132] What I propose is that the scare attraction industry is driven by a range of different forms of subcultural capital. Perhaps the most open form of subcultural capital is gained by progression up an informal hierarchy within the system of each company. Frequently the drivers of this progression tend to be rooted in volunteerism, working longer hours, working additional rehearsal days, helping developing performance content and performing manual labour in the construction and maintenance of the scare mazes themselves. This is often framed as a site for proving one's mettle within the subculture; providing what amounts to unpaid labour to garner subcultural capital for future potential rewards within the subculture. Here, to acquire an economic and/or status goal of the subculture performers compete in a subcultural race to be exploited which is then facilitated and encouraged by the marketer of the spatiotemporal environment. If one aligns with Jensen's perspective on subcultural capital, social capital may be perceived as valuable in relative relation to economic value - a way of accruing wealth without the need to shift upwards from a poor socioeconomic platform, which itself returns to what appears to be presented in *Spookers*. At worst, in this perspective, the use of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and of outsider status are being used in a grotesque extension of the dynamic of them 'appear(ing) less as artists in their own right…and much more often as participants in professional productions that are dramaturgically designed around the inclusion of real people – where in this instance 'real people' become that which they play - the outcasts, the threats and the subhuman.

Other forms of subcultural capital are revealed by the scare performers that are not necessarily directly driven by the marketer and instead self-generated via ludic

[131] Jensen, Sune Qvotrup, "Rethinking Subcultural Capital", Nordic Journal of Youth Research 14(3) (2006): 272
[132] Ibid.

competitiveness. The development of cool or original characters, the development of more 'extreme' content or characters, and the repeated use of a character are all in-show goals that a performer can aim for to generate subcultural capital with no economic component. Further to this is the ability to frame the self as committed to the culture, or the perceived in-group (again, the term 'family' is often used) for example, longer hours for their own sake, working in uncomfortable conditions, being willing to do something that is perceived as risky. All of these carry with them a form of cache within scare attraction circles that I have encountered.

Conclusion:

Play and community have an intimate relationship, but while the two fundamentally interact, it can be challenging to truly facilitate ludic experiences.[133] Scareacting is a community in which, as in/with many subcultures, individuals seek moments of ecstasy and feelings of solidarity – communitas – that escape them in their everyday lives. This ties distinctly into Pine and Gilmore's conception of The Experience Economy which, in the case of Scare Attractions and other equivalent ludic performances, can be perceived in three phases distinct from the producer/consumer dynamic of former economies. The distinction is that one phase, that of the marketer, is the initial producer, but both subsequent phases involve consumption, with the first consumption phase acting as the production for the second set of consumers. In these formats the performers are the first consumers of the ludic experience, and the spectators are the second. The three phases being producers (MacroAuthors) first, performers (who are both consumers and producers - MicroAuthors) second and spectators (active consumers – SpectAuthors) third.

Two games concurrently exist in the ludic spatiotemporal environment of a scare attraction. Marketers curate/oversee a liminoid space (which will be described as MacroText in a subsequent chapter) into what players feel is a system where they can perform a grotesque self and affirm themselves as both a reaction to the (capitalist

[133] An example of the tensions of this kind that also include Live action roleplaying may be found in Mitchell, Laura, "Volunteers as monstrous workers: 'monsters' in UK live-action roleplay game organizations,"*Culture and Organisation*, 25 (3) (2019): 233-248.

neoliberal) society they live in and possibly feel a sense of oppression by. However, they ironically do so via collaborating with the means of a capitalist, neoliberal format structure, and become themselves a mechanised product, part of a system within a (often literal) maze, and subject to the dynamics of a community that does not align with the subcultural idyll sold to them, but instead simply replaces one version of a hierarchy with another.

This chapter doesn't wish to frame the relationship between ludic communities such as scareacting and the commercial world as being inherently exploitative by necessity or convention. I have argued that there are good reasons to think that ludic communities can solve problems that marketers have in creating community demand for their performances and supply enthusiastic temporary labour. Conversely marketers can solve problems for ludic communities by reducing barriers to entry for individuals and providing a spatiotemporal environment in which a positive community atmosphere may be fostered and experienced, and individuals may feel affirmed and comforted.

This chapter also doesn't wish to frame marketers as being inherently flawed or being particularly deliberate in forms of exploitation. It is my experience that marketers within scare attractions are usually enthusiasts themselves and largely care about those with whom they work, with the dissonance between risk and labour having developed from a marketer having developed from the *backyard haunt* phase of their scare attraction production to the *ludic grey area* phrase without having reconciled the difference as regards their labour. Nevertheless, I think it is important to lay out in this chapter the existential problems that arise when play overlaps with labour given the degree to which hierarchies of influence and power are still present, as well as to highlight that to some degree even the commercial wing of scare entertainment can sometimes lean on arbitrary notions of community and appeals to subcultural value rather than financial earnings.

Since play is one of the primary features of an ideal leisure experience,[134] research into subcultural and community spaces tends to emphasise the consumption exclusively and not the labour and custody of the hospitality space.[135] Communitas has been argued as a core part of the spectatorship of haunt attractions and dark tourism in general.[136] I argue that labour needs to be centered as strongly as consumption in this communitas, especially in industries where hobbyists and enthusiasts make up part of the workforce and there are industrial fruits of labour from play.

In a performance world increasingly dominated by experience and immersive shows that blur the lines between the playful and the professional the dynamics that have become manifest in the scare attraction industry may represent a combination of warning, and a cautious call for optimism.

It is interesting to note in the wider perspective of this thesis, that there was a trend around the millennium – around the same time as the experience economy was developing as the primary economic driver – to challenge the notion of subculture and to attempt to adjust sociological perspectives into a form of 'post-subculture'.[137] While this attempt was only somewhat successful with many sociologists refusing to shift away from conceiving subculture as a useful paradigm, it demonstrates the potential challenges that subcultures may provide to current conceptions of identity and structuralism.[138] Subcultures provide opportunities to create hierarchies significantly deviating away from hegemonic structures, and likewise form alternative iterations of oppression, opportunism, and manipulation of individual and community senses of self. This is an inevitable challenge to scholarship that would instead position alternative identity paradigms as exclusively positive and manifestations of liberation from a hegemonic power structure, as well as heighten the extent to which structural forms of power can be challenged by targeting the overarching societal framework. Subcultures,

[134] Holbrook Morris B., Lehmann Donald R., "Allocating Discretionary Time: Complementarity among Activities," *Journal of Consumer Research* 7(4) (1981): 395–406.
[135] Lugosi, "Queer consumption and commercial hospitality": 172
[136] Rojek, Chris, *The Labour of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time*, (London: Sage. 2010)
[137] Bristow, Robert, S., "Communitas in fright tourism," *Tourism Geographies* 22 (2) (2020):319-337.
[138] Muggleton, Davis and Weinzierl, Ruprt (eds.) (2003) *The Post-subcultures Reader* (Oxford: Berg., 2003)

as they may be perceived in horror scareacting and the cultural idyll, may indicate that systemic power is a hydra, not a monolith.

CHAPTER 2: In the Back Row-ow-ow:

Mutual Spectatorship in Response to Seen and Unseen Invitations of Affect

This chapter examines different layers of experience available for spectators in scare attractions. It argues that walkthrough scare attractions, otherwise known as scare mazes, may be described as curated fantastical encounters. These fantastical encounters may borrow elements from the folkloric in so far as they incorporate popular cultural mythology. Such encounters offer differing layers of spectatorship; each of these layers invite affective responses using a combination of seen and unseen invitations. Group improvisational dynamics, achieved across different layers of spectatorship, are prominent in these environments. The subsequent result provides experiences for spectators that may be felt as intimate, memorable, multifaceted, communal, and contemplative moments of their past and future selves.

I will begin by framing the curated personal experience as a means of elucidating the different layers of spectatorship that manifest in mutually experienced performance. Then, having defined these layers of spectatorship, will apply them to an environment in which an audience group manifests a series of responses to seen and unseen invitations using the case study of a walkthrough scare maze experience.

The importance of intimacy within the scare entertainment industry, and relating to the curated fantastical encounter, is introduced in this chapter, and will be expanded upon in the fourth chapter of this thesis. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the framework of intimacy to which I refer, is that of the pursuit of personal value affirmed through self-fulfilling encounters,[139] as well as attempts to retrieve lost senses of self-identity amid the threat of globalisation.[140] The intimacy in the fantastical curated encounter can be aligned to the 'mass customisation' Pine and Gilmore referred

[139] Wang, Ning, "Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience". *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26,(1999): 349–370.
[140] Lull, James, *Media, communication, culture: A global approach*. (Cambridge: Polity. 2000).

to in their second seminal text on the experience economy.[141] The alignment between the experience economy and intimacy (sometimes referred to as intimacy theory or the intimacy model when applied in a corporate context) has been explored in the field of tourism and corporate studies as part of contemporary business strategy, notably by Sidali, Kastenholz and Bianchi who applied the analysis to food tourism.[142] They found that 'memory of the experience is provided through the "sense of belonging"' that stems from both the contact of the tourists with the host or food producer and among the tourists themselves, indicating that communion and intimacy may be felt not just by the consumer, but along consumer/producer and consumer/fellow consumer paradigms. The analysis juxtaposing such intimacy theories with the experience economy to explore group communion has not yet been applied to scare attractions, fantastical curated encounters or to immersive theatre itself.

The Commodification of Intimacy:

Nigel Thrift argues that the modern consumer has acquired a taste for affect and that capitalist forces have now fully identified and harnessed this desire, rendering sensations as commodities.[143] This consumption pattern, which brings the concepts of audience and consumer together, can be traced back to what was initially termed the *Experience Economy* by Pine and Gilmore in the late 90s.[144] The experience economy is rooted in the notion that industrial movements over the last thirty years have shifted in such a way that theatrical methods are applied to corporate environments in a replication of dramaturgical methods such as play and collaboration.[145] The experience economy is described by Thrift as 'a stream of thought and practice (that) has now blossomed into a set of fully fledged models of 'co-creation' which are changing corporate perceptions of what constitutes 'production', 'consumption', 'commodity', 'the

[141]B. Joseph Pine II and Gilmore, James H., *The Experience Economy: Competing for Customer Time, Attention and Money*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019): 31

[142] Katia Laura Sidali; Elisabeth Kastenholz; Rossella Bianchi, "Food tourism, niche markets and products in rural tourism: combining the intimacy model and the experience economy as a rural development strategy," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 23 (8-9) (2015): 1187.

[143] Nigel Thrift, "Re-inventing invention: new tendencies in capitalist commodification*", Economy and Society* Volume 35 (2) (2006): 280.

[144] B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999)

[145] Rob Austin and Lee Devin, *Artful making: What managers need to know about how artists work*, (New York : Prentice-Hall, 2003)

market', and indeed 'innovation''.[146] Having been written in 2006, this indicates that as of time-of-writing in 2024, capitalism in Western economies are in the second decade of developing these streams and 'co-creations'. Consumers and audiences are now concepts that it is hard to distinguish between, and each are experienced co-creators who expect control and agency in their consumption/spectatorship.

Through this combination of consumption/spectatorship, the notion of experience is strongly associated with moments of affective disturbance, the moment in which a form of bodily transportation takes place, has become a commodity, harnessing 'magical technologies of public intimacy', in order to create the semblance of intimate felt moments in a manufactured environment.[147] Examples of this discussed in the original *The Experience Economy* text include the *American Wilderness Experience* and *Club Disney*,[148] and have been more recently analysed in areas as diverse as online events during the COVID-19 pandemic and wine destination vacations.[149] As discussed by Josef Chytry, Pine and Gilmore 'leave no doubt about the founder of the phenomenon' and argued, using the example of Disneyland, that if entertainment, education, escapism, happiness, and explicitly aesthetic rewards were brought together into a single setting, any plain space could be turned into a space appropriate for 'staging an experience''.[150] This chapter will employ two non-horror case studies, one of which will draw from this root of the experience economy in Disney. This will be *Cinderella's Royal Table,* a restaurant within Disney's Magic Kingdom theme park, and will be paralleled, alongside the other case study of the Santa's Grotto, with scare attractions. Like the scare attraction, *Cinderella's Royal Table* is a performance within a performance, the experience economy facilitating play and communion via complex dramaturgical methods rooted in multiple layers of spectatorship.

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[146] Thrift, "Re-inventing invention": 281.
[147] Pine and Gilmore, *The Experience Economy:* 7.
[148] Ibid, 40-43.
[149] Leung, Wilson; Man Kit Chang; Man Lai Cheung; Si Shi, "VR tourism experiences and tourist behaviour intention in COVID-19: an experience economy and mood management perspective," *Information Technology & People* 36 (3) (2023): 1095-1125. https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-06-2021-0423; also Kastenholz, Elisabeth; Cunha, Diana; Aletxigerra, Ainhize; Carvalho, Mariana; Siva, Isabel, " The experience economy in a wine Destination—Analysing visitor reviews". *Sustainabilit*y, 14(15) (2022): 9308.: doi: https://doi.org/10.3390/su14159308
[150] Chytry, Josef, "Walt Disney and the creation of emotional environments: interpreting Walt Disney's oeuvre from the Disney studios to Disneyland, CalArts, and the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT)", *Rethinking History* 16 (2) (2012): 259-278, DOI: 10.1080/13642529.2012.681194

That the modern consumer seeks out supposedly authentic activities with transformational potential and the intention of seeking memories has been observed in several tourist areas, which identify the importance of affect in these events appealing to emotion and curating a sense of meaningfulness.[151] Such events with transformational potential, are an 'interconnected phenomenon focused on the creation of a memorable event that elicits a sensory response through multi-dimensional innovation and design',[152] and might include thrill-based events such as skydiving; the "once in a lifetime" holiday; or heritage tourism.[153]

Thrift's argument indicates there is significant potential from both a financial and cultural perspective in creating a sense of sincere, authentic encounters that are charged with a sense of the fantastical or folkloric. In Thrift's description of 'the automaticity of intuition',[154] the allure of commodified affect is the notion that a sense of intimacy, even if it is experienced intangibly/non-cognitively, can be created from experiences subsequently perceived as enchanted or magical. This intimacy may happen between performer and spectator, as explored in the fourth chapter of this thesis, but also may happen within groups, from spectator to spectator, creating a sense of cohesion or communion. In a performance context these notions are perhaps best associated with the theme parks cited by Pine and Gilmore as the heralds of the experience economy, 'connecting with (customers) in a personal, memorable way'.[155] However, the vocabulary presented here seems to indicate additional overlap with the expanding immersive and participatory theatre industry. In this chapter I apply these ideas to the commercial scare attraction, which shares elements with both immersive theatre - as identified in the introduction to this thesis – and the theme park.

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[151] Watkins, Megan, "Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect" in *The Affect Theory Reader*, Ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (Durham, Duke University Press, 2010): 290

[152] White, James T.; Hickie, James; Orr, Allison; Jackson, Cath; Richardson, Robert, "The experience economy in UK city centres: A multidimensional and interconnected response to the 'death of the high street'?" *Urban Studies*, 60(10) (2023): 1833-1852. https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/00420980221143043

[153] Kerr, Margee, *Scream: Chilling Adventuress in the Science of Fear,* (Pittsburgh, Public Affairs, 2015). The book details each of these events across different chapters.

[154] Thrift, "Re-inventing invention": 282.

[155] Pine & Gilmore. *The Experience Economy:* 3.

Just as restaurants and the service sector aim to engage consumers via immersivity, informed by Schechner's broad definition of performance as extensively discussed by Pine and Gilmore linking performance with business services, so immersivity has begun to dominate the language involved in theatrical production.[156] This includes the subgenre of as-now-defined 'immersive theatre'. The term of immersive theatre would include theatrical events that have existed for many decades and beyond, nevertheless the tendency was for both academic and casual discourse to elide these performance formats with conventional/observational theatre.

Returning to Thrift's descriptions of commodified affect, the words *magical* and *supernatural* also align with many horror narratives. Magical and supernatural are words suited to an environment in which spectators appear on the surface to fulfil criteria of 'public intimacy'. Presenting oneself as vulnerable, which arguably can be seen as being fundamental to all forms of participatory theatre, but which is overtly a part of the spectatorship of commercial immersive horror, is inherently a form of public intimacy. The act of being vulnerable is something western culture tends to enact behind closed doors, even if 'magical technologies' have shown that other people's vulnerability is something that is, to many, compelling viewing in the form of reality television, YouTube content and TikTok, such an event will be discussed in chapter four when discussing *McKamey Manor.*

Experience Economy and the Invitation of an Alternative Reality

Gareth White states that a production 'work(s) with audience members as their material', by which the audience member is the true author of their own experience, a 'procedural' author, who accepts invitations of engagement that are offered in the production. As he puts it, 'This peculiar authorship is realised when the practitioner takes the risk of making an invitation and opens the conversation out of which the action of participation will arrive.'[157] I will use the concept of invitation and its

[156] Ibid. 108-111
[157] White, Gareth, *Audience Participation in Theatre : Aesthetics of the Invitation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 196.

relationship to authorship as part of the language of the experience economy and fantastical curated encounters. The invitations of immersive theatre come as a constant bombardment, with one of the key initial invitations being to enter the space itself, including when and how that act is undertaken. In the cases of this chapter the spectators undergo physical journeys through a geographic space, making their conceptual journey of procedural authorship a literal journey as well; a journey in which the first invitation is that of receiving and interpreting the new spaces encountered, and the characters in them, as being charged with transformational potential, even a kind of magic. It is no surprise therefore that promotional material of the original experience economy influencer, Disney theme parks, so often refers to 'The Magic of Walt Disney World' and guests invited to 'Remember the Magic'.[158]

In Walt Disney World, the material reality is that Mickey Mouse is portrayed by an actor in a skin costume. However, the response of a child, unaware of this materiality, may involve perception of an equally authentic reality in which the Mickey Mouse being encountered, interacting directly with them and responding to their provocations, is real and present in the shared space with the child. These senses of authenticity may be enhanced by the behaviour of others present. Family members and fellow spectators may validate the child's experience of the moment as authentic despite their meta-knowledge of the fiction. This experience allows for the magic to be shared, the intimate moment for the child to be co-opted by the community. The affective stimulation provided by such encounters feels similarly authentic despite the fact that the majority of people present know perfectly well the fictional commercial mechanisms underpinning the event. One family of such 'public intimacy' events is the fantastical curated encounter.

Fantastical Curated Encounters

[158] 'Remember the Magic' is a refrain repeatedly sung in a long-running parade at Disney's Magic Kingdom theme park. The term 'Magic of Walt Disney World' was featured as early as 1982 in promotional videos for the theme park resort itself. Both phrases are ever present cultural terms associated with the Florida resort and other theme parks. This is also the location of the Cinderella's Royal Table restaurant that is used as a case study in this chapter.

The fantastical curated encounter is a term original to this thesis, one I am applying to performance events that have previously been defined and analysed separately in scholarship. By *fantastical curated encounters* I am referring to performances in which spectators are presented, and subsequently interact, with a predetermined character figure who has fantastical and/or folkloric qualities. These happen in a location that has been specifically curated or adapted for the purpose of that interaction. The spatiotemporal environments of these experiences exist, therefore, in both realms of reality and unreality, of both the everyday and fiction.

Two culturally prominent forms of the fantastical curated encounter, which I will use as case studies within this chapter, are the Santa's Grotto and Disney Princess Dining experiences. I use these examples because they are prominent examples of this type of performance, also, because they are forms of this performance that have been subject to some academic attention. The third form of fantastical curated encounter I will discuss is the scare attraction, which I position not as one fantastical curated encounter in a fixed magical space but rather a series of encounters delivered one after another, as if on a conveyor belt.

Christou, Pericleous & Komppula use a similar term to fantastical curated encounters in their phrase *legend-based experiences*, in reference to actors performing as legendary figures within legend-informed settings.[159] Their focus is primarily on Santa Claus interactions in Lapland and part of their discovery in their extended ethnographic study of the Joulupukin Pajakylä[160] was that a sense of authenticity – in this case the validation of Santa Claus as a "real" person – was possible through 'the careful representation and semblance…of the legendary figure and natural/designed environmental themed cues'.[161] This recent discourse follows on from an evolution of the relationship between seen and unseen mythology that is ephemeral in nature from oral tradition, in which inter-relationships were key;[162] and from narrative telling to

[159] Prokopsis A. Christou, Katerina Pericleous, and Raija Komppula, "Designing and offering legend-based experiences: Perspectives of Santa Claus in the Joulupukin Pajakylä, *Annals of Tourism Research* 98 (2023): https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2022.103519

[160] Joulupukin Pajaklya is a traditional Santa Claus experience as performed in the Lapland region The Chrisou, Pericleous & Komppula paper provides a thorough description of the event.

[161] Christou, Pericleous, and Komppula, "Designing and offering legend-based experiences": 12.

[162] Ong, Walter, *Orality and Literacy,* (London, Routledge, 2002):136.

more active physical engagement with an environment that sits between the 'real' and folkloric world that nevertheless retains the importance of communion.[163]

Such discussions have featured in scholarship on tourism and hospitality, as well as in childhood studies.[164] However, less attention has been paid to these events within the fields of performance and theatre studies. The observations found in these areas, nevertheless, might usefully contribute to analyses of folkloric performance, contemporary immersive theatre, and audience studies. The feedback loop evoked by fantastical curated encounters might also be aligned to what Joanna Bucknall describes as (Remember)ing, an evolution of Machon's ideas in which Bucknall argues for the term to describe recall of affective embodiment.[165] According to Bucknall 'If hypermnesis is the affective recalling and reminiscence of the perception of a particular experience, then I want to suggest that it has the potential to be employed as an embodied tool for capturing and disseminating actual instances of audience's experience, or at least the perception of those experiences, in such a way as to privilege the audience's ontology rather than the dramaturgies.'[166] While Bucknall here describes the concept in terms of data capture of audience experiences, this dynamic also describes a secondary and tertiary audience member in a Fantastical Curated Encounter aware of their own previously embodied memories as they engage in 'reflecting in participation.

The reason for the attention within childhood studies such as those invoked by Santa and Disney fairytale princesses is that collaborations involved within fantastical curated performances have great potential for co-creation and theory making, with Busch, Theobald and Hayes observing that the Santa's Grotto can be one of the key formational, memory-making and culture-interacting experiences for three-to-five-

[163] Price, John E. "Digital Thunderdome: Performing Identity and Creating Community in a Facebook World", *New Directions in Folklore* 14 (1-2) (2016): 40.
[164] Maryanne Theobald; Gillian Busch; Susan Danby, "Socializing children into pop culture: A visit to Santa," *Global Studies of Childhood* 8 (3) (2018): 252. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610618798930
[165] Bucknall, Joanna J., "The "Reflective Participant," "(Remember)ing" and "(Remember)ance": A (Syn)aesthetic Approach to the Documentation of Audience Experience," *PARtake: The Journal of Performance* as Research: 1(2) (2017): p3.
[166] Ibid. p9.

year-old children in being invited to collaborate with environment and context, and to make decisions about what is authentic and what isn't.[167]

Busch, Theobald and Hayes' intentions relate to the 'value of children's contributions and decisions about the enactment of celebrations'.[168] Similar observations may be made with older children in their interactions with characters in theme parks, such as the Princess meet-and-greet dining experiences available within Disney theme parks. *Cinderella's Royal Table*, for instance, is an attraction located in the Magic Kingdom theme park, part of Walt Disney World, in which park attendees may dine in "Cinderella Castle". Cinderella Castle is a Disney brand icon, used in marketing as both the icon of the park and as an ident before movies. During this dinner, the attendees are met by the characters of Cinderella, Prince Charming and other Disney Princess characters in a brief free interaction.[169] *Cinderella's Royal Table* involves environment curation, authenticity validation, and management of spatiotemporal environment in a fairytale environment that is a similarly 'legend-informed setting' as that described by Prokosis, Pericleous & Komppula when exploring Santa Claus encounters.[170]

Like the Santa Claus and theme park dining experience, scare attractions use legend-informed settings to play with notions of reality in affective manners in a way that promotes a sense of togetherness. However, the Santa Claus and theme park dining experience have fixed expected cultural roles of spectatorship relating to a relative binary of adults and children, the scare attraction has no such binary – with differing spectators being variably prone to fear stimuli of different types. Scare attractions may be sites where adults might engage with some of the same challenges and dynamics: honing and exploring their relationships with reality, their imagination, their own bodies, and their interpersonal relationships. I will now identify what these events are

[167] Gillian Busch, Maryanne Theobald, and M Hayes, "Young children as theory makers and co-creators of cultural practices: challenging the authenticity of Santa", *European Early Childhood* 31 (2) (2023): 175. DOI:10.1080/1350293X.2022.2081346
[168] Ibid.: 169
[169] A description of the guest experience at Cinderella's Royal Table is written by Tom Bricker, "Cinderella's Royal Table Restaurant Review", DisneyTouristBlog, (most recently updated Feb 2023), https://www.disneytouristblog.com/cinderellas-royal-table-review/
[170] Christou, Pericleous, & Komppula, "Designing and offering legend-based experiences".

and some of the key terminology and mechanics of the scare attraction. I will particularly focus in this description on the importance of the dispatch mechanism and batching of consumers.

Scare Attractions: Definition, Terminology and Mechanics

Scare attractions are a subset of live horror performance defined by Madelon Hoedt as '[a] venue designed to frighten its audience. The term does not apply to sites that claim to be haunted by actual ghosts. Instead, the venues have a basis in fiction or 'horrible history'".[171] Hoedt is one of the few scholars to have given scare attractions academic attention.

The following aspects of scare attractions come from my own ethno-biographic experiences as an insider to both the commercial workings of the industry and the experience of extensively performing, producing and viewing such events. In addition to existing as a venue designed to frighten audiences, separate to the ghost tour, I would add that there is a tendency, as Alston observed, for the scare attraction to be a commercial endeavour and, as identified by Hoedt, to be offered primarily, albeit not exclusively, at Halloween. [172]

It is necessary to provide a brief glossary of terms relating to the scare attraction, most of which are widely used in the industry but have not been codified academically. By *scare maze* I refer to a single walkthrough entity. Despite the common name there is generally not a labyrinthine component, but instead a single winding, usually thin, one-way passageway, occasionally opening up to larger rooms or other pod-like spaces, that purportedly creates the sensation of being within a maze. Scare mazes may be indoor or outdoor and may be themed to a single narrative or eclectic.

Scream Parks are large-scale events, usually seasonal, in which there are likely to be multiple scare mazes along with other horror-themed events such as street theatre

[171] Hoedt, "Keeping a Distance": 34.
[172] Madelon Hoedt, "HAuNTco", The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies 18 (2020): 297.

and themed refreshment. Scream parks are often overlays of existing theme parks, but also frequently take place in rural environments at farm parks. The terms *Scare Attraction* and *Haunt*, as Hoedt identifies, encompass any of the above descriptions.[173]

Important to the audience experience of the scare attraction, and relevant to this chapter is the throughput mechanism, as determined by the attraction dispatch. The dispatch, derived from theme park ride terminology, is how the audience enters and consumes each individual scare maze. There are two broad designs to scare maze throughput: *batched delivery* and *conga line*. A batched delivery scare maze is one in which a controlled, limited number of spectators are sent into the maze at a time, with the intent that they are collected treated as a single unit, experiencing the event mutually within that grouping. A conga line scare maze is one in which very large numbers of spectators are continuously processed through a scare maze to create an on-going, continuous audience, also leading to a mutual experience but in which the mutual grouping is less clearly defined. In each case the audience experiences the event as individuals, but also as a group.

Most commonly, batched delivery systems for scare mazes will number somewhere between six and fifteen, although in some cases such as Merlin Entertainment's *Dungeons* attractions, that rely significantly less on moments of individual affect and are predicated less on providing a scary experience, the batch numbers may be significantly higher.[174] This grouping produces a clearly defined "community" for the duration of the attraction. In batched attractions the community is fixed and may be made up, depending on guest grouping, of a single friendship or family group or a blend of strangers. This produces a major variable in the nature of the mutual experience within a scare attraction: the community may be made up entirely of members of a pre-existing peer group, alternatively it may be a group of people who have never previously met. Conga line communities are more ephemeral and are limited to the moment of exposure – there is still mutual experience but only by those who witness the same event simultaneously. If the event is a chainsaw attack jump scare,

[173] Hoedt, "Keeping a Distance": 36

[174] Merlin generally uses groups of roughly 20-25 people, as indicated by their private tours of the York Dungeons: "Private Group Tours", The Dungeons, https://www.thedungeons.com/york/tickets-passes/groups-and-events/private-group-tours/

perhaps only as few as three guests may experience a communal event; conversely if the event is a sequence taking place in a whole room, the whole room's worth of guests will experience the event mutually.

Thus, batching is important for the mutual nature of the attraction. Batched events lead to semi-permanent communities who are mutually experiencing the event as a whole group for the duration of the attraction (likely at least several minutes). Conga line events lead to fragmentary communities who form, disperse, and re-form and mutual experiences last only for brief durations of seconds. Both events show marked differences from how the other, more established, folkloric curated encounters forge their communities and engage in mutual intimate experiences.

The scare attraction as fantastical curated encounter: a case study.

The themed scare attraction or maze can be perceived as a form of fantastical curated encounter as defined earlier in this chapter. More precisely, its scene-by-scene procedural nature as the guests move through the themed environment provide for an ongoing series of fantastical curated encounters. Through this process it produces a series of mutually experienced intimate events. Those events being mutually experienced not, as with other such encounters by predominantly family groups with defined spectatorship roles, but instead by friendship, couple and peer groups with non-defined and thus improvised spectatorship roles that can change over the course of the attraction.

To explain this, I will discuss a case study from my own experience, the *Manormortis* scare maze at *Scare Kingdom Scream Park* in Preston, Lancashire.[175] *Manormortis* would be categorised within the industry as a themed, indoor scare maze that usually operates within the context of the *Scare Kingdom* scream park but which sometimes opens in a standalone capacity at other times of the year for special events. It uses batched delivery of eight to ten people concurrently.

[175] Scare Kingdom Homepage, (Updated 2023), Scare Kingdom, https://www.scarekingdom.com/

Manormortis was created from scratch in a custom warehouse. Nothing had previously stood on the site where the construction was made, it had previously been open farmland. The template for the building's interior is that of a traditional Victorian/Edwardian mansion, "Haxenghast Hall". As a theme *Manormortis* takes on the spatial environment of a traditional haunted house story. The attraction has stood since 2012 and has had many variations,[176] however when discussing the attraction *Manormortis* henceforth I will be referring to the original presentation as given at the Halloween season of 2012. This is a production which I viewed multiple times, and was party to its creative development and, as such, the descriptions given are informed by that background.

Each version of the *Manormortis* attraction differs in its historical setting, allowing the producers to incorporate varied types of horror to match each period with their cultural associations: for instance, witches in the 1600s, Egyptology in the 1910s, ghosts in the 1800's. In each case the act of stepping into the *Manormortis* attraction evokes transportation into that moment in history. It therefore may be said that the spectators are entering the heterotopic space to 'haunt' it. The theming and characters in place as a series of invitations, available for the next group of temporal anomalies to pick up those invitations and interpret them into stories, intimacies and moments for that moment in time. Some of these memories may disappear straight away, forgotten. Others may become powerful memories that linger.

As an original story, *Manormortis* is clearly not the same kind of legend or folklore as Santa Claus or the fairy tales used as the templates for Disney Princess encounters, however it is the haunted house which itself is folkloric with many of the features that provide validation of shared folkloric understanding.[177] It also ensures within the dispatch event that information is provided to give context to the location

[176] Examples of these variations include *Christmas FestEVIL A Christmas SCAREol* (Christmas 2014); L'Amortis House of *Darkness (Valentine's 2015); Christmas FestEVIL Krampusnacht* (Christmas 2015); *Walpurgis Night – HYDE & Seek* (Midsummer 2017)*; Manormortis* – Ghostkeeper (Halloween 2017)

[177] Ulo Valk and Daniel Savborg, "Place-Lore, Liminal Storyworld and Ontology of the Supernatural. An Introduction", in *Storied and Supernatural Place: Studies in Spatial and Social Dimension of Folklore and Sagas.* Eds Volk and Savborg, (Helsinki, SKS/Finnish Literature Society, 2018): 7

and provide further folkloresque features that provide the ingredients needed to buy in to the series of curated encounters that the audience will face.

The dispatch character of *Manormortis* was called Theodora Price. Price, who was costumed as a pop-culture stereotype version of a scientist (Fig 1), met the group outside *Manormortis,* brought them inside, and lined them against the wall in a set replicating the hallway of a large classical home. The purpose of this role was to provide the narrative ghost story involved in *Manormortis*, name-checking the building, referring directly to the manor as haunted, framing the group as "new recruits" from "The Institute of Paranormal Research" there to go deeper into the house and explore.

Fig 1: Theodora Price

Price managed expectations, giving guidelines through this for spectatorship by providing spectators with their supposed 'role' for the attraction: students of the paranormal, as well as making it clear of what they were supposed to be scared: ghosts. The first of these is exclusively in-fiction while the second of these is only partially in-fiction given the scale of popular belief in ghosts detailed later in this chapter. Price didn't return at the end of the attraction to close a narrative, and there was no further reference to the Institute of Paranormal Research. However, Price's role fulfilled the task of establishing the group – perhaps a group of strangers, perhaps a collective peer group – as a singular community and provided a stable non-horror foundation for the audience to register and respond as mutual spectators to the upcoming events. That they were 'recruits' was fictional but that they were a community was an underlying reality. Thus, the purpose of this role was not exclusively to create attachment or immersion into the world: this would be varied according to the internal imaginative cognitive space of the individuals; but also, to create attachment to each other as mutual experiencers – both in and out of narrative – to the affective playground they were entering.

The remainder of the haunted house "story" of *Manormortis*, was not narrative but affective; it was the story that took place in the interactions between the rest of the journey of each group of spectators through the scare maze, their reactions to that journey, and any internal narrative that was constructed on a communal and individual level. As a result, the narrative that audiences constructed for themselves had potential for self-reflection, community and may be determined by their own intentions, pre-occupations, and imagination. The only potential barrier to their chosen storytelling form being the company they have within their scare attraction communit(ies); and their own bodies, which may not physically respond to the provocations in the way that they consciously/cognitively wish to. The subsequent chapter to this one will address elements of such chosen storytelling or 'SpectAuthorship', while this chapter will continue to discuss curated encounters in terms of group dynamics, spectatorship, and affect.

As spectators in their batches progress from scene to scene within the scare maze, the scare attraction can be thought of as a machine; a system which takes a

collection of audience members and, through incorporation into an othered reality, processes them through a series of affective encounters and finally deposits them back into the everyday world. Other folkloric curated encounters may also feature elements of this dynamic – such as meeting Elves at the entrance to Santa's Grotto, or the behaviour of Disney World 'cast members' in their introductions to, and laying out the atmosphere of, Princess Dining encounters. While elements of this batched processing occur in these other formats, this is particularly the case for the scare attraction. In scare mazes, series of affective encounters are provided not just temporally but spatially via the audience member literally progressing physically through an extended maze from beginning to end almost in the manner of a production line.

Having established that the scare maze is confluent with the fantastical curated encounter through its use of commonly understood mythology, shared cultural understandings and use of a charged heterotopic environment. I would like to further explore the group and individual spectatorship in such events. As such I will return to wider discussion of the curated encounter, specifically the layers of spectatorship that exist within them. I shall apply these concepts to the instances of Santa's Grottos and Princess Dining events before reincorporating this approach back into the discourse of the scare attraction. This is because the Santa/Child interaction has been more fully analysed, is more static, and therefore a useful comparison to initially explore before applying equivalent concepts to the scare attraction while the Princess Dining demonstrates an additional layer of complexity via a more heterotopic spectatorship.

The central perspective here is that what is the case regarding those interactions will also be the case, albeit in a more dynamic context, for the scare attraction. The scare attraction offers a more heterogenous environment since it may make more use of various types of stimuli and has a buffet of cultural tropes and pre-existing knowledge to play upon. Instead of a single piece/family of folklore or fantasy, it may instead delve from any cultural stimulus found in horror or that has the potential to generate it. This may be applied seen or unseen, physically manifested or merely imagined, real or unreal, as invited by the mechanisms of the performance. The invitations in scare attractions, rather than overt, can be very passive – down to as little as the implied danger of darkness, and invitations as to what may lie inside.

Curated Encounters: Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Spectatorship

Drawing on Richard Schechner, Maria Bäcke analyses two RPG communities in these terms and states that in these communities the roleplaying spectator/participants,

> 'create collaborative make-believe fantasies, but they also negotiate their boundaries and they do so in very different ways. In formulating social and cultural rules appropriate to the medium and in negotiating the goal of the performative utopias of which they are a part, the role-players…interact in innovative make-believe as well as make-belief ways in the social, performative arena….'[178]

This is aligned with the dynamics of fantastical curated encounters as discussed, but also allows for a more fluid, heterogenous approach to the give and take of spectatorships in these environments, aligned with the more heterogenous responses seen in horror and among peer group adults – the general demographic of scare attractions.

Scholarship of curated encounters relating to Santa and other 'places of the imagination',[179] has primarily focused on the spectator, predominantly a child, who is the one directly engaged in the 'encounter with a magical world'.[180] There is also a further relevant dynamic pertaining to the relationships among those who spectate the performance together. In the mythology of Santa Claus, Corsaro and Fingerson note that the supposed 'realness' of Santa Claus is not just present in childhood, but is reinforced by discussion and ritual that is facilitated, indeed engineered,[181] by adults to the point that adults are in a sense curating a child's relationship with the folkloric Santa into their later juvenile stage directly, and indeed further throughout their lives indirectly

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[178] Maria Bäcke, "Make-believe and make-belief in Second Life role-playing communities." *Convergence* 18(1), (2012): 89. https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1354856511419917

[179] Maryanne Theobald, Gillian Busch and Susan Danby, "Socializing children into pop culture: A visit to Santa", *Global Studies of Childhood* 8 (3) (2018): 250

[180] Gillian Busch, M Theobald, and M Hayes, "Young children as theory makers and co-creators of cultural practices": 165

[181] William A. Corsaro and Laura Fingerson, "Development and Socialization in Childhood", in *Handbook of Social Psychology,* Ed. John Delamater. (New York, Springer, 2003): 148.

through subsequent relationships with others'/loved ones' relations with the folkloric Santa.[182] These subsequent relationships may even include the children's own future children, completing a folkloric cycle and passing the curated encounter of Santa's Grotto as ritual from generation to generation. Similar spectatorship dynamics can be observed in fan accounts of Princess Dining interactions, both in terms of adult validation of the child or child-equivalent's 'real' experience of the princess, and in terms of experiences passing through family groups and even across generations.

This conditioning of expectations, cultural storytelling and validation of folkloric realness do not stop at the entry to Santa's Grotto or the doors of *Cinderella's Royal Table.* Indeed, they have the capacity to enhance the experience of the child via not just spectatorship but collaboration. Schechner argues, 'The performances of everyday life – 'make-belief' – create the very social realities they enact'.[183] In this case the everyday life of the one person (traditionally the 'adult' coded spectators) helps shape the social reality make belief of another (the traditionally 'child' coded spectators). 'The drama is complicated further in these events by them usually being played out in front of a wider audience, most overtly in the case of the other diners at *Cinderella's Royal Table.* This means there are three different paradigms rather than the pure binary of an 'adult' and 'child': I believe it is relevant to observe and define the different layers of spectatorship that groups may find themselves in within these encounters - I therefore propose a vocabulary for these events of the primary, secondary and tertiary spectator.

The primary spectator correlates with the child at the Santa encounter. They are the person undergoing the immersive fictional narrative of the performance, invited to experience the encounter as "real". They are the audience member who is being asked to validate the character interaction, and the world in which it takes place, as being a legitimate encounter. It is the validation of the authenticity of the encounter, and their collaboration with this authenticity, that is the premise of the performance and the primary determinant of its success.

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[182] Steven Merrell, "Belief, Unbelief, and Rebelief in Santa Claus: A Theory of Cyclical Belief or a Belief Cycle", *All Graduate Theses and Dissertations, (*2022): 79.
[183] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction.* (New York, Routledge: 2006) 42.

By contrast, the secondary spectator correlates to the parent or guardian figure at the Santa's Grotto. They are the audience member who is not necessarily experiencing the performance as "real" but instead their own spectatorship is predicated on managing the interaction between the performer/environment and the primary spectator. They provide the expectations, cues and rituals needed for the interaction for the primary spectator. When successful this will validate the authenticity of the encounter for the primary spectator, and perhaps when unsuccessful they may undermine the collaboration between primary spectator and encounter and fail in their attempt to create a sense of authenticity. At times, they may find themselves in the position of being able to actively collaborate with the performer/environment as a part of the performance themselves. Fantastical curated encounters allow spectators to provide different parts of the make belief and position themselves into differing roles. For Santa's Grotto and Princess case studies those differing roles in make belief are defined by different stages of the spectators' lives, and their family roles. In the case of Scare Attractions, however, these differing roles in curating make believe are less intuitively manifest. It may also be the case – and often will be – that due to the folkloric nature of these encounters the secondary spectator will have memories of themselves being the primary spectator (again, the common example here is Santa: a parent often having memories of their own childhood trips to a Santa's grotto, thus making the rituals involved a part of personal and familial heritage) that lead them to understand the collaborations and cues needed to be a part of the fantastical fictional world and perform within the fictional environment as another character of sorts. This is both juvenile and lifelong indoctrination into a shared sense of Schechner's make-belief, and how play can curate intimacy and a sense of togetherness, creating potentially long-lasting memories.

Finally, the tertiary spectator correlates to those at the Santa's Grotto who are waiting in line or are otherwise present. They are not part of the immediate curated experience; however, they are sharing the spatial and temporal environment and as such become implied members of the encounter as well. It is likely to be the case that they are about to have the encounter themselves or have just had the equivalent encounter. Another correlation here would be to the diners who are also in the room while a Princess character interaction takes place at one table. At Princess dining

interactions, the spectator spends much of their time as a tertiary spectator, viewing other tables of diners interact with the princesses as they have done, or will do. Sharing past or future joy and becoming part of an implied community with people who perhaps they have never met and will never meet again but, for one moment, may feel a sense of shared experience with. In the case of a nuclear family watching another family this may be an immediate sense of shared experience, but in the case of, for instance, an adult couple unaccompanied by children (and thus perhaps without their own ability to primary or secondary spectate), this may relate to a former experience years past, or one they hope to experience again.

The levels of spectatorship – primary, secondary, and tertiary may be fixed and predetermined when a single encounter such as Santa Claus is the performance. However, in the case of scare attractions, these spectatorship levels are in constant flux, in part because of the affective dynamics involved in jump scares, and in part because of the different series of invitations available to spectators as they proceed through the walkthrough environment. A person who manifests as the primary spectator in one encounter may become a secondary spectator in the next room, or even moments later. In batched scare attractions it will often be the case that multiple peer groups who do not know each other experience these pieces of 'magical intimacy' together and as a result watch, unfolding, the intense responses of complete strangers – who now become part of their entertainment.

A series of different spectatorships are available within a walkthrough experience such as *Manormortis* all of which have the potential to create senses of intimacy, and to entertain on multiple levels. To each spectator there is the potential to garner entertainment from their own direct interaction with the curated environment of location/performer; or from their peer group's interaction with the curated environment; or by observing events at a (physical or emotional) distance of a tertiary spectator. I will now explore how these spectatorship dynamics manifest in a haunted house scare attraction such as *Manormortis*, with a particular focus on collaboration involving the seen and unseen.

The Magical Intimacy of the Scare Attraction as a Pseudo-Folkloric Encounter

As discussed by Dagnell et al., the act of walking into a haunted house is a charged moment with which people are broadly culturally familiar as a 'pervasive cultural narrative'.[184] This familiarity may have come via exposure to popular media in which this trope is evident or in many cases via the physical experience of entering a 'forbidden' environment for the first time which may have been the subject of ghost stories or other elements of peer-shared folklore, or could simply be a place a child has been warned against entering. If a location has been framed as haunted – be that in everyday life or via a fictional attraction – it has been because of storytelling that has taken advantage of the anxieties from preexisting perception of the paranormal.[185] The idea of walking into a spiritually charged space that we have been dared to go into is something that shadows many childhood experiences: the dare, the forbidden building, the place with local folklore surrounding it is something that many individuals will experience. Parallel to this the idea of walking into a playful immersive environment will be something that many members of the public associate with theme parks and childhood experiences. Haunting experiences are driven by somatic manifestations and environmental factors, for instance the visual cues of lighting (or lack of it) and discomforting sound effects interacting with eerie, weird, or disturbing physical theming, and scare mazes are better placed than any other form of media to take advantage of this. [186] In a conventional "haunted house" the visual cue will often be a lack of lighting, the discomforting nature of silence and the physical presence of a site or structure. The scare attraction, by contrast, is unlikely to be able to replicate the silence or solitude that marks the general haunting experience but may replicate similar sensations via a wider array of artificial possibilities: in the "haunted house" the solitude and silence will rarely ever be truly disturbed by confirmation that there is

[184] Dagnall, Neil; Drainkwater, Kenneth, G.; O'Keeffe, Ciarán; Ventola, Annalisa, 'Things that Got Bump in the Literature: An Environmental Appraisal of "Haunted Houses", Frontiers in Psychology Volume 11 (2020): 1328 https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01328

[185]Rense Lange and James Houran, "the Role of Fear in Delusions of the Paranormal," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 187 (3) (1999): 160.
Ricardo deOliviera-Souza, "Phobia of the Supernatural: A Distinct but Poorly Recognized Specific Phobia with an Adverse Impact on Daily Living," *Front. Psychiatry* Volume 9 (2018): 590.

[186] Dagnall et al. 'Things that Got Bump in the Literature":1328

someone lying in wait, but the scare attraction "haunt" may confirm this suspicion. The entering of the haunted-house-charged space is done in the instance of scare mazes with others allows the transgressive experience to become a mutual feeling. This mutual feeling from sharing in a moment of transgression may facilitate or reinforce communion between friends or lovers in a manner like those explored in the first chapter of this thesis regarding ludic communities and mischievous play.

Regardless of which dynamics are specific to the individual, the act of walking into a charged space and moving beyond the threshold of an environment rendered potent with unseen power will be a form of self-haunting for many people, with figures suggesting that a substantial proportion of individuals believe in ghosts.[187] Figures of 37% have been given for the number of people who believe in the concept of haunted houses.[188] The consequences is that it makes the relative 'reality' of the scare attraction encounter blended. Unlike the Santa's Grotto where the primary spectator child is positioned as the believer in the folkloric reality, while the secondary spectator parent is aware of the artificiality, the nuances, and variations in belief in supernatural concepts such as "ghosts" and "haunting" lend themselves to a wider range of positions. In a batched group of twelve spectators, it is possible that some will actively believe in the supernatural, some will be cynical but able to be coerced situationally into superstition, while others will be resolute in their rationalism. Here we see equivalent positions of primary and secondary spectators, with the former group acting as potential primary spectators within the group, the latter secondary and tertiary spectators, and the middle secondary spectators who may become dragged by affective dynamics and/or their own imagination into primary spectatorship.

John Paul Jones, writing about literary ghost stories, argues that '… many people believe the haunting of everyday places. The retelling of … stories – of memories, and memories gone bad- can assuredly make our place stories more complex and textures,

[187] Chapman University (2018). Survey of American Fears - Paranormal America 2018. Orange: Chapman University; YouGov, "45% of Americans believe that ghosts and demons exist" *YouGov*, https://today.yougov.com/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2019/10/21/paranormal-beliefs-ghosts-demons-poll (accessed January 14, 2020).
[188] Moore, D. W. "Three in Four Americans Believe in Paranormal". Princeton, NJ: Gallup News Service. (2005)

for they point us to those hidden corners of habitation that few people talk about'.[189] Jones positions the haunted story as a journey that stimulates a sense of transition back to childhood or innocence - that places consumers into a particular version of themselves that follows them throughout their life (their scared self, their innocent self, their curious self, their sadistic self) and allows for a challenging and reconstruction of that very self. For instance, allowing someone who perceives themselves, and/or is perceived, as being fearful to challenge that perception in a public forum – to demonstrate to peers the desire for self-improvement or resilience; or someone perceived as uptight to risk being placed in a vulnerable state openly in a public forum – challenging that perception of them. This makes a haunted house such as *Manormortis* an exemplary heterotopic space to be created for the purpose of a scare attraction, and thus as a series of folkloric curated encounters. It also makes ghosts, and other forms of spectrality, an excellent weapon in the arsenal of the scare attraction since it means that no actual presence is required for the spectator to perceive a presence. The unseen can be just as powerful as the seen, the absence of an actor just as powerful as an actor, the anticipation of a jump-scare just as powerful as its execution.

The entry into a scare attraction may provide the same transformative experience into a fantastical sense of place as those described above. A scare maze may not initially seem to be as specific, as tied to personal histories, as Santa's Grotto or Cinderella's castle, however, the link to the haunted house or other types of scary stories may carry similar folkloric qualities and sense of transportation as those discussed earlier in this chapter. Scare attractions overtly play towards understood tropes, most obviously the haunted house but also towards specific cultural elements. Universal Studios' *Halloween Horror Nights* portfolio of scare mazes in 2023, for instance, included a mixture of well-established stories to which the audience demographic will be largely familiar, such as the popular franchises *Stranger Things*, *The Exorcist* and *The Last of Us,* alongside stories that are less specific yet play upon imagery and ideas with which spectators will be familiar, such as *The Darkest Deal* which plays on the cultural association of blues music with devil worship and *YETI: Campground Kills* which uses an American folkloric figure in a horror context.[190] This

[189] John Paul Jones III, "What's the Matter with Ghost Stories," *Geohumanities* 5 (1) (2019): 279.
[190] *Halloween Horror Nights,* Universal Orlando, https://www.universalorlando.com/hhn/en/us/haunted-houses (accessed August 2023)

chapter will now address physical progression of a group through the maze/haunt that will continue to be the focus of this chapter, with a particular emphasis on affect.

Affect: Definition, Models and Relevance

To explore the dynamics of scare attraction spectatorship any further it is necessary to fully define the notion of affect, a word used so far in this thesis with a degree of presumed clarity, subsequently identifying its core importance to horror as a genre and specifically to the scare attraction.

The study of affect can be traced back to Spinoza, who includes the definition in *Ethics* as, 'the modifications of the body whereby the active power of the said body is increased or diminished, aided or constrained, and also the ideas of such modification'.[191] This conception of affect locates the idea, firstly, as a physical response that has been instigated from the outside: external stimulus impacting internal response. It also sets affect from the outset as being made up of several possible types – the body being modified by being 'aided' is ontologically separate from it being 'constrained' and so on – requiring affect to be categorically heterogenous and so, by nature, framing stimuli that appeal to affect such as horror, the fantastic, and nostalgia as being similarly heterogenous and capable of a plethora of possible 'modifications' which will not necessarily be experienced the same across different people, or even by the same person across different time or context.

The use of affect as a tool of study within performance is a relatively recent phenomenon, as discussed at length by Mireia Aragey, Cristina Delgado-García and Martin Middeke in their introduction to *Affects in 21st-Century British Theatre : Exploring Feeling on Page and Stage*.[192] As part of what they describe as a series of 'turn(s) to affect', the editors highlight increased respect for sociologist Brian Massumi in the analysis of such affective turns and in particular the consideration of the two-

[191] Benedict De Spinoza, *Ethics,* (London, Penguin Classics, 1996): 130.
[192] Aragay, Mireia; Delgado-García, Cristina, Meddeke, Martin(ed), *Affects in 21st-Century British Theatre : Exploring Feeling on Page and Stage*, (edited by Springer International Publishing AG, 2021): 2 https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=6546245.

sided aspects of affect and its potential to influence group dynamics rather than simply the individual. Massumi's Deleuzian approach to affect will inform the subsequent analysis.

> The basic Spinozan definition of affect also involves an "ability to affect and be affected". Right off the bat, this cuts transversally across a persistent division…the ability to affect and be affected are two facets of the same event. One face is turned towards what you might be tempted to isolate as an object, the other towards what you might isolate as a subject.[193]

Massumi, quoted above, bases his definition of the term on Spinoza's ideas and emphasises that it is an interactive process, in which not only does the body receive affect, but it exerts affect in response.

In the instance of treating affect in audience dynamics, the initial 'object' of the description aligns with the performance stimulus with the 'subject' being the spectator.[194] However, once considering the dynamics of primary, secondary and tertiary spectators the possibility also arises for each layer of spectatorship to impact the other. The first affective impact to the primary spectator creating a spiral of responses in a chain reaction of affect that shift through the layers of spectatorship and then back down again as each party's response is visible to the other thus both creating new invitations for affective responses and producing conditioning factors for the subsequent cognitive reconciliation.

Massumi argues for a two-sided process means that the beginning of any analysis on affect needs to start with 'the dynamic unity of an event' rather than focusing on the perspective of one side of the affect.[195] This reinforces the notion of exploring the moment of interaction in a piece of theatre and treating a participatory performance objectively rather than in an exclusively phenomenological fashion that prioritises the subjective experience of the spectator. A study that exclusively treats the spectator's personal experience as the sole subject of affect would potentially

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[193] Brian Massumi, *The Politics of Affect, (*Cambridge, Polity, 2015): 48.

[194] This is how most immersive theatre scholars have broadly approached the topic of affect within immersive theatre, reasonably and with many valuable results. This is expanded upon in other parts of this thesis, notable the introduction and conclusion.

[195] Massumi, *The Politics of Affect:* 137.

compromise the Spinozan definition of the term as a two-sided entity. These movements of interaction when applied to the fantastical curated encounter are multifaceted as there is an interaction between the performance stimulus and the primary spectator; also, an interaction between the primary and secondary spectators; and, also, the interaction as visible to the tertiary spectators. Positive affective experiences therefore may shift from an optimal encounter between a single child and Santa to the whole body of people present experiencing a sense of communal shared tradition due to a positive feedback loop created by the eventual 'dynamic unity' of not just one two-sided process, but several.

The difficulty this creates is that in determining moments of affect in the spectatorship of participatory theatre once one has identified the problems inherent with employing phenomenological approaches or there is a need to either use some conjecture on theoretical performance behaviour or capture live audience data in the moment of the experience. This was discussed at length in the introduction to this thesis following a review of both phenomenological and data driven approaches to immersive theatre spectatorship, especially as regards affect, and is reasserted here. I will continue in this chapter by using the former models of hypothetical spectatorship available to audiences. This may be perceived as an overemphasis on conjecture, but when discussing audience behaviour and categorisation I will be using examples and categories that I have drawn from the previous chapter and use case studies in subsequent chapters focusing on potential spectatorship and forms of audience behaviour that is offered, rather than via direct data collection. Such projects would also be valuable, and this paper is a partial provocation to such projects.

A speculative example here to explore the levels of spectatorship might be described by following three friends, Sam, Anika and Jessie, who are travelling through the *Manormortis* attraction.[196] As they proceed into a new room Sam is visibly scared while Anika comforts her and Jessie, less scared, follows behind watching her friends. An actor appears to scare Sam into jumping, resulting in Jessie laughing at her friend's

[196] Clarification: Sam, Anika and Jessie as described in this chapter are entirely fictional figures. They are hypothetical, however, the behaviours described are all drawn from personal observation on several occasions across multiple scare attractions.

jump. In this scenario Sam is the primary spectator whose fear and jump affect is the nominal 'purpose' of the exchange; Anika is the secondary spectator, whose physical comfort is validating Sam's (false world) affect that this is a truly threatening environment; Jessie is the tertiary spectator who spectated her friend's response to the environment while not being part of this performative exchange, however through this was stimulated into her own affective response - laughter. An in-performance invitation of a jump-scare, then spirals an audience invitation…to laugh mutually. On seeing their friend laugh at Sam's misfortune, Anika and Sam may laugh too. Note that while the jump was predicated on the threat being real (engaged in the fiction), the laugh is predicated on the threat being false (a real threat would not have caused humour) and so reality and fiction co-existing in an oscillating reality is necessary for this exchange. The possibility of an oscillating reality – a "world 1.5" that is predicated on a world that exists both within and outside of fiction needs to be present for this function to occur.

Horror and Affect in World 1.5

In their influential teaching text for literature, Michael Benton and Geoff Fox popularly propagated the terms *primary world* and *secondary world*, borrowed from Tolkien.[197] The primary world being the actual space occupied by the reader, the secondary world the space the reader's mind can enter and inhabit until 'the moment disbelief arises and "the spell is broken' and the imaginary world of words and pictures is compromised.[198]

The immersive scare attraction, along with other folkloric curated encounters and many immersive performances, posits the conception of a world 1.5. This would be the negotiated liminal environment that the spectator and their colleagues are able to negotiate themselves into during their experience. Neither the fictional world of folklore nor the normal space of reality but a heterotopic space between the two. A world in which the levels of 'reality' or fictionality can be negotiated and not necessarily even

[197] Michael Benton and Geoff Fox, *Teaching Literature: Nine to Fourteen,* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985)
[198] Boyce, Lisa Boggiss "Pop Into my Place: An Exploration of the Narrative and Physical Space in Jan Pienkowski's Haunted House" *Children's Literature in Education* (2011): 244

mutually experienced as direct equivalents by others within the same space. A world where for some there may be a sense of performing the role of 'paranormal investigator' (or at the very least a 'person under threat of ghostly encounters'), for others there may be no unselfing at all not any experience of spectrality, and yet others may not experience an unselfing and remain in their own body but who do experience spectrality and a sense of unease within the environment. This pertains to the unseen within the scare attraction, yet even the person in the centre category may respond differently when the provocation is not the general sentiment of a haunted house, but also a physical actor with a prop. This is where both the unseen and intangible my collaborate with the seen and tangible. An individual who has taken up the role as a tertiary spectator as Jessie did in the example above – regarding the provocation of ghosts, may not experience the same level of distance when faced with a more direct visceral threat like a jump-scare. Indeed, to return to the speculative example above where we left Anika, Jessie and Sam laughing at the jump scare enacted on Sam who had previously been scared, there is a possibility for a second actor to jump-scare the formerly non-scared laughing Jessie, taking advantage of a loss of focus, and generating a shock response from the spectator who had previously been the least scared. One reconciliation to this is for the three friends to come together more as a community as collectively amused or collectively scared spectators with a sense of mutual escape from the "threats" now a shared goal. This explains why the last scene of the first *Manormortis* performance was not only a ghostly representative of the matriarch of the fictional Haxenghast family, but that she had – rather counter-narratively and counterintuitively – a chainsaw and was threatening the audience with it. This did not make narrative or folkloric logic, but it made affective logic regarding the blended spectatorship the commercial endeavour catered for in that the group leaving together faced one final very visceral strong "threat" to provide a climax to the hopefully-now-well-established sense of communal escape.

The collective development between production and spectator group of a shared and negotiated world 1.5, if it sits in neither extreme, and may be experienced by members of the group at differing levels of fictionality, is perhaps one of the keys to a successful experience in a folkloric curated encounter and, likewise, a scare maze. Santa's Grotto is both the magical North Pole and the potentially mundane reality of its

locale. *Cinderella's Royal Table* is both an expensive restaurant in a commercially built structure and the home of a fairytale Princess. *Manormortis* is both a haunted house and a warehouse in Lancashire. Spectators experience themselves to varying degrees partway between those locales. And while neither a primary nor secondary world can be recreated without the use of an actual site-specific location, the world 1.5 of an immersive environment may be created in openly contrived circumstances: perhaps explaining why scare mazes may be effectively constructed in barns, warehouses, and as overlays to existing theme park attractions, rather than fitted around spectacular landscapes and houses that themselves already have surrounding narratives relating to being haunted.

Affect is a dynamic that crosses between these worlds. In observational horror plays there may be a reaching beyond the Primary World to some degree, for instance in a performance of *The Haunting of Hill House* loud, sudden noises were used to create startle responses and beyond this on stage the effect of the supernatural within the performance impeded on the world of the real within the audience even as the action remained contained in the onstage drama.[199] Even though the characters could not share the world of the audience, the spiritual world of the play and all the ghosts it contained could. Kelly Jones describes in detail the degree to which observational ghost plays consistently invoke the death of the narrative voice – often literally – in their drama.[200] The worlds blurred together into that World 1.5 effect. All immersive theatre may itself be said to deliberately blur the lines between the worlds owing to the shared space. Alston identifies the audience as 'engag(ing) with an environment that prompts the perception of immersion's cues' as part of his central definition of immersive theatre.[201] In this tradition, Folkloric curated encounters expand the liminal grounds between Primary and Secondary world further since the world of folklore has already had many years and preconditioning to notionally 'exist' in the real world. Carlson emphasises the importance of personal exposure to former material regarding art by

[199] *The Haunting of Hill House*, script by Anthony Neilson, directed by Melly Still, based on the book by Shirley Jackson, Liverpool Playhouse, Liverpool, January 15, 2016.
[200] Jones, Kelly, "Authorized absence: Theatrical representations of authorship in three contemporary ghost plays," Studies in theatre and performance, Vol.32 (2) (2012): 165-177
[201] Alston, Adam, "Making mistakes in contemporary theatre: spectatorship and errant immersion," *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 4 (1), (2016): 71.

declaring 'how important to us, and yet how underrated, are the ghosts of our previous theatregoing…any theatrical performance weaves a ghostly tapestry for the audience',[202] however with regards folkloric curated encounters, those ghosts are more long lasting cultural phenomena than simply other theatrical productions, but long-established cultural mythology to which the spectators has likely been repeatedly exposed.

The blurring of these worlds, especially within folklore-informed immersive theatre, mean that the world may be spectated at any scale within that shift from Primary to Secondary world. One moment an audience member may take up position of fearing the 'zombie' character and place themselves close to the primary world, while the next they may find themselves laughing at someone else who has tripped, placing themselves close to the Secondary world. All this taking place in the liminal place between the two, allowing for the sense of the folkloric world transferring itself into the body of the spectators (albeit in different ways) simultaneously and making for a satisfying communal experience, in which the group emerges from the maze together either all screaming together, laughing together, or reconciling their experiences together. The togetherness during moments of heightened affect becomes the satisfaction.

Affect and Jump Scares

In the previous section I indicated the role jump-scares have in the mutual experience of the scare attraction. Jump-scares within scare attractions are generally in-theme to an attraction, however, since the affect associated with jump-scares (visceral shock) is aiming for different affective responses to atmospheric horror (fear) the two need not always align and scare attractions will often use arbitrary thematic mechanics to generate jump scares if this will potentially enhance the mutual experience. An example of this does come in the final sequence of *Manormortis.* The final scene experienced by the batched group was in the supposed attic of the mansion. Guests walked into a tight hallway that could only be walked one person at a time for an

[202] Carlson, Marvin, *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2003) 164-165

extended period before they reached the attic. Unlike most scenes in which the room opens to allow for a collective experience, the walk through the attic had a fenced walkway to ensure the progression remained one-by-one. The character of *Malumyre* held an adapted chainsaw that would be used to threaten members of the group as she behaved erratically, flailing back and forth. She would approach around three times per group, ensuring that each approach was aimed at different members of the group.

This was one of many jump scares that were found in *Manormortis* but this was the only sequence that featured the jump scare alone, and with such a break from narrative sense. It also was the final impression before leaving the maze. Notably, the effect of the walkway in the final scene altered the delivery system briefly so it became less like a batched attraction and something closer to the conga line system. This indicates a particular effect – jump scares are aimed to reduce every individual to a potential primary spectator and intended to be experienced, at least at their affective stage, individually.

Watkins articulates that the two-sided nature of affect means that it has been split in terminology on occasion,

> Spinoza (defines a difference between) affectus and affectio, the force of an affecting body and the impact it leaves on the one affected. [203]

Sudden startle 'jump scares' that take place in *Manormortis*, provide differing forms of affective engagement at each stage of audienceship. A jump scare is a moment of sudden shock or surprise when the flow of the attraction is halted by the sudden appearance of a threat, character or loud noise, intended to make one or more of the spectators startled, and 'jump'. It is the most standard stock-in-trade of horror media in theatre and film.[204]

Here, the *affectus* is the inducement to preconscious response. Indeed, it is exclusively so since the event itself contains little to no actual logic: the chainsaw being

[203] Megan Watkins, "Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect" in the Affect Theory Reader, Ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (Durham, Duke University Press, 2010): 269.
[204] Hoedt, "Keeping a Distance": 41.

an anachronistic item. The purpose of the event is solely to create a sudden and impactful jump scare. If we were to take the moment at which Malumyre starts to rev her chainsaw then the action of revving would be an example of *affectus* as would be the stimulus a few moments later of her lunging towards the spectator. The *affectio* would then be any prelingual impact that this *affectus* has on the spectator. This *affectio* may be a jump, a scream, an imagining of impending assault, a bracing of the body for impact, or a number of other possibilities. The *affectio* then is the body's collaboration with the event, preconsciously and therefore initially subconsciously, with the experience immediately impacting the conscious after the fact.

To return to terms of invitations:[205] the *affectus* may be considered a bodily invitation and the *affectio* the taking up of that invitation. While on the one hand the *affectio* is a pre-conscious action, nevertheless the *affectio* that occurs may be impacted by the strategies that have been implemented in the SpectAuthorship of the participant.

At the same moment of *affectus* of Malumyre's chainsaw, the following *affectio* bodily-invitations may occur:

- a jump and scream response due to the body having been strongly and repeatedly conditioned for threat for the prior duration of the scare attraction, causing the experience of physical anxiety and tension.
- a small flinch response due to the body having become used to threats and attacks over the duration of the story but responding to the real-world, non-spectral threat of a chainsaw.
- a laugh due to the incongruity of the item.
- a look away and mental imagining of the chainsaw burying into one's flesh, with little corporeal movement due to having tension in the body in the attempted proof of one's bravery.
- an alert jump due to continued general anxiety.

[205] By which I mean referring back to White, *Audience Participation in Theatre:* 10.

Each of these examples carries their own possibility to commence an affective chain of responses with each of the above acts being other stimuli, as witnessing the responses of others in the experience acts as their own invitation or affective trigger. Some responses, especially emotionally charged ones involving fear or laughter, have possibilities for extended social contagion.

It is also important to note from the Malumyre example that the specific *affectus* that impacts the spectator doesn't need to be the same with each event. It is theoretically possible that the relevant (or at least *more* relevant) *affectus* for one spectator may be the sound of the chainsaw revving up. This could come about either through individual prioritisation of senses, or because at that moment the spectator wasn't looking in that direction. For another spectator the more relevant aspect of the event, and thus their *affectus* might be the sight of the sharp blades of the chainsaw. For another still it may be the specific belief that the chainsaw is coming towards them. These are notional, but clear possibilities of which the audience is in full control. While Hoedt discussing scare attractions argues in favour of control being central to the horror event, she claims, 'If, somehow, a visitor can convince themselves that the events portrayed are unrelated to them, they might be frightened, but this fear can be expected to be less intense than in the case of someone who does not distance themselves'.[206] However, counter to this come group exchanges: that the distancing may oscillate over the course of the attraction and that the group narratives over the scare maze will interact with individual narratives. By choosing to eventually respond together either during or after the maze, they have the option to harness control from where there seemed to be none. To choose their interpretation of their affective experience as being fun in retrospect, even for those individuals within that group for whom the experience was not always fun and who had temporary sensations of legitimate fear.

This hints at a particularly interesting dynamic. The production of *Manormortis* is in control of the event and the initial invitations within it, it is not in control of the *affectio* experienced by each spectator, and while the event determines the range/scope of the possible *affectus*, via the event, it cannot absolutely predict specifically where in

[206] Hoedt, "Keeping a distance": 40.

this range each individual or group will respond. It can however observe trends over time and make educated guesses about this range of audience behaviour, which is exactly what as a commercial entity one would expect.

Is the Malumyre chainsaw experience, therefore, incongruent with the mutual nature of batched delivery and thus reductive, along with all conga line dispatch mechanisms, to the folkloric curated experience? I would argue that this is where the status of this jump-scare as the final moments of the performance is relevant. If the dispatch of an encounter is important, so too is the ending. The end of the attraction produces the possibility of reconciliation and discussion among the whole community. Hence, giving members of the community individual experiences whereby they are invited to be a primary spectator at the end of the event provides a prompt for the next phase of their experience where they begin to discuss and make meaning of their mutual experience. This ensures, or at least promotes, the idea that the momentary affect experienced in the attraction lingers well after the event, that the whole experience is one that the community – at least those who have come together in peer groups or couples – may retain as a memory of a shared experience long into the future. The state of a chainsaw in a haunted house attraction is a parting reference to the fictionality of the encounter – something designed for largest possible alarm, but lowest credibility. To instil shock without fear. To send Anika, Jessie and Sam out into the everyday world again – despite their individual differences in inherent relationship to fear and horror - with a jump all together, followed by a laugh all together.

This event may be aligned to contemporary interpretations of Gerda Walther's work on the core of togetherness through affect.[207] She claims that communities may come together under common intention or focus and that this is reciprocal.[208] That, over time there is a coming together into a shared sense of experience, an experience of a "we".[209] Lucy Osler provides an extensive application of these ideas to online communities, but uses an interesting example to illuminate this point,

[207] Gerda Walther, *Ontology of Social Communities,* 1923
[208] Ibid: 22
[209] Ibid: 33

'I go to the cinema to watch Call Me By Your Name with a friend. My friend is sitting on one side of me and on the other side is a stranger. All three of us are watching the film. However, there is a sense in which I am watching the film together with my friend that does not seem to hold with the stranger'.[210]

In this instance the friends align to Anika, Jessie and Sam. However, this chapter has shown that in the fantastical curated encounter the stranger is indeed implicated in the same shared focus, togetherness, and mutual experiences. Anika, Jessie and Sam may indeed all come out together laughing, but they may do so also with Ben and Carol – a couple with whom they did not come yet with whom they have been interacting throughout the whole experience. The tertiary spectators who, through shared involvement and affect, have become part of their wider community, at least for that evening. Such dynamics can further develop into images I have witnessed at scare attractions – complete strangers huddling into the chest of each other, people offering a stranger for "sacrifice" to a jump scare, people discussing their bodily functions to strangers out loud. What has been created might be described as a turbocharged community.

Affect and Long-Term Memory Curation

While the initial reception of *affectio* occurs immediately in the moment as a response to the *affectus*, affect can be experienced as long-lasting in terms of memory held within in the mind and body, as a trace ready to be retriggered or interacted with, since 'The body can undergo many changes and nevertheless retain impressions or traces'. [211] Thus, a moment of *affectio* that has been strongly felt early in life can interact with a similar moment of *affectio* that occurs many years later, and in this way, nodes can be constructed in personal history as a form of bodily archive.

The capacitation of the body as it's gearing up for a passage towards a diminished or augmented state is completely wound up with the lived past of the body. That past includes what we think of as subjective elements such as habits, acquired

[210] Lucy Osler, "Feeling togetherness online: a phenomenological sketch of online communal experiences," *Phenom Cogn Sci* 19 (2020): 569–588. https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s11097-019-09627-4

[211] Watkins, "Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect": 269.

skills, inclinations, desires, even willingness, all of which come in patterns of repetition. This doesn't make the event less rooted in the body.[212]

The Santa's Grotto experiences discussed earlier in the chapter may provide personal change and development that lasts a lifetime.[213] Massumi's commentary here surrounding affect, align with the idea that fantastical curated encounters that trade in high levels of affect provide the opportunity to potentially induce or revisit seminal moments in a spectator's personal history. This indicates not only the forging of future memories but also retrieval of the past. Allowing the fantastical curated encounter to be stamped as an enjoyable long-term memory. Sthapit and Coudounaris used empirical data to discover that in tourism, 'when … participants experience thrills, enjoyment, excitement (hedonism), something meaningful or important, and learn about themselves (meaningfulness) while at the destination, they are more likely to have a memorable experience'.[214] This correlates with arguments in this chapter and my observations. If the experiences themselves are etched into the long-term memory, it follows (and possibly worth further empirical investigation) there is a strong possibility of the mutuality and togetherness felt as part of that experience becomes part of the memory as well. Sam, Jessie and Anika have the potential not just to leave the scare event with a satisfying experience they will remember, but an experience that ties self-perception with their group and a bonded sense of community, along with the invitation even for new friendships with those who experienced the event alongside them. This is an experience aligned to the family bonds of the Santa's Grotto and the Disney Princess Dining Experience – and similarly commercial.

Conclusion: Mutual Intimacy

Both Daniel Schulze and Jennifer Buckley have identified how the durational theatre of Forced Entertainment may be argued to create senses of slowly developing

[212] Massumi, *The Politics of Affect*: 49.
[213] Christou, Pericleous, and Komppula, "Designing and offering legend-based experiences": 118.
[214] Erose Sthapit & Dafnis N. Coudounaris, "Memorable tourism experiences: antecedents and outcomes," *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 18 (1) (2018): 72-94, DOI: 10.1080/15022250.2017.1287003

spontaneous community within their audiences through shared acts of witnessing.[215] Brian Massumi likewise discusses affective-driven communities by arguing 'Intensification of positive affects……seems a function of engagement with others'.[216] While companies such as Forced Entertainment indeed harness these dynamics, scare attractions and other folkloric curated encounters within the experience economy have been doing so with a fast turnover rate for several decades.

In this chapter I have discussed the background and context in which scare attractions exist, framing them firstly as part of the experience economy trading in 'magical intimacy' and secondly as a fantastical curated encounter. I have identified the layers of spectatorship involved in such fantastical curated encounters. These are performances which are intended to provide individual moments of affect controllable in part by the individuals' intentions, but also which act as indoctrination and community formation into a mutually intimate experience. In the case of many fantastical curated encounters the purpose is to bring a juvenile member of a family group into a shared experience that crosses generations. Conversely, in the case of a scare attraction the event provides equivalent experiences for friendship groups, couples, colleagues, and other groups of adults to explore and reinforce their roles within the group, to share intimate moments publicly via vulnerability, and doing so in a culturally acceptable manner validated by a commercial entity. Affect plays a strong role in this dynamic. Affect may be perceived as a two-sided concept in which an event is defined and the range of *affectus* and potential resulting *affectio* states are considered. Affect will also be treated as something that has the potential to both interact with the spectator's personal history, and to make a corporeal archive towards their future. Therefore, a summary of affective possibilities contained within a scare attraction or participatory theatre performance would seem to behove a study of the affective relationships not just between the individual spectator and the performance, but between the individual spectator and the other spectators.

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[215] Daniel Schulze, *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance;* (New York, Bloomsbury: 2017): 80-103; also, Jennifer Buckley; Long "Live" Theater: Feeling Time and Togetherness in Forced Entertainment's Livestreamed Durationals. *Theater* 1 May 2016; 46 (2): 35–53. doi: https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.1215/01610775-3547659

[216] Watkins, "Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect": 278

In the instance of a scare attraction this means that analysis needs to include the affective event as site not just of individual but also of group affective dynamics. The individual spectator traverses the scare attraction with other spectators and given the nature of affect, other performers. It is possible they will know them, possible they do not, and this dynamic also has the potential to affect the experience of the spectator and indeed the events themselves. It also strongly juxtaposes two forms of participatory theatre. The first of those are performances in which the audience are encouraged to perceive other audience members as participants and players, such as Ontroerend Goed's *The Smile Off Your Face* and Zoe Svenson's *Third Ring Out* which feature elements not dissimilar to commercial equivalents: Scare Attractions for the former and activities events like escape rooms and *The Crystal Maze Experience* in the latter. The second form of participatory theatre are immersive performances, such as Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*, in which measures are taken to diminish the effects of other spectator behaviour on the individual spectator's experience,[217] reducing the range of possible affect in the event and, according to Massumi and Watkins' approach, potentially frustrating many of the possible ways in which the spectator may have otherwise chosen to interact with the environment.

By contrast, the structure of fantastical curated encounters allows for types of affects to be heterogeneously spread via layers of spectatorship to enhance friendships, couples, and families. With the scare attraction particularly focused on the couple and friendships among younger people and enthusiasts, compared to the Santa and Princess endeavours, largely intended to operate for the benefit of families. I have somewhat blurred the concepts of fantastical and folkloric in this chapter and used the rare word *folkloresque*. The exploration of the relationship between these ideas and their importance in horror, horror performance, and the role of communion, and how the concept of the folkloresque is manifested in horror performance will be key to the next chapter of this thesis.

[217] Punchdrunks audience negation tactics, including their full mask policy is included on their website for the McKittrick Hotel Sleep No More event at https://mckittrickhotel.com/sleep-no-more-guest-advisements/ (accessed October 2023), while a discussion of the effect of masking and unmasking can be found in this account: "Sleep No more – A beginner's Guide to the McKittrick Hotel, Become Immersed, https://becomeimmersed.com/sleep-no-more-guide/?utm_content=cmp-true (accessed October 2023)

Scare attractions are a mechanised curated encounter that take advantage of the multiple layers of spectatorship that occur within curated encounters and do so on a commodified conveyor belt type system. As curated encounters there are a range of spectatorship levels that may alter as the performance develops. This altering spectatorship format giving audience members the experiences of direct engagement with 'real'-felt affective disturbances at some times, while at other times prompting the possibilities of collaborating with the performance to validate the authenticity of the environment and causing fear to others. A third format comes from giving the distanced experience of watching others engaged in a fictional world and experiencing it as authentic which itself has the potential to generate a felt sense of enjoyment, this format evidenced from the virality of online videos that replicate this aspect of the experience. In the scare attraction these roles can change very quickly from scene to scene, jump scare to jump scare, encounter to encounter along the conveyor belt of the throughput there is the possibility depending on the improvised dynamics of the group to generate a sense of thrilling communal play combined with an 'authentic' and intimate experience. A large proportion of the function of many fantastical curated encounters is to foster a sense of closeness and community by using ritual and negotiation in an unfamiliar yet familiar setting. While many fantastical curated encounters use family as the scaffold for this bonding experience, scare attractions provide opportunities for friendship groups, couples, and other adult peer-groups to find the same type of variant play and ultimately communion.

CHAPTER 3: Funny Not Scary

Audience Agency, Procedural Spectatorship and Role Taking in Commercial Scare Events

This chapter will define and investigate heterogeneity of spectatorship within the scare attraction industry. It will analyse how spectatorship of scare attractions aligns with scholarly perception of theatre audience behaviour and agency, and scholarship's treatment of horror spectatorship. It will identify the differing audience roles that exist within the industry as described by the industry itself and compare with the perspective of academia. It will consider whether, and how, the roles or different spectatorship forms are influenced by pre-existing factors regarding the self. This contrasts with the former chapter which considered how social environment influences spectatorship. My intention is to help form mutual vocabulary for roles and dynamics of audience agency in scare attractions and, perhaps, more widely within participatory performance. This will bridge gaps between industry, scholarship and the varied nature of participatory and immersive theatre shows. As an inherent byproduct of this discussion, the chapter will evaluate how we perceive and talk about text regarding shows that are partially improvised and involve audience interactivity.

I have used the term 'roles' above in relation to spectatorship. By this I mean the chapter will discuss the different strategies taken by participants as they negotiate their scare attraction experience, curating their entertainment. This will include evaluating the way heterogeneity has already been addressed within horror spectatorship,[218] which have limited the discussion to primarily fear-related elements. This has broadly overlooked other key dynamics involved such as para-social spectatorship and sub-culturalism. The chapter will also consider what happens when participants' strategies are disrupted and the relationship between viewer and performers change, with a particular emphasis on a case study from my own experience. I will draw from scholarship pertaining to audiences, as well as paradigms of spectatorship associated with immersive theatre. This includes contemporary notions of the emancipated

[218] This will be expanded upon below, drawing on work both from literature and from the Recreational Horror Laboratory output who have published extensively on the subject of horror audiences.

audience, as derived initially from the work of Ranciére in his call for a theatre which facilitates 'spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the 'story' and make it their own story…. a community of narrators and translators'.[219] I will also borrow the paradigms of procedural authorship from Gareth White and (syn)aesthetics from Josephine Machon. I will use these ideas alongside working industry terminology, including from a working internal document from a commercial scare entertainment company.[220] The handbook contains a glossary of common vocabulary that overlaps with some of the scholarly terminology such as Clasen, Andersen and Schjoet's.[221] I will bring this together to formulate an argument for an overarching approach to discussing audiences within immersive and participatory theatre that may help traverse potential commercial, artistic and academic barriers. This will include language that builds upon prior scholarship while incorporating working terminology of the commercial industry, multiple strata of text, and the mechanics of heterogenous spectatorship involved.

The term 'heterogenous spectatorship' used throughout this chapter refers to the potential manners in which the same piece of artwork may be viewed and refers to forms of spectatorship that are consciously determined before consumption, forms of spectatorship determined by culture, and the nature of spectatorship in the moment of performance.

In producing an example of the different elements involved in live horror spectatorship, I will begin with a personal experience I underwent while producing a scare attraction in which a spectator experienced severe distress beyond that which represented entertainment and almost caused herself potential harm by sprinting in a hazardous area. The experience has stayed with me for many years. This lingering consideration was initially due to the discomfort I felt after the event. Subsequently, I have put much thought into considering how many different dynamics were at play that resulted in the outcome and how, ultimately, these dynamics were impacted, indeed formed by, the differing forms of authorship of the event that were at play,

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[219] Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator.* (London: Verso. 2009) p22

[220] This is the Producer's Handbook of AtmosFEAR! Scare Entertainment and is included in the Appendices of the thesis.

[221] Clasen, Andersen &Schjoedt, "Adrenaline junkies and white-knucklers": Title and abstract.

simultaneously, in the moments of the performance. All parties involved were watching, desirous of, curating and/or experiencing a different performance and these differences are what, in hindsight, caused the problems.

The following instance occurred during the overnight horror attraction *Horror Camp, Live!* in 2014. My purpose in this description is not intended to act as a judgment on any of the parties involved, but because this anecdote best describes, for me, an incident which elucidates the challenges of catering to the multifaceted nature of live horror spectatorship. Firstly, the producers attempted to cater to a large range of possible audience reactions and used informed experience to do so; secondly an experience actor made choices based on that experience; thirdly a spectator followed their instinctive behaviours based on their expectations of the evening and events that unfolded around them; and all of these three intentions intersected in a way that created a dissonant moment of ethics and a potentially dangerous climax.

There are elements to note about the event. These include all participants having completed a detailed waiver at the beginning of the evening that indicated the adult and physically demanding content involved in their experience. In addition, one of the on-site producers (me) had clearly stated at the beginning of the evening the importance of interaction and collaboration between performers and spectators as the driving force behind the material. Thirdly, a 'safe word' had been given to all audience members to end their experience at any time. Fourthly, the event took place at a working farm, and so spectators were informed they could not leave performance areas due to potential major hazards. Fifthly, this performance event, which was catered to thirty-six spectators at a time and lasted the whole evening, was expensive. Consequently, the audience had gone through several points intended to, or had passively, conditioned their expectations and undergone an initiation that formed the informal behavioural contract of the evening. The intention and belief from the production team was that measures had been taken to ensure spectators knew what to expect.

The incident took place between 01:00 and 02:00. The participants had been on site since 19:00 and been exposed to a considerable amount of horror content up to that point.

The incident involved a subgroup of twelve audience members who had been sent out from the central 'campsite' hub with a map to participate in an activity in a barn. I was producing all events that didn't take place in the central hub and was watching the events unfold from an unseen spot in the barn.

The actor involved was playing an original character called 'Crazed Magnus'. He wore a one-piece robe underneath a butcher's apron made of what appeared to be human skin and wore a likewise 'human skin' mask. The character was intended to have an alarming and intimidating design, with clear delineation between their behaviour in character and how they would come across if they were to drop their character if necessary – a large separation between performer and role.

*The content as designed was as follows (my own words**):** Magnus forces the group to choose and isolate an individual, hereafter 'victim', from within the group, the group use a hessian sack to capture their chosen victim, the victim is lowered into a coffin and the group are then forced to leave the victim with Magnus and are sent away into encounters with other characters while the victim left with Magnus is verbally threatened with torture and deviant sexual acts. This includes being subject to the taboo act of him 'urinating' on them, which was simulated using a bottle of tepid water being poured onto the hessian sack so that the victim could feel the warm liquid through the material – the temperature and stream of the liquid being appropriately convincing as urine. My role as producer involved setting up and deconstructing the scene, liaising with the actor before and after, and ensuring safety and estate protocol were upheld. It was not my responsibility to interpose in the scene or make choices on the night for how the scene played out, including whom the actor chose to keep behind. The actor involved was a several-year veteran of scare entertainment and a trusted regular with the company.*

On the evening in question the actor playing Magnus made his choice for victim: a young woman who was standing towards the back of the group with body language that indicated disengagement with the performance. He initiated the choice with language designed to antagonise them and emphasise their differences from the group, for instance, "You! You look fucking miserable. Nobody likes you. Come here."

Watching from a distance and having been with the group all evening, I was concerned at the choice but only on behalf of show impact and entertainment rather than safety. The member of the public involved had been similarly sullen all evening, projecting an indication of boredom and I doubted that there was much chance the actor would be able to get any affective response from her. Magnus completed the scene and, as I expected, the victim did not give much response – either of anger or fear – as she was bagged and lain into the coffin.

The group was dismissed and Magnus's actor, unseen by audience members, collected his bottle of warm water as he improvised dialogue. The dialogue related – as it always did – to having the guest at his mercy and his ability to do whatever he wanted to them. Through the veiled threats he revealed that his 'greatest love' was urinating on people.

With feigned sexualised moans he sprayed warm water on the figure. As soon as the water touched her there was an exclamation of profanity and she squirmed in the sack. Eventually she stood up and over a few seconds awkwardly removed herself from the sack. It was instantly clear there was significant change in her manner and the urination event had made an affective impact upon her much beyond any previous part of the event, with a shift taking place that completely changed her physical language. Her face was white and, swearing again, she threw the sack at the actor who was attempting to remain in character, balancing the upkeep of the immersive fictional conceit with the developing situation. At this point she had still not used the given safe word.

After a few moments, without any real sense of purpose or direction, she walked away at fast pace out of the scene. Since she was heading towards the farm equipment and warehouses and there was clearly an imminent risk attached with trip hazards and farming equipment, I revealed myself and interposed into her path. Her initial response was to flee from me – despite my having identified myself clearly as a producer at the beginning of the evening and wearing branded clothing rather than a costume. After a few moments, as I repeatedly loudly that it was dangerous for her to go further into the dark farm, she stopped walking briskly and began to cry. Trembling, she placed a cigarette into her mouth the wrong way round, not even noticing the fact as she lit it and started to

smoke the reverse end, such was her loss of operating logic. While crying she remained antagonistic and angry. From conversation with her it was clear that even in the moments of a producer interposing and taking her out of show she had been drawn out of any sense of fiction and to her the urination remained 'real'.. Still in a panic response, she argued from a position of anger and horror that she had been urinated on.

Even with my stating repeatedly that it 'wasn't real' the guest still claimed it to be 'unacceptable' that she had been urinated on. Trying a different tactic, I pointed out that she had previously been attacked with chainsaws and knives that evening, and these likewise would be considered unacceptable if they possessed any element of reality. Notably, it was only when she spoke herself through the event herself, that she found herself able to see what had happened in a non-threatening light: she spoke a sentence that stated the sentiment (paraphrased) "I expected to be chased by chainsaws, that's alright, but I didn't expect anyone to piss on me". It was only a few moments after speaking this phrase as a verbal procedure that she was able to renegotiate and re-experience this information: that she knew the chainsaws were fake but had been taken by surprise with the very different tactic taken by the inclusion of a non-violent but strongly taboo element. Not only was there a sudden recognition of what had happened, but a rationalisation and understanding of why such an element would be incorporated into the show.

I finally beckoned the actor to come over unmasked; he brought the prop bottle and showed her the contents. I reiterated that I was always watching at all stage to ensure nothing genuinely dangerous was ever happening. Finally, I asked her gently why she had not used the safe word: she took several moments to remember that it existed and indicated that she thought she would only use the safe word if she was scared – indicating that she did not consider her emotional response to have been 'scared'. Finally with her calmed and relatively content, I walked her back to the rest of the audience.

This extended case study represents the dynamics I wish to discuss in this chapter: audience agency and forms of spectatorship amid balance of immersion. In this instance on a level of affective narrative everything the producers intended went

exactly as planned: A spectator who had not been affectively disturbed by physical threats was instead disturbed by the taboo threat of the urine, inducing a strong panic response. The spectator had gone from a clear awareness and distancing of the fictional world around them into instead becoming completely immersed within the fictional narrative. When she said, "I expected to be attacked by people with chainsaws and knives, but I didn't expect anyone to piss on me" this was the manifestation, by most standards, of a performance success and from a producer and writer's perspective exactly why that element had been included. As producers and writers, we knew that over several hours the constant threat of weapons, expected within scare attractions, could not be maintained since the audience would become increasingly aware they would never be used. Similarly, the experienced actor had, when making their selection, correctly identified someone who was somewhat immune to physical threat but whom might be susceptible to a completely different and unexpected experience.

On one level, then, everything in this instance had gone as intended and yet despite this and the pains gone to frame an initiation that had supposedly lain out the expectations for the evening in informal ethical contract, all parties found a negative outcome. The guest was distressed, the actor felt guilt and embarrassment, and I experienced significant anxiety as the producer dealing with the situation. The event is one I have mentally returned to several times through the years as indicative of the challenges of scare entertainment and perhaps immersive sensory performance more widely. One memory that lingered was the victim, even after she had calmed herself down and we were walking back the main hub, emphasising that she had not been scared. This indicating that – internally to her perspective - the response she had to the urination event was not fear, or at least not the same kind of fear the other audience members were undergoing, but some alternative affective response somehow distinct from it. The incident had manifested, at least in part, by this perceptual 'refusal' for the victim to frame themselves as a victim. By their distancing from the inherently submissive position of holding themselves up to be scared … even though they attended an event seemingly designed specifically for that purpose … a dissonance had occurred when they found their body affectively responding in shock or fear.

Assumptions of spectatorship in a commercial environment:

Much of the dissonance in this case study is the result of producers, including myself, making assumptions based on probability and prior experiences. These assumptions were reasonable, yet still insufficient to avoid this incident. One of these assumptions was that participants paying a high-ticket price would be invested in having a good time in which they were open to various forms of horror. However, that assumption turned out to be incorrect owing to alternative situational reasons for the attendance. The audience from which the spectator of the case study was drawn were attending a large work outing in which the choice of event had been that of the coordinator. Thus, there were some individuals present, including our victim, who had no agency in choosing the event. The change from the expected demographic led to an atypical audience from that for which the event was designed, which led to the distressing case study anecdote. I have observed other somewhat similar negative experiences over several years when audience members have not been responsible for the direct choice to consume the product. The dynamic of an audience member not directly choosing to attend the event and instead having a surprise brought to them, or alternatively an audience member having been subject to peer pressure or deception by their co-attendees, also have the potential to disrupt consent elements of a scare attraction: producers are producing experiences which deliver short-term negative sensations, and so it is necessary that all audience members understand that their attendance is an informal consent to negative sensations being part of their experience. If they are uninformed, to whatever degree, this may be said to destroy this inherent consent contract. However, as in this case, sometimes producers are not in full control off this consent dynamic. Similar questions of consent may be raised regarding children brought into contact with characters they subsequently find intimidating – Santa or life-sized skin characters – and are coerced by an adult to continue to interact with those figures even as they remain distressed. The challenges facing Santa performers may be paralleled to the actor playing Magnus in this encounter. He was required to negotiate a negative encounter with an audience member engaged in an affective panic response who would not have been present were it not for their employment scenario; likewise, an actor playing Santa or costumed figure may be required to respond to a combination of upset children intimidated by them, with parental figures who are insisting upon the encounter.

The spectator's participation strategy for that evening, seemingly, was to avoid engaging in content as much as possible and to get through the event without incident. Was this a strategy that the production could reasonably have expected? Certainly it factored into future events: the next time a mass booking was arranged – a stag group - we were prepared before the evening began for a wider-than-usual form of spectatorship in which certain members of the group would not wish to engage in the horror content and facilitated for some guests to opt out of horror content completely.

Notes on Reception and Audiencing:

Kirsty Sedgman, in *The Reasonable Audience: theatre etiquette, behaviour policing, and the live performance experience* identifies that theatre is 'becoming increasingly participatory and interactive',[222] drawing on an argument by James Frieze, and she claims that as it is doing so the tensions between production and reception is increasingly a focus of audience scholarship. Her work is a discussion of theatrical behaviour and etiquette, from an assumed starting position of two alternatives – the 'traditional 'stifling' theatre environment and the ''extra live' movement ... (which) facilitate(s) access for audience members who have difficulty adhering to traditional behavioural expectations'.[223] Sedgman identifies a 'tension between production and reception (that) is negotiated between audience members', and she argues that the behaviour of audiences in theatres and debates surrounding it is an 'ideal platform for exploring other issues of social participation, cultural inequality, and the politics of identity'.[224]

Horror might superficially offer little scope for tensions between production and reception in that the assumed intent in both cases is that the producers attempt to create something scary, and the audience member hopes to be scared by the creation, with the relative success of the performance being determined by whether the audience member becomes scared. The case study above indicates why, instead, horror is a

[222] Sedgman, Kirsty, *The reasonable audience: theatre etiquette, behaviour policing, and the live performance experience* (Palgrave-McMillan, London. 2018): 3.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid. P6

potent ground for such study. That politics of social participation and identity to which Sedgman alludes are manifest several times in the anecdote, especially in tensions created between production (and the intent of the performance from the creators' perspective) versus reception (and the spectator's intent for the performance). For instance, it was the performed attitude of the spectator that drew the attention of the performer to pick her; this performed attitude had in turn been derived from her chosen spectatorship of the event over the course of the evening. That the spectator was someone who distanced herself from the 'fakeness' of the event and wasn't scared held situational capital for her, yet her body's insistence on the 'reality' of the situation was something she took time to reconcile with her feigned distancing, apparently leading her to maintain the urine was real after being demonstrated otherwise. It required verbal processing of her situation and relationship towards the event, "I didn't have a problem with chainsaws or knives …." for her to understand the situation, and this in turn allowed herself to renegotiate her relationship to the event. She was present at the event but wished to refuse participation and for that refusal to be spectated by her peers and, perhaps, herself. There were mechanisms in place – a safe word – for her to refuse to participate but this was not a mechanism that she, initially, chose nor subsequently remembered.

Sedgman in her later text *On Being Unreasonable: Breaking the Rules and Making Things Better* focuses on notions of inherent 'reasonability' and 'unreasonability' of audiences. She argues in favour of reframing the audience-as-citizen away from a conceptual 'Mr. Reasonable' the 'patriarchal-colonial construction of upright civility and disciplined order',[225] and instead enable the spectator citizen, positively, as being – at least potentially – an 'unreasonable'. This derives from a challenge she gives to the notion of 'civility' that she argues stifles reception and acts as a problematic dynamic that ignores the social forces that 'underpin dominant social and cultural value systems'.[226] This perceived civility, on the surface, seems to come from a challengeable assumption Sedgman – drawing on performance scholarship in general – makes about the nature of performance history, in that there is a preference towards discussing

[225] Sedgman, Kirsty. *On Being Unreasonable: Breaking the Rules and Making Things Better* (Faber & Faber, London. 2023): 276.
[226] Ibid.

conventional theatre, and perhaps not including historic forms of what we now perceive as immersive theatre: The Mr. Reasonable concept seems drawn from observational theatre and not from cabaret, concerts, theme parks, carnival etc. As Gareth White observes, however, 'Though audience participation has often been a marginal and experimental impulse, it also has its place in the most commercial performance and is enjoyed by some of the largest audiences'.[227]

In the case study, one of the elements was to place the participant into a scenario for which there was no cultural or societal precursor – what was happening to the spectator was something that was outside of the range of behaviours that a person is prepared for by 'civil' society and as such any 'reasonable' response did not exist, other than perhaps to give the safe-word and leave the area. Whatever the spectator's response was would be an 'unreasonable' behavior that took place outside of 'social and cultural value systems' and this was also seen with other participants who were chosen in this slot on other evenings: where some spectators laughed audibly at the idea of being urinated on while bagged in a coffin by a masked stranger while others gave affective responses (such as squirming or vocalising) but did nothing otherwise about it. I would argue that in attempting to scaffold her 'Mr. Reasonable' concept around the 'patriarchal-colonial construction of upright civility and disciplined order' represented by observational theatre, Sedgman reinforces what she intends to challenge by affirming immersivity and unordered forms of spectatorship as being a more modern notion and overlooking the many forms of historic popular performance that have been looked down on or ignored by scholarship until more recently.

While she draws from immersive and participatory performance, Sedgman's primary binary of traditional spectatorship and 'extra live' are still primarily drawn from observational theatre and the conventional theatre house, the audience behaviour mostly discussed being audience interruptions such as mobile-phones ringing in formalized theatre houses, disturbances caused by those on the autistic spectrum and those with PMLD, and heckling through the fourth wall of observational theatre. What is left perhaps unstudied here is a model of 'civility' that also incorporates the commercial

[227] White, *Audience Participation in Theatre:* 15.

immersive world. A world which Sedgman addresses early in her work to discuss audience agency, but having rightly identified that immersivity and a quest for audience emancipation can form an 'utopian claim',[228] about the benefits or good-ness of an active audience, seems to serve as a justification to shift attention away from the immersive world and especially away from the kind of commercial realm in which the majority of non-regular theatregoers attend. However, the commercial realm is where many of the more dynamic audience behaviours happen; and while this thesis is dedicated to perhaps only one part of the more dramatic wing this analysis may just as easily apply to children and parents' behaviours at the Santa's grotto, the multifaceted theme park character interaction, the medium manipulating a grieving client, or the heckled stand-up comedian. These are all fertile grounds to explore civility in performance away from the supposed 'disciplined order' of observational theatre or even 'artistic' immersive performances. Within the scare attraction industry 'uncivil' behaviors I have witnessed include drunken audience members destroying set for fun, threats to punch actors and the crude propositioning of young actresses. These behaviors also transgress the 'social forces that underpin dominant social and cultural value systems' but lead to exclusively negative outcomes for performer, production, and audience member. Unleashed from the responsibilities and assumptions of the theatre house, and located in more informal settings, audiences can assert themselves with agency and without much of the required supposed 'reasonable' persona of which Sedgman is cynical.

According to Sedgman, some audiences (of immersive work) have found it difficult to reconcile tensions between promises of agency – 'freedom to explore spaces, construct narratives, make meaning for themselves' – and the knowledge that the rules of these encounters are set by practitioners, their 'interaction delimitated by (explicit or implicit) constraints'.[229] While an audience may seek agency, an audience member of live performance (in contrast with screen, and especially streaming culture) is limited by the fragmentary nature of theatre. Regarding the horror genre on film, a person might choose to watch a scary film one night alone with the lights turned out, and subsequently watch the same film with friends, eating snacks, and with the lights on and

[228] Sedgman, *On Being Unreasonable:* 15.
[229] Sedgman, *On Being Unreasonable:* 15

it is possible, even likely, the viewing experiences will be significantly different. In a development of this phenomenon, the scare attraction audience member has even more means of interacting with the performance and thus could not spectate in all possible ways within a single viewing experience. Instead, the audience member employs the agency they have, consciously or unconsciously, to negotiate what they consider to be an optimum viewing experience for them. That optimum viewing experience may align or not align with other viewers who are at the same performance.

I will investigate means by which each spectator selects and operates within their optimum viewing experience. One possibility is that it is determined by elements that exist before the performance takes place if the approach is non-flaneuristic. If this is the case, then a viewing strategy may be a result of either internal aspects of the spectator's identity and/or the environmental factors of the performance, both of which have the potential to inform how the spectator wishes to either experience the performance, to witness themselves experiencing the performance, or be seen experiencing the performance. One intuitive example of how an internal aspect of a spectator's identity may determine a viewing strategy towards a scare attraction is if they value the idea that they are, or are seen as, brave or unflappable. An example of how an environmental aspect may determine a viewing strategy towards a scare attraction is if they are attending the performance with a loved one who is very nervous. Even under the relatively controlled conditions of a scare attraction the 'promise of agency' is extremely open, and this second example demonstrates that while elements that exist before the performance takes place might inform the viewing experience, it is equally possible that events that unfold during the performance may inform a recalibration of spectatorship, creating a new optimum viewing experience for the spectator: as would be the case in the instance of a person who initially wished to prevent themselves from being scared, but who subsequently had to adjust their intentions to placate an even more scared colleague who was in distress.

I will use two approaches that have tried to reconcile the different possibilities of what a scare attraction audience – and indeed horror audiences in general – might do with the promise of agency, including the categorization of audience optimum viewing experiences. One is the *AtmosFEAR! Scare Entertainment* producers' manual, a

commercial company document generated from trial and error over several years in the industry, which provides within it a series of roles taken on by spectators which it tasks producers with observing and encouraging actors to cater towards. The second is that from the collection of researchers working through the *Recreational Fear Laboratory* at the University of Aarhus as discussed in the introduction, who have codified some elements of the heterogeneity of live horror spectatorship. I will not delve into either of these yet in the chapter, but I would like to note that the heterogeneity of horror spectatorship is something that is identified both within academia and commercial industry.

One factor determining the viewing strategies of spectators is that in a scare attraction they are visible to both the performers and other spectators. I have addressed inter-group relationships, and how these may develop in the moment as a form of group improvisation in the manner discussed by Brian Massumi, within the previous chapter of this thesis.[230] What I will newly address are the impacts of the spectatorship strategies on performers. Spectatorship strategies, when they are clear to those viewing them, can be collaborated with, and thus incorporated into the performance making the spectator agency not only free and visible but also affirmed as important by the performers. For instance, in the case study, that the guest was hiding herself away and demonstrating disinterest was a behavioral signifier. Likewise in the examples above a person who is 'being brave' (a performance that may be for the benefit of several audiences: the self, peers, or the performers) is likely to be performing themselves in a visible manner, as is a couple in which one of the individuals is relying on the other to provide comfort. This collaborative behavior provides the kind of 'invitations' White refers to, with each behavioural choice – conscious or not – an offer to the performer to collaborate with the chosen form of spectatorship provided by the guest.

It is perhaps worth observing that much of the scholarship currently available surrounding immersive theatre has a focus on performance forms that are widely accepted as more artistically worthwhile than horror. The theatre company *Punchdrunk,* for instance, has been at the forefront of discourse from scholars including

[230] See subsequent chapter drawing on Massumi, Brian. *Politics of Affect* (polity: Cambridge. 2015)

Lavender, Machon and Alston, all of whom devote considerable space to the company in their texts.[231] This perhaps overlooks the importance, the worth, and the scope of longer established, commercially successful endeavors that are not only consumed by more spectators overall once taking into account the scale of theme park-level scare events where *Halloween Horror Nights* processes 1.5 million visitors per year in Orlando alone.[232] Those spectators have a firm grasp of what they want in their performance and expectations of their immersive experiences. This wider family of commercial immersive entertainment includes the scare attraction, but also séances, cabaret, legerdemain, Santa's Grottos and their cultural equivalents, performative shops and restaurants, escape rooms, fortune tellers/cold-readers and theme parks. Audience pre-existing awareness and expectation have the potential in each case to create an authorial aspect of their own as Zaointz explores when discussing the competitive nature of such spectatorships.[233] Having addressed the importance and scale of this analysis I will explore the affective underpinnings of horror spectatorship.

Performance paradigms, affect and the scare attraction:

Josephine Machon, in *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance,* attempts to produce a comprehensive meshing of affect and the pre-lingual, corporeal response – synaesthetics – with the post-lingual and cognitive intellectualisation that follows, describing this approach with the term used as the title of the book.[234] Foundational to Machon's (syn)aesthetic response is the notion that the body is a primary sentient conduit for the appreciation of artistic work in general, and live performance in particular. Performances as described here are best suited to be received in a primal manner. It may be worth briefly proposing that performance may also best be suited to

[231] These core immersive texts are referred to in the introduction of the thesis. To reiterate, they are: Machon, Josephine, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*, (Palgrave: London, 2013); Alston, Adam, *Beyond Immersive Theatre,* (Palgrave Macmillan, London. 2019) and Lavender, Andy, *Performance in the Twenty-First Century: Theatres of Engagement*. (London: Routledge, 2016). For reference and critique of these texts' relationship to Punchdrunk, please see the introduction of this thesis.
[232] Suzanne Kelleher, "How Universal Scares Up Monster Revenues with Halloween Horror Nights," *Forbes.* October 1, 2023. https://www.forbes.com/sites/suzannerowankelleher/2023/10/01/universal-scares-halloween-horror-nights/?sh=720b838a7690
[233] Zaiointz, Keren, "Narcissistic Spectatorship in Immersive and One-On-One Performance", *Theatre Journal*. 66 (3): 405
[234] Machon, *(Syn)Aesthetics:* 1

be performed/acted in a primal manner, which may provide a rationale behind live horror and other live affective performance forms, such as comedy and street/theme park performances as well-known characters, being such instinctively appealing genres to work in. This implies that participatory and sensate spectatorship is a more 'natural' format for engaging in play – and thus enacting agency on a performance – than are more passive formats. Machon's approach sits within a philosophical framework that human perception is fundamentally embodied and does not operate with a subject-object relationship to the world. It assumes sentience takes place both inside and outside of linguistic sign-systems and as such conceives of the sentient body as a pre-lingual entity. Machon uses these arguments to reframe the sentient body as the primary receptor and sense-maker in performance perception. In this is a dynamic that seemingly separates the mediums of film and literature, where most horror scholarship has taken place, definitively from the medium of theatre and especially immersive/participatory theatre. This indicates the live horror performance genre may be validated as an exploratory ground for this perspective, since much contemporary criticism of horror content in film and literature has been rooted in embodiment and corporeal modes of spectatorship. This includes commentary on corporeality in literature where 'dangerous books have been imbricated on dangerous bodies',[235] and film where 'the body incarnates the ideals that inspire us all as well as the devastating failures that petrify us'.[236] While the spectatorship of horror films cannot evoke an ongoing, perpetuating spectator-performer dynamic since the horror movie cannot knowingly collaborate with its viewer; spectators can a) author the viewership of the movie themselves, adjusting everything up to its genre if necessary, based in group dynamics in the room as discussed in the 'solitary-viewing v pizza and friends' example given above and are b) potentially subject to a corporeal experience. Both Reyes and Wilson argue for corporeal affect as not just one of, but the central form of spectatorship of many contemporary horror films.[237] Horror, it would seem, is specifically suited to

[235] Mulvey-Roberts, Marie, *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal*, (Manchester University Press, 2016): 2.
[236] Loiselle, Andre, "Canadian horror, American bodies: corporeal obsession and cultural projection in American Nightmare, American Psycho, and American Mary," *Brno studies in English*. 39 (2) (2013): 124.
[237] Reyes, Xavier, *Horror Film and Affect: Toward a Corporeal Mode of* Viewership. (Routledge, New York. 2016); Wilson, Laura. *Spectatorship, Embodiment and Physicality in the Contemporary Mutilation Film. (Palgrave Macmillan, London. 2015)*

this form of analysis and worthy of focus as a site for exploring the spectatorship of participatory theatre and Machon's (syn)aesthetics.

Machon uses the term (syn)aesthetics as a means of fusing the corporeal and the cerebral.[238] She also uses the term 'disturbance' as a means of exploring the work on a regular basis throughout the first chapter of (Syn)aesthetics, which aligns with the language used by Massumi as Spinoza's affectus. This disturbance may also be contrasted with the Pierce notion of abduction, which through its notion of, 'Surprising fact, C, is observed. But if A were true, C would be a matter of course. Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true' aligns more closely with Spinoza's affect due to its use of direct logic rather than each affective disturbance/abduction being subject to ongoing reincorporation, as with Massumi and Machon. [239] Machon emphasizes the capacity of disturbances to either unsettle or exhilarate,[240] once again using language that reads as a description of a horror text. (Syn)aesthetics takes the spectator's body as the primary text of the performance, but always rests on the binary dynamic of the somatic and the semantic (or that which is absorbed by the body against that which is mentally read and intellectualised by the mind and formed into words).

Taking on board the work of Machon, therefore, means that not only must the event, affectus, and affectio be considered – the writing on the body, but that we must also consider the semantic interpretation of these disturbances 'in the moment' following the initial experience of the affectio. These semantic interpretations can, once again, be experienced on an individual level or a group level, or indeed involve the individual negotiating their felt affectio against those seemingly experienced by the others in the group. In turn, it is possible that the affectation demonstrated by the others in the group may not be a manifestation of their felt affectio, but instead the sensate impression they wish to impart on their peers. In our case study, it may have been the case that the spectator was experiencing affectio sensations of fear, surprise, or shock before they finally manifested and that the impression of disinterest, apathy and non-sensation read by the actor playing Magnus was a feigned performance that

[238] Machon *(Syn)Aesthetics:* 4.
[239] Peirce, C. S. [CP]. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, edited by C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, and A. Burks, 1931–1958, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press: 189.
[240] Machon *(Syn)Aesthetics:* 4.

indicated how the spectator wished to be viewing the performance, rather than how they were physically experiencing the performance.

Machon uses three performance strategies : a synaesthetic hybrid, a predominance of the body as text, and the visceral-verbal playtext.[241] While on the surface this appears to define these strategies in terms of the rationale of the producers of a synaesthetic performance, it could just as easily be interpreted as describing three different spectatorial strategies (or indeed preferences) by a suitably emancipated spectator.

Using her terminology, we might say that in a (syn)aesthetic analysis of the case study our guest became trapped in a synaesthetic mode, which only transferred into its cognitive phase once she spoke herself verbally through the logic of the fiction versus non-fiction elements of the event which allowed her to come to a (syn)aesthetic processing of the event, breaking her away from being caught in pure affect. However the time she had spent in that synaesthetic mode had been deeply distressing and so when the connection between the two modes arrived into the feedback loop, the experience was still read as distressing, and thus an 'unsuccessful' performance rather than what ideally is created in a scare attraction whereby a synaesthetic disturbance (a jump scare or shock) is renegotiated via cognitive understanding into a positive experience despite the affect having been something often interpreted as negative. These negotiations into spectatorial strategies align with immersive scholarship as 'liminoid invitations presented by ludic dramaturgies generate the potential for their audiences to engage in liminoid acts'.[242]

The notion of spectatorial strategies aligns with notions of both Procedural Authorship and Frame Analysis, for which reason I will now explore the notion of invitation and immersive theatre engagement explored by Gareth White, which will also address these ideas. Gareth White provides a perspective of emancipated audience participation in part by use of the word "invitation". The dynamics between spectator

[241] Ibid.
[242] Bucknall, Joanna J, "Liminoid invitations & liminoid acts : The role of ludic strategies & tropes in immersive and micro-performance dramaturgies"**.** *Performance Research.* 21, (4). (2016) p53.

and performers may be considered in similar fashion to the notion of the invitation explored by White in an inverted fashion, whereby not only do invitations occur from performer to audience, but also from audience to performer.[243] Invitations may be partially open, such as Magnus' request to choose a member of the audience (they can decide not to choose at all, or can choose from any one of the ten people, or choose to negotiate); they may be closed, such as Magnus' demand that they 'bag' the individual (they have a binary choice of adhering to the demand or not); or completely open, such as how the audience member chooses to. Again, 'chooses to' may be something that occurs at a cognitive level or as in the case study a visceral affective corporeal level responds to the abject sensation of being urinated on that unmasks the cognitively driven performance and instead betrays the pure thinking body.

In White's writing the notion of the invitation is seemingly intended to describe a conscious, cognitive response on behalf of the spectator. I argue this notion might also exist on Machon's synaesthetic level in form of an invitation of affect from the production company. In these cases, the audience member will have no conscious choice but to accept some of the offers they are given since it is their body doing the accepting (or rejecting) for them. Thus, the invitation of, for instance, a chainsaw sound may be proffered by the production. The spectator's body chooses to accept this invitation by responding with an alarmed response, and what this alarmed response is – a vocalisation, a swear word, a jump, a laugh – is not in the conscious control of the spectator in that moment. However, it then becomes the conscious choice of the spectator as to how to accept a new invitation - the invitation of (syn)aesthetics - which is that having been made to jump, swear or laugh, how is the spectator going to choose to perceive and respond to that jump, swear word or laugh. In another instance, a chainsaw sound may not cause the body to jump, with the body rejecting the affective invitation … however, a spectator may decide to then choose - if they so wish – to more consciously accept the invitation by producing a counterfeit jump or scream. There may be a range of spectatorial reasons for this based on the strategy of the spectator – an investment in wanting to enjoy the experience for instance, or by the inherent social pressures produced by being among friends who are jumping and screaming together.

[243] White, *Audience Participation in Theatre:* 9.

What occurs within a scare maze is, therefore, many different offers than have been constructed by the production team – some of which exist as affective offers, while some exist as offers of conscious collaboration such as the exchange of dialogue. Having established the importance of affect in this chain, I will focus for the remainder of this chapter on the more conscious aspects of participatory spectatorship, since the thesis will dedicate two the fourth chapter to the subject of the corporeal and affect.

The idea that the spectator may be conceived as part of the work has been well established within performance studies. Fischer-Lichte states that there is no distance between spectator and work while discussing all theatre, claiming that the spectator is part of the work. For here there is only an 'autopoietic feedback loop'.[244] The autopoeticism refers to the loop being self-generating from the perspective of the audience allowing for variations in the activity and responses of both spectators and performers to influence each other from the start of any performance. She argues against separately considering production and reception as differing parts of a performance since the two have a co-dependent relationship – as manifested by the dynamics discussed so far in this chapter. This however negates the productive consideration of preparation – the preparation by the production company in offering the kind of feedback loops that can occur within the given event in the design of the performance; and conversely the preparation by the spectator to spectate the event. Rancière, on the other hand, does separate out the notion of production and reception while retaining the idea of an active spectator in both directions since, 'That is what the word 'emancipation' means, the blurring of boundary between those who act and those who look'.[245] Here, the spectator meets a group of things/signs that they then choose to actively engage with, but which may engage back and treat the spectator as a sign system themself. With this point Rancière describes a parallel, reciprocal, dynamic to White's 'invitation'.

White argues, 'An interactive work is an event made through the collaboration of artists and participating audience members, and the way this comes to happen is

[244] Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (Routledge: New York. 2005): 39
[245] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*: 19.

something we will need to ask questions about'.[246] In the case of a scare attraction, the collaboration occurs by physical actions, by the spontaneous and conscious response to stimuli prepared by the producers and mutual sharing of activities by actors and spectators. White suggests that interactivity exists in the medium of 'gaps' that are laid into a performance - 'gaps to be filled with the actions of responding audience members.'[247]

To refer again to the case study: on the one hand the notion of these gaps was placed within the design of the show as conceived. Each core interaction in the case study was written into the script that the actor playing Magnus was working from. However, from the scaffolding of these gaps, the details were then completed by the actor playing Magnus – it was his choice as to how to exactly phrase each of these lines, his choice of customer following the audience refusing to pick up his initial invitation, his choice of timing and his choice of how to manage the departure of the group. And in each of those cases, he was strongly informed by the behaviour of the audience. Indeed, the audience itself provides some of the collaborative provocations themselves: the audience themselves invite.

This returns us to a model discussed by White, which is the concept of a spectatorial horizon in environments in which the participant-spectator is simultaneously 'the performer, the one who enacts their performance, the performance that emerges from their own body and the spectator as they view it' (note this definition will form a starting point for the following chapter of this thesis).[248] Drawing on the philosophical framework that all performance text is inherently limited by a spectator's pre-judgements and expectations of the performance they will watch (or in the case of participatory theatre, that they will co-author), White proposes the 'horizon of participation, defined as 'the range of behaviours through which the (audience members) are invited to participate in a performance'.[249] White also applies the reverse of this model back on performance makers, who themselves equally have a range of possible means by which the audience is hoped to read their work. A direct example of

[246] White, *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*: 30.
[247] Ibid, p31.
[248] White, Audience *Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*: 161.
[249] White, Audience *Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation*: 56.

this drawn from scare attractions might be that two different scare producers developing an attraction might have differing notions of whether the audience laughing at their event is considered a positive response or not. The horizon of participation determined in the preparation phase, mostly, of the design of a participatory event – however in performance where there is the ability to adjust the gaps/invitations in the performance on the level of the group, or even the individual, it's also possible to curate several different horizons of participation within the same event.

In the case of *Horror Camp, Live!*, the obvious difference in the horizons of participation for all those not chosen to remain in the coffin was different from the one chosen. Even within this there are different horizons of participation: if the audience had determined to choose the individual to leave behind (as occurred on other nights) a 'betrayal' would have happened – changing the horizon. Thus, the audience is partially determinant of their own horizon of spectatorship – the range of behaviours that they have come with that they are willing to engage in (or that they are able to be coerced into) comfortably. It's therefore possible to diagnose that in the central anecdote of our chapter, the performer misdiagnosed the invitation of the supposedly 'sullen' audience member and stretched them beyond their personal horizon of spectatorship, perhaps because their lack of stakes in the evening led them to be less flexible in this horizon than the average audience member might be expected for the performance. On other performance occasions of this scene, the group themselves had accepted a wider field of participation and as a result the horizons of spectatorship were themselves much wider: the individual that was chosen was someone willing to stretch their spectatorship far enough that the simulation of being urinated on was a taboo, and a disorientating experience, but something that remained a fictional construct, and reality was not so challenged that the spectator forgot the framing of the event and the existence of a safe word.

The kind of balance described here is a challenge, since horror genre comes with the expectations that it may challenge or develop the audience members' resilience to some degree,[250] with horror fandom having a correlative relationship with real-world

[250] Kerr, Margee; Siegle, Greg J.; Orsini, Jahala (2019). "Voluntary arousing negative experiences (VANE): Why we like to be scared". *Emotion,* 19(4): 682.

resilience as was discovered by the Recreational Fear Laboratory.[251] Horror performance fits into Jauss' category of theatre that is intended to extend the horizon of the audience members and challenge them to encounter new behaviours from themselves.[252] The tone of the carnivalesque, use of affect and general semiotics of chaos infused into many horror events provides an environment in which the spectator is encouraged to behave and tolerate stimuli they would otherwise have found off-putting, or something they were unwilling to engage in in a public setting, instead pushing their horizons. This includes *Horror Camp Live's* use of bodily excretions but may also include provocative invitations relating to gender presentation (such as a cross-dressing character intended to evoke an uncanny response), archetypes (such as a "redneck" cannibal), disability (such as a "lunatic" character), and foul language.[253] All of which similarly may be described as in various ways as carnivalesque, taboo, abject or – in contemporary terms - problematic and as such align to the extension of spectatorial horizons, and challenge the audience's resilience or behaviour patterns in an unsettling way.

I have chosen mostly to focus on Kristeva's abject within the thesis as a whole rather than Antonin Artaud's more performance-centric paradigms. However, I think it is important to raise Artaud at this point and acknowledge that any reader of this thesis who notes alignment with Artaud's theatre of cruelty is correct: phenomena that align with his ideas are very much present in scare attractions in a manner discussed by Machon in application to immersive theatre – as a 'total experience' in which the body is a primary tool for writing upon.[254] Scare attractions may sit into the notion of cruelty both in the more literal sense, and perhaps more importantly in the sense of a disturbance from everyday life by an alternative somatic reality. I have chosen to leave this paradigm out of the thesis on the basis that Kristeva's notion of the abject is more complimentary to the ideas explored within it as it is more focused on the self. However, scholarship exploring Artaud's relationship with horror theatre and the commercial

[251] Scrivner, Coltan; Johnson, John A.; Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, Jens; Clasen, Mathias, "Pandemic practice: Horror fans and morbidly curious individuals are more psychologically resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic". *Personality and individual differences* 168 (2021): 110397-110397
[252] Jauss, Hans-Robert. *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis): 23.
[253] This includes use of character types and humour broadly considered potentially offensive or problematic.
[254] Machon, p43.

scare attraction and perhaps especially how his "doubles" manifest within the mediums – in the relationships, for instance between, scare attractions and ghost tours and between entertainment mentalism and fortune telling/mediumship – would be valuable and welcome.

One measure of spectatorship for horror attractions, then, may be the willingness of the spectator to extend their spectatorial horizon and, conversely, the ability of the production to appropriately invite these extensions. In the instance of the case study at *Horror Camp, Live!* the collaboration between the production and spectator may be argued as having collapsed since the invited spectatorial horizon of the production was outside of the scope of the willing spectatorial horizon of the participant.

However, spectatorial horizon is not the only paradigm relevant to this event, nor to the spectatorship of scare attractions in general. Procedural authorship is a term that Gareth White has borrowed from the work of Jan Murray drawn from games design. This term refers to how the authors of a text write 'the rules by which the texts appear as well as writing the text themselves'. [255] So the text doesn't just include the literal spoken word and course of action, but also includes the conditions (or 'gaps') in terms of what occurs in response to the participant's actions. This relates to the way that the objects in the world of the narrative are endowed and the properties they own. However, in an immersive theatre piece such as scare attractions (and fantastical curated encounters) we have already seen the 'authors of the text' can apply to at least three different agents: the producers who generate the (fixed) script for the piece; the actors who apply this script in a semi-improvised format; and the spectator who negotiates their physical journey and their interpretation of it based on their horizon of spectatorship.

The spectator has some of their own procedural authorship determined before even arriving at the threshold of the space. It is worth taking a moment here to

[255] White, *Audience Participation in Theatre:* 31.

establish some terminology, since confusion may arise when discussing the idea of the 'authors' of the text as being those creating and writing the script. Within tourism, a term already exists to describe those who author the overarching content and design of the show. This is the term *imagineer* which is a word derived from Disney theme parks and applied informally across the theme park and scare entertainment industry to refer to creative producers – this term may carry across into producers who generate the working script of the show and create the day-to-day specifics of the attraction.[256] I would propose that a term that makes these distinctions clearer would be preferable. I am therefore proposing the following terms for these different categories of procedural authors within an immersive event:

SuperAuthors – Closest to the current term of imagineers, this term describes those who have creatively produced the performance, including the working scripts, director, sound design, and lighting design. In the case we have discussed, the production team and imagineers of *Horror Camp Live!* were the SuperAuthors of the experience and the scaffolders of the invitations to be found within the show.

MicroAuthors – Those who operate within the script provided by the SuperAuthors in the moment of performance. MicroAuthors include actors and production crew members who are involved during the performance to adjust the show according to environmental factors, most of which will relate to the audience. Most importantly, while the SuperAuthors create performance material with no awareness of who the audience will be, the MicroAuthors are able to customise or alter their performance according to the audience. In the case we have discussed, the actor playing Magnus was the MicroAuthor of the experience and while the actions he took came from the SuperAuthoring of the show, his choice of victim was part of the MicroAuthorship of the show.

SpectAuthors – refer to the Spectators in their state of actively authoring the performance for their own behalf and to the effect of others in the group. In the case study, the SpectAuthorship included the choice of who the victim would be (in the case

[256] Vorspan, Ben, "Look to Disney's Imagineers for Inspiration", *Nonprofit communications report* 2023 Vol.21 (8) (2023): 2.

study instance, the choice was to avoid choosing, relinquishing back to the MicroAuthor). Further choices might have included the choice to lead the group in determining the response to the offer of "sacrificing a group member": for instance, as to whether to perceive the offer as either scary or funny.

MacroText – the show as written and curated by the SuperAuthors. A scaffolding for the performance. This is written with a broad sense of possible audience responses but cannot predict the infinite variety of consumer behaviour in a participatory environment. The elements of the performance that never change from group to group.

MicroText – The show that occurs in the moment within the parameters of the MacroText, a negotiation between the MicroAuthors and SpectAuthors. The text that is created afresh for each audience group.

SpectText – The show that the SpectAuthor infers from the show as it maps against their conscious and unconscious spectatorship intentions.

PostTexts – The various versions of the show as it is told in future recollections by the parties above for social currency, internal validation, and archive. This may or not be an accurate reflection of any of the above and are retrospective interpretations of each of the three different forms of above text.

This terminology encompasses three forms of procedural authorship as well as four forms of the text that the procedural authorship 'writes'.

In horror performance the ranges of behaviours at the SpectAuthorship stage encompass a significant variety and include such show-altering events as a refusal to participate any further in the performance, threats of violence, panic attacks, physical soiling, drunken behaviour, and fights. Returning to Sedgman's description of audiences, I argue that what might be framed as etiquette in observational forms of theatre is simply a function of SpectAuthorship participation within an immersive setting.

The challenge for MicroAuthors, very often the scareactors in the attractions, is to read audience invitations and behaviour very quickly, all while delivering the content they have received from the MacroAuthors, allowing them to offer the MacroText in a way that allows the subsequent MicroText that develops to be customised to the preferred spectatorship horizon of the individuals or group that are progressing through the attraction at any one time. As such it is helpful to observe, over time, the patterns that emerge in audience behaviour and audience expectation. This is a skill that is also particularly honed in the performance formats of fortune telling, professional astrology and other formats that incorporate the skill of cold reading – a dynamic very much aligned to what I describe here. Equally this skill might be seen to be a particularly useful performance tool for actors playing the role of Father Christmas, or recognisable 'face' and 'skin' characters within a theme park. I am not proposing this to be identification of a skill, but to recognise and put vocabulary against a craft that has long been woven into these performance formats and has gone perhaps dismissed by academia and left behind in the dynamic of focusing on newer immersive performance forms.

In the binary consideration of open and closed texts defined by Umberto Eco, in which closed texts are defined as 'tests that obsessively aim at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less precise readers';[257] scare attractions that encourage this range of horizons are unambiguously 'open' – artworks where there are relatively speaking very few imperatives on behaviour as to how to interact with the material presented, or as Eco puts it, 'the reader is invited to make his (sic) own free choices and to reevaluate the whole text from his final decision'.[258] Very often the very mechanics of the event allows there to be elements of MacroText that are unscripted and part of the architecture. The dynamics of the event and creation of MicroText may happen without the participation of scareactors in which the architecture itself is the invitation.

A very simple example of this might be the common trait of tunnels – features where all SpectAuthors are required to bend over to progress through a scene. The

[257] Eco, Umberto*, The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semantics of Texts* (London. Hutchinson, 1981)*:* 8.
[258] Ibid.: 34.

natural result of this is that a chain of bodies is created whereby the backside of one SpectAuthor is reasonably close to the head of the person behind, at the same time a physically uncomfortable posture is created, and the spectator is also very much made aware of their physical form (including real-world aspects such as fitness). As well as reinforcing their presence within the environment, this also provides additional opportunities for SpectAuthorship. Other tactics commonly employed by MacroAuthors in the industry include 'claustrophobia' techniques such as aerated tubes and blindfolds, changes of floor texture, and blackouts.

While these may go uncommented upon by the MicroAuthors they remain part of the sequence of provocations within the Microtext and subject to the SpectAuthorship of the spectators, enhancing and building on their experience from within their horizon of spectatorship and based on their spectatorship agendas and the pro-conditioning of their experience that has shaped that agenda. It's important therefore to move into discussion of those agendas and how they may be shaped by real-world identity paradigms.

Strategies and Expectations:

Frame analysis – the notion of roles being assigned and taken on by audience members – has been explored by White as having links with Bourdieu's writing on social interaction and capital.[259] It is possible to consider that the spectatorship in an immersive environment may involve an extension of the social performance ongoing to identity curation, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. The roles that a spectator takes on during their walk through a scare attraction may be driven by an aim at creating or maximising social capital for each SpectAuthor, allowing the process of moving through a scare attraction or immersive experience as being one that realigns or reaffirms their role within a particular social group. For some may perceive their social capital as being enhanced by bravery, others by responding in alignment with the peer group, others still by positioning themselves as in some way above/superior to the product, as may have been the case in the case study.

[259] White, *Audience Participation in Theatre*: 53.

The scare maze, grotto or experience economy location can be seen in this instance as a conditioning field for the social order, which aligns with Bourdieu's concept of a habitus, a 'subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class', [260] in which the group or class is both the batch of spectators on one side, and simultaneously the MicroAuthors on the other. I propose that a scare attraction – or indeed any immersive or participatory experience event creates a form of temporary habitus, a location in which a particular social order can be created anew, explored and played out safely as the two habiti of the SpectAuthors and the MicroAuthors come together. These small pseudo-habiti can provide temporary new fields for living and responding in, one in which senses are heightened and affect reigns, ones in which social standing within groups or couples can be affirmed or challenged, renegotiated, and played with, subverted, or celebrated.

These dynamics, unlike Bourdieu's habitus, are less concerned with social dynamics relating to class, and more to small scale power dynamics that exist within a group: couples reinforcing their sense of mutuality, self-perceived group leaders reinforcing their bravery or stoicism, jokers reinforcing their position as the group's source of laughter, friends reinforcing their emotional and/or physical closeness, colleagues going through an arduous process together. The idea of habitus as a 'strategy generating mechanism' as invoked by de Certeau rather than with the immobile focus on class that Bourdieu himself saw as the application of the concept,[261] seems far more aligned to habitus: an experience event can be employed as a means of reinforcing our place in the social order if the SpectAuthor chooses to do so.

I would firstly like to identify two key dynamics of the heterogenous spectatorship forms that will generate the differing experiences of audience members of the scare attraction. The first is the Preconditioning state of the audience member and the second is the Authorship strategy with which they approach the scare attraction. Both of these dynamics interact with personal identity and with corporeal affect.

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[260] Bourdieu, Pierre*, Outline of a Theory of Practice*. (Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. Vol 16. 1977): 86.
[261] deCerteau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (University of California Press. London. 1988): 58.

Determinants of audience conditioning:

A range of factors will inform the horizon of spectatorship for the audience member and the SpectAuthorship strategy they are likely to arrive at a scare attraction with and thus the likely areas and manners by which they are likely to exert their control over the production and their collaboration in creating the MicroText of their own experience.

I have found to be the primary factors in driving horizons of spectatorship and shaped the strategies audiences have taken on.

1. Expectation of the event

The demographic of spectators at a scare attraction will be drawn from various segments of the public. In the case of a continuously operating standalone attraction such as *Pasaje Del Terror* in Blackpool these will be tourists in the area who are mostly impulse and informal visitors, who have not scheduled their experience. In the case of scare attractions within scream parks such as Busch Garden's *Howl O Scream* and *Tully's Shocktoberfest* these will be guests who have centred their evening around their scare entertainment experience. Difference between these two audience demographics is significant, with the latter much more prepared with a strategy, or chosen aim, for the event when compared to the former.

With scream parks the expectation of the event could vary from those who enjoy regular visits to immersive haunt experiences and/or are local regulars to a single attraction: events such as *Farmageddon* in Merseyside have many local volunteers and loyal regulars to that specific event as identified in the first chapter of this thesis.

Regular haunt-goers will have experience of prior events and as such have an informed expectation based on prior experience, which may be affirmed of challenged, potentially even engaging in forms of competitive spectatorship in which they are

'implicitly called-on to prioritize their multisensory encounters over one another' .[262] Irregular haunt goers may be significantly less informed about the experience having booked as a family outing, work outing or friendship group excursion – collective bookings also may mean that some individuals have lower levels of willingness and enthusiasm than others.

Those who have not experienced many scare events before may have a range of expectation that veers from the family activity if their frame of references are local park events such as *Fun By Day at Spooky World*; marketed as 'joy to be found for all ages for a fun-filled day out;[263] to the expectation of extreme or taboo content if their points of reference are from online content drawn from highly-marketed extreme haunts such as *McKamey Manor*, which frequent the web and are passed among those even not involved in the haunt industry, especially following a Hulu series, *Monster Inside: America's Most Extreme Haunted House,* in 2023.[264]

2. Who the spectator attends the event with

The social grouping of the spectator defines elements of individuals' social identity, and elements of group identity, as they cross the threshold into the performance space. They are entering perhaps as friend, colleague, partner, family member or stranger and this dynamic is still partly present as the spectator enters the environment, shaping their perception of it.

The social group provides an opportunity not only to maintain a spectatorship strategy that is predicated on relationship to the horror content but also a SpectAuthorship strategy that is determined by one's perceived role within the social group. There are roles that may be generated in the MicroText of the performance: leader, joker, underminer, offering that align with everyday social roles. Every group of people arriving, from a work group to a couple, will have an internal dynamic which

[262] Zaiontz, "Narcissistic Spectatorship in Immersive and One-on-One Performance": 408
[263] Spooky World, (2023), *Spooky World Fun by Day*: (https://funbyday.spookyworld.co.uk/)
[264] Horton, Maggie (2023) *McKamey Manor: The History and Controversy Behind America's Most Extreme Haunted House*. Country Life: https://www.countryliving.com/life/entertainment/a45460509/russ-mckamey-manor-history-controversy/

strongly informs their SpectAuthorship of a piece of live horror material. Communal dynamics within the scare event and other curated encounters are discussed at length in the previous chapter.

3. Immediate Experience in and out of the Environment

Simple contextual dynamics that are seemingly irrelevant to the performance, such as the audience member's frame of mind on the day, the weather, the suitability of clothing, perception of the environment and atmosphere, and other non-group members, have the potential to impact the reading of the event by spectators. This preconditioning element is a significant challenge to producers since it is something of which they are in limited to zero control.

Usually, the approach to diminish the possible impact of these factors is via a liminal transition via the entrance to the event as a form of 'warm up' performance. This may take the form of a small mini performance to introduce the rules and format of the park such as *Oubliette* at Scare Kingdom or street performances by an icon character at Halloween Horror Nights:[265] appetising performances where the audience is not invited to be scared so much as participate in the events to come. Even so, these liminal performances often cannot override these dynamics.

4. Experience of immersive events

The theatrical spectator may or may not have had experience of immersive events and the invitations and tropes invited by such events. If this is the case they may expect that they will be offered a more practical role in the events that transpire. They may be expecting to be assigned a role by a character early on since this is an expected note of participatory or immersive theatre. For instance, upon entering the room, it is possible that the immersive spectator may look for notes to indicate whether a

[265] An example of this was the House of Vayne event at the front of Busch Gardens during its Howl-O-Scream season in 2009. This semi-show and transitional performance is available in part at Attractions Magazine (Youtube Clip: Oct 2009) *Howl-O-Scream House of Vayne front gate show Busch Gardens: (*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reaCy3slhXI)

flaneuristic or non-flaneuristic engagement is expected, or be more prone to actively seek out and details in the room.

A theatrical spectator less used to the immersive subcategory may be more prone to an expectation of a relatively passive experience where the non-theatrical spectator may not be subject to any form of expectation of this kind one way or another.

5 Engagement with horror as a genre

Many of those who attend a Halloween attraction will be fans of, and experienced in consuming, the horror genre. However, there will be plenty of spectators in a mass commercial environment who are not, and there will be a range of experience in terms of the detailed knowledge of horror texts, movies and other entertainments.

What this shows, however, is not whether someone is engaged with the genre, but how. This is too large of a topic to come into the scope of this thesis, but all other forms of engagement with the genre indicated by other sections of this thesis – sadistic spectatorship, masochistic spectatorship, horror as a pure aesthetic, the reclamation of fear due to life trauma – will provide a different approach to entering the space and determine where the gaze will first present itself, what affects will be stimulated, whether or not there is a sense of wonder or entering a new space, how this new space is endowed and whether it is treated with a form of sacredness.

SpectAuthorship Strategies:

Clasen, Andersen and Schoedt,[266] acknowledged the heterogenous nature of spectatorship within scare attractions (described by them as 'haunted houses'). Deriving their work from a two-paradigm model of horror film spectatorship from Robinson, Callahan & Evans they collected data against minimal and maximal fear

[266] Clasen, Andersen & Schjoedt: Adrenaline junkies and white-knucklers: 61

value.[267] This study worked on the assumption that "consumers deliberately up- and down-regulate arousal in pursuit of the optimal experience". Arguing that the primary personal trait that determined which of the two overall strategies related to openness and sensation seeking the researchers used questionnaires to ask for strategies used to minimise or maximise fear. [268]

They concluded that around 15% of attendances (21% who considered themselves to be maximising fear and 9% who minimised it) were purely flaneuristic in their experience – via language such as "I just allowed it to happen". Other maximal attendants described deliberate immersion tactics such as "trying to be in it" and telling themselves "it was real" while the reverse was true of fear minimisers: telling themselves it wasn't real and attempting to shut emotional reactions off.

Within their commentary, Clasen, Andersen and Shoedt affirm that within psychology and sociology thrill-seeking as a dynamic has been relatively little studied since the applicatory purposes of most psychology is to get people less anxious and scared, not more. As the scare attraction industry flourishes and sensation seeking increases across society it will surely be called upon to expand this body of knowledge, and the scare attraction is a suitable/appropriate excellent laboratory for doing so.[269]

While this study is invaluable in terms of its long-term goals and the identification/acknowledgement of heterogenous spectatorships within live horror I would argue that this binary model is insufficient in encapsulating the range of tactics associated with spectatorship. The core assumption – that strategies in horror attractions are derived exclusively from the relationship with fear – and subsequently spectatorship strategies intended to enhance or diminish that response – is understandable but limiting. To discover the extent to which it is a robust conception of

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[267] Robinson, Tom; Callahan, Clark; Evans, Keith, "Why do we keep going back? A Q method analysis of our attraction to horror movies," *Operant Subjectivity: The international Journal of Q Methodology.* 37 (1-2) (2014):41-57

[267] Lang, Annie; Bradley, Samuel D.; Sparks, Johnny V.; Lee, Sungkyoung, "The Motivation Activation Measure (MAM) How well does MAM predict individual differences in physiological indicators of appetitive and aversive activation?". *Communication Methods and Measures* 1(2) (2017): 113-136

[268] Clasen, Andersen & Schjoedt: Adrenaline junkies and white-knucklers: Under 'Data'

[269] Robinson, Callahan & Evans, 'Why do we keep going back?"*;* Lang, Bradie, Spakes & Lee, "The Motivation Activation Measure."

spectatorship I will turn to the industry itself and explore from an inside perspective how spectators are described and prepared for.

The commercial scare industry has, operating primarily by trial and error over multiple decades, discovered that, in order to function efficiently, it is required to cater to heterogenous spectatorship, demonstrating awareness both of the vast range of audience demographics they are likely to get, but even more so the SpectAuthorship strategies they will use to write their own journey and determine their ongoing relationship with the attraction. Successful businesses such as AtmosFEAR, Pasaje Del Terror and Universal have each learned to cater their mazes to these different strategies.

The scare entertainment company AtmosFear has compiled a Scare Entertainment Dictionary from which I will now identify and analyse the five "guest types" named in the document.[270] Some of these terms are industry standard, other terms are specific to AtmosFear but have their equivalents elsewhere in other commercial environments. What these terms demonstrate are the observed, long-term trends that have been trapped and recorded as common ranges of audience behaviour by the commercial entity. Each comes with their own definitions of 'success' for the performance. These guest types represent a range of conscious spectatorship strategies:

The Brave One: This guest may be trying to impress their colleagues by going first or may be relishing the thought of being scared but have a high tolerance level against being scared. They will be very happy if someone manages to scare them. Sometimes they do not want to be scared and are more interested in being seen as brave by the rest of the guest group.

The Expert: These guests enjoy looking at details in sets, properties, costume and makeup. Their enjoyment comes from an appreciation of Imagineering presented in an attraction, and less from the overall experience. Occasionally this intense focus on the sets allows scareactors to scare them with ease. Other guests often ask this 'expert'

[270] See document in Appendix

what they think of the attraction, and their opinions are often broadcast via social media and websites.

The Offerer: What this guest wants most, is to see what the offering does. They are often more interested in the reaction of the offering than the scare attraction itself. Sometimes they are very scared and are using the offering as a shield. Often guest groups containing several offerers who will ask the scareactors to 'get him/her'.

The Offering: Usually terrified, they are pushed to the front to be offered to the scareactors by their partners or colleagues, who are usually too scared to lead the group.

The Thrill-Seeker: This type of guest is most open to the experience and will shriek, scream and laugh along with the scareactors. Their behaviour is infectious, and a good thrill seeker will encourage the rest of the group to react in the same way, entering into the 'spirit' of the experience. They may not remember details of the attraction and are generally more interested in the overall experience.

These categories may blend together and are by no means exhaustive. However I would, in my own experience emphasise one further SpectAuthor type:

The Filter – a self-appointed leader of sorts of the group, they will be the one who interacts the most with the attraction – especially verbally – and they will attempt to condition/filter their perception and attitude to the event to the others present.

The Thrill Seeker: An 'ideal' SpectAuthor:

Massumi and Machon both describe a sense of fundamental belonging and borderline ecstasy in the more idealized moments of their descriptions. Massumi identifies forms of individual and group embeddedness, identifying that 'With intensified affect comes a stronger sense of embeddedness in a larger field of life – a

heightened sense of belonging, with other people and to other places'.[271] This intensified affect and sense of life-embeddedness indicates the significant appeal of horror for a thrill-seeking; this thrill seeking through intensified affect aligns with the scholarship by Clasen and the Recreational Fear Laboratory as their fear maximising 'adrenaline junkies' rather than fear minimising 'white knucklers'. It also aligns with the more uncouth, but perhaps accurate informal term "Scare me, Daddy! Spectators" used in the industry. Machon draws on Luria in her aim to describe the idealized intense (syn)aesthetic experience.

Luria describes synaesthetic perception as the equivalent of perceiving details corporeally, with the ability to 'induce changes in somatic responses'; that blur 'the boundary between real and imaginary'.[272] This includes the meaning of words being more 'felt' than they are usually: the words one heard while packaged in a hessian bag in a coffin likely to be significantly more corporeally received than when in a less threatened position, causing a potential override of what were otherwise conscious aspects of knowledge – such as being in a fictional environment. Luria's commentary, as expanded upon by Machon,[273] gives a strong reason as to why a spectator who was reduced in the number of senses that were available (sight, the ability to move) lost her sense of determined purpose (again, whether that was stoicism, or flaneurie, or attempted superiority to the event) and was reduced to an inadvertent thrill-seeker against her will, with the real and imaginary lost and – a non-seasoned horror consumer unused to managing that boundary – perceived the urine as real, in a way she had not perceived any of the content of the previous several hours as real.

Cytowic concludes that sensations are involuntary, induce a noetic response that struggles to be defined in words, produce a sense of achievement and are somewhat addictive.[274] This perhaps describes the reception of horror theatre albeit in a somewhat idealised and romanticized fashion, aligned with the adrenaline junkie stereotype. For those who experience a thrill reliably in such environments and who are repeatedly scared, but it does not necessarily explain the appeal for those who neither

[271] Massumi, Brian. *the Politics of Affect:* 6.
[272] Luria, A.R,: Trans. Solotaroff, Lynn. *The Mind of a Mnemonist*. (Jonathan Cape Ltd. London. 1969): 138, 144.
[273] Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics*: 17.
[274] Cytowic, Richard, *The Man Who Tasted Shapes.* (Abacus, London. 1994): 167

expect nor receive this kind of intense ecstasy-like strong response. What seemingly aligns most to those who visit a horror attraction is the sense of achievement, individual or mutual in completing that completion of a personal task of which Eco wrote when describing his conception of open texts. The completion of such tasks, and the physical sense of gratification they provide, may count themselves as synaesthetic achievements aligned with Cytowic's definition and likewise according to him capable of generating an addictive or emotionally satisfying response. This is reinforced by Cytowic also describing synaesthesia as being an experience that reinforces a sense of knowledge - knowledge of one's place in the order of things perhaps, just as much of a sense of knowing anything of the experience itself. Once again this might also represent an argument for scare entertainment – and affective environments in general – as an environment for reinforcing a sense of self: a place to reassert one's self knowledge and/or place within a peer group.

Luria describes 'those who experience synaesthesia' as those who can disrupt, via somatics, the line between the real and the imaginary.[275] For them, the fictionality of the performance becomes an increasing irrelevance. Cytowic describes this as being akin to inhabiting two worlds at once by obtaining an almost dreamlike state. This seems a poetic and idealized reception for a horror attraction but can help to define distinct lines between the goals of different spectators and provide templates for much higher forms of experiences to some more affectively ambitious SpectAuthors in contrast with others. These dynamics align with the Victim Dynamic as indicated in the industry example, but with no other form of spectatorship, indicating that there is a fundamental difference in kind between those who engage in the Cytowic fiction and dreamlike state, compared with all the other brackets of spectatorship, even if those other forms of spectatorship themselves contain the remaining subgroups.

Thrill Seeker might be conceived as the ideal SpectAuthor for scare attractions and their equivalent: the "Affect Maximiser" or "Joy Collaborator" perhaps, the ideal SpectAuthor for any equivalent experience economy work, aligning perhaps most

[275] Luria, *The Mind of a Mnemonist*: 138

strongly with the with the fear-maximising strategies of the data-driven spectatorship study: engaging in a willingly undergone collaboration with the performance.

Case Study: Three Instances of SpectAuthorship Analysis in *Pasaje Del Terror*

I would like to conclude this chapter by applying SpectAuthorship analysis to another case study scare attraction using the terminology above. This is a brief summary example of how a designed encounter may be spectated differently according to those with differing SpectAuthorship strategies. I will focus outside of the fear-minimising and fear-maximising paradigms of current scholarship, exploring how differing horizons of spectatorship might impact how MicroText becomes generated and how MicroAuthors may respond. This will create pictures of how varied the same simple exchange in a performance might become based on the assorted agendas of an emancipated audience.

I will use an example of a very archetypal scare attraction scene drawn from *Pasaje Del Terror*, Blackpool, hereafter *Pasa*je. This is an eight-to-twelve-minute walkthrough attraction for a single fee. The walkthrough is batched into groups of six to nine guests and the narrative is non-linear: guests walk through unrelated scenes many of which are intended to evoke popular movie franchises.

I will examine a scene early on within the attraction, wherein the guests pass by a small, dark, cemetery. The MacroText of the scene is that a zombie in an overcoat bangs a spade onto the ground to create a jump scare, and then slowly walks towards the group, exiting the cemetery and following the spectators into the next scene, dragging the shovel behind them, or holding it above their head as a threatening weapon.

The Brave One: MicroText and Horizon of Performance

The Brave one projects as a fear minimiser, but their overarching intention is social: they wish to be seen as stoic and unflappable, immune to affective impacts. They

enter the attraction with the agenda of wanting to be seen as not scared, or brave, in contrast to other members of their group who might be scared (a variation of this may also exist whereby a whole peer group may wish to be communally seen as unflappable). They are likely to be at the front of any group. The MacroText of the scene demands that the zombie MicroAuthor will produce an 'impact scare' of their shovel hitting the ground for the first time, prior to which the zombie will probably not have been seen. The MicroText will involve the zombie MicroAuthor determining the timing of this: which will involve a judgement of whether they believe The Brave One is the person to whom they should deliver the impact scare or whether to wait and see if a more suitable candidate for the impact scare (A Thrill Seeker or Offering) are going to be available for the impact if they want a few moments longer. Perhaps they may also choose to attempt two different impact scares, though it is usually the case that the second impact will be diminished by the Brave One pointing out the zombie to the rest of the group. If the Brave One appears to be – according to the MicroAuthor observer – unlikely to jump at the impact scare, the zombie actor may play the scene exclusively to other members of the group. However, this undermines the horizon of performance for the Brave One who is now unable to 'prove' their function to their friendship group.

The industry document also indicates two very different kind of 'Brave One' type. The first will be very pleased if they are scared as it means their self-perceived resistance to fear has been overridden. The second will potentially be annoyed since the dissonance of being scared goes against their self-perception. It is the cues that the actor reads from the SpectAuthor is working towards that will determine how the zombie actor chooses their MicroText in this moment. The second most likely location for a Brave One is at the back of the group. This would considerably impact the likely MicroTextual choices of the zombie actor in the second half of the scene – a Brave One SpectAuthor determined to show off their social dynamics may choose to perform their lack of fear at the zombie actor 'chasing' them via a range of means including walking deliberately slowly, turning to confront the zombie, or laughing performatively at them; I have witnessed each of these responses on several occasions. This will likely undermine the impact of the scene for the rest of the group and/or cause the MicroText to be shortened and the zombie to stop following.

The Expert – MicroText and Horizon of Performance

The expert notably sits outside the binary of fear-minimiser and fear-maximiser and is the industry-glossary exception and challenge to the model provided by Clasen, Anderson and Schjoet since their primary agenda does not relate to fear at all.

Based on the definition given, the Expert is going to progress methodically through the graveyard set determining their perspective on the quality and detail of the set, costume or lighting. If they truly are a scare attraction regular, they may be wise to the likely hiding spots for actors and see if they find them. Unlike the Brave One, however, they are relatively unlikely to share the information with the rest of the group as they are more likely to be aware of the dynamics of the scare attraction and not want to interfere with the spectatorship of others.

An intense focus on the set may also provide a good opportunity to the MicroAuthor to create an effective impact scare – though an experienced MicroAuthor may once again choose to locate the idea target of a Thrill Seeker or Offering. Indications that the experienced MicroAuthor may choose to observe the presence of an experienced Expert would be looking around, smiling (as opposed to the neutral expression of a Brave One, the scared/cautious expression of Thrill Seekers and the audience-focused expression of Offerer/Offerings), a relaxed physical language. An experienced MicroAuthor who delivers text, unlike the zombie, will often choose to ignore this kind of Expert treating them as a form of critic or outside observer, catering to a form of SpectAuthorship that allows them to take a more apparently objective Horizon of Spectatorship, distanced from total immersion in the production and engaged in a more consistently 'selfed' experience.

On the other hand, the Expert of a group may be more of a self-appointed leader – a version of The Filter – whose positioning as The Expert is less based on their experience and knowledge of scare attractions or immersive theatre and more based on their self-perception and/or desired dynamic within their group. This version of the Expert likely inverts those of the Expert previously discussed, enjoying the 'game' of

finding the zombie and pointing them out to the remainder of the group with little thought for the impact of this on the horizon of spectatorship of the rest of the group.

An experienced MicroAuthor will often be very cautious with this latter type of Expert when delivering jump scares due to those dynamics. However, when delivering text, the presence of a Filter-type Expert will sometimes be unavoidable since they are often determined to deliver their perception to others.

It is worth also indicating that this type of Filter/Expert arises quite often in cultural subgroups that have a long-established societal leader (perhaps a patriarch or matriarch) within the spectatorship group. Traveller families and families from ethnicities with traditionally structured groups coming through as a single group will often demonstrate this form of spectatorship with a single appointed figurehead being the point-of-interaction with the performance and subsequently filtering that information to the rest of the group. This figurehead may be one that is culturally determined and passively agreed among the group, such as a paterfamilias or oldest sibling; or it could be someone who essentially self-appoints themself as a figurehead, regardless of the feelings of the rest of the group, which would naturally lay ground for much more potential dissonance and a potentially disrupted performance. Extrovert individuals in an introverted group will sometimes improvise themselves into this role when they may feel it is necessary, filling a gap when it appears to be needed.

The Offerer and Offering – MicroText and Horizon of Performance

The Offerer/Offering dynamic is the one that produces the clearest MicroText invitation for the MicroAuthor. It declares the form of SpectAuthorshp that has been chosen and gives the MicroAuthor clear cues. An impact scare is invited to be delivered to the Offering and that is the desired SpectAuthorship of the Offered and the desired, or at least expected, SpectAuthorship of the Offering. Outside of very rare instances of the Offering being legitimately in the environment against their will or having come into something that they truly didn't understand – more likely in an off-the-street context like *Pasaje* than in a scream park – the MicroAuthor has a clear piece of text to perform

– take the invitation of the impact to the Offering and then commit to whatever MicroText maximises the fear level of the Offering for the enjoyment of both parties.

An inexperienced MicroAuthor may wish to subvert the spectatorship forms in this instance and impact the Offerer but this has the potential to cause dissonance and goes against the spectatorial horizon of both parties in the dynamic.

This is the case for all variants of the Offerer-Offering, whether in the form of a couple, contained within a family or group dynamic, or in some cases in scenarios where the Offerer is a single person – possibly also an Expert or Brave One – and the Offering is the whole rest of the group.

Conclusion

I have analysed the range of paradigms offered within SpectAuthorship and proposed terminology with which to describe such events. This terminology exctends the range of viewing opportunities that extend beyond that of the relationship with fear, for which terminology already exists, and instead relates to how the individual wishes to project themselves in a threatening environment. The chapter has also argued that the relative success of a scare attraction event rests largely on collaboration in MicroText between spectator and MicroAuthors in the moment of performance, and the communication to MacroAuthors to MicroAuthors of the range of behaviours they might expect.

Collaboration does puts agency onto the spectator, yet also responsibility and therefore the needed trust of the marketer. In a participatory environment, are there ways in which an audience member may be perceived as being, to return to Sedgman, ‘reasonable’ versus ‘unreasonable’ in their collaborations, and likewise a production in their cues? Certainly, each party will have their own idea of the span of ‘reasonable’ behaviour or spectatorial horizon. These expectations and attempted collaborations may fall distressingly short, as occurred in the instance of the case study that this chapter has focused on. It is not my place to speak for the exact intentions of an anonymous guest as to why she had an aloof manner on that evening, nor as to why she

responded the way she did to the performance of Crazed Magnus; however, there are several rationales to explain such behaviour which would be the result of intentions she had towards the event that the activity did not align with, that challenged her too much and were outside of the range of her horizon. All of this occurred despite attempts to discern clarity of consent and content. Among all the possibilities for this guest, each are impacted by core elements of identity, self-perception and the projected intentions of the self into the world: whether this was a belief she was unflappable, or that she was in some way "above" the event, or that if she didn't respond or appear enthusiastic then nothing "bad" would happen, that her outward behaviour of "disengaged" did not match an inner life of "vulnerable" that she avoided projecting. All of these are possible and several more, generating private exposed moments within a public setting in ways that are both desired and, sometimes, undesired. That the scare attraction, and perhaps the affective immersive environment in general, is a site in which this is so exposed and dominant, is perhaps the most significant conclusion of this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: "I've Shit Myself"

Extreme Attractions and the Body as Performance Stage

This chapter involves analysis of scare attractions that are more extreme in nature, a subgenre of scare events which will be referred to as Extreme Scare Attractions. Gareth White describes the immersive/participatory theatre spectator moving towards becoming simultaneously all three aspects of a performance themself, 'the performer, the one who enacts their performance, the performance that emerges from their own body and the spectator as they view it'. [276] I would like to position this subgenre of extreme horror event as a terminal representation of this perspective and artistic aim, the natural endpoint of reducing a performance entirely into the body of the participant in a form of immediate (i.e. non empathetic or sympathetic) embodiment, while retaining the framework of a fictional staged performance. I will begin with the case study, detailing my own experience as spectator in this taboo attraction (The following contains adult content):

I had been ordered to get onto on the gurney and did so. After lying down I had my face covered with a slightly damp rag. The experience was almost akin to descriptions of waterboarding as moisture filled my nostrils. The impact was noticeably affecting my breathing and inducing a sense of panic. The gurney was wheeled down the corridor with an aggressive ambient soundtrack of undefinable guttural sounds blazing and a fungal scent overwhelming my nose. The gurney stopped abruptly, and I heard a new voice. A male voice. Speaking in lascivious terms of his new arrival, he took my hand and rubbed it against what appeared to be his naked hairy leg in a threatening, lecherous fashion. He swung his leg over the gurney until his chest was right up upon mine, briefly lifting the rag off my face so I could see his visage. It was muddy, sweaty, and snarling. Putting the rag back over my eyes he exclaimed how turned on he was and how he had uses for me. He took two fingers of my right hand and rubbed them against his leg. Next, in one deft movement, he plunged them into a moist, tight aperture repeatedly into a squelching texture, the whole while shouting for me to "use his fucking arse".

[276] White, *Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation:* 161.

The performer was a colleague of mine. I was at *Scare Kingdom Scream Park* in my role as a producer of street theatre, asked to test the setup of the *Pscyhomanteum* attraction. The experience was subsequently referred to in an article in *The Sun* as 'the UK's sickest attraction', a quote perennially used as a badge of honour by the park in marketing thereafter.[277] I had thankfully known in advance that the aperture my fingers had been placed into was a grapefruit, but future guests would not be so informed.

By contrast, *McKamey Manor* is a location in St Luis, Missouri,[278] positioned as a scare attraction for one (occasionally more) guests at a time and advertised as 'a rough intense and truly frightening experience' and 'and audience participation event in which you will live your own horror movie'; perhaps just as notably it refers to itself as 'survival theatre' and claims 'you will be tested to your very core'.[279] On several occasions since 2010 it has become viral on various media platforms for its violent content, referred to as 'a bona-fide torture chamber'.[280] One typical example of *McKamey Manor* YouTube content, of which there is a considerable amount with the material having driven their notoriety, involves a visibly distressed woman screaming to be let down as she is tied up with her arms above her head with tape, having large amounts of "blood" thrown directly into her face repeatedly while she shouts that she is no longer able to see. Before this the scareactor involved poses to camera with the bucket, in a dynamic that shows a high degree of intention to play to camera output rather than the live performance, an element that will be returned to below.[281]

Psychomanteum and *McKamey Manor* are examples of what are termed *extreme scare attractions*. This chapter considers extreme scare attractions: reasons behind their existence; how they interact with spectators' identity; what may be drawn from them in

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[277] Psychomanteum – AtmosFEAR! Scare Entertainment. Available at http://www.atmosfearuk.com/case-studies/psychomanteum

[278] At time of writing the original location is active, as are two separate locations, but each is regularly closed for extended periods at short notice

[279] McKamey Manor (2013), https://www.mckameymanor.com/warning

[280] Smithers, Dominic, (Oct 2023) Ladbible. *Documentary exposes 'truth' behind terrifying horror house where guests 'have pulled their own teeth out':* https://www.ladbible.com/entertainment/film/monster-inside-mckamey-manor-documentary-742175-20231019

[281] McKamey Manor Presents (Youtube Video) *MCKAMEY MANOR Presents (Video That Started It All)* (Apr 2017): (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CF8FJx1El7c&t=181s): 2:54

terms of the wider scare attraction and immersive theatre genres; and what the phenomenon of extreme scare attractions might reflect about the time and context in which they emerged. While they have received harsh criticism in the mainstream press,[282] I argue that extreme scare attractions are rooted in a range of different viewership paradigms representative of the contemporary moment in which the self and individuality are seen as of exceptional important and in which "knowledge of oneself" and the extent to which one has engaged in pursuit and revelation of it may be seen as holding significant cultural capital. These paradigms include sadistic voyeurism, identity affirmation via the abject, masochism and *Pleasurable Decay*. Extreme scare attractions also invite the discussion that surrounds consent and ethics in performance and highlights contemporary trends regarding the prioritisation, indeed deification, of versions of authenticity. It also parallels the conversation in the first chapter of this thesis regarding the lofted status of both suffering and perceived resilience as a potential form of subcultural capital and capital of the self.

Definition and Chapter Intent

As with other aspects of terminology covered in this thesis, the term "extreme scare attraction" is used extensively within the industry and its fandom without any fixed or centralised definition. The industry has no centralised controlling body or union and as such terminologies entering the working lexicon are permeable. This leads to phrases such as extreme scare attraction being in common use but contestable in terms of its exact meaning and scope. As a result, this chapter which is, as far as I am aware, the first treatment of this subgenre of performance in academic literature, will require not just a potential definition, but it must also ask the question of whether a single subgenre of performance is present at all. The possibilities may also be considered that extreme scare attractions are merely scare attractions with an adjective attached by the individual speaker or author and as such need no distinct approach in their study or industrial relevance; or alternatively that what are currently termed extreme scare attractions describe multiple different categories of horror performance with different rationales.

[282] Emma Thomas, *Halloween attraction branded 'degrading' by rape charity because viewers are strapped to a bed while a man climbs on top of them.* Daily Mail. 18 October 2013.

In industry usage, the term extreme scare attraction is generally designated to an event based on the inclusion of performance elements. I have tried to be as exhaustive as possible in distinguishing the elements of performances that are likely to cause an event to be described within the industry as "extreme". Elements that would lead to a classification of an attraction to be extreme would include:

- Physical contact with the guest outside of normal parameters.[283]
- Physical manoeuvring of guest.
- Restraint of guest.
- Being put into or onto transportable items which are then moved such as wheelchairs or gurneys.
- Forced consumption of food and drink intended to provoke a disgust or vomit response. Examples might include eating insects or drinking water laced with fish oil.
- Use of stress positions.
- Verbal abuse of guests, including humiliation.
- Swearing.
- Sexual language.
- Threats of non-consensual sex.
- Use of terminology and tropes associated with mental ill-health and/or mental disability.
- Nudity (Usually that of a performer, guest nudity is rare but has existed in my experience).
- Scatological imagery or content.
- Menstrual imagery or content.
- Use of race/gender/disability tropes and language generally perceived as inappropriate.

[283] "Normal parameters" here refers to being touched – without grabbing - on the cheek, the outside of the shoulder, the outside of the lower leg, or the back. It was once the case that touching within scare attractions was totally taboo, however, the last decade has seen a significant influx of touching into some mainstream attractions. This will be addressed towards the end of this chapter.

- Blindfolding and other forms of withholding or overwhelming senses.

ESAs are typically only available to those above a certain age dependent on the location (typically ages associated with adulthood such as sixteen, eighteen or twenty-one), include a safe word for participants to end their experience early, and involve the signing of a waiver by the attendee that details all the things that may be done to them for the duration of the event. For the purposes of the chapter, I will define extreme scare attractions, hereafter 'ESAs' as a scare attraction that features three or more of the performance elements identified above.

The aim of this chapter is to ask how this subgenre of scare attraction is expressed, how it is spectated, what its relationship is to other media, why it saw some success, and what the study of this form of performance, and the fascination of many with it, may tell us about the contemporary moment. I will argue that while this performance subgenre might not have a significant profile within popular culture that it is an indicator of the direction of popular performance, that it provides possible warnings about the direction of immersive-driven performance. In addition, the study of the spectatorship of ESAs might feed into our understanding of an increasingly narcissistic and attention driven popular culture environment as a performance format where the stage upon which the performance takes place becomes the spectator's body itself. I have already acknowledged the extent to which this work aligns with White's discussion of immersive theatre and positioned the performance format as being an endpoint of his frame of reference with regards to corporeality in participation. I would also like to argue that ESAs manifest performances where a clear barrier breach takes place between the experience economy and what is increasingly termed the 'attention economy', and that ESAs provide a kind of endpoint of Zaointz's 'narcissistic spectatorship'. Through this narcissistic spectatorship the spectatorship of a performance is flipped back fully on the spectator to make them both the object and subject of the performance. The spectator is watching themselves but with an added 'self-preoccupation with their (own) reception'. This aligns Zaointz's framing of narcissism and individuality into the heart of White's participatory framework.[284]

[284] Zaointz, *Narcissistic Spectatorship in Immersive and One-on-One Performance:* 425

Zaointz also argues this using *Punchdrunk*'s work, much discussed online as 'an undeclared passage to online exhibitionism'.[285] I will position extreme horror attractions likewise as a kind of undeclared passage to anecdotal exhibitionism: an experience that is valuable for conversational bravado and social currency after the fact to position oneself as being interesting or capable of breaching personal barriers and indeed as having taken steps in a pseudo-journey of self-discovery. This potential for social capital comes alongside a sense of visceral felt achievement, whether that achievement has any actual legitimacy or not. As a result, it presents the darker elements of extreme scare attractions as a reference point for other participatory works, and a challenge to the potential idealisation of audience agency and emancipation, reduced instead to forums for potential exploitation, as demonstrated by the case of *McKamey Manor*.

The chapter interrogates how scare attractions can act as a site of conflict or affirmation with one's own body. In ESAs the relationship with the body is paramount, as the subgenre is marked by the participant being subjected to direct, sustained, visceral assault in which the body is challenged, violated and repeatedly made to respond at a pre-lingual and subconscious level. Direct physical responses are often induced that the spectator is not in immediate conscious control of: pain, thermoregulation, physical shock, disgust, panic, toilet urgency, nausea and arousal.

Case Studies

As a frame of reference, I will provide brief summaries of two events from within the UK that sit within the definition of ESAs as they would generally be agreed upon within the industry, each of which fulfil more than five of the criteria given above. The first was experienced personally, the second is derived from formal interview and casual discussion with members of the scare attraction review community. The purpose of these case studies is twofold, to act as frameworks for analysis in the rest of this chapter, and to act as descriptive documentation as core examples of ESAs for those

[285] Ibid.

outside the industry. I will all briefly expand upon the earlier descriptions of *McKamey Manor* and address what I consider it does, and does not, contribute to this discussion.

Psychomanteum was a six-to-eight-minute experience which was one of the many attractions at the *Scare Kingdom Scream Park* seasonal event in Lancashire, UK. This was an upcharge attraction for one person at a time. First staged in 2014 different updated versions of *Psychomanteum* continued to be presented at the park until 2022. The event described here is the original iteration, as presented in 2014.

Spectators were referred to within the attraction as 'patients' undergoing 'psychosexual therapy' under the watch of the 'sadistic' Doctor Goodkind. Upon dispatch, which required crawling on hands and knees through a small doorway, the guest was met by a semi-naked female nurse who demanded the 'patient' sit in a wheelchair. The wheelchair had a hole cut out in the centre: which created the familiar sensation of being sat on the commode. The nurse character straddled the guest and delivered lines to the guest just centimetres from their ear. The scene ended with the nurse demanding the guest shout "Doctor Goodkind is a filthy fucker" before pushing the guest in the wheelchair into the next scene. In the second room a masked man wearing underpants in a bathroom forced guests to kneel on the ground in front of a dirtied toilet and put their face inside – supposedly to smell his recently produced excrement (a liquid scent is commercially available for such purposes). Following this, the guest was shouted at to lie down on a gurney, resulting in the events described at the top of this chapter. Finally, the guest met Dr Goodkind who delivered the climax of the performance and its most taboo moment, transgressing the division between spectatorship and participant. The performer displayed the prone spectator an oversized sex toy and questioned them if they "want it in their arse, their cunt or their mouth?" before deeming them unworthy and sending them to the exit.

In the first year of operations, the names of those who used the safe-word were chalked upon a 'wall of shame' type blackboard outside the entrance. This aspect was removed in all subsequent variants of the show since it was determined the use of the safe-word should end all engagement with the show and as such the threat of

potentially public shame if an audience member used the safe-word was seen as potentially muddying the consent contract.

Faceless Ventures, based in Yorkshire, are among the pioneers of the UK ESA scene and curated *Cracked: Survival Experience* in the Summer of 2012, with variants continuing until 2022. All versions of *Cracked* constitute an all-evening experience in which a group of participants are subject to a series of physical and mental ordeals that sit somewhere between horror content and a kind of faux-SAS training exercise. For instance, guests were held in stress positions for extended periods, blindfolded, partially buried and, in one particularly intense event, laid down while a truck backed up next to them before being blindfolded and having a tyre rolled over their face to create the sound and sensation of being run over, and partially buried. Exercises are conducted until participants use a pre-agreed safe-word and are then provided with their 'time': the length of time they took before using the safe-word. Those who have participated in the *Cracked* experience will generally compare their experiences and share their 'times'.

McKamey Manor located in various sites including San Diego, Huntsville and Summertown has been in operation since the late 2000s and now runs from two different sites. It has become associated, both inside and outside of the industry, with extreme horror owing to the various provocative elements of its operations and use of social media. It has become the model of perception for the ESA genre, with a 2023 television programme on Hulu featuring as a pseudo-debate on the ethics of the attraction. However, it is important to acknowledge that only a relatively small number of consumers have "spectated" *McKamey Manor* directly and in person. The overwhelming majority of *McKamey Manor* consumers are those who discuss it, provide it with social media success and variously interact with its online presence. Attention on this topic has been given to McKamey Manor due to its visibility, including the Hulu series and an episode of the series *Dark Tourism*. The most popular videos associated with *McKamey Manor* at the time of writing have over 3 million views on platforms such as YouTube, far more than have ever been through the doors of the attraction. That McKamey Manor, a location that has been consumed online significantly more than in person, is the byword for extreme attractions, by comparison to the many ESA's that do

not operate in this fashion, is indicative that the content of ESAs extends out of the experience economy, into dynamics that are more additionally voyeuristic and predicated on the lives of others. I therefore consider *McKamey Manor* as much, perhaps more, of a media platform than a live performance venue. For this reason, the Manor is of less direct relevance to this chapter, even if its extreme prominence necessitates that I have addressed the site. I have considered it vital to discuss the site in setting up the scope of this chapter, however from this point I will focus more on alternative case studies.

Delving into Extremity: Drawing from the Mutilation Film

I propose that the ESA reduces the space of the performance down to the audience member's body itself. The body is the stage, and the performance is written onto it. The different senses are the characters, and each sensory assault to the body a different line of dialogue. This performance is contained within three phases: The prelude to the event, the event itself and the decay following the event.

In turn I will address each of these phases and identify the key features by which the narrative of the ESA is played out on its stage, the body. In an acrophobic skydive or edge walk, the body is placed in panic mode and experiences the sensations of direct threat.[286] Conversely, in an ESA the body experiences this also, but in addition is made to undergo affective sensations that point towards the abject, a menu of phenomena that may include physical pain, unpleasant temperature, heave, potential masochistic arousal, wetness, shocking tastes, shocking smells, shame/humiliation/embarrassment, the feeling of uncleanliness and the evocation of excretion/urination - a series of sensual transgressions.

More visceral horror films are, at least in the contemporary moment, defined by bodily mutilation,[287] and its results and can be defined more precisely as 'mutilation

[286] Margee Kerr, *Scream: Chilling Adventures in the Science of Fear*, (PublicAffairs, New York. 2015): Account beginning at p31.
[287] Xavier Reyes, *Horror Film and Affect: Towards a Corporeal Model of Viewership* (London: Routledge, 2016): 15.

films' as defined by Laura Wilson.[288] In much the same way I propose that the participant body is the performance stage of the ESA, Wilson describes the broken and mutilated body of film characters functioning as the central unit, the canvas, of this form of horror film, which 'revel(s) in a direct corporeal rapport between text and viewer'.[289] There are two distinctions across the media of film and performance that I would like to focus on: firstly that the body-stage of the live ESA belongs to the participant/spectator and not a third-party character; and secondly that unlike in the mutilation film where trickery and craft is employed to represent actual mutilation events up to and including the entire destruction of the body, the body in an ESA remains intact and no actual mutilation takes place. However, the common nature of the body-as-narrative leads me to draw upon a framework drawn from scholarship surrounding the subgenre of mutilation horror films. Mutilation horror films in this context refer to movies which graphically show acts of mutilation on human bodies as a prominent feature of their rationale. This includes movies from violent slashers such as the *Halloween* and *Hatchet* franchise, torture-focused horror such as the *Saw* and *Hostel* franchises.

Wilson proposes a three-stage process for each violent scene within the horror film: a pre-mutilation state, the mutilation phase, and the post-mutilation state.[290] In order to fulfil the affective dynamics of the spectatorship of the mutilation, Wilson claims it is necessary to show an unbroken, unwounded body first; then show the act of mutilation; and subsequently show the wound.

The slasher and torture narrative genres have been the primary focus of scholarship pertaining to the mutilation film, however in seeking to explore parallels to the ESA I will identify a third type of movie. These are movies, most prominent in the VHS era of the 1980s and less subject to academic attention, that broadly remove narrative entirely to the extent that the gore and mutilation is itself the narrative. This genre includes films such as the *Guinea Pig* series (1985-1990), *A Serbian Film* (2010) and *Men Behind the Sun* (1988) along with Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997) which acts as both critique of and membership within this subgenre.[291] As with ESAs, this

[288] Laura Wilson, *Spectatorship, Embodiment and Physicality in the Contemporary Mutilation Film.* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
[289] Wilson: 35
[290] Ibid.
[291] Speck, Oliver, *Funny Frames: The Filmic Concepts of Michael Haneke.* (Continuum, New York. 2010): 211.

subgenre of movie is much less commercial and broadly unknown outside of the horror fandom community. In these movies the primary form of spectatorship rests less on the progression of scene to scene (or, to follow Wilson's model, mutilation event to mutilation event) so much as the entire movies consist of one whole mutilation/trauma event that the spectator is invited to withstand. They call to mind *Crack'd's* marketing which refers to itself as 'NOT just an immersive survival experience, but a lifestyle that will never quite leave you'.[292] Here I would argue, the framework Wilson applies on a scene-by-scene basis in the commercial slasher or torture movie can be applied singularly to the whole film.

Having established significant parallels between the mutilation film and the ESA, and even more between the ESA and plot-bereft trauma movies, this paper will now apply Wilson's framework to the ESA event. I will analyse the pre-performance spectatorship against Wilson's pre-mutilation phase; then the performance itself against the mutilation phase; and finally, the post-mutilation phase against the post-performance experience.

Phase One: ANTICIPATION

This phase considers everything that takes place before the ESA event begins and/or before entry into the space of the ESA.

The first phase of Wilson's assault paradigm is that of anticipation, triggered by the moment in which the spectator and victim's perspectives converge as the events that are to transpire are revealed.[293] The viewer and victim learn together of the threat of a chainsaw, for instance, and upon this the victim's body becomes the proxy of that of the viewer, resulting in a form of 'embodied voyeurism'.[294] This convergence of spectator and victim on the one hand may be argued as highlighting a distinct difference between the media forms: the body under threat in a film is that of a character, while the body under threat in the ESA is that of the spectator. However, I propose that the dynamics of an ESA may work in the same manner, with the key difference being that

[292] Faceless Ventures. *CRACKED -SURVIVAL EXPERIENCE FAQ* (Accessed Jan 2024): https://www.facelessventures.co.uk/CRACKEDFAQ
[293] Wilson. *Spectatorship, Embodiment and Physicality in the Contemporary Mutilation Film:* 23
[294] Ibid.:19

rather than the converging bodies are not *fictional victim* and *spectator*, but rather *safe-spectator* and *threatened-spectator*.

In this paradigm, *safe-spectator* is the audience member as they are in their everyday life without threat, while *threatened-spectator* is the spectator once they have transitioned into the ESA and the assault has begun. In Wilson's description of the mutilation film, the anticipation phase is triggered due to presentation of that visceral threat to the character, and with it the transition of the film from a purely viewed object, to one that is capable of creating embodiment and having the capacity for sensory empathy.[295] In my adaptation to the ESA, the anticipation phase is triggered due to *safe-spectator* learning of the events that are going to transpire in the ESA, leading to the *safe-spectator* of the present embodying themselves as the *threatened-spectator* of the future. For *Psychomanteum* the equivalent of this might be the experience of being in the queue and seeing participants exit from the attraction in various states of response, imagining what has led to that state of response and thus their body engaging in anticipatory behaviours.

Rushton describes 'gaps in the viewing experience' that are 'moments of imaginary phantasmagoria, of unconscious perception of a degree of hyper-perceptive hallucination where one believes in the reality of the screen world in which one is engrossed'.[296] It is these gaps that Wilson, following Rushton, argues the mutilation film looks to fill with moments of embodiment, moments that are elusive and fragmentary. I would proffer that the embodiment dynamic of the self and the future-self have the potential to be less elusive and fragmentary since in these cases the 'imaginary phantasmagoria' of the assault is not happening via empathetic proxy to a fictional character but rather imagined as impacting the same body: the spectator's own. The gap from the body of the fictional other to the self, is larger than the gap from the spectator's anticipating body to the spectator's body-under-assault.

In Wilson's anticipation stage, the viewer is 'put into the victim's shoes' and is the longest of the phases in most mutilation films. In my adapted notion of the anticipation stage, the *safe-spectator* is put into the *threatened-spectator*'s shoes and

[295] Ibid.: 21
[296] Rushton, '*Cinema's Double: Some Reflections on Metz*': 113.

imagines the experience that they are to have, whilst remaining, physically, within their own 'safe' body.[297] This might apply to any scare maze to a degree. This will be explored elsewhere in the thesis, however, there is a key element of ESAs that is generally distinct from the average scare maze. This comes not just in the directness and greater range of abject threats within ESAs compared to conventional scare attractions, but also in the management of consent within the ESA performances.

It is worth considering the effects of consent on the anticipation of a sensory assault experience. Without some form of consent being established and the pre-agreement that events (or at least their context) are simulated, the events of an ESA would represent morally and potentially legally nefarious acts. The descriptions of the *Psychomanteum* and *Crack'd* experiences both directly include content that evoke an assault – the former simulating non-consensual penetration and the latter simulating vehicular assault. Equally, it is important to acknowledge that without a willingness to undergo the events of an ESA there would be no feasible instance by which a participant would interpret the events as enjoyable entertainment, or even as anything other than a deeply negative experience. A degree of informed consent before the attraction begins is, therefore, central to ESA management and to any potential enjoyment/satisfaction the audience experiences from their participation in the ESA.

Psychomanteum is typical of the genre in terms of the administration of consent. It uses a combination of detailed signage online and in person, a consent form for the guest to sign and a safe word. Extensive information including all of the elements of performance that 'may' happen was provided on the event website (this is no longer the case, though the Scare Kingdom website has an extensive FAQ section about what is included in the park). This information was also included in large signage on the walls surrounding the entrance to the attraction. This information is replicated on a consent form, read and signed by participants before entrance into the attraction. The costumed employee is present at the door of the attraction whose primary roles are to take payment, manage entrance to the attraction and to manage the consent forms and safe word deployment. The safe-word (zebra) is provided to participants before entering and the last thing they are required to do before entering the attraction is speak the safe

[297] Wilson.: 23

word neutrally to the attendant. Whether such practice is sufficient to constitute a fair ethical agreement between spectator and production company is not the focus of this paper, although I would invite and welcome scholarship in this overlooked area. However, I include this example as the standard, perhaps even best, practice as currently employed within the industry.

The consent form primarily and ostensibly exists as risk management, and to communicate clearly to customers the nature of the attraction so an informed decision can be made about whether they wish to participate. However, the consent form also has the secondary effect. These details have the potential to trigger the embodiment of the attraction before it has begun in the same manner as Wilson's anticipation phase of the mutilation film. This effect aligns alongside communicating clearly to the future spectators of the attraction events that will potentially happen to them within the attraction. As such, this seemingly functional setup becomes a significant part of the attraction and experience itself. An example of this may be taken from the contract from *Psychomanteum* which warned of the possibilities of being forcefully restrained and being required to consume undesirable matter, both instructions which even being described to the participant had potential induce a bodily response.[298] Without the self-awareness of the spectators as 'safe', and the imagined futures of the spectators as 'threatened' from that 'safe' base, the experience would have no chance of any pleasurable qualities. It is only by awareness of oneself as inherently and normatively 'safe' by which the 'threatened' can offer catharsis.

Wilson draws on Sara Ahmed's claims that 'mimesis is an imminent way of being in the world, whereby the subject comes into being not through abstraction from the world but compassionate involvement in it'.[299] In the anticipation of an ESA the spectator finds themselves engaged in their future actions, embodied into a future self in which their body will be subject to unpleasantness - an unpleasantness that the same body generally does not need to experience in everyday life. If a participant is informed in writing that at some point in the future they will be restrained and subject to

[298] The consent form from Psychomanteum is a document I interacted with considerably but for discretion will not reproduce in this thesis rather referring to my own background as evidence, for alternatives with equivalent impact and more direct evidence, the websites for both McKamey Manor and Faceless Ventures contain similar instructions.
[299] Sara Ahmed. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004): 141.

profanities and humiliation, will experience nudity, may be force-fed, then they will likely embody that description. The empathetic embodiment which in film and observational theatre is marked by the double of the observer—observed, of spectator-character, is instead the *safe-present-self* and the *threatened-future-self:* a form of embodiment that carries across time rather than space in this anticipation of the assault that the body will undergo.

Phase Two: ASSAULT

In the mutilation film, the mutilating image itself is relatively brief yet is the moment that defines the genre – the time when the body is under attack and going from intact to mutilated. Wilson applies the term to films such as *Hostel* and *Saw* in which scenes of mutilation are paced around the film.[300] However, as previously stated, there are also mutilation films that are a more continued series of mutilations in which the whole film itself can be seen as a singular act of continuous assault. The ESA can potentially be framed in both of these two ways: an event in which there is a series of different mutilation/assault events in the way Wilson describes, or a singular mutilation/assault act that encompasses the whole event. In the case of the ESA rather than 'show(ing) the process of bodily destruction',[301] the ESA evokes it via the use of two means - either implying bodily destruction by the integrity of the body being under threat as in the use of restraints or in *Crack'd*'s car sequence, or by engaging with the abject body with the use of content that is scatological, sexual or nauseating. This is why I used the examples of *Psychomanteum* and *Crack'd* to show that ESAs exist on a scale between two different points in their approach to the assault event, their challenge to the body, and their rationale. In one extreme there is the type of ESA exemplified by *Crack'd.* These events are generally marked by an experience of persistent assault, tend to involve implied bodily destruction (threats of actual violence), and have an ultimate rationale of confronting one's own body via a survival experience. At the other extreme is the ESA exemplified by *Psychomanteum* which is marked by an experience of multiple different assaults, tending to involve the direct invocation of body functions (generally without actual violence or indication of the body integrity actually being broken) and

[300] Wilson. *Spectatorship, Embodiment and Physicality in the Contemporary Mutilation Film*: 35
[301] Ibid. p36.

have an ultimate rationale of a confrontation with the abject self**.** Notably the first requires more fictional simulation than the second since no actual violence may take place, while the second may take place entirely 'for real'. Both may involve the use of 'safe' pain.

Literature surrounding the creation of the wounding image emphasises the notion of an 'embodied visuality' in which the mastery of the visual over the object is lost and gives up control of the spectatorship away from the cognitive, and instead locates itself into the body.[302] This has been called corporeal mimicry as the body of the spectator senses and emulates the body of the character being mutilated.[303] The wounding image invites the 'viewer to respond to the image in an intimate and embodied way, and thus facilitate the experience of other sensory impressions as well'.[304] I will take up these two dynamics: embodied visuality and intimacy, and argue that not only do ESAs also provoke these responses, but that the liveness of the ESA compared to the distanced viewership of the movie intensifies their impact.

Embodied visuality, or haptic visuality,[305] 'involves the body in the process of seeing to a greater extent'.[306] The concept of embodied visuality is drawn from film scholarship, nevertheless I would like to explore the notion that in the ESA it is the simultaneous experiencing of self as both subject and object in the moment that is crucial to the experience.

Consider two moments from the case studies: the moment of being made to kneel in front of a foul-smelling toilet bowl in *Psychomanteum,* and the experience of being held in stress positions in *Cracked.* In both performances the acts are perpetrated to the spectator's own body, which is inherently unlike the spectatorship of film*.* In the toilet scene the body is physically kneeling and suffering an unpleasant experience but

[302] Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses.* (London: Duke University Press, 2000): 151.
[303] Wilson,: 35.
[304] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*: 132.
[305] Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (London, University of California Press, 2004)
[306] Bori Maté, "Haptic Trangression. The Horror of Materiality in Kurt Kren's Films,' *Acta Universityatis Sapientiae Film and Media Studies* 16(1) (2019): 154.

there is further embodiment of the two bodily functions evoked by this experience – vomiting and defecating. The kneeling self is the subject of the performance, the abject self - vomiting and defecating without 'borders, positions, rules' – is the object, the equivalent of the mutilating image – albeit in this case it might be more appropriately termed the embodied abject image: 'at the border of (one's) condition as living beings'.[307] In the case of *Cracked,* the body is physically subject to painful states but there is further embodiment of the violent acts and consequence of what this kind of pain could lead to - the breakdown of the body, the embodied mutilating image. The body is both spectator and performer with all focus overwhelmingly taken up.

ESAs as Intimate Performance

The above sequences conform to ESAs but is perhaps also transferrable to any scare attraction. The chainsaw, or vampire attack of a more conventional scare maze might also point towards embodied mutilating experiences. The thing that particularly marks out the ESA from both film and from other scare attractions is the increased level of intimacy. ESAs are experienced in small numbers *(*as in *Cracked)* or alone (as in *Psychomanteum)* with a high performer to spectator ratio and there is frequent direct interaction between a sole performer and a sole spectator for extended periods of time. To explore this, I will turn to scholarship surrounding one to one performance work, and particularly the work of Adrian Howells.

The majority of Howells' work, including better known performances such as *Foot Washing for the Sole* (2008) and *The Garden of Adrian* (2009), were designed to generate caring, intimate and otherwise affectively positive encounters. Howells stated in interview that when uncaring or unkind elements accidentally crept into *Foot Washing for the Sole*, a performance in which Howells would ritualistically wash the spectator's feet while discussing the history of such practices, this would sabotage the

[307] Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* translated by Leon S Roudiez. (NewYork: Columbia University Press. 1982): 3.

performance.[308] This prompted Dominic Johnson, the interviewer, to pose the possibility of applying Howells' intimate performance work in a negative context: Howell's answer was that 'Cold water might be interesting, if the piece was potentially geared towards a difficult or uncaring encounter. I think intimacy can have a broad range of possible textures or affective qualities, from the agreeable and comfortable to hostile or abusive interactions'.[309] This points to the kind of possibilities curated in ESAs, where textures of sadism and masochism provide oppositional affective responses to those employed by Howells in his sensory works.

Howells' work, designed as it was to seek 'real, immediate, and urgent experiences', aligns itself as a kind of opposite to the scare attraction as explored in this thesis and particularly the extreme event – both of the case studies in this chapter as well as any ESA I have encountered could equally be described with the words 'real, immediate and urgent'. *Cracked* and equivalent survival-style events fulfil Johnson's proposed criteria of containing abusive interactions, fulfilling a different texture of intimate performance from that of Howells.

Notably, Howells did not always succeed in his intention of curating experiences of purely positive affect. In his interview with Johnson, Howells shares a distressed e-mail from a student who discussed feeling shame and regret as she reflected upon his performance *The Pleasures of Being: Washing, Feeding, Holding.*[310] Intended to be an exclusively positive experience this participant had instead felt embarrassment akin to a regretted one-night-stand. Conversely, following a performance of an ESA called *Snuffhouse: After Dark*, attended and part-produced by the author, in the immediate aftermath of the event a spectator asked to meet her "tormentor" (the in-show terminology) so she could thank him for the experience she had gone through. She did this having considered the experience to be transformative and had clearly felt the encounter between herself and her performer as being in some way intimate. Some guests in ESAs demonstrate arousal, and customers choosing to repeat one-person

[308] Dom Johnson in conversation with Adrian Howells. Contained within: Heddon & Johnson: *It's all Allowed: The Performance of Adriqn Howells* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2017)
[309] Heddon & Johnson, *It's all allowed*: 111.
[310] Heddon & Johnson, *It's all allowed*:112.

experiences such as *Psychomanteum* is not uncommon. I argue that both the positive sensations experienced within ESAs and the negative sensations described in the student in her e-mail to Howells indicate the affective power of intimacy, alongside the potential for audience members to have unpredictable response to it that are determined by self-perception, and comfort with both physical proximity and prolonged attention.

While intimacy creates strong sensations, it does not always create the anticipated or desired response to that intimacy. While anecdotal, the spectator who asked to thank her tormentor may indicate one reason as to why the extreme haunt exists as a commercially viable venture – even an event as apparently one-dimensional in its intent to create negative sensations as an ESA created an oppositional reaction that exposed the perception of a beneficial, positive experience. Between both Howells and the ESAs it appears the case that intimacy and urgency can be an end in and of themselves, due to the high level of focus and attention of an interpersonal manner that such activities provide. There is a demand for extreme personal attention and a focus on the spectator's self or being whatever that attention or focus may be.

One aspect of his work that Howells acknowledged as an ongoing concern in his performances was how to deal with what he termed the "mask" of the audience member: the need for the spectator to "play" the role of the spectator. This indicates Howells' perception of a differentiation between the 'self' subject in the moment of the performance from the 'self' who cognitively interprets the audience; a dynamic that parallels the one I argued earlier in the chapter as a major element of ESA viewership.

Phenomenological accounts further evidence this phenomenon of the audience "performing as the audience", such as when Rachel Zerihan acknowledges that she chose to eat some strawberries offered by Howells during *The Garden of Adrian*, despite the fact that she didn't like strawberries and she was aware that the whole point of the performance was intended to be a positive interaction and she could have said no, but that she felt the inherent need to be a 'dutiful' spectator.[311] Helen Iball uses the phrase

[311] Heddon & Johnson, *It's all Allowed:* 174-175.

'give good audience' to describe this problematic element of audiences becoming an insincere version of themselves in order to help a performance along.[312] The ambiguity of spectator behaviour in one-to-one intimate performance, the sense of 'What does he want of me? And what am I supposed to do?'[313] is common to immersive theatrical events, especially those of a more participatory kind, compromising the potential for effective intimacy due to projecting it behind a performatised behaviour that is insincere and produced an awkward form of collaboration – one that is overtly mutual but actually is predicated on the audience member passively agreeing to the default script of the performer.

This ambiguity is not present in most ESA events and thus provides a point of differentiation that extends beyond the positive-negative affect paradigm. An audience members can feel validated as a good audience member if they are accepting suffering since it is what they are expected to do, and yet, paradoxically, they can also feel validated as a good audience member if they are not suffering, since they are successfully demonstrating resilience.

In the ESA whatever the spectator is doing is 'giving good audience' and fulfilling their role. The ambiguity inherent in these performances is removed, the notion of good audiencing disappears since it when the body is a stage of suffering the 'audiencing' is passive owing to a mono-focus on the awareness of one's body. As a result of this focus, ESAs provide a potential space for self-awareness to arrive as a wave at the end of the performance. For all their brutalism and ethical compromises, ESAs at some levels have solved a problem that immersive performances with ambitions to liberate/emancipate their audience often find difficult to solve and regardless of how the performance plays out the audience succeeds.

To summarise, the assault phase of the ESA aligns strongly to the Wison's second 'mutilating image' phase of sequences in horror films, with two primary differences:

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[312] Helen Iball, "Towards an Ethic of Intimate Audience", *Performing Ethos: International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance* 3 (1), (2013):41 – 57. Anecdotally attributed to the *iconfess* symposium also detailed in Deirdre Heddon, Helen Iball, Rachel Zerihan, *Come Closer: Confessions of Intimate Spectators in One-to-One Performance;* (London, Routledge. 2013)

[313] Walsh as quote in Heddon & Johnson, It's all allowed: 244.

their heightened sense of intimacy and their viewership turned into personal experience. The intimacy which is one-sided and may be overwhelming is a particular feature of this genre. The body becomes the stage, and the ESA maintains a gap in the experience between subject and object – with the focus of the spectator taken up so strongly that they exist primarily within their body and not their cognitive state, leading to the arguable absence of a 'viewer'. I have also differentiated clearly between two frames of reference with which to frame ESAs, one trending towards the embodiment of the implied destruction of the body, the other trending towards the embodiment of the abject self.

Phase Three: DECAY

The final phase of Wilson's model of the mutilation film sequence is the 'aftermath'.[314] This refers to the revelation of the complete mutilated image, the wound that is left following the mutilation. Here Wilson conceives that there is a shift in spectatorship in which the viewer's perspective goes from identifying with the recipient of the wound, to either the implied torturer (if the spectatorship is active) or a complicit voyeur (if the spectatorship is passive). The spectator journeys from having become jolted outside of their own body during the mutilation phase and, having 'emptied of all contents',[315] is returned to the position of viewer. Thus, 'the gaze alone tears the flesh' and the spectator becomes agent of torture or collaboration rather than victim.[316]

This shift in spectatorship, I believe, is a useful equivalent to the experience of completing an ESA or ESA sequence. Parallel to the viewer being affectively "returned" to their own body, as in Wilson's description of film spectatorship, the end of the ESA or ESA sequence is marked by a transfer of the spectator's audiencing from a corporeal response to a cognitive response. This is due to focus. The experiences of the body are no longer taking up the whole attention of the participant. This coincides with the shift from *threatened-spectator* back to *safe-spectator.* From the *safe-spectator* position it

[314] Wilson, *Spectatorship, Embodiment and Physicality in the Contemporary Mutilation Film:* 21
[315] Rushton, 'Cinema's Double: Some Reflections on Metz': 113
[316] Wilson, *Spectatorship, Embodiment and Physicality in the Contemporary Mutilation Film*: 35.

becomes possible to once again act as viewer to the threatened version of oneself. Again, the gap occurs between time rather than space.

This brings me to a key dynamic of the ESA. The primary viewed object is the body of the spectator under duress and the primary viewer is the spectator before and after the event. It is in this gap and through reflections on the *threatened-spectator* self that the spectator finds the purpose of the event. Unlike in Wilson's model what the participant experiences is not the broken body of another, but instead a body of their own that they experience as having survived and remained intact. The main relationship being developed is between a person and their own body, the person is the actor and the body the stage. The performers of the ERA become facilitators to an event that isn't about them and for which they are neither true subject or object: hence why there is no real importance to any consistent sense of character or narrative.

Wilson shifts viewer perspective from embodying the victim to embodying the torturer? This is where the notion of consent becomes particularly important in the ERA. The assault experience has been willingly undergone and, if to be read positively, the spectator is required to see themselves as their own willing torturer rather than the performers in the show. They have chosen to subject themselves to the undertaking and as such are responsible for their own assault, their own wound, their own mutilation becoming the torturer/voyeur of Wilson's third stage. And finally, after the show has finished, they are bearing witness to the assault's completion… and subsequent survival and with that survival comes the potential for a perceived resilience and agency into the future having provided the body the experience of being able to withstand a traumatic event, even if it was simulated.

Returning to Howells, during an account of his *The Garden of Adrian,* Rachel Zerihan describes leaving with 'not just an emotional state, but the concept of moving forward, moving on and opening up the possibilities for new attachments to others'.[317] Similarly, Howells described a foot washer attendant who cried during her performance because, 'I suppose it... makes me wish that the world was better'.[318] Notably the latter of these testimonies – the sense of agency – came from a performance that had finished,

[317] Zerihan in Heddon & Johnson*, It's all allowed:* 177.
[318] Heddon & Johnson, *It's all allowed*: 195.

while the testimony of helplessness came from one that was still ongoing and while the subject was *inside* the performance with her body still being treated as subject. The intimacy of one-to-one experiences and performances that prioritise the body can drive the spectator to a wider self-awareness and either a sense of or a desire for agency. I believe the key to this is that moment in which, like Wilson's model, the spectator, at the end of this performance, suddenly shunts from their passive body (mutilating image/helplessness/abject) to their active self (survival/completion) of the future.

As the "wound" of the assault closes in the days after the event, the spectator will likely continue to feel the affective sensations of their experience linger. In bruises and aches caused by the event, and in their immediate haptic recollections. Over time this will give away to a purely cognitive reflection on the experience. The spectator will continue to move forward as their safe version of self, but the relationship to the threatened self will remain. This potentially can be framed as an enjoyable experience seasoned by time, a kind of pleasurable decay.

For Korsmeyer, a person taking pleasure in something means that one is occupied with a singular keenness and ardour.[319] Korsmeyer makes an argument that disgust, anxiety and nausea (and I will add physical discomfort as well) are not sensations to perceive as opposite to – or even in relation to – pleasure but as 'a modifier of attention, intensifying for a host of reasons some experience that the participant would rather have continue than not'.[320] Thus, pain and discomfort undergone willingly (such as within the framework of a piece of entertainment) are ontologically entirely separate from pain and discomfort undergone unwillingly.

In *The Lived Nightmare* Elizabeth Cowie follows Freud's theory of pleasure by suggesting that pleasure, or satisfaction, is dependent on a previous unpleasure for a recognisable change in the state of the subject or organism to be experienced.[321] Here, the decay phase provides an initial, possibly joyful experience of

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[319] Carolyn Korsmeyer. *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and Fair in Aesthetics (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 118.
[320] Ibid. 120.
[321] Elizabeth Cowie, *The Lived Nightmare: Trauma, Anxiety and the Ethical Aesthetics of Horror* in ed. Schneider, SJ, Shaw D *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror* (Oxford: The Scarecrow Press Inc, 2003): 29.

the cessation of unpleasantness. Beyond this, a time in which the event can be relived in comfort and interpreted in safety – as a survivor, with the intact body a testament to one's capability to withstand and endure.

Self as Viewed Image

The wider argument of this thesis is that we live in a contemporary environment that prioritises the self and one's identity and that the scare attraction is a playground that manifests and magnifies this activity, making the self a viewed object, refracting different elements of self-perception. The ESA might be the ultimate culmination of these dynamics: performance in which the viewed image is the bodily integrity and functions of the spectator.

I have already argued that the boom in popularity of scare entertainment this century, and especially since 2010, may be tied to Zaointz' concept of sensory narcissism.[322] This is a condition aligned to both Josephine Machon's concept of (syn)aesthetics,[323] and Schultz's interpretation of this as representative of the contemporary public's yearning for forms of authenticity that comes from within the self as much as it does from without.[324] The primordial or pre-linguistic response therefore becomes experienced and even prioritised as the interpretation of what is 'real'. This can be linked to Vermeulen and Van Den Akker's proposal of the contemporary condition as one of 'metamodernism' in which a lack of trust in the external has caused increased value to be placed on the concept of identity, on affect, and the relationship between the two.[325] Sensory narcissism is the state of being whereby the contemporary individual consumes entertainment content in which the protagonist is the person who matters the most: themselves. Under this dynamic, spectatorship occurs via the most trusted means possible: the affective stimulation of the senses.

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[322] Zaointz, *Narcissistic Spectatorship in Immersive and One-on-One Performance:* Introduction
[323] Josephine Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance.*
[324] Daniel Schulze, *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance*: 58.
[325] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin Van Den Akker. 'Notes on Metamodernism'

Extreme attractions, I suggest, are representative of an inevitable conclusion of sensory narcissism within the metamodern condition. They are the furthest that 'using fakeness and simulation' as described by Schultze can be drawn to induce responses before an event is no longer simulated and comes around to become actually real again. Events in which the affective responses are almost universally real even if there is fictional context or simulation present.[326] Only the framework, the loose conceit, is simulated – to support this the trappings of most scare attractions: the blood, the skeletons, the vampires and witches, the chainsaws and curses are all absent for these are manifestations of narrative and open fiction. There is no place for conceptual terror or the uncanny, and instead a pure focus on the immediate affective sensation.

Extreme horror is marked, among other things, by having much less narrative and theming compared to other scare attraction events. While atmosphere, character and storytelling, with their respective effects on the spectator, have featured in other chapters, the case studies described both above and below bear little equivalent. There is, certainly, a loose theme to *Psychomanteum* with one named character in Doctor Goodkind, but anything that might be described as a narrative is undeveloped, unimportant, and irrelevant to the spectator experience. In events such as *Cracked* the entire notion of a plot or fictitious world is eschewed altogether.

ESAs have had little to no academic attention, but some scholarly attention has been paid to socio-political sensory performances. Within *Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Performances,* Stephen Di Benedetto discusses the 'sentient body'.[327] Amid this, he describes various forms of what he interprets as Anthony Julius' "transgressive performance",[328] in which he perceives transgression (or at least one form of it) as referring to the breaching of the spectator-audience contract. Examples of these forms of transgressive performance include the re-enactment of Vietnam war activities at the CuChi tunnels; a replication of an El Norte border crossing event in Parque Alberto, Mexico; Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco's installation *Two*

[326] Daniel Schulze, *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance,* p58

[327] Stephen DiBenedetto, *The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 160.

[328] Anthony Julius. *Transgressions: The Offences of Art* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2002).

Undiscovered Amerindians (1992); the body-centred performance art of Franko B; and the work of the collaborative group Societas Rafaello Sanzio (SRS). These all involve a form of sensory assault, like the ESAs considered in this chapter. Notably however, these works are primarily predicated on combining the socio-political with elements of existentialism.

Di Benedetto claims that multi-sensory performance 'strives to viscerally jolt the attendant's understanding and experience of what it is to be human'.[329] While they may, in some cases, assault the body – or at least some of the senses – they do not treat the viewer's body as subject and object in the manner of an ESA – if a survival experience such as the El Norte border crossing event is replicated then the primary relationship is not between the *threatened-spectator* and *safe-spectator* so much as it is *viewer-now-fictionally-threatened* and *those-who-have-experienced-this-for-real.* The viewing gap is not between selves in time, but across time, subject and space. I think it is important to make this distinction.

In his chapter on the sentient body, DeBenedetto analyses how sensory performance challenge their audience member's awareness of both their own humanity, and what that humanity is capable of withstanding? He draws on the work on Fusco to identify how the immediacy of a theatrical format is perfectly set up to do this:

> (Theatre's) liveness invites the activation of our sensorial engagement…It is by pushing the boundaries of what is expected or conventional that some performances remove the safety net between performer and attendant and commit many violent acts on the psyche, the intellect, the aesthetic or even the body.[330]

He further points out that humans in general have been shown to be more attendant to their environment – more "alive" – when it is spun into chaos and negativity. I again propose that DiBenedetto's attention here might be paid to the world of the ESA and commercial hauntings just as they are to sociopolitical works of a sensory nature.

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[329] DiBenedetto, *The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre:* 178.
[330] DiBenedetto, *The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre*: 180.

The parallels between ESAs and scholarship on sensory theatre, especially in performance art and participatory theatre, may be explored further. When Lydia Lunch claims, 'Instead of pleasure, sell them pain. My pain. Their own pain. Regurgitated and spat back at them. Make them pay to be tortured. Assaulted. Abused'.[331] her statement refers directly to payment, and by implication to the commercial sector with an emphasis on the masochistic, certainly on the transgressive, prophesised intersection of commodity and narcissism. However, most literature drawn from Lunch relating to live performance has been focused on the non-commercial and certainly not on the popular. I have sought to address this dynamic by drawing on scholarship of horror films that reside in a more overtly popular genre than the scholarship currently available on sensory performance.

Di Benedetto was writing of the burgeoning sensory theatre genre seemingly without combining his ideas with the concept of metamodernism but his words about perceived pioneers of the sensory genre within performance ring strongly in their alignment with extreme live performance to the contemporary condition. He describes spectators who have spent most of their lives in a kind of incubated state – one dominated by screens and awareness of the performativity of virtual and even live human interaction – and that the breaking of core performance taboos is one way to 'reconfigure neural pathways from habitual paths'.[332]

The phenomenon of the ESA, which arose in the late 2000s may be potentially explained in some part by a drive in some to challenge the desensitization, the incubated state - that exists within contemporary society especially within the context of the virtual world we largely inhabit. As Di Benedetto continues: 'Going too far is an ethical necessity in today's society because it encourages our natural biological processes to trigger changes in behaviour and perceptions …. we have become desensitized' due, especially, to high levels of exposure to images of graphic violence and sexuality without sensory consequences. Events such as *Psychomanteum* and *Cracked* present such imagery and ideas and apply clear sensory consequences to them,

[331] Lydia Lunch interview with Jason Gross. 1997. Transcript Available at https://www.furious.com/perfect/lydialunch.html
[332] DiBenedetto, *The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre*: 185.

providing affective augmentation to perception, giving the highest possible dose of *realness* even if – as is still the case – the true realness is limited. This takes us back to the first chapter of this thesis looking at the concept of *realness* in contemporary performance and where *realness* can be situated. *Psychomanteum* and *Cracked* are full of performativity, trickery, stagecraft techniques and contrivance – they are not *real* in any sense pertaining to the world outside the performance. However, they do appear to be predicated in replicating as closely as possible what the spectators perceive to be 'real' senses. They exist to draw 'real' responses and 'real' sensory behaviours out of the participants, who have rarely found their way into the real.

Thus, on one level, it is possible to frame extreme scare attractions as nothing more than an even more stretched version of the dynamics I propose elsewhere in this thesis – as a manifestation of the contemporary crisis of authenticity and the *sensory narcissism* that comes with an urge for participants to experience performances in terms almost exclusively of themselves and their affective responses, with extreme haunt tropes acting as an even greater disturbance from habitual life than a conventional scare attraction or horror film.

CONCLUSION:

In the contemporary world we find ourselves in dissonance between increasingly sedentary lifestyles and increasing immediacy and urgency in our interpersonal virtual communications. The information we receive implies that everything is important, while our bodies are receiving the instructions that nothing is. It is within this gap and due to this dissonance that individuals seek out a sense of sensory stimulation to close that gap – an attempt at DiBenedetto's reconfiguring of neural pathways from habitual paths. For some this may be extreme sports, high-risk personal behaviour in one's social life or outdoor fitness activities. However, for others even these kinds of interventions are not enough - the sensation seeking must needs develop further and further until it manifests in such ethically questionable, odd and seemingly irrational pursuits such as those found in ESAs.

Claims that extreme forms of stimulation such as skydiving, base jumping or the stimuli encountered in an ESA are in some way legitimately therapeutic or rewarding are not proven. Nevertheless, this dynamic is a matter of *perception*, not truth. DiBenedetto doesn't know whether 'neural pathways in the brain' can be reconfigured from habitual paths, or even if they could whether this would be meaningful. At least he provides no tangible evidence to that direction. But what is observable is that this is an instinct that the audiences engaged in this material seem to have. It provides a clear rationale. And it aligns with the world in which we currently reside and in which the rise of ESAs occurred.

The information we receive is calibrated to imply that everything is important while our bodies are receiving the information that nothing is. Within this gap and due to this dissonance that individuals seek out a sense of sensory stimulation to close the gap. An extreme haunt, mirroring the three-phase process of the mutilation film and surmisable as a process of initiation, sensory assault, pleasurable decay, writes its experience onto the body in a more procedural fashion and stimulates a wider range of bodily responses, providing a longer-lasting and more memorable imprint that the body will potentially remember. The ESA represents, perhaps, one of the most distinct interventions humans in the Western contemporary condition have mounted in trying to close the affect gap manifesting in an ethically questionable, odd and seemingly irrational series of pursuits.

If we are indeed in an era of narcissistic spectatorship, the primary subject and object of art will continue to trend towards the self. This is inherently the case of participatory theatre, indicating that the study of the genre will be of increasing relevance. In the case of the scare attraction the self is centred throughout the experience, the spectator is aware of themselves being viewed and thus themselves as the object of the performance. In the case of the ESA this concentrates even further to the object of the performance being the spectator's physical body and its capacity for abjection, resilience, or dysfunction. When the subject and object of art is reduced to the self, the primary form of mimesis available in performance is not that between spaces or between self and other but between different versions of our own self across time. The relationship between our past, present and future selves are therefore central to the

dynamics of participatory theatre as manifested in Wilson's model and its adaptation to the live environment. Within ESAs this is the bodily self – and going through a conceptual transition back and forth between a version of ourselves that is safe, healthy and intact and versions of ourselves that are threatened and in pain. For some audience members, ESAs become a perceived – if ethically compromised - celebration of bodily integrity, safety, westernised luxury and, perhaps, privilege. An investment in a moment of fragmentary and conditioned discomfort, to better experience a world to which we have become increasingly desensitised on an affective level.

CHAPTER 5: A Pan-Dimensional Bard:

Live Horror Theatre, Nostalgia and Folklore.

This chapter addresses folk horror in live performance and the manners that the shared space between story and audience impact the dynamics of the subgenre. I argue that central to the manifestation of live folk horror is the performance's relationship with affect, specifically, how a blend of fear and nostalgia is manipulated. Fear is commonly associated with the horror genre, while the response of nostalgia is the primary form of affect associated with senses of belonging and cultural identity. This chapter argues that live folk horror, more so than its counterparts in other media, makes an inherent statement about the nature of cultural belonging and identity. Consequently, live folk horror is either actively or passively political and positioned in relation to how communities are defined and how their stories from the past are told.

This chapter will also touch on the impact of tying the performance space to a sense of wider geographical belonging, The stage, and the audience's relationship to it, being something that may be compared to a relationship to a locale or idea. A proxy community, or land, with associated rituals and traditions, might be created in that space and subsequently the fear and nostalgia stimuli have potential to connect the audience's relationship with a locale or sense of community. Community, belonging, and identity are strongly aligned concepts as detailed in chapter one of this thesis, consequently the possibility that horror might be used to manipulate or challenge experiences of community is a potent concept.

Horror and Seasonality

Live Horror is most frequently staged and encountered seasonally. The most common period of the year in which horror is performed is Halloween.[333] This increasingly includes celebratory events that take place at rural locations.[334]

[333] Hoedt, 'Keeping a Distance: The Joy of Haunted Attractions': 34.
[334] For instance, *Tully's Shocktoberfest* and *Farmageddon,* two of the most popular horror events in South and North England respectively, are located on farms.

Commentators have also observed an established tie between British Christmas and the ghost story.[335] Both Halloween and Christmas have strong traditional ties to the British seasonal calendar. Christmas is a Christian celebration occurring around the Winter Solstice, and Halloween aligns All Souls with pagan Samhain. These events are simultaneously Christian and rooted in rural and pagan tradition with the implication of a natural progression from one to the other and a symbiosis between the two a part of some cultural commentary from at least the beginning of the 20th century.[336]

Many of the character types that recur throughout horror and commonly appear in live performances – the werewolf, zombie, vampire, witch, scarecrow -, are associated with cultural folklore.[337] In other cases, horror performances make creative use of the folkloresque. The folkloresque is a term used by Michael Dylan Foster to describe work that is intended to evoke the sense that it is a piece of folklore but is not. He describes this phenomenon as 'popular culture's own (emic) perception and performance of folklore … consciously cobbled together from a range of folkloric elements, often mixed with newly created elements, to appear as if it emerged organically'.[338] The predominance of popular folkloric tropes in horror means that the genre represents a fertile and creative environment to manifest and make use of the folkloresque.

The relationship of horror performance to seasonality, means that live horror events and performances often incorporate elements of folklore and heritage. They take place at seasonally relevant moments in the calendar – something often reserved for culturally distinct performance formats. In the UK these performance formats would include traditional pantomime, Winter Wonderlands and Santa's Grottos. Seasonal performances such as pantomime come with their own culturally coded expectations and mutually understood rituals, passed down from generation to generation, just as they exist in wider culture.[339] Horror events fit into these dynamics also. As has already been identified and explored within this thesis, each of these seasonal events involve

[335] Derek Johnston. *Haunted Seasons: Television Ghost Stories for Christmas and Horror for Halloween.* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 2.
[336] Clement A. Miles. *Christmas in ritual and tradition: Christian and Pagan.* (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1913)
[337] Bob Trubshaw, *Explore Folklore* (Loughborough: Explore books. 2002): 85.
[338] Michael Dylan Foster & Jeffrey A. Tolbert, *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World*. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016): 5.
[339] Millie Taylor, *British Pantomime Performance* (Bristol: Intellect. 2007)

the curation and communal experience of a shared space, differentiating live experiential formats from their screen and literary equivalents. The co-presence of the audience and performers sharing a space creates an inherently statement-based and political dynamic based on the topology of the space and how it is related to by those present.[340]

For a piece of folk performance there is an opportunity to not just highlight the landscape, but to viscerally feel it as a shared communal space that belongs to both storytellers and attendants. The geography of the space, the relationship of the storytellers to that geography and the relationship of the community/audience to that geography becomes a core part of the performance. Unlike in screen and literary productions, this means that there can be an inherent spiritual/totemic attachment to that shared space. The audience are offered the experience of a quasi-community, felt as being naturally in assembly, thus becoming an in-group that has gathered to share in mutual folklore.

Folk Horror in Literature and Film

The term folk horror, along with its study as a subgenre of horror, has been embraced by academia. Prior to this, it spent time as a more informal descriptor used in film studies and horror discourse. Adam Scovell produced the framework of folk horror as a scholarly subject, most prominently in *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange.*[341] His text explores the ideas underlying folk horror and proposes tropes and analytic frameworks drawn from film and literature. The book includes a précis of the journey of the term 'folk horror' from its colloquial beginnings into its place in scholarship. Used to describe a subgenre of horror cinema and subsequently in literature, the term "folk horror" dates back to an interview in *Fangoria* magazine with the director Piers Haggard, regarding *The Blood on Satan's Claw*.[342] Haggard was asked for a rationale of the movie and answered that he was 'trying to make a folk horror film,

[340] Erika Fischer-Lichte & Benjamin Wihstutz, *Performance and the Politics of Space: theatre and topology.* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 3.
[341] Adrian Scovell, *Folk horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur Publishing, 2017)
[342] *The Blood on Satan's Claw*, (1971). [film] Directed by P. Haggard. United Kingdom: Tigon British Film Productions

I suppose'.[343] *The Blood on Satan's Claw* is one of three unrelated British films that retroactively have been widely described as an informal, original trilogy of folk horror.[344] The term was given reinforcement and popularised by Mark Gatiss in his BBC4 Documentary *A History of Horror* in which Gatiss uses the description to describe the three films.[345] It is from Gatiss and subsequently Scovell that the most frequently used definition of folk horror evolved, as 'That which shares a common obsession with the British landscape, its folklore and superstitions'.[346]

Defining Folk Horror Performance

Scovell's definition pinpoints several key features of folk horror: the use of folklore and superstition, a focus on geography and landscape, as well as its British origins. Nevertheless, there are two arguable limitations in this definition. Firstly, this definition comes from sources dedicated exclusively to horror, leading to the omission of any reference to fear or horror tropes; consequently, the definition has no direct reference to horror at all. Secondly, the definition does not address reception. As such the definition restricts itself to describing content as opposed to the purposes of the content, or the sensations evoked by the content. I will take an affect-centric analytical approach with a view to augmenting what 'folk horror' may mean in terms of the live performance environment and with an increased focus on reception. It is also necessary to note that, in contrast to the focus of contemporary film studies, folkloric performance is in and of itself a significant theatrical format with a long history and a body of existing scholarship. There are also pre-existing staging techniques and traditions of folkloric performance that are still performed by live practitioners today across the world even in the digital era and within digital environments.[347] This analysis does not just allow for a more refined definition of 'folk horror' or, at least, 'live folk horror performance' but can more precisely consider what the scope of intentions may be with live folk

[343] Fangoria Interview available at blog site MJ Simpson, "Cult Films and the People who Make Them" (2013): https://mjsimpson-films.blogspot.com/2013/11/interview-piers-haggard.html
[344] Along with *Witchfinder General* (Reeves, 1968) and *The Wicker Man* (Hardy, 1973).
[345] *A History of Horror.* BBC4 Television, 18 October, 2010.
[346] Scovell, *Folk horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange*:13
[347] Rachmawanti, R. & Yuningsih, C.R. "Folklore-based Art Performances in digital art space as a form of revitalizing local wisdom in the metaverse era". *Sustainable Development in Creative Industries: Embracing Digital Culture for Humanities* – Sintowoko et al (eds). (Routledge, Oxon: 2023): 285.

horror and how the intersecting forms of affect, involved in such performances, might be employed.

This chapter proposes a new definition for folk horror performance, which develops Scovell's definition with adjustments based on the differentiation between media, and an emphasis on how folkloric performance may add its own sense of experienced authenticity regarding heritage and tradition. Thus, I propose a definition for folk horror performance as: performance occupied with the folklore and superstitions of a shared people and landscape, to which the audience is implicated; and which offers affective sensations that combine horror elements with feigned cultural authenticity. In most cases it is likely that these performances will, to some degree, draw upon traditional heritage performance forms.

The presence of a shared geographic space in a folkloric work indicates that the audience are implicitly led into sensations of cultural identity and of place. Zygmunt Bauman observes that nostalgia is a complex emotion that allows for an 'affectionate relationship with an "elsewhere"', and the live performance environment allows for that "elsewhere" to be artificially constructed around the audience and experienced as themselves, rather than observed in screen or book or experienced via identification with a character.[348] This relationship with the "elsewhere" of the folkloric and nostalgic space may become manifest in one of two ways, based on the awareness and intentions of the artist. Firstly, the work may seek to confirm the senses of nostalgia and cultural-identity that are instigated by the folklore, in a dynamic I term 'nostalgia-affirming'. Alternatively, the work may be 'nostalgia-challenging' in that it creates a distance or framing to the nostalgic affect, with the audience invited to question their own tendencies towards experiencing bodily responses to cultural and folkloric provocations. This is true of all folkloric performance, however what is distinct to folk horror performance is a notably strong visceral and affective sensation, fear, is already being instigated by the horror component. Thus, the performance is already inherently situated in the bodies of the audience, who have been invited to be physically open and exposed to affective responses by that dynamic.

[348] Zygmunt Bauman *Retrotopia* (Cambridge: Polity Books, 2017): 3.

To demonstrate folk horror performance with respect to nostalgia and the community, I will introduce and analyse two case studies: *Soulstice: A Twisted Tale of Two Seasons* (hereafter *Soulstice)* and *Story Beast: This is Bardcore* (hereafter *Bardcore*). *Soulstice* was produced by *AtmosFEAR! Scare Entertainment* and was written and directed by Jason Karl. The version discussed in this paper is the one in which I performed, presented at Smithills Hall, Bolton in December 2014. *Bardcore* was written and performed by John Henry Falle and was attended by the author at *Udderbelly* during the 2018 Edinburgh Festival.

These two performances have a significant amount in common. They both fit into the category of folk horror performance as described above. They both invite the audience into a shared affective world within their performances encompassing both fear and nostalgia. Each employs a distinctly folkloric blend in relation to objective and recorded historical accuracy. This blend includes some legitimately truthful historical accuracy, including some historic facts, evidence-based cultural references, and artefacts from the past and legitimate folkloric performance. The blend also includes some contestable interpretations of historical performance and stretched artistic license. Finally, they include some outrightly fictive elements intended to appear as folkloric – the folkloresque – but which are not rooted in any genuine recorded history. Both performances directly appeal to British heritage, contain several references to British culture, inviting contemplation about British heritage, exploring their definition of 'Britishness', employing heritage performance forms to do so.

I argue that the directions of these two performances demonstrate two diametrically opposed formats of folk horror. The rationales of the works are oppositional due to the way they approach their corporeal assaults with horror-based and nostalgic affect. *Soulstice* is affirmative in its presentation of nostalgia, horror, tradition, heritage and community, and as such is nostalgia-affirming; while *Bardcore* is cynical and hence nostalgia-challenging. The performances also curate different degrees of social cohesion within the audience, splintering the boundaries of audience in different locations: one around the audience, one within the audience. Through the management of these dynamics the two pieces communicate functionally different

relationships to the nation and provide oppositional respective relationships of the creative artists to 21st Century Britain.

Folklore and Tradition in Performance

Sigurdssen considers live performance and storytelling to be a fundamental element of culture that draws on the oral heritage of the folk tale. He considers the 'fluid and constantly changing' entity as something that exists partially in the moment. Oral folk stories are something he positions as sitting partially within the relationship between teller and listener which, therefore, can't exist as a fully fixed vision in text. To him, it is not fully possible to trap a piece of folk text and finally pin it down to 'the way things ought to be', even if done word for word, despite that being often perceived as the goal in nostalgic descriptions of folkloric performance.[349] Storytelling and folklore are rooted in this oral tradition, sharing a degree of this fluidity and lack of fixedness. This allows no absolute or definitive version of a story that passes from one teller to the next, one generation to the next, backwards and forwards through time, since the act of telling is inherently loaded with knowing and unknowing adjustments. This is the sense and continuity that oral storytelling contrives in its listeners, but under Sigurdssen's argument can never exist as an absolute truth.

Sigurdssen's argument features two aspects: the first is the fluidity and constantly changing aspect of folklore and heritage; the second is the notion that there is an intimate relationship between teller and listener(s), captured in the folk tale. This relationship evokes a statement on how things 'ought to be'. Given the relationship of folklore to a determined parcel of land, the way things 'ought to be' are definitionally those that occur on a particular location and therefore these become lore and rules for and of the land.

In the instance of a book or a film, the location of the land beholden to the folkloric narrative may be anywhere that happens to be the subject of the narrative.

[349] Sigurðssen, Gísli, *Orality Harnessed: How to Read Written Sagas.* Contained in Mundal, E. and Wellendorf, J., *Oral art forms and their passage into writing*. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press. 2008): 27.

However, in the instance of performance, the location becomes that which is shared between the teller and the listener(s). Indeed, the teller and the listener(s) become the community about which the folklore becomes subject, making those present subjects themselves of the folklore. This shared space may be enacted on the actual land that the narrative is about. For instance, meeting Santa in Lapland is enhanced by the shared awareness that the land is, literally, the one about which the folklore is told. Alternatively, the land and the audience are transported together to become that location. For instance, the Santa interaction may instead take place in Britain but for the duration of the performance the location of both land, performer and audience are all transported to a shared sense of being in Lapland/The North Pole, the play world. Either way differentiation is made from other media – notably books and screen – where the audience do not have the same literal or affectively-near-literal presence within the land of the folklore.

In the moment of storytelling, the location is shared between teller and listener and at that moment the boundaries are established in relation to the community to which the folklore is relevant. Boundaries can be created to embrace the entire group, implying that the audience and teller make up a shared community. Alternatively, boundaries can be split among and between audience members to imply a shared cultural in-group - who are of the landscape and are implicated in the folklore - and the out-group(s) - who do not share in the folklore and therefore neither share the landscape nor are part of the community.

Oral tradition creates both the stories and the means or rituals in which those stories are told and therefore generate intangible heritage. Intangible heritage is the term used by UNESCO to refer to cultural value.[350] The inability of oral tradition to remain fixed makes intangibility a definitive property of oral storytelling and, therefore, folkloric performance. The fragmentary nature of the oral folk tale and the relationship between teller and listener will be perennially negotiated in the invisible space between them. This negotiated space provides the shared sense of whatever, at that moment, becomes defined as *the community* and *its culture*. Tradition is predicated on the idea

[350] UNESCO: Intangible Heritage (2019). [online] Available at: https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003 [Accessed 23 Aug. 2019].

that these momentary senses of community and culture can be replicated in the future, and have been passed down, creating shared moments. This tradition allows the culture and community to spiritually connect between generations in a way that feels real or authentic.

Bauman acknowledges that there is 'no single idea more central to conceptions of folklore than tradition'.[351] He defines tradition as 'both the process of transmission of an isolable cultural element through time and the elements themselves that are transmitted in the process'. On one hand Bauman's definition follows a more accepting, positive view of the ability to isolate cultural attributes from the past and replicate them in the future than does Sigurdssen. But this ignores the nuance that Bauman introduces when using the term 'the process of transmission'.

In cinematic and literary form, the process of transmission is relatively fixed. Nothing will be shaped or changed between the curation of the element and its reception by the spectator. It will still be subject to the nuances of reception in that spectator and the environmental and cultural context in which they consume it. That nuance exists despite no change in the artefact itself. What the consumer consumes is the text of the artefact that came from the past, providing at least a significant amount of legitimacy. However, in live performance this transmission requires more sequences. The coming-together of a community into a shared space; the rituals this coming-together involves; the acknowledgement of the shared landscape, and then the oral storytelling in whichever form it may take. Only from then onwards come the various forms of reception that are partially common to those of film and literature.

Daniel Schultze highlights both the contestability of the idea of authenticity and the high value attributed to it in modern popular reception.[352] The past is a paradigm that can be presented as rooted in objective truth. History is sometimes portrayed in public sentiment as a fact-based subject. This positions the past ideally as a means of communicating supposed authenticity. In looking at the transmission phase of the Bauman model, it seems as though tradition is how 'transmission' of isolable cultural

[351] Bauman, *Retrotopia*: 30.
[352] Schulze, *Authenticity in Contemporary Performance*

elements being brought from the past indicate that the purpose of 'tradition' and, in the case of performance, 'tradition'-al performance formats, gives the impression of elusive authenticity. This authenticity, Schulze claims, is central to modern performance reception. It is also what metamodern theorists Vermeulen and Van Den Akker centralise as part of the post-post-modern experience in which they argue that the contemporary condition rests on creating the sensation of a kind of sentimental authenticity, a romanticised idyll and the modern sensibility to seek a, 'deliberate being out of time, an intentional being out of place, and the pretence that that desired atemporality and displacement are actually possible even though they are not.'[353] Folklore, and especially the space constructed in live folk performance, is an exceptionally fertile space for such sensations. By combining Bauman and Sigurdssen's definitions, we can see a model whereby tradition and traditional performance formats will often be experienced by the spectators as continuous and authentic despite such a thing being impossible. No cultural element from the past can ever be fully replicated. Time passing makes that impossible. Nevertheless, conditions may be created to invite and potentially induce consumers to experience such traditional events as supposedly authentic.

Horror, especially with regards to the representations of the supernatural, implicitly promises the idea that the past can be replicated in the present. The supernatural in most representations indicates *things that go on after they have ended.* However, there are few things that provide a greater sense of continuity than physical landscape. Compared to the other elements of fluidity, it is easiest to see the landscape as being, at least within human experience, permanent and fixed. It is perhaps for this reason why folklore emphasises traits of the landscape to such an extent. References to the land help make customs and folklore appear inherently *natural* and *authentic*. That this authenticity of the landscape *going on* can be slipped into stories alongside other forms of sensed *going on* provides a possible explanation as to why folklore and horror may sit well together. Horror providing parallels of continuity, and revival after ending, to stories of the land. Emphases on the land provide seemingly robust credibility to the supernatural narrative elements.

[353] Vermeulen & Van Den Akker "Notes on metamodernism": 12.

In his discussion of folk drama, Steve Tillis argues that rather than considering folklore on stage as a piece of history that has 'more or less died out…a part of the appeal of heritage theatre, or at least theatre that appeals to a heritage nature is that it does indeed appeal to something that is perceived as having ended, something that has been lost never to truly be refound even if this is strictly inaccurate'.[354] Tillis implies that there is a sense of conclusion inherent to the history of a folk drama, and thus any attempt to stage it in the modern day represents an ongoing form of 'revival' regardless of similar performances. It provides a conflict and the impression that there are forces of modernity that represent obstacles to the continuation of tradition, possibly even the same forces that were responsible for the first supposed conclusion.

Fear and Nostalgia as Affective Bedfellows

Both Reyes and Wilson have emphasised the affective nature of horror spectatorship and the degree to which the responses associated with the genre - fear, the uncanny response, disgust, and shock - are all corporeal responses, experienced first in the body and subsequently interpreted cognitively. [355] [356] This two-phase process that attacks the body subconsciously and then becomes consciously interpreted is augmented in the live environment in which the body is physically present. Live horror becomes even more body and location-focused when compared to literary and screen horror. Once again, the shared space and communal presence emphasises the location and the shared attachment to that location.

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[354] Steve Tillis, *Rethinking folk Drama*. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press. 1999): 13.

[355] Affect fundamentally underpin key works of both academics. Prominently so in Xavier Reyes. *Horror Film and Affect. (*London. Routledge), and Laura Wilson *Spectatorship, Embodiment and Physicality in the Contemporary Mutilation Film. (*NY. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

[356] The corporeal nature of fear is summarised in C. Renda 'Watching "Insidious" – On the Social Construction of Fear'. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(2) (2019): 1784-1804.
The corporeal nature of the uncanny response is also summarised in W. Weisman and J.F. Pena. "Face the Uncanny: The effects of Doppelganger Talking Head Avatars on Affect-Based Trust towards Artificial Intelligence Technology are Mediated by Uncanny Valley Perceptions" *CyberPsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking*, Vol. 24 (3) (2021): 182-188.
The corporeal nature of disgust, shock and other powerful affects are analysed within E. Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014): 155.

Affect is a shared attribute of both horror and nostalgia. Jarret & Gammon highlight the affective nature of the nostalgia response,[357] and Sather-Wagstaff has noted the degree to which affect as a response has the potential to elicit embodied, physiological responses with very powerful effects' and can be powerful enough for both the construction of memory and the access of embodied memories.[358]

Nostalgia generates a sense of social cohesion and identity. These traits, as part of the nostalgic emotion, produce strongly positive sensations in the consumer/spectator. Jarrett and Gammon found that Nostalgia increases current levels of positive affect, self-esteem and social connectedness – a sense of acceptance, inclusion, belonging',[359] indicating that it is an extremely desirable sensation that can have lasting impact on self-actualisation and sense of community. To set this positive cathartic response against its near opposite, that of fear and the uncanny and the alienation and isolation these sensations bring, has the potential to provide a powerful experience.

Nostalgia combines conceptual memories involving 'loss or displacement (with) a romance with one's own fantasy',[360] making it a useful tool of those in power looking to romanticise difficulties in the present by making recourse to a glorious past. Throughout his book, *The Ministry of Nostalgia*, Owen Hatherley argues that the British public, faced with austerity politics under the post-2010 government, began to appeal to a sense of history, or, to be more accurate, a quasi-utopianised version of history in order to sell the suffering felt from the austerity policy.[361] This positioned community suffering and resulting stoicism as being part of a national story via a sense of shared hardship. This hardship, experienced collectively as a community or even as a community-affirming event, consequently making the austerity feel more of a national duty. This duty may contextualise, perhaps partially negate, this suffering then with a

[357] David Jarratt & Sean Gammon, "'We had the most wonderful times': Seaside nostalgia at a British Resort," *Tourism Recreation Research* 31(2) (2016): 42.
[358] Sather-Wagstaff, Joy, *Making Polysense of the World: Affect, Memory, Heritage,* contained in Tolia-Kelly. D, Waterton, E & Watson. S, (2016). *Heritage, Affect and Emotion* (London. Routledge. 2016): 12.
[359] Jarrett & Gammon, "We had the most wonderful times": 43.
[360] Svetlana Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia* (London: Basic Books, 2001): 13.
[361] Owen Hatherley, *The Ministry of Nostalgia*. (London: Verso, 2016): The introduction and a core argument of the whole book.

sense of perceived positive purpose. Jarrett & Gammon identify that reconnection with the past can enter a feedback loop when combined with a sense of dissatisfaction with the present and, just as importantly, can create a flux between personal experiences in the past and a more general sense of communal history. Nostalgia 'hinges on the loss of childhood yet it enables a positive re-telling of the past, underpinning family narratives'.[362] Hence, 'nostalgia, may be regarded as the longing to return to a seemingly ideal past, which requires memory arousal and amalgamation of positive and negative states, such as comfort, warmth and sadness'.[363] Note that the 'amalgamation of positive and negative states' which hinge on bodily sensations and fundamental aspects of living once again provide an indication of why horror, which brings strongly negative sensations at times, might prove an effective accompaniment for folkloric stories. This is a mechanism where fear or suffering affect provides a quick means of accessing vulnerable states including personal states of childhood and the memory of childhood naivety and insecurity.

It is satisfying and convenient for public figures to appeal to nostalgia. For politicians, journalists and commentators, generating a sense of lost past provides very easy wins with a general public that live in an era of affect and ongoing suspicion of fake news and media, and commentators have observed a fetishisation of the real.[364] In this context what *feels* real is as or more important than objectivity, making this a matter of affect as much as materialism and this dynamic has veered into sociological scholarship as a competition for 'realness' with paradigms such as Joe Kennedy's *authentocracy* which argues that the experience felt by some is that 'we must now fall back on some notion of tradition' via a 'spurious concern for "real people"'.[365] This can be observed in performance as well, as manifest by the *Soulstice* performance I will explore. To condition nostalgia and to both point out that continuation is not really possible, that folklore is constructed and not enduring, and that the past cannot be replicated in the present may be more accurate but represents a much harder argument, feels dissonant, and requires a level of distancing from the affective catharsis of nostalgia. This will be

[362] Jarrett & Gammon, "We had the most wonderful times," :43.
[363] Ibid.
[364] H. Barekat *"Authentocrats" by Joe Kennedy review – privileging the working class 'real' in politics and culture.* Published in The Guardian, 18 July 2018
[365] Joe Kennedy *Authentocracy: Culture, Politics and the New Seriousness.* (Repeater, 2018)

manifest in the *This Is Bardcore* performance. When producing live folk horror, it is impossible to remain neutral in one's presentation on nostalgia and thus on the commentary the piece makes about heritage, tradition and the relationship between community and individual identity.

Two Case Studies: Soulstice and Story Beast: This is Bardcore

Soulstice was a site-adaptable performance inspired by mumming plays. Mumming plays are one of many heritage forms of British performance and consistent with other heritage forms are seasonal in nature being performed primarily at midsummer, Christmas and Easter. Mumming as documented by Hannant has multiple formats varying across Britain.[366] It has sundry regional variant names such as 'guising' and pace-egging.[367] The plays feature folkloric characters such as Robin Hood and Father Christmas and have been argued to sometimes incorporate aspects of paganism deliberately. The variation among mumming plays leads to a difficulty in developing a precise definition, however in Brody's seminal text, *The English Mummers and their Plays,* he argues that two elements remain common to all mumming plays in that, 'we can safely say all the hundreds of texts and fragments collected so far have in common, they are all seasonal and they all contain a death and resurrection somewhere in the course of their action'.[368] Death and resurrection make for a notable concoction, since they are common themes of both the spiritual traditions that have marked Britishness as indicated above, namely Christianity and paganism.

One form described by Brody is the hero-combat mumming play, in which a heroic figure, often named as St George or The White Knight, is challenged to combat by an antagonistic figure, often referred to as a Black or Turkish Knight. The two play out their combat and one of the pair falls slain only to be revived by a third-party doctor.[369] Firstly, the race-coding of the knights in their more traditional form provides a representation of the *local*, including the community present, being threatened by the

[366] Sara Hannant, *Mummers, maypoles and milkmaids*. (London: Merrell, 2011):15, 130, 151.
[367] Adam Brody, *The English Mummers and Their Plays*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul., 1970): 3.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid.:5.

outside. The drama of the fight is Britishness defended in the most literal form: the noble paragon of British virtue against the heathen outsider. However, the form of the drama has other parallels in folklore, especially once the revival element of the mumming play is considered. The revival can be seen as a parallel of Christian resurrection mythology, but some scholars such as Brody claim these can be traced to paganism and contain pagan symbolism. *Soulstice* takes these traces and symbols and enhances them so that the notional pagan origins of mumming are fully affirmed. Director Jason Karl does this not just by more prominently featuring pagan symbolism, but by making the central conflict directly reference pagan mythology – yet maintaining the British landscape focus and the use of characters from seasonal, Christian and British historical folklore. The overarching narrative of *Sousltice* dispenses completely with ethnic coding to the combatants, and instead presents a variant of the story through the figures of the holly king and the oak king.[370] These stories written about extensively by Robert Graves and John Williamson have been adopted by various contemporary neo-pagan and wiccan traditions as symbolising the cyclical nature of life and the seasons.

In *Soulstice,* audiences are subject to uncanny music and darkness before being engaged by Beelzebob, the Christian Devil and stock archetype within the traditional mumming play, who functions as the mumming narrator, or guiser, in this story taking the traditional role of the welcomer-in (also known as caller-in). His first line to the audience is:

In Times Long Gone and Christmas Past
The Mummers' Magic Spell Was Cast

These lines demonstrate several dynamics already addressed. Firstly, the connection to the past and sense of something that has been complete, or in this case 'long gone'. Secondly, the direct appeal to seasonality since the audience is being presented with a

[370] Discussion and analysis of the Holly King and the Oak King narrative are found in Robert Graves. *The White Goddess: A historical grammar of poetic myth.* (New York: Octagon Books. 1978).; and John Williamson. *The Oak King, the Holly King, and the Unicorn: the myths and symbolism of the unicorn tapestries*. (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1986). Variations of the story exist but all feature conflict between avatars of the traditional seasons of the year.

Christianity-evoking figure referring to a Christian seasonal festival, yet simultaneously is pointing to the idea of 'magic' in a way seemingly distanced from the Christian.

The principal characters are Dame Seasons, Robin Goodfellow, and Jack Frost. Robin and Jack are folkloresque, pop culture savvy alternatives to the oak and holly kings of the usual narrative. Dame Seasons' name and function is an unambiguous reference to 'Mother Earth', and her characterisation (larger than life, confident and flirtatious) evokes the persona of a pantomime dame – a British seasonal tradition with which the audience is likely to be more familiar than mumming.[371] Robin is the protagonist of the hero combat. He is the son of Dame Seasons and reigns over a kingdom of greenery and bounty. Robin Goodfellow is a name most likely to be familiar to audiences as the character Puck, a sprite, from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The makeup of Robin Goodfellow also evokes other British figures of Summer: The Green Man, Jack Barleycorn or Jack-of-the-Green. This Robin Goodfellow, then, creates an amalgam of British-seeming, Summer-related folkloric figures into one anthropomorphic character. Various forms of the Green Man are associated with pagan imagery surrounding the summer months.[372] Jack Frost takes the equivalent function of the Turkish knight. Jack Frost is introduced with a dance, a figure of snow and cold. He is Dame Seasons' wayward son and the two fight for supremacy over the land. Jack Frost replaces the holly king of the common version of this story, perhaps as he is a more familiar character to western audiences as the secular personification of Winter. Most audiences would likely know the name and the characterisation from *A Christmas Song*,[373] or from his portrayal in the popular film *Santa Clause 3*.[374] In *Soulstice,* Jack Frost is the victor in the fight between himself and Robin and takes over the rule of the landscape.

Dame Seasons' lamentations over her slain son are answered by a questionable doctor in plague mask: Doctor Dee – an archetype predicated on quack doctors and alchemists based on the seventeenth century Royal court alchemist and doctor Dr John

[371] The popularity of pantomime in the UK is summarised in Taylor, *British Pantomime Performance.*
[372] Hannant, *Mummers, Maypoles and Milkmaids*: 19
[373] Robert Wells and Mel Tormé, *The Christmas Song* (1945)
[374] *Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause* (2006), [film] Directed by Michael Lembeck. USA: Buena Vista Pictures

Dee and existing as an archetype on the British stage prior even to that.[375] The Doctor brings Robin back to life via ambiguous magic. The drama is concluded by the arrival of Old Father Nick, costumed in his more familiar form of Father Christmas, who is Dame Seasons' lover and the assumed father to both Robin and Jack. He agrees that the two warring figures, the personification of Summer and Winter, should reign for half the year each.

By incorporating a combat play featuring a resurrection narrative, set in rhyming couplets, with the inclusion of figures from British folklore, *Soulstice* can legitimately claim to follow the form of a mumming play. However, the incorporation of pagan mythology in which one cycle of life is destroyed in order to facilitate regeneration is taken much more literally in *Soulstice* than any known version of mumming plays. *Soulstice* is using narrative form and pop culture sensibilities in order to enact an affirmative piece of pagan mythology that feels legitimate, specifically tied to the land that the audience are in (in this instance both British and Boltonian).

The narrative of the affect in *Soulstice* augments the rationale of the show. The description of the show above might not appear to be folk horror in the reading owing to a relative lack of obvious horror component in the narrative, but the production company AtmosFEAR! Are an outfit who specialise in commercial horror. The affect instigated at the start of the show: a grotesquely adorned Satan emerging from the darkness to the refrain of ethereal music was intended to create an uncanny affective response and the costume, lighting, music, masks and appeals to a greater magic all have shared origins in horror and employed the grammar of horror. However, the invitations for affect that develop in the progression of *Soulstice's* narrative indicate a marked shift away from horror and towards the affective sensations associated with nostalgia. As Tolia-Kelly has demonstrated, individuals have differing tendencies towards varied forms of affect and so have varied degrees of affective capacities.[376]

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[375] A summary of the history of John Dee's representation is included in Bailey-Thiele, Anna. "The hieroglyphic Monad of Dr John Dee as a synthesis of late renaissance European thought." PhD diss., Murdoch University, (2015). While the history of quack doctors as a tradition in English theatre is included in Kolin, Philip C. The Elizabethan stage doctor as a dramatic convention. Northwestern University, (1973).

[376] Divya Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton & Steve Watson, *Heritage, Affect and Emotion* (London: Routledge, 2016): 213.

Subsequently affective works will all have heterogenous spectatorship and, with it, heterogenous reception that is difficult to control. I propose that the affect and embodiment generated using techniques of horror theatre are employed in *Soulstice* to exert greater control and garner a more homogenous audience response in the later stages of the play. In other words, the horror elements create a sense of corporeal vulnerability that can be filled with the positive corporeal sensations associated with the nostalgic affect response. The show creates an impression of identity with heritage and the past that is experienced on an affective level.[377] *Soulstice* may aim to generate the positive affective attributes associated with heritage and embodied tendencies of the nostalgic response by first exposing the bodies of the spectators to the forms of affect associated with horror. Instead of fear, however, this embodiment is then subject to the states of belonging, warmth and vitality associated with nostalgia.[378]

In the case of *Soulstice,* the purpose of this association is to make the show's overtly pagan presentation and argument be palatable to as wide an audience as possible. This is done by making pagan mythology, via the use of the popular and folk theatre forms, come across as a sincere and, most importantly, authentic representation of British heritage. It is intended to connect the audience with a felt sense of a conceived "Britain's pagan history" of which they are part of the community and legacy in the present. The use of heritage, site-specific venues also emphasise this dynamic as the supposedly historical appeals of the production are sensed as legitimate by the environment of the shared space. The real-life location validating the seeming claims of the arguments of the fictional-life location and feeling like this is, authentically, a story of *the land*.

In contrast to this stands *Bardcore*. Falle's presentation is a combination of stand up and variety, self-described as 'folk horror comedy'. *Bardcore*'s eponymous Story Beast is described in marketing materials as a 'trans dimensional bard' who travels between different versions of Britain from plane to plane using a portal – a tree. One such tree is the primary piece of set on stage. The tree is adorned with white lights

[377] Sather-Wagstaff, *Making Polysense of the World:* 18.
[378] Vanessa May, "Belonging from afar: nostalgia, time and memory," *The Sociological Review*, 65(2) (2017): 401-415

which illuminate to speak and interact with the Beast to comic effect. The trope evoked is that of a folk-hero human 'speaking to the land' which in this production, was both figurative and literal: *Bardcore* presents this trope calling attention to it and simultaneously making such an idea, often rendered sincerely and with Romantic potential, seem ludicrous. The show is made up of loosely connected songs, stand up sets, poems, and sequences of audience interaction. The version attended by the author was in a late-night slot at the Edinburgh Fringe, and appeared to be part of a programme aiming to attract and audience looking for pure entertainment. The feel of the event was informal, more akin to an atmosphere of stand-up comedy than a theatrical performance.

Some scholars have emphasised a difference between personal and collective nostalgia, with a good summary of the current arguments of nostalgic ontology being provided in Sedikides & Wildschut.[379] The variation of nostalgia between individual, collective and permeable memory is explored in *Bardcore*. When confronted with nostalgia for events and exposures that have been experienced in childhood there can be a corporeal transformation into those moments of childhood and personal experience.[380] References to British paraphernalia from the previous century that audience members may have encountered at fixed moments in time are Embedded into the variety of *Bardcore's* many songs and poems. Some of the references refer to pop or niche culture of the past and will be recognisable to a limited proportion of those in attendance, based on age or interests. I will attempt to list each of these 'mini-experiences' as referents below.

The *Bardcore* performance was a one-man cabaret, with vignettes pulled together by a loose narrative. Comedic songs performed in *Bardcore* include *I am a Horse (And I'm in Your House)*, sung by the Story Beast wearing a large rubber horse mask [Referent 1: A reference to the various regional horse performance traditions

[379] Constantine Sedikides & Tim Wildschut. 'The sociality of personal and collective nostalgia'. *European Review of Social Psychology* 30 (1) (2019): 123-173

[380] Constantine Sedikides; Tim Wildschut; Wing-Yee Cheung, Clay Routledge, Erica G. Hepper, Jamie Arndt; Kenneth Vail; Xinyue Zhou; Kenny Brackstone; A.J.J.M. Vingerhoets, "Nostalgia fosters self-continuity: |Uncovering the mechanism (social connectedness) and the consequence (eudemonic well-being)," *Emotion* 16: Under Conclusion

across Britain such as Welsh Mari Lywd and Cornish 'Obby 'Oss Penglaz];[381] *Jam*, a song about a man covered in strawberry jam being attacked by wasps [Referent 2: The commonly shared British experience of going for a picnic on a rare sunny day and having it ruined by flying creatures]; *Halloween,* a version of the song *Monster Mash* in which the audience are supposedly cursed by performing ritualistic dance moves [Referent 3: The song itself, recorded by Bobby Pickett in 1962 and Referent 4: Being awkwardly asked to dance in a children's party environment]; and *Cone Dog*, about a frustrated dog forced to wear a protective cone following a trip to the vets [Referent 5: Experiencing this event with one's own pet].

Poems and stories from the show include *Bertie the Bus,* a grotesque rendition of a story about an anthropomorphic bus made of human flesh [Referent 6: this is a thinly disguised satire of Wilbert Awbry's *Railway Series*]; *Gruber,* a rendition of the plot of the film *Die Hard* told in rhyming iambic pentameter [Referent 7: the popular move Die Hard and Referent 8: Shakespearean verse]; and *Little Whingeing* a poem set in the world of *Harry Potter [*Referent 9: The Harry Potter Books and Movies].

Interactive segments include a *Blue Peter* sequence [Referent 10 The long running British children's television series *Blue Peter*] in which the audience are taught how to use various objects such as pasta shapes, glitter, and a cornflake box [Referent 11: School experiences of making these types of art works, typical of primary schools in the 70s to 90s. Also Referent 12: A more specific reference to the "Tracy Island" construction on *Blue Peter,* a Christmas phenomenon in Britain in 1992, and *Thunderbirds*, the popular marionette TV show from which Tracy Island originated]; to construct an archaeological dig site [This included Referent 13: Direct calls to the 1971 Doctor Who serial *The Daemons* and Referent 14: neolithic findings on British soil of a similar nature, most specifically the Le Houge Bie remains site in Jersey] and a game of audience pass-the-parcel [Referent 15: the experience of playing the game as a child] to determine a designated 'King' who, it is implied, will likely be sacrificed at the end of the performance [Referent 16: The Wicker Man].

[381] Hannant, *Mummers, Maypoles and Milkmaids:* 10

The referents above are significantly more heterogenous than those contained within *Soulstice.* Some of the referents are based on 'collective' knowledge but will be beyond the knowledge of some audience members; others address popular culture, however audience members experience of and context of consumption of that popular culture will be multifaceted; finally, some referents refer to more general common life experiences that many in the audience will have had, but represent different individual past memories. These appeals to personal memories lead to a performance where nostalgia, or at least corporeal attachment to past times, is taking place in the shared space. However, these corporeal abductions are occurring individually, not as a community. Individual journeys and histories are being emphasised, and as such the individual differing relationships of the people collected to the Britain. It is clear here that the ideas and symbols that represent Britain are of differing levels of importance and attachment to different people.

The loosely-connected narrative concludes with Story Beast asking the evening's selected monarch, by this time adorned with leaves, a garland, and a branch-staff (*Bardcore's* version of the Green Man image) to come on a journey across dimensions:

> For I know there are many Britains out there among the never-ending forking paths of what is and what could be. And among those, I think there must be a Perfect Britain.

Story Beast then deviates into an extended monologue describing this 'perfect Britain', a rural idyll in which everything is the ideal version imagined by the spectator:

> In this Perfect Britain everyone is happy! Everyone is healthy! Everyone is loved and respected!... Everyone that is except…

He describes the exception: a carriage containing the popular British naturalist and nature-presenter David Attenborough:

> …who sits shackled hobbled within. His mouth stopped with wax lest he narrate the Natural History of even a single sparrow. Everybody knows that only suffering of one so pure as David Attenborough can pay the price for their unending happiness.

The finale of the show presents and ridicules the idea of a 'perfect' Britain. This is a direct and knowing appropriation of Ursula K Le Guin's *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* about a utopia maintained by the suffering of a single child.[382] Falle replaces the suffering of an innocent child in Le Guin's original with that of David Attenborough, presented as a pinnacle of Britishness, a secular British Christ. These different experiences are paralleled by the in-show references to there being an infinite number of Britains across the different realities that Story Beast traverses: which become the infinite Britains of the audience's individual journeys: no one Britain the same and the idea of a perfect Britain presented as monstrous. Falle aligns with Sigurdssen argument that indeed momentary representations of history are fluid, and impossible to trap. This evokes the sense that there can be no one true perfect Britain. No strictly accurate Britain.

In conclusion, *Soulstice* employs an historical theatre form, appeals to two different forms of affect, and manipulates the sense of shared space surrounding its audience, to create a nostalgia-affirming experience. Perhaps describable as a kind of heritage propaganda, it invites the audience to recognise its pagan themes implicitly tying them to a shared sense of Britishness using the characters of Robin Goodfellow and Father Christmas and the use of a recognisable pantomime style and invites the audience to experience themselves as taking part in a piece of intangible cultural heritage using direct appeals to the body to do so. It uses affect to bypass potential cognitive cynicism, appealing to the audience's likely sense of pre-existing relationship to their own landscape and encouraging the sense of shared communality. *Bardcore* contrasts this journey The management of affect in that case being dissonant, jarring and prone to jerk the individual on their own personal journey, countering any sense of collectivism and affirmation.

Appealing to affect is usually more persuasive than appealing to objectivity and presenting a nostalgic view of the past as an objective tradition is a highly effective means of appealing to the former while appearing to appeal to the latter.[383] The

[382] Le Guin, U. (1973). *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*.
[383] Eunjin Kim, S. Ratneshawar & Esther Thorson, "Why Narrative Ads Work: An Integrated Process Explanation", *Journal of Advertising.* 46(2)(2017): 283-296

increasing predominance of folkloric texts in contemporary pop culture indicates increased awareness of folklore as valuable and viable in a neoliberal environment.[384] As we witness our news becoming taken over with political figures increasingly keen to generate collective senses of a shared objective nationhood and emotionally appealing to the nostalgia for a part-true, part-fictive, often folkloresque history, the management of affect within folkloric and horror artworks – and especially in those that combine the two – will likely provide a fascinating window into artists' representation of these national sentiments.

[384] Foster & Tolbert, *The Folkloresque*: p.5.

Scripts for both *Soulstice: A Twisted Tale of Two Seasons* and *Story Beast: This is Bardcore* were kindly provided and are replicated with permission from the artists.

CHAPTER 6: Empty Behind the Eyes:

Liveness and Aliveness - Chasing the Uncanny in the Contemporary Haunt Industry

In this final chapter, I address an element of identity that pertains to mortality. Horror provides an array of means by which mortality may be explored and this has been addressed by Keisner, who argues that 'horror movies, while one step removed from the experience, allow viewers a vicarious opportunity to experience the moment of death without actually dying—a safe way to play with death'.[385] Christine Davis and Jonathan Paine draw on similar arguments, stating that ' The ever-present proximity of death is often experienced as a form of universal horror'.[386] Consequentially, fiction can provide a forum for self-interrogation and understanding, since 'Horror stories offer a narrative arena in which to develop a dialogic relationship with death and to fathom what mortality means as beings living to die'.[387] Davis and Paine's paper on the subject of horror films' relationship with the dead, drawn from communication studies, will inform this chapter. Two areas of focus in both the Davis and Paine paper and this chapter are the presentation of death and the associated sensations of the uncanny and, subsequently, the use of the undead as a trope within the horror genre as a means of maintaining that 'dialogic relationship with death'.

The presentation of death within live horror theatre will be explored in this chapter by examining three different forms. Firstly, the use of death in live horror: both in terms of the literal use of organic dead matter and in the representation of death. Secondly, the use of the theatrical effect commonly associated with the replication of death: the uncanny invocation of absence and presence simultaneously. Thirdly, the use of inanimate humanlike objects which trigger the sensation commonly referred to as uncanny valley syndrome. Each of these elements will be interrogated in turn. The relevance of these three elements is their common link to one of the core elements of

[385] Keisner, Jody, "Do you want to watch? A study of the visual rhetoric of the postmodern horror film," *Women's Studies* 37 (2008): 409-410.
[386] Davis, Christine & Paine, Jonathan, "A Dialogue with (Un)Death: Horror Films as a Discursive Attempt to Construct a Relationship with the Dead," *Journal of Loss and Trauma.* 20 (2015): 421.
[387] Ibid.: 427.

identity - one's relationship with mortality. In the horror genre the idea of death is omnipresent as has been observed by scholars within both literary and film criticism.[388] The live environment provides alternative possibilities and challenges in the representation of death. Liveness provides opportunities for more visceral and immediate presentations. It is possible to take advantage of communal space and to use the immediacy and communal aspects of live performance to highlight the differences between imagined death, imagined afterlife, the corpse, and the difficulty humans have in conceiving and representing what death means.

The Problematic Nature of Representing Death and Spectator Response

The presentation of a corpse is used extensively within horror. In *Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva situates the corpse as the epitome of the abject, acknowledging the relationship between our own living body and the corpse and creates an unavoidable physical response,

> A corpse is able to inexorably provide sensations of both disgust and fascination as they are so fundamentally linked to living bodies, including our own in a reminder of our own mortality.[389]

Here she details two potential routes of response for the spectator - disgust and an invitation to voyeurism. These two responses correlate with a route towards a more passive spectator and separate route for more active spectator.

The corpse can create affect and horror as 'gross bodies elicit a tangible physical response in us: chills, goose bumps, inarticulate noises, subtle movements of the face, a grin, a laugh, a scream, sort of violence that peels us from the inside out'.[390] The affective

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[388] Examples of this include Taylor, L. D. (2012). "Death and television: Terror management theory and themes of law and justice on television," *Death Studies* 36: 340–359.; and Bishop, K., "Dead man still walking".*Journal of Popular Film and Television* 37 (2009): 16–25.
[389] Kristeva, Julia. *Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.
[390] Stommel, Jesse, "The Loveliness of Decay: Rotting Flesh, Literary Matter, and Dead Media," *Journal of the fantastic in the arts* 25 (2/3 (91)) (2015): 333.

response to the corpse is often executed to great effect within film, detailed by Reyes and Wilson as discussed previously in the thesis. Both scholars discuss interactions between active and passive audience responses in contemporary films that emphasise the mutilated or dead body. Following these uses in film, it is perhaps intuitive that death and the corpse could be even more effective in a live environment due to increased immediacy and intimacy. It is not uncommon for immersive haunts to be littered with fake corpses. However, the portrayal of death in such an environment will often come with a challenge: sustaining a credibility and necessary collaboration with the spectator to create a sense of fiction in which those corpses are real.

While the live environment allows for greater intimacy, it also can prove harder in sustaining a sense of reality as the mimesis of performance becomes more exposed and itself becomes uncanny, as explored by Twitchin.[391] Under the circumstances present in live theatre the potentially increased levels of affective response that can be generated when a spectator confronts a grotesque body or corpse is limited by a barrier. This barrier is a compromised realism; a consequence of performance mechanics in presenting the dead body and the resulting spectator awareness of the falseness of any actual death. There is a potentially greater barrier between the spectator's affective response to the reality of looking at something that isn't a dead body (i.e. A prop or a living person pretending to be dead) and the suspension of disbelief needed to accept the dead body as part of the fictional world. This barrier is likely to be even greater in immersive theatre, owing to the increased degree in which the spectator feels part of the environment, and is the one faced by producers of live horror. These producers may give up on seeking the response described by Stommel, and instead use corpses not as figures of horror but instead as mere set dressing to generate a wider sense of atmosphere or detail, or even to generate a sense of macabre humour. This is a widespread practice in the industry.

The challenges proposed by the live representation of death and undeath can be summarised through an account of a personal experience of viewing a performance of

[391] Twitchin, Mischa. *The theatre of death: the uncanny in mimesis: Tadeusz Kantor, Aby Warburg, and an iconology of the actor* (London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): A core premise of the book, as established in the introduction.

Forced Entertainment's *The Coming Storm*. The performance, a collage of begun-yet never finished-stories included death in multiple ways. It featured repeated patterns of killing – at least two death scenes were enacted multiple times – and there was an extended representation of an archetypal ghost: an actor covered with a white blanket and emitting a high pitched "wooooo!" sound. I was struck with the company's regular use of dying as a motif in their work, a theme also evident in their previous work *First Night.*[392] I asked director Tim Etchells, following the performance, why this motif of the action of dying came up so frequently within Forced Entertainment's body of work, noting that these performances did not seem to place death or mortality as a key theme within these pieces' rationales – *The Coming Storm* being a piece of work primarily about storytelling. His informal answer to this may be summarised in three stages: firstly, he stated that it is interesting to play dead on stage since it is something that is, by its own definition, impossible; secondly, that this impossibility is very clear to both performers and audience at the moment of viewing; thirdly, that the dissonance generated by this implausibility was amusing. Both this mimetic impossibility and the resulting potential for amusement will become a running theme in the endeavour to represent death onstage and, as we shall see, undeath as well. The relevance of this dynamic being exposed by a piece of work about storytelling and theatricality is not accidental. *The Coming Storm* saw a series of frustrated authors attempt to control the telling of their stories and repeatedly fail. The presence and control of authors themselves will also become a key theme in this chapter, which this chapter argues that any rendering of death and undeath requires the author to give up significant amounts of control over to the audience in a high-risk transaction that relies upon affect, individual differences, and the spectator's self-perception of their role. Similar dynamics are explored in the Spymonkey's *The Complete Deaths* originating at Brighton Festival in 2016 which involved the comical performance of killing sequences from Shakespeare's plays. The surrounding premise for this involves the failure of an author in 'Toby Park, the intellectual, (who) is determined to shatter the complacency of the well-fed bourgeois audience by confronting us with our own mortality' by staging the violent

[392] Williams, David (2009). "Killing the Audience: Forced Entertainment's First Night". *Australasian drama studies*, Vol.54 (54): 50.

acts all together, with humorous consequences.[393] The play's meta-narrative highlights the near impossibility of rendering deaths in a live environment, especially visceral and violent ones, in a manner that doesn't have the potential for humour.

Jungmin Song argues that, within art, death is an abstract idea that 'cannot be faked in material form' because it does not have one.[394] The concept is ephemeral and only marked by indexes of death, notably the corpse. As such, this idea of death is equally conceptual if represented by a real corpse, skeleton or a living person with blood coming out of their mouth on a gimmicked table. It is worth considering the differing levels of authenticity when representing both death as a concept and the physical corpse onstage, starting with the use of literal human artefacts within both artistic and theatrical works.

Some implementations of authentic death within the arts comes in the work of Mexican artist Teresa Margolles. Margolles deploys human artefacts within her work, both within the SMEFO group responsible for works such as *Lavatio Corporis* (1994) and individually such as *Entierro* (1999), *Grumos Sobre La Piel* (2001*), Papele* (2003) and *Muerte Sin Fin* (2006). SMEFO, originally a death-metal folk group were claimed by Margolles to primarily be concerned with considering the 'life of the corpse',[395] however critical attention given to the group primarily revolves around its socio-political commentary 'revis(ing) art history from a necrophilic perspective',[396] with focus on Mexico's colonial and violent past: *Lavatio Corporis* – a carousel formed of dead horses – representing a 'reading into … Mexican national allegory' using 'a well-known icon of colonialism'.[397] Meanwhile Margolles' individual work has also largely been interpreted in relation to Mexico and South America's dissonant position as significant world

[393] Clare Brennan, 'The Complete Deaths review – poignant and hilarious' *The Observer* 15 May 2016. Available online at: https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/may/15/the-complete-deaths-spymonkey-review-shakespeare-brighton-festival

[394] Song, Jungmin, "Death and the anthropomorphic life of objects in performance: Marina Abramović's Nude with Skeleton and other animations". *Performance Research - A Journal of the Performing Arts,* 20 (2) (2015): 6.

[395] Cuauhtemoc Medina, "Zones of Tolerance: Teresa Margolles, SEMEFO and Beyond," *Parachute* 104, (2001): 320.

[396] Ibid.: 321

[397] Carroll, Amy Sara "Muerte Sin Fin: Teresa Margolles's Gendered States of Exception*". TDR : Drama review* 54 (2) (2010) :104.

powers with nevertheless huge social problems – 'Countries not at war yet with death rates comparable to those in war zones'.[398]

The purpose of Margolles' use of human artefacts and exploration of death is largely sociopolitical, as she 'works on…mortuary by-products through an authentic arsenal of tactics of production that connect the embodied spectator to the lingering poverty and violence embedded in the (after)life of the corpse'.[399] This validates the potency of connecting the spectator to an imagined alternative self corporeally via the presentation of death.

Margolles' work speaks of the power of the presentation of death in an 'authentic' manner within artistic presentation. Yet this assertion sits within the visual arts, rather than performance. By contrast, Marina Abramovic is quoted as saying that performance artistry is rooted in a hatred of theatre,

> Theatre is fake...the knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real.[400]

Abramovic's claim here would prevent the satisfactory rendering of death in theatre in any form, and that transition in the presentation of death from visual and performative arts into wider performance and theatre is not possible. The use of human remains is, however, not solely the domain of visual and performance art. A Royal Shakespeare Company version of *Hamlet* in 2008, already prominent in the press owing to the presence of David Tennant, made some headlines owing to the use of the real skull of Andre Tchaikowsky, a Polish musician who had requested for his cranium to be used as "the role" of Yoric following his death in 1982. This story was reported widely as a macabre curio in The Guardian, Metro, Telegraph, BBC online and Daily Mail

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[398] Painter (2008), quoted in Carroll, "Muerte Sin Fin": 123.

[399] Romero, Luis Gómez, "Beyond the Corpse-Barbarian: The Radical (Mexican) Grammar of Death in the Works of Teresa Margolles and Sergio González Rodríguez", *Law & Literature*, 33:3 (2021) DOI: 10.1080/1535685X.2021.1919408: 521

[400] Stowell-Kaplan, Isabel, "Playing with Then and Now." *Performance Research* 26 (7) (2021) DOI: 10.1080/13528165.2021.2059279: 148.

evidencing a strange public fascination with the skull's usage.[401] Director Greg Doran claimed to want the performance to be 'as real as possible' implying the skull contributed.[402] Aoife Monks addresses the curious assumptions regarding human remains in theatre and their ability to spark some hypothetical connection between past and present that is inaccessible when using copy skulls, even when physically identical. The use of remains in these contexts seem to have potent power in stimulating the actor who knows they are real, and yet at the same time – evidenced by the media response – their very realness seems to have the potential to derail the process by asserting their autonomy from being theatricised to the audience: who find themselves possibly reminded of the *fakeness* of Hamlet due to excessive awareness of the *realness* of the single artefact. When it comes to the use of the human remains as theatrical artefact, Abramovic's claims about the difference between performance and theatre are thus validated.

However, what Abramovic appears to ignore is the dynamic that Etchells highlighted: agency of the spectator's response in the perception of death, rather than the authenticity of the actual death. The idea of death and death itself are different things. This has been addressed more in dance scholarship where there is, as with theatrical death and especially undeath, an inherent uncanny aspect to any staging,

> 'Through the staging of death we can think about watching as a kind of labor (sic) that mediated between what could and could not physically happen on stage, and in which, accordingly, spectators would co-produce dance's dramaturgy',[403]

writes Kate Elswit in her chapter *Death, Dance and Direct Expression*. She continues,

> …the crucial question concerns not the problems of representation in themselves that these works (representing death) pose. Rather it has to do with how their spectacles both complicated and clarify (cultural) understanding of expressibility as located in the bodies of dancers whose experience of their own physicality was crucial for those watching.[404]

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[401] Monks, Aoife, "Human Remains: Acting, Objects, and Belief in Performance", *Theatre and Material Culture* 64 (3), (2012): 355.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Elswit, Kate. *Watching Weimar Dance* (Oxford University Press, New York. 2014): 19
[404] Ibid.: 21

Spectators, according to Elswit, can be co-opted to author the act of death or the corpse - and perhaps, the spirit - if called upon to do so. As Etchells discussed, just because an audience perceives a death or corpse doesn't mean that the author can easily control how the audience responds. A challenge for the producer of a performance that involves the act of death is to made decisions regarding how to facilitate, mediate or otherwise siphon the agency of the audience in their spectatorship.

As with producing a 'dance of death', the performance of a zombie, vampire - or even a corpse - is not in itself difficult to present, but to achieve mimesis, and therefore for a sense of uncanny to be developed, there needs to be a form of active spectatorship. This requires a heavy suspension of disbelief, an active imagination, or, for the spectator to have lost sight of her bearings in order to not just 'recognise' the corpse, vampire or zombie but to generate a legitimate sense of mimesis.

Spectator Agency and Human Remains – Cabaret du Néant and the ZPS Kroll Opera House Installation:

Two case studies embody the power of spectator agency in the interpretation of authentic human remains. The first is a chandelier made of human bone that was featured in the Cabaret du Néant in the Montmartre district of Paris for many decades in the early twentieth century; while the second is a monument allegedly containing human remains that was set outside the Reichstag building by the German Art Collective ZPS (Centre for Political Beauty).

The *Cabaret du Néant* (Cabaret of Nothingness) was established in 1892, and remained in the Boulevard du Cichy until the mid-20th Century.[405] Accounts of the events at the Cabaret are readily available in contemporaneous reviews, as in an 1896 edition of the *London Journal* under an article entitled *A Ghastly Joke*.[406] The *Cabaret du Néant* was a themed restaurant and cabaret in which patrons sat drinking out of skull-

[405] Strange Remains "The human bone chandelier and other creepy decorations of the cabaret of death". Strange Remains. January 2016: (https://strangeremains.com/2016/01/03/the-human-bone-chandelier-and-other-creepy-decorations-of-the-cabaret-of-death/#:~:text=The%20human%20bone%20chandelier%20at,opened%20in%20the%20early%201890's).
[406] *London Journal Parisian Correspondent*, 1896: 64

shaped drinking vessels off coffin-shaped tables. Live entertainment at the cabaret included illusions, tricks in which patrons were 'turned' into skeletons and live interactions with characters alongside a drinking area, the *Salle D'Intoxication*. In the salon, patrons drank horror-themed beverages while lit by candles set inside real bones, including a chandelier centrepiece made out of authentic human remains, detailed contemporaneously,[407] and today on internet sites dedicated to such curios as *Strange Remains*.[408] In English periodicals of the time there are accounts which express displeasure at the overall aesthetic and tone of the *Cabaret Du Neant*, for instance describing the environment as 'the grave of French humour' and 'without gaeity', but the passage is without any outrage or a response other than that reserved for perceived bad art, rather than immorality.[409] In most cases, though, reception of the *Cabaret* was more akin that within *the Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser* who stated that 'Parisians do some queer things by way of novelty and excitement'.[410] There is no mention in these articles of the use of legitimate human remains as artefacts within the exhibits and the focus is on the theatrics. All the above reviews refer to the *Cabaret* being regularly busy at this period, with Parisians flocking in their hundreds to the supposed appeals of the location. Significant detail is provided of evenings at the *Cabaret* in Andrew Michael Roberts' summaries of Victorian Paris.[411] His descriptions have strong alignment to modern scare attractions, for instance the Coffin mongers he describes at the front of the *Cabaret* as described align almost exactly with the barkers dressed as pallbearers who have patrolled the front of the *Pasaje de Terror* attraction in Blackpool right up to the time of writing in 2024. While human remains are not viable, the *Pasaje* also uses authentic coffins as props to create the legitimacy described within the *Cabaret* over a hundred years earlier.

Zentrum Fur Politische Schionheit (Hitherto ZPS), are a German art collective who engage in socio-political art demonstrations. In 2019, ZPS installed an eight-foot-tall black steel monument on the site of the Kroll Opera House, where the vote to give

[407] Bensusan, S. L.; "THE WORLD'S CAFES". *The Idler*, Feb. 1899-July 1901: 235
[408] *Strange Remains* is a WordPress site available at https://strangeremains.com/. It describes itself as 'A compendium of corpses, bizarre history, and macabre excavations'.
[409] JC. "How Parisians Amuse Themselves". August 16, 1899, p170
[410] *Oban Times and Argyllshire Advertiser* December 5, 1896.
[411] Andrew Michael Roberts, "'How to Be Happy in Paris': Mina Loy and the Transvaluation of the Body" *The Cambridge Quarterly* 27 (2) (1998): 140.

Hitler unlimited powers via the 'Enabling Act' was made. The monument was advertised as containing ashes from Holocaust victims along with soil samples from locations near Nazi death camps, the majority of which were found to contain human remains.[412] The intention of the piece, as stated on the website of ZPS, is to combat apathy surrounding Holocaust legacy, exemplified by the current relative success of the AfD party.[413] Nevertheless, the monument was criticised by the International Auschwitz Committee for 'disturb(ing) the eternal rest of their murdered relative … Even if they understand and respect the political intention of the initiators, they consider this kind of demonstration disrespectful'.[414] Days after this statement, after ZPS had removed the ashes and soil from the exhibit, members of the Action Artists Committee attempted to use a sledgehammer to destroy the monument with AKK member Eliyah Havemann declaring, 'No one should make art and politics with ashes of Holocaust victims'.[415]

These two examples, separated by time and culture, show wildly different responses to the use of human remains as art objects in a public space. One provoked outrage to the point that the remains were removed while the other was in place for multiple decades with relatively little commentary. Of the two, it might be expected that the *Cabaret Du Néant* installation would be perceived as more unacceptable, owing to the irreverent, even gauche use of remains. This was not the case, and it was the more artistically intended ZPS installation that caused controversy. Counter-intuitively, in the use of human remains in public spaces in these case studies, sensitivity and artistic purpose produced anger while irreverence and purposelessness provoked no anger. I propose two key reasons for this dynamic that do not tie these responses to space or time but spectatorship. Firstly, the audience in the case of the Cabaret du Néant were a self-selecting group while the audience for ZPS had no selection into their spectatorship; and secondly, the ZPS installation came with an inherent dictated

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[412] As detailed in Brown, Kate, "Activists Used a Sledgehammer to Attack Berlin's Newest Holocaust Memorial, Objecting to the Use of Victims' Ashes", *artnet*. 7 January 2020*: (*https://news.artnet.com/art-world-archives/center-political-beauty-reichstag-1746957)

[413] Gully, Jennifer M., & Itagaki, Lynn Mie, "Fleeing bodies and fleeting performances: Transience and the nation-state" *Cultural Dynamics*, 33(1-2) (2021): 124-139. https://doi.org/10.1177/0921374020934517

[414] Heubner, C quoted by Hickley, "German art activists apologise for upsetting Holocaust survivors with monument containing human remains", *The Art Newspaper. 5* December 2019: (https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2019/12/05/german-art-activists-apologise-for-upsetting-holocaust-survivors-with-monument-containing-human-remains)

[415] Brown, "Activists used a sledgehammer…", *artnet.*

spectatorship in which the audience were, by nature of the artwork, actively told how to feel about it.

I believe these two dynamics are essential to an understanding of the spectatorship of human remains and of the perception of death and the uncanny in general. Audiences are more tolerant of artistic objects that they feel that they can openly collaborate with. The ZPS monument imposes its presence on a general public who has no choice but to spectate it for as long as they are walking in that direction. In addition, the work is so clearly intended as a socio-political artwork about the Holocaust that this is the one and only way in which it can be perceived. Even if the spectators agree with the sentiment, they are still having human remains used to 'tell them what to do and how to feel' in a way that is emotionally antagonising. This aligns the ZPS instillation not as an equivalent of the Cabaret du Néant chandelier but with the horse-carrousel of Margolles and her social group. However, Margolles retains a self-selecting spectatorship, and while the horse carousel may be sincerely intended to carry with it a socio-political message regarding colonialisation, it is also open to be treated as a simple macabre curio, or as an item of affective horror, or as a memorable experience to tell an anecdote about at a later date. A spectator doesn't 'have' to read it as a statement about the history of the nation if they don't want to, they can alternatively view it to accrue cultural value for themselves or out of pure voyeurism. None of these forms of viewership are open to the ZPS monument, which in its context asserts its purpose wholly – the idea of flaneuristically viewing remains of Holocaust victim is taboo, and there is no cultural value in witnessing an art object in a public space that is passed by all.

Across these two case studies, we see that heterogeneity of spectatorship and the selectiveness of that spectatorship is key to the public's perception of the presentation of death. I assert that while the public found reference to the mass genocide of the Holocaust via an artefact as emotionally charged as human remains unacceptable, this objection was heightened on the grounds that it applied a single interpretation to the artefact. Even to someone who found the monument itself potentially touching on a personal level might have wider concerns that others would view the item with an objectionable amount of voyeurism or morbid curiosity.

Thus, while socio-political readings may be the stated and genuine intention of visual and performance art piece such as that one, there are further rationales which heavily influence true reception of these pieces including sensationalism, morbid fascination, cultural interest in the taboo, and ease of marketing and public attention. The important argument for the overall discussion of this chapter is that when presenting death in any form, spectators possess such strong cultural associations and individual emotional variance that:

- The artist can only exert a very limited amount of control and
- The artist should always bear in mind the need to cater to multiple spectatorships simultaneously.

Presentational Theatre: Vampires and Zombies (and Ghosts?):

In *Stage Blood: Vampires of the 19th Century Stage,* Roxana Stuart provides a comprehensive historic guide to the use of vampires within presentational theatre in Europe and the United States. This may be summarised by a boom period following the publication of Polidori's *Vampyre* in 1819, followed by adaptations of Stoker's *Dracula* in the 1900s. Vampires remain prevalent on the stages of Western Theatre, but as with each movement, the horrific is subverted and terror transformed by familiarity away from the uncanny. Stuart concludes in her summary that, 'the creature seems to have forgotten its mystery and become hopelessly debased and vulgar. When we think of the vampire today, we are more likely to snicker than to shudder. We know everything'.[416] Since Stuart's book was published the vampire has undoubtedly seen a resurgence on the screen and further evolved its mythology within pop culture, however it has not significantly furthered its presence a as horrifying entity on stage or other live environments alongside this other than its presence in scare attractions in which, while still common, we will see that they are less figures of fear than expected staples of the genre or used for deconstruction.

[416] Stuart, Roxana *Stage Blood: Vampires of the 19th Century Stage* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press. 1994): 257.

A typical example of the vampire's presence on today's stage is found in the *Dracula* adaptation presented at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2018 by *Let Them Call It Mischief*. This was a satirical, feminist performance relying on familiarity of the 'standard' *Dracula* narrative.[417] The advertisement for an earlier 2016 version of the production shows a clear switch from a 'traditional' production of *Dracula* to its subversion.[418] This is signified by the Count, at the moment of vampiric embrace with a backdrop of swelling string music, sneezing – whereupon the red lighting wash switches to natural candlelight and the music momentarily stops and is replaced by an upbeat, jaunty tune. The villainous entity of Let them Call It Mischief's *Dracula* was patriarchal English society itself and the narrative concluded with an emancipated Mina eloping with the eponymous Count. The tone was light-hearted throughout. In this example we see the use of the vampire as a figure of fun rather than terror, and a vehicle for critiquing Victorian society. This is symptomatic of the vampire's current onstage presence.

I will now turn to presentations of the zombie and zombie-like versions of the undead. The following review is drawn from a critical response to Wilkie Collins' 1888 play *The Red Vial*,

> If told on paper…everything in it would pass muster; the reader would be in the story-teller's power. But to give such a story flesh and blood, risk a comparison by setting it upon the stage, and the story-teller is in the hands of his public, powerless.[419]

The sensationalism of the response, the 'such a story', relates to the third act of the play situated in a morgue in which the character of Rodenberg, previously deceased, is first reported, then manifests in offstage space, then is presented part-physically via the opening and slamming of a door, and finally emerges as a grey reanimated corpse.

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[417] *Dracula* Produced by *Let them Call It Mischief*. Attended at Pleasance Above, Edinburgh, 21 August 2016.
[418] Daniel Hallissey, "Dracula Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2018", YouTube Video, 15 February 2021: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLzYyh1js4c) 00:40.
[419] *Examiner*, Issue 3631, 1 September 1877: 1113., as quoted in Radcliffe, Caroline, 2015, "Behind Closed Doors: The Theatrical Uncanny and the Panoptical Viewer in the Dramas of Wilkie Collins" *Nineteenth century theatre and film* 42 (1) (2015)

Such a response summarises the sudden jolt felt by spectators when an uncanny presence shifts from invisible to visible space, and when the physical uncanny entity of a living corpse is presented directly to the audience. In this instance audiences and critics were unanimous in finding the slow movement of the uncanny from the offstage space to the onstage space and the eventual presentation of the non-human human as repulsive and objectionable.

In his later drama, *Miss Gwilt*, an adaption of his novel *Armadale*, Collins adjusted to his critics. The narrative demanded a similar dead-alive character following the poisoning by gas of the character Midwinter who was then rendered into a semi-conscious state. Seeking to avoid the mistakes of The Red Vial, Collins instead chose to play out the whole of the poisoning scene onstage. A typical critical response read,

> …the real 'sensation' of the piece – the poisoning of the scene in the sanatorium – will have rather a mirth-provoking than a horrifying effect.[420]

These two critical responses summarise the challenges found by directors seeking to present the zombie (and indeed the vampire) as an active threat in live performance. Zombies are as much a horror staple as the vampire and a fundamental expectation of spectators when it comes to the horror genre. However, the challenges of presenting the zombie as a legitimately uncanny character in a live immersive environment are plentiful. At the end of the 19th century Wilkie Collins found it a challenge to present the living dead as uncanny entities and stimulants of unease and fear, with audiences being more likely to find such presentations as either being disgusting and outright unpleasant or ridiculous and hilarious. Well over a century later producers of live horror and the commercial immersive haunt economy regularly find themselves in the same circumstances as Collins, trapped between outrage and ridicule.

The Uncanny and Object Vivification

The offstage space, and the portal to it, has become integral to scholarship surrounding the uncanny. However, this scholarship has been dedicated, for the most

[420] *Pall Mall Gazette*, Issue 3502, 10 May 1876*, p. 11.*as quoted in Radcliffe, "Behind Closed Doors".

part, to purely observational theatre in which the audience remains in one place. It has not included, thus far, the burgeoning immersive theatre and experiential genres that have increasingly dominated the live horror landscape of the 21st century. The final portion of this chapter addresses the manifestation and manipulation of the uncanny within scare attractions.

The moving audience of a scare maze significantly changes the sense of audience place in the theatrical dynamic for one key reason: in immersive theatre offstage space becomes a literal moving and changing dynamic, while, in observational theatre the offstage space is effectively an idea of 'anywhere but here',[421] and a fixed 'locus of the uncanny…. [that] exists in relation to that stage'.[422] This is not strictly true of space in an immersive environment. In the case of an immersive experience, the moment of 'now', in terms of literal onstage space, is not onstage space then and will not be onstage space in the future. This offstage environment is now a not-fully-knowable space left to the imagination but a place of tangible reality that may already have been viewed moments prior, or a space into which the participant knows they are about to walk. This adjusts the nature of the space in terms of the spectator's relationship with the uncanny and it adjusts the relationship the spectator has with the doors/portals between those spaces. This, I argue, does not remove the uncanny potential and nature of the offstage space, but it does fundamentally change it from a theatrical perspective and in terms of the agency and authorship dynamics that Jones identifies as being central to most contemporary treatments of the spectral in observational theatre. Jones observes that several ghost plays 'are haunted by questions of the author's fragile 'ownership' of the text and the evident loss of authorial control'. [423] An extension of this loss of authorial control by both the producers and, more importantly, the SpectAuthor who has taken control of their own viewing experience, may be found in scare entertainment, not just in representations of ghosts and the undead, as in live plays, but perhaps most effectively in object vivification. Jones writes of the use of ghost plays as a challenge to

[421] Güçbilmez, Beliz, "An Uncanny Theatricality: The Representation of the Offstage", *New theatre quarterly*, Vol.23 (2) (2007): 152.
[422] Ibid.: 154.
[423] Jones, "Authorized absence: Theatrical representations of authorship in three contemporary ghost plays": 168

the "death of the author" concept,[424] in the case of live horror, and especially scare attractions, the primary author of the scare attraction is the spectator, the SpectAuthor. Since the geography of a scare maze has less potency for rendering the uncanny in the way Jones describes, it is left increasingly to the characters to generate such unease and the withholding of authorial control. One family of characters serves this purpose exceptionally well.

In her essay on the use of dolls and object vivification within Gothic film, Joana Ria Ramalho proposes a 'taxonomy of inanimate bodies', in which a collective branch of non-person, inanimate objects are split into two subcategories: 'human-like objects' and 'dead bodies'.[425] Across these classifications exist figures common to horror, including dolls, mannequins, dummies, automata, ghosts, vampires, and zombies. While Ramalho's essay addresses film, this chapter centres upon the non-person, inanimate objects that human actors embody in immersive scare attractions. I will analyse the character of the doll, gauging the extent to which it sparks an affective uncanny response in scare attraction visitors. Drawing upon my own ten years of experience in the haunt industry, along with case studies from high-profile European and American scream parks, I will consider the ways in which the performer-embodied doll figure disorients and manipulates spectators' perceptions of liveness. I argue that it is the relative vagueness of the doll as a horror trope that makes it distinctly useful in the scare entertainment industry, where producers are generally aiming at a broad market with a range of expectations.

Scare attractions are a subset of immersive theatre, sitting within the definition provided by Adam Alston of 'theatre that surrounds audiences within an aesthetic space in which they are frequently...free to move and/or participate'.[426] Scholars of this form often emphasize the spectator's increased agency and control,[427] or extend 'the

[424] Ibid: 166
[425] Juania Rita Ramalho, 'The Uncanny Afterlife of Dolls: Reconfiguring Personhood through Object Vivification in Gothic Film', *Studies in Gothic Fiction*, 6/2 (2020): 29.
[426] Adam Alston, 'Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value: Risk, Agency and Responsibility in Immersive Theatre', *Performance Research,* 18/2 (2013): 129.
[427] Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

participatory nature of audiencing',[428] in these formats compared to the relatively more passive spectatorship contexts of book, film, and observational theatre. A satisfying rendering of the uncanny in a live environment requires a relative abdication of control by the creator whereby the audience member's imagination is creating potential threats that are not stated outright. There is a subsequent internal collaboration between the audience member's creative imagination and their own body which is less mediated and promote a more 'visceral understanding and experience of performance' that may be felt as an authentic moment of uncanny fear.[429] Thus, effective characters within relatively passive media forms may operate differently in immersive environments, where a lack of fixed offstage space, a less controllable soundscape, and a more unpredictable spectator-actor relationship shape the uncanny's materialization.

The terrain of the haunt industry

While Madelon Hoedt's definition used throughout this thesis is sound it perhaps omits the importance, often foregrounding, of macabre humour to some scare attractions, including 2018's *Revenge of Chucky* 'ScareZone' from Universal Studios Hollywood's *Halloween Horror Nights 28,* which featured a wisecracking interactive version of the eponymous film-series character surrounded by large-scale grotesque versions of popular board games.[430] Theme parks will often operate a series of indoor and outdoor walkthrough events in the fall season under titles like Universal Studios Theme Parks' *Halloween Horror Nights*; *Knott's Scary Farm* at Knott's Berry Farm in Buena Park, California; and *Alton Towers Scarefest* at Alton Towers, Staffordshire, England. These are all examples of what are referred to in the industry as 'scream parks'.

One metaphor that I often use when describing commercial scare attractions, and particularly the scream park, is that of a bread sampling plate with an array of accompanying dips. A restaurateur cannot dictate to a customer which bread to put into

[428] James Frieze (ed.), *Reframing Immersive Theatre: The Politics and Pragmatics of Participatory Performance (*London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 6.
[429] Schulze, *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance*: 37.
[430] AllCentralFlorida *Revenge of Chucky – Halloween Horror Nights Orlando 2018* (2018) Available at: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIbbh1Nlei8&t=1163s*.

which dip, and certainly cannot predict with total accuracy the preferences of any individual guest, owing to a natural variation in personal tastes, cultural expectations, or other dynamics. What can be done is to identify what combinations most customers have responded to well and make recommendations based on those responses, while still leaving opportunities for choice and individual agency. Universal Studios Hollywood's *Revenge of Chucky* was a humorous zoned area that centred on the infamous killer doll,[431] while Universal Studios Orlando, also under the *Halloween Horror Nights* brand, used the doll archetype far differently four years prior in the *Dollhouse of the Damned* scare maze.[432] With little scholarly research focused on the haunt attraction industry and commercial interests as a major driver, approaches to scare attractions evolve primarily through trial and error. Over time, attraction designers build industry knowledge on the most effective, guest-terrorizing techniques, all the while recognizing that audience responses, including fear-based reactions, are inherently variable and challenging to assess.

Scare attraction designers balance and juxtapose an atmosphere of collective celebration and tension-release with attempts to activate individual spectators' self-reflexive horror responses. This tension can be seen in the scare attraction's use of crowd-pleasing jump scares and elements that trigger the uncanny.

A jump scare, in which a build-up of tension precedes a sudden, adrenaline-releasing surprise, is perhaps the simplest tool in the horror creator's arsenal. In most instances, it matters very little whether the actor or animatronic is dressed as a doll, a vampire, a zombie, an axe murderer, or an average joe: if the attraction successfully builds tension in between jump scares, the startle's specific trigger is of little importance. The jump scare is both the haunt industry's bread and butter and something of a bête noir. As with films, scare attractions perceived to rely exclusively on jump scares are often criticised as 'an end in themselves',[433] with the implication that

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[431] AllCentralFlorida *Revenge of Chucky – Halloween Horror Nights Orlando 2018* (2018) Available at: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIbbh1Nlei8&t=1163s*.
[432] Behind the Thrills *Dollhouse of the Damned at HHN 24 Full Walkthrough* (2015) Available a: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFtLGKs-rks
[433] Alison Landsberg, "Horror Vérité: Politics and History in Jordan Peele's Get Out'," *Continuum,* 32/5 (2018): 635.

they are simplistic, one-dimensional, and creatively lazy. While these critiques are perhaps short-sighted, the most adept of scare attraction designers combine fragmentary jump scares with attempts to build a more sustained fear response. One of the most popular ways to do this is through engaging the uncanny.

The theoretical uncanny

Foundational to contemporary understandings of the uncanny are Ernst Jentsch's *On the Psychology of the Uncanny* (1906) and Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny* (1919).[434] Most theorists, including Freud himself, have treated the latter as an extension of the former, with Freud explicitly crediting Jentsch as originating the theory. However as Carol Leader observes, the two essays' treatment of the idea are ontologically different, especially in their approach to the case study text, E. T. A. Hoffman's *The Sandman* (1818).[435] Both essays use the Sandman character as an example of the uncanny, but while Freud's definition of the *unheimlich* ('uncanny') focuses on the sensations of the 'familiar yet unhomely' triggered within the spectator, Jentsch is more concerned with how an alien object is living or inanimate. Another way of framing this is that Freud's definition of the affective response revolves around the spectator's relationship with themselves and their worldview, while Jentsch's definition is preoccupied with the spectator's relationship with a viewed object that represents a direct threat. The affective uncanny response, therefore, has been tied directly to human survival.[436] The implication of this Jentschian definition (and subsequent empirical findings of the uncanny as a potential form of survival response) is that the live encounter creates and strengthens the affective uncanny response beyond what is possible in literary and filmic mediums. There is, however, another consideration: live encounters with the uncanny demand a different level of belief suspension and credibility. To take advantage of live manifestations of the uncanny, scare attraction

[434] S. Freud, 'The Uncanny' in James Stackey (ed.) *the Standard Edition of the Complete Psycological Works of Sigmund Freud. (*London: The Hogarth Press, 1961/1919); E. Jentsch, 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny', translated by R. Sellars*. Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 2/1 (1995): 16.
[435] C. Leader, 'Supervising the Uncanny: The Play within the Play', *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 60/5 (2015).; E. T. A. Hoffman, *The Sandman* in John Oxenford (ed), *19th Century German Stories* (1994). Hoffman, E.T.A. (1994) *The Sandman* (Oxenford. J) 19th Century German Stories (Godwin-Jones. R). (Original work published 1817)
[436] Michael Parsons, *Living Psychoanalysis: From Theory to Experience* (London: Karnac, 2014): 8-9

designers must override the dissonance of bearing witness to inanimate objects coming to life alongside the suspension of disbelief that knows this is both impossible and manipulative.

In addition to empathy, Michael Parsons identifies the 'sum of past experience', or individuals' personal histories, encounters, or exposures to particular character types, as being central to their affective uncanny responses.[437] Masahiro Mori's notion of the 'uncanny valley' also affirms the impact of individual and cultural expectations.[438] Together, these theorists suggest that there may be a 'shelf-life' to the efficacy of uncanny characters based on cultural exposure. 'When we think of the vampire today, we are more likely to snicker than to shudder. We know everything'.[439]

In *The Uncanny*, Nicholas Royle invokes not a sense of externality, but a sense of the self-reflexive, arguing that 'The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in *particular* regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced. Suddenly one's sense of oneself…seems strangely questionable'.[440] This emphasis frames the uncanny as a sensation that centres the individual spectator and is derived internally, by a kind of crisis of self, rather than the seen object itself directly conveying the uncanny response. Royle's suppositions are aligned with Freud, who suggests that the uncanny emerges in the following sequence: an object is viewed; the perceiver has a strange affective response to the viewed object; and the perceiver experiences discomfort from their own initial response to the viewed object. Jentsch offers a different chain of events, which aligns with Parsons' survival model: a strange object is viewed, and the perceiver experiences an uncomfortable affective response.

Identifying manifestations of the uncanny does not stop with these two chains. Mori's understanding of *Shinwakan,* for example, recognizes that while human-like behaviour in artificial intelligence elicits positive responses from perceivers, there is a

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[437] Parsons, *Living Psychoanalysis*: 9.
[438] C. Bartneck, T. Kanda, H. Ishiguro and N. Hagita, 'Is the uncanny valley an uncanny cliff?' Proceedings of the 16th IEEE International Symposium on robot and Human Interactive Communication, RO-MAN, Jeju, Korea (2007): 368-373.
[439] Stuart, *Stage Blood: Vampires of the 19th Century Stage:* 256.
[440] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003): 1.

level of A.I. human-likeness that inspires intense discomfort.[441] For Mori, humans experience unease when interacting with a machine or automaton that behaves mostly, but not entirely, like a human. Prof. James Hamilton describes this phenomenon as 'a combination, perhaps a blending, of repulsion and attraction…felt in the presence of fixtures whose visually apparent features are very close to, but not exactly like, those of a healthy human being'.[442] '*Shinwakan*' has no simple English definition and is best translated as a combination of the phrases 'mutually be friendly' and '"the sense of" hybridized as a negative sensation'.[443] Not surprisingly, robotics researchers, social scientists, and humanities scholars often return to Mori's uncanny valley to theorize how humans respond to human-like entities. Such encounters can inspire fear, disgust, shock, and nervousness, suggesting that 'the uncanny valley may not be a single phenomenon to be explained by a single theory but rather a nexus of phenomena with disparate causes'.[444] This is encouraging for scare attraction designers seeking to employ the uncanny as a dynamic; the more different phenomena available, the more possible collaborations between performers and participants.

An individual's propensity for empathy also contours Mori's uncanny valley, as researchers determined from comparing spectators' scores on a Davis (1980, 1983) Interpersonal Reactivity Index (a measurement of innate empathetic behaviours) against the responses to base and uncanny versions of cartoon animal characters. These observations have two implications for scare attraction designers. First, they can most effectively serve a broad audience by embracing a variety of human-like characters, the better to trigger spectators' uncanny responses. Second, as spectators have naturally varying levels of empathy, it perhaps follows that they have varying tendencies in collaborating, consciously or unconsciously, with an actor's attempt to elicit an uncanny response. Thus, while both the *unheimlich* and the uncanny valley have at times been treated as representing a single, overlapping affective dynamic, these notions are better

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[441] Masahiro Mori, 'The Uncanny Valley', K.F.MacDorman and T. Minato (trans.) *Energy,* 7, (1970/2005): 33-35.
[442] James R. Hamilton, 'The "Uncanny Valley" and Spectating Animated Objects.' *Performance Research* 20 (2) (2015): 60-61.
[443] Shensheng Wang; Scott O. Lilienfeld; Philippe Rochat, 'The Uncanny Valley: Existence and Explanations'. *Review of General Psychology*, 19/4 (2015): 398.
[444] Chin-Chang Ho, Karl MacDorman, and Z. Pramano, 'Human emotion and the uncanny valley: A GLM, MDS, and Isomap analysis of robot video ratings', in *Proceedings of the 3rd ACM/IEEE iinternational conference on Human robot interaction, HRI '08* (2008): 169-196.

understood as incorporating multiple sensations, all of which are subject to individual variety.

The human-like object in the commercial haunt industry: the doll as a case study

In representing the undead, an actor is tasked with performing their own dead body brought back to life. The spectator is subsequently asked to understand this intention and, in a horror environment, be afraid of it. However, in the instance of Ramalho's human-like entities such as the doll, the human actor is being tasked with performing something 'other'. Something less than human. Something empty. A doll is neither alive nor dead; it is an inanimate object that we imbue with animation: the living-unliving. And scholars have long linked the doll to strong uncanny responses.[445]

In a live environment, the presentation of a human-like entity such as a doll does not require a visible weapon or detailed backstory to generate a threat for the spectator. The spectator is often left instead to make such active choices of their own regarding what 'possible' threats they might provide. However, unlike the undead in popular culture, which come back to animated life, the doll is partially uncanny because of its lack of motion, or its implied potential motion.[446] The doll has the potential both to be weird and eerie, the two aspects of the uncanny discussed by Mark Fisher in his text of the same name.[447] Fisher describes the weird as 'so strange that it should not exist here. Yet if the entity or object is here, then the categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world cannot be valid'.[448] This evokes both the 'categorisational uncertainty' model, which Christopher Ramey argues is at heart of Mori's uncanny

[445] Kristen Smirnov and John Pracejus, 'Empathy Drivers in the Uncanny Valley', *Advances in Consumer Research* 38 (2011): 807.
[445] Roberta Ballestriedo, 'From the Contortion of Reality to the Sinister: The Uncomfortable Hyperrealism of Mannequins, Dolls, Effigies and Wax figures', *Revista de Investigación sobre lo Fantástico,* 4/2 (2016): 93 Hajnal Király, 'An Uncanny Cinema, a Cinema of the Uncanny: The Trope of the Doll in the films of Manoel de Oliveira', *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae Film and Media Studies*, 15/1 (2018): 33. S. Y. Sencidiver, 'The Doll's Uncanny Soul' in L. Pinatti-Farnell & M. Beville, (eds), *The Gothic and the Everyday: Living Gothic* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 103.
[446] Király, 'An Uncanny Cinema': 36.
[447] Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater, 2016): 15.
[448] Ibid.

valley,[449] and the 'categorical interstitiality' proposed by Noel Carroll when describing the doll's sinister effect.[450] In the case of the live actor embodying a doll, two qualities are being endowed to the doll that 'should not exist here' – namely the ability to move and the presence of a mind. Ramalho, who presents these two qualities as the locus of a doll's uncanniness, claims that dolls 'always seem to be on the verge of moving and revealing agency'.[451] Not only might dolls create weird sensations, but also eerie ones, 'either when there is something present where there should be nothing, or there is nothing present when there should be something'.[452] In the case of the doll and other human-like inanimate objects, the absence of a movement and brain is the void where that 'nothing' exists – the things that are repurposed when the doll becomes animate. This might in theory have the potential to negate any possible uncanny sensation with the potential 'nothing' filled in, but not if the movement and brain are not perfectly aligned with human behaviour. If the actor executes movement of a non-human quality then both an eerie and weird sensation can potentially be created. Likewise, the mind projected by the animate doll is of a somewhat alien nature as it is subject to both the imaginative whims of the spectator and an important component: the mask. The doll character's mask may be relatively neutral or grotesque but either way are generally vague in the way they present the doll's attitude. As such the scare attraction doll may have 'a' brain; to the susceptible spectator, however, it is an unclear, ambiguous, non-human brain. Under these circumstances there is the possibility of human mirroring – the self-reflective dynamic of Freud's *unheimlich* that allows the spectator to be confronted with their own object-ness, a challenging of identity. A thing that is defined by being-looked-at is now doing-the-looking-at; subject becomes object and vice versa. This dynamic, along with the scare attraction's already optimal conditions for generating the uncanny, allows a doll to become perhaps the most frightening character type in scare attractions.

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[449] Christopher H. Ramey 'An Inventory of Reported Characteristics for Home Computers, Robots, and Human Beings: Applications for Android Science and the Uncanny Valley', in The Proceedings of the ICCS/CogSci-2006 Long Symposium 'Towards Social Mechanisms of Android Science', Vancouver, Canada, 2006. Quoted in Wang, Lilienfeld, S. & P. Rochat

[450] Noel Carroll. 'The Nature of Horror', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 46/1 (1987): 55.

[451] Ramalho, 'The Uncanny Afterlife of Dolls': 29.

[452] Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*: 61.

In summer 2012, I was part of the production team working for *Horror Camp Live!*, billed as the first overnight scare attraction in Europe. With a high price point, the event catered to small audiences of just 36 spectators and was located on the site of the *Scare Kingdom* seasonal Halloween event. *Horror Camp Live!* used a pre-existing scare maze structure (known as *Blood Bath* during Halloween) as part of its setting, in addition to a camping area and a room that operated as a bar location during the Halloween season. During Halloween, guests came out of the *Blood Bath* maze into the bar area; for *Horror Camp Live!*, then, a quiet, empty scare maze bordered the area in which the visitors congregated.

Horror Camp Live! incorporated standard horror characters, one of which was a living porcelain doll named Domina. Domina was introduced to spectators early in the evening, with a group sent to 'retrieve' her from her location at the far end of the farm. Once found, Domina would follow and, arriving at the base, disappear into the body of the *Blood Bath* attraction. From this moment on, Domina would appear and sporadically take individual guests into *Blood Bath* for an unspecified time. The performer playing Domina had free reign to do what she wanted in response to the guest's fear level: she would walk hand-in-hand with the guest in the pitch dark, sit the guest in a chair to abandon them, use a torch to create jump scares, dance with or for the guest, and make ambiguous gestures and hand movements, among other 'creepy' activities. Many guests found their encounter to be extremely frightening, frequently using the given safe-word to end the experience; there were multiple instances of guests bursting into tears.

The case of Domina is from a niche attraction and not the industry norm. It does, however, show the potency of dolls to generate the uncanny response. Domina's performer operated in optimum conditions - low audience numbers and extended time availability - thus many opportunities to generate scary scenarios, this is outside the constraints of most Halloween scare mazes that require greater guest throughput and subsequently have less exposure time and more environmental controls. Few scare attractions operate in an environment that can be silent or that can isolate guests. *Horror Camp Live!* was a high-cost event that consequently, through its small audience sizes, reduced the risk of undesirable audience behaviours and encouraged collaboration.

Major US scare attractions have profited from featuring performer-embodied dolls within disorienting mazes. In 2014, *Halloween Horror Nights* showcased the Orlando maze *Dollhouse of the Damned*, while *Knotts Scary Farm* hosted *The Doll Factory* annually from 2007 to 2011.[453] Both mazes depended on jump scares, but also generated a greater range of potential frights than comparative attractions. Indeed, they thematically demonstrated opposing approaches to the doll's inherent uncanniness. *Dollhouse of the Damned* presented the dolls as weird objects: grotesque and oversized.[454] The maze featured an unusually proportioned baby doll, headless mannequins, and ballerinas with impossibly contorted bodies intermixed with live performers. Conversely, the long-running *The Doll Factory* staged the slow loss of humanity as an industrial unit turned human beings into dolls, which visitors encountered throughout the attraction.[455] This arguably invokes Ramalho's 'dollifying,' or the 'recurring tendency towards abjection, self-hate and destruction',[456] which she suggests is a source of the doll's uncanniness (and reinforces the self-crisis in Freud's *unheimlich) The Doll Factory*'s embodied dolls still executed jump scares, but within this narrative audiences also were prompted through the attraction's varied collaborations to experience self-reflexive uncanny responses.

Conclusion:

In terms of investigating the uncanny response, it may be intuitive that producers of scare attractions would be prone to use undead character types such as the vampire or zombie in their attractions. However, this is not the case. These tropes are used regularly within the industry when creating non-uncanny responses such as jump scares. However, scare attraction producers will more often use actors playing

[453] Behind the Thrills, *Dollhouse of the Damned at HHN 24 Full Walkthrough* (2014), Available at: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFtLGKs-rks&t=15s.*
[454] ThemeParkAdventure (2011).*Knott's Scary Farm's THE DOLL FACTORY 2011 Maze Flow-Through*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Efp8numQaA4]
[455] Behind the Thrills, *Dollhouse of the Damned*
[456] Ramalho, 'The Uncanny Afterlife of Dolls': 35.

human-like entities such as dolls when aiming to stimulate the uncanny response. In this chapter I have indicated some of the reasons for this:

1. Audience overfamiliarity with undead character types lessening the ability to create the uncanny response;
2. The double dissonance inherent in live actors who are present in the same shared space as the spectator playing undead roles. The spectator is asked to suspend disbelief by reading a living body that is viscerally present in their space as a corpse-object, and simultaneously suspend disbelief in a different way by reading a corpse-object as animate. This asks high levels of conscious collaboration from the audience to be sustained for any length of time.
3. The human-like entity's status, especially in the case of the doll, is both potentially weird and eerie object when played by actors. This allows for a greater range of affective opportunities and provides more ways of being discomforted within a genre that is impacted considerably by individual preference.
4. The doll is more easily sprinkled as a component part of a wider aesthetic or narrative within scare mazes, whereas undead characters often demand exclusive focus. Dolls can be intermingled semi-formally with other horror tropes more readily than, for instance, a vampire.

As Andy Lavender claims, 'we have moved from a society of the spectacle to a society of involved spectation; in turn, we experience ourselves having an experience'.[457] This evokes the Freudian *unheimlich* chain and multiple models of Mori's '*Shinwakan'*. It has been claimed that the current performance environment is one where audiences seek 'a greater range of choices', in order to '[perform] a larger array of actions'.[458] I propose that within scare attractions there is a multiplicity of invitations provided by designers, of which the uncanny is a potentially useful, but simultaneously problematic one. In the case of the human-like object there are fewer obstacles, and scare attractions are usually designed to offer the spectator an uncanny response at least potentially. However, offers of the uncanny response are compromised by the

[457] Andy Lavender, *Performance in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Routledge, 2016): 29-30.
[458] Lavender, *Performance in the Twenty First Century:* 29.

mechanical aspects of the scare attraction industry, especially during the high-volume Halloween season, and cannot be solely relied upon. It is often blended with other spectatorship offerings such as jump scares, humour, and pop culture references to produce high satisfaction among spectators when exposed to a broad audience as popular entertainment. My example of *Horror Camp Live!* Indicates the considerable potential of live actors playing dolls for instilling the uncanny, while another, The Doll Factory demonstrates how this dynamic may be partially maintained while also incorporated into the standard industry model. Therefore, exploring the range and scope of human-like objects offers an extremely fertile ground in live performance for generating uneasy and uncomfortable responses in a wide range of audiences. While our cinema and television screens may be prone to fill with creatures that emanate from the graveyard or crypt, the immersive environments of live horror are less likely to threaten us with fangs and more likely to stare at us blankly from plastic eyeballs, indicating nothing and letting us suspect anything.

Thesis Conclusion

This thesis has synthesised several areas of study including performance, hospitality, business, film studies, folklore studies, personal experience as an industry insider and empirical psychology to expand upon the small body of scholarship currently addressing the popular commercial scare attraction. It has generated vocabulary to describe elements of the performance, most notably in the areas of dramaturgy and reception for which the terms "MicroAuthors", "MacroAuthors", "SpectAuthors", "MicroText" and "MacroText" have been proposed and spectatorship categories have been expanded beyond those of basic "fear minimising" and "fear maximising" strategies. This has been with a view to positioning scare attractions as a relevant 'hotspot' for two dynamics that are particularly pertinent in the current moment as well as pertinent to immersive theatre scholarship. These are the dynamics of authenticity and identity, which this thesis has demonstrated manifest themselves in several means within horror performance.

Scholarship that describes events that might be described as appealing to 'postmodern authenticity' have generally emphasised the inauthentic with cynicism 'with scholars contending that it speaks more to the consumptive, the superficial, and the trivial than to the substantive and meaningful', with places such as Walt Disney World and shopping centres being established as locations where tourists are 'motivated by consumption, frivolity, and image (see Brown, 1996; Bruner, 1994; Buchmann, Moore, & Fisher, 2010; Fjellman, 1992; Guttentag, 2010; Hollinshead, 1998; Wang, 1999; Mintz, 2004; Pretes, 1995)'.[459] This observation, by Vidon, Rickley and Knudsen, was made in a branch of scholarship less traditionally cynical towards consumerism than that of performance – that of tourism studies. It is perhaps unsurprising then, that discourse surrounding popular immersive performance of the past such as fortune telling, mediums, carnival sideshows and performative ghost tours are sometimes eschewed in immersive performance scholarship in favour of discussing contemporary immersive theatre companies. Through the study of scare attractions and

[459] Elizabeth S. Vidon, Jillian M. Rickly, Daniel C. Knudsen ″Wilderness state of mind: Expanding authenticity." *Annals of Tourism Research* 73 (2018):64

live performance horror over the course of this thesis, which incorporate many of the techniques of those popular performances minus some, but not all, of the ethically questionable practices such as deception and charlatanism, I hope to have elucidated a bridge between the past and into the present moment in which authenticity and identity are significant paradigms. Scare attractions act as melting pots for customers and performers to try out and test versions of themselves under the fictional challenge of false threats.

I have explored various means by which immersive horror interacts with the concepts of self and authenticity. I have argued that elements of a person's self-actualisation will strongly determine how they interact with haunts, to such a degree that scare mazes are sites in which individuals attempt to author their own affective stories and shape their bodily experiences in such a way as to affirm their sense of self. By describing the range of spectatorships that are informally used within the industry along with my own analysis of the audience's cultural relationship with live horror performance using the detailed example of the *Manormortis* attraction I have concluded that, rather than solely exposing themselves to their relationship with fear, people attend scare attractions for a significantly wider array of purposes. These are indeed derived from affective interactions: because it gives them the sense of feeling something in their body, and some of this may indeed come with the cathartic forms of affect associated with horror; but it also incorporates elements beyond this that reach further into internal and external elements of identity formation, and affirmations and challenges to the audience of who they are.

Part of these "real" communal experiences are paralleled not only in the spectators, but in the groups of actors and enthusiasts who stage scare mazes. Subcultures can develop that revel in the sense of shared experience and otherness that is conveyed by the horror community that promises not only companionship, but an often sincere but potentially misguided perception of therapeutic qualities. These locations are mechanised environments that have occurred through a distinct number

of phenomena, and have required the intersection of multiple aspects of contemporary society:

- Contemporary neoliberalism
- A fractured work environment, in which volunteerism and low paid employment veer together
- The onset of the experience economy, developed to such a point where the commodification of affect has become normalised.
- Consumers are used to authoring their experiences within familiar worlds
- Consumers in Western society rarely experience bodily threat within their everyday lives.
- Consumers are used to living in a world that they perceived as performative and fraudulent.
- Identity is perceived as important.
- Self-actualisation has a dynamic relationship with one's community.

These cultural trends might also be shown to align strongly with aspects of the concept of metamodernism: a yearning for a sense of authenticity and spiritual "truth" while being aware simultaneously that this is not possible. Informal conversation among horror communities proffer hope for therapeutic qualities and provide means for people who feel "othered" to have a community and a sense of mutual embrace without specific labels. However, this often results only in a fight for subcultural capital and engagement with a potentially exploitative environment that encourages unpaid and sometimes unsafe labour, matching that against good will and the opportunity to play that the forum of the scare attraction provides. Spectators too, may manifest elements of the metamodern by conceiving a performance that has involve physical affect and intimacy as carrying more inherent 'meaning', whatever that means to them. I have shown this via the examples of *Cracked*, *Psychomanteum* and evaluation of the

cultural phenomenon surrounding *McKamey Manor* This aligns with patterns in other forms of intimate performance such as the work of Adrian Howells.

In the case of extreme attractions, the senses of realism and authenticity associated with suffering are engaged, with the body itself forming the platform on which the performance takes place. These attractions, alongside events influenced by them, increase the memorability of these experience. Scare attractions provide the opportunity for all those present – performers and audience - to make the performance about themselves in whatever manner they wish. For those how have internal self-construal tendencies, it's possible that the extent of the performance being held within and on top of their bodies may be enhanced. Another focus of the scare attraction, enhanced by the study of the ESA is the intimacy that takes place in a false-torture scenario or the scarer-scaree dynamic: two people in a fixed relationship to each other, having a visceral experience which has the 'demeanour' of feeling primal.

Another primary feature of the scare attraction is its tendency towards not just heterogenous spectatorship but facilitating consumers who arrive with the intentions of determining their own engagement with the performance: something we have already seen happen within immersive theatre and theme parks. However, having been commercialised, the scare attraction industry has in places come up with vocabularies to define and structure universal truths surrounding the most common human behaviours and strategised for the most common response forms - this creating a kind of algorithm that allows for multiple means of reading the same physical attraction. I employed scholarship from immersive theatre such as (syn)aesthetics from Josephine Machon and the notion of the affective invitation from Gareth White. One example of such an algorithm would be one group or individual reading and interacting the attraction as being a terrifying communal experience, another group or individual experiencing the same attraction as being an amusing bit of fun, another group or individual treating the attraction as a curio to be explored and/or appreciated for its storytelling or theming, and another as an opportunity to cause mischief. Again, this

mirrors scholarship within tourism studies regarding the use of new and exotic spaces as locations to act out.

The scare attraction industry uses affect in a way that weaponises the seeming authenticity that affect creates to create the veneer of performances that feel much more personal, intimate, and individual than they are. These are, at design level, intended for the broadest audience, however some customers exit these events having reconciled the events surrounding themselves and their spectatorship group, since that is the constant, they have had over the course of the maze – they have witnessed a performance. But they have also seen themselves, their bodies, undergo that performance – experiencing it from the inside and constantly feeding that information back and forth within their peer group. By defining and then providing evidence from a range of fantastical curated encounters I have shown that a spectator in a scare attraction is a witness and participant to the event, to others and to themselves and that this is the case for a family of similar performances, including Santa's Grottos and theme park character and dining interactions. These have been termed tertiary, secondary and primary forms of spectatorship. A spectator may treat any of these differing layers of spectatorship as their main reason for attending the live horror performance.

Folklore and cultural traditions play a part in how audiences receive a piece of work, often categorising spectators as part of a shared community and creating a stage-space of a shared land. This allows for the strongly affective sensation of nostalgia to interact with felt senses of unease to create the dynamics associated, in film scholarship, of folk horror, which in live environments may encircle the whole audience or create splits between them. Performances that infuse culture with horror, as I have shown with the case studies of *Soulstice* and *This is Bardcore* have the potential to present either affirmative or challenging perspectives of shared culture and community membership.

This thesis has evaluated how scare attractions may be used to explore the concept of mortality in a manner that is removed from the traumatic towards the

informal. This has involved a detailed analysis of both commonly understood forms of the word uncanny and the scholarship surrounding the phenomenon of the Mori's uncanny valley. I have referenced multiple scare attractions' use of the uncanny alongside other forms of art, architecture and performance to unpick the various ways in which live art has presented the dead and the undead, concluding that the most common means of presenting these concepts in the scare attraction is via the uncanny response. The doll, the clown and the automaton along with other forms of unalive yet anthropomorphic entities have an impact in live horror. These forms demonstrate one of the greatest challenges to individual humans is not only mortality but the ambiguity that comes with it.

Regarding the paradigm of identity, I have shown a range of manners – from defining the role of the spectators on arrival to open ended dialogue to jump scares - in which the environment of a commercial scare attraction presents affective invitations, challenges and the means to author the experience according to a sense of self. Bulteau et al argued that 'preservation of selfhood (understood as the subjective identity continuity at the phenomenological level) in the face of stress … , may be central in the self-evaluation homeostasis' and that this may result from 'engagement in goal-directed behaviour in the environment' indicating the degree to which the external and internal referents to identity may collaborate in the use of a fictional environment to affirm a sense of this self out of contrived 'challenges' such as jump-scares, tough labour conditions, challenges to the sense of nostalgia, one's relationship with the group or one's relationship with mortality and the body.[460] Given that '(negative mental outcomes) alter(s) self-perception and event reappraisal, due to attentional, emotional, cognitive and memory negative bias' it's my contention that contrived fear-based stimuli provide a template for the creation of new pseudotraumatic memories that are forged in a knowingly safe environment and therefore be "overcome" as a means of creating the perception of a triumph of the self. The event that is being reappraised in these cases a fabricated fictional threat rather than the legitimately traumatic life

[460] Bulteau, Samuel, Roman Malo, Zoé Holland, Andrew Laurin, and Anne Sauvaget, "The update of self-identity: Importance of assessing autobiographical memory in major depressive disorder." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 14 (3) (2023): e1644.

experience. Spectators may therefore receive the medium- and long-term benefits associated with negative experiences without the negative experiences themselves having any real impact on their lives. Spectators are offered the feeling that they have been shown to be "correct" about themselves, be it whether it was affirming that they are brave, or that they can't be scared, or that their group is a community, or that they can control and master their body, or that they can survive the threatening.

As audiences seek additional means of confirming or challenging their identity and are attracted to whatever they determine to be 'authentic' experiences, the immersive genre will continue to appeal and within this the scare attraction has shown itself a robust and multivariate form of sating these drives. There has been scholarly focus on immersive practices from the mid-2010s onwards and hopefully there will be additional focus on, not just the scare attraction, but all forms of commercial participatory performance formats which have not always been at the forefront of scholarship. As immersive theatre maintains a significantly commercialised component, this is necessary and I hope that this thesis has offered a significant contribution to that argument and provided frameworks and analyses for that to happen.

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