ACTING OUT: THE PLEASURES OF PERFORMANCE HORROR

MADELON HOEDT

A submission presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
the University of South Wales/Prifysgol De Cymru
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2014

Abstract

The horror genre has always been a subject of fascination, both in popular culture and in academia, and its manifestations continue to inspire monographs and papers. These studies, however, often focus only on books and movies, whilst the genre encompasses much more: art, music, theatre and games, forms which have not had as much attention. The objective of the current discussion is to move beyond this limited tradition, instead engaging with performance, or live action, horror. This study begins with the premise that, because of its often immersive format, performance horror creates an intensity that is unique to this form. This uniqueness stems from the fact that the form is live and this type of horror thus creates a confrontation between audience and performance that cannot be replicated by books or film.

The focus of this thesis, then, is in the analysis of this form and its elements and to identify how these work together to create a particular narrative. In order to adequately discuss performance horror, a theoretical framework is established in the introduction, aiming to bring together a wide variety of scholarship in order to pin down the specifics of the form and its features. As such, secondary reading provides a clear context for the work presented here. In addition, case studies of a number of productions are used to show how performance horror works in practice. These case studies are informed by close readings of both play scripts (where available) and marketing materials. Interviews with many of the creators were undertaken to gain insight into the underlying ideas and thought processes when staging these productions. Each of these tools helps to build a picture of the elements which influence the narrative of this form of horror, how they are translated into performance, and how they may impact an audience. Through this process, the thesis provides a new way of looking at this particular practice, as well as a means to approach the study of popular and immersive performance.

Preface

> And the audience always got to hide in the dark. Didn't it?
> - Scott Bakker, *Neuropath*, 2008:160

Despite being taken from a work of fiction, Scott Bakker's comment seems strangely appropriate to this study, providing a link to both 'performance' and 'horror'. Blanketed by the gloom of the cinema or the auditorium, an audience can enjoy all kinds of terrifying entertainments, feeling safe in the knowledge that they can see without being seen, that they can participate without taking part, that they can fear without being threatened. Yet what if this is not true; what if, as Bakker seems to suggest, the audience does not get to hide in the dark? What if, instead of simply watching a victim being chased by a chainsaw-wielding maniac, *they* are the ones being chased, *they* are the ones who have to run for their lives? It is these questions that underpin the current discussion.

Most people will be familiar with the tropes of horror: the roar of a chainsaw; a bloody knife sinking into the flesh of its next victim; a strange phone call late at night; a dark room with something scratching at the window. Simple descriptions of recognizable scenes, but the images and emotions they evoke are much more complex. Some people will fondly remember a particular scene from a well-loved horror novel or movie, or shudder at the recollection, while others might need to suppress the urge to hide their eyes at the mere thought of pain and violence. Yet no matter how complicated the emotional response, the recognition and classification of such scenes is much easier, as is argued by Noël Carroll: "[Horror] is not an obscure notion. We manage to use it with a great deal of consensus; note how rarely one has cause to dispute the sorting of items under the rubric of horror in your local videostore" (1990:13). Covers of both horror DVDs and novels often feature dark and bloody images, assisted by lurid taglines to describe the even more sensational content. Despite this ease of recognition, definitions of what horror is, or is supposed to be, abound. Many refer to the origins of the word, from the Latin verb *horrere*, to bristle.

Others, such as Carroll, have made an attempt to separate ideas of real-life and 'art-horror', the latter emotion only being evoked when one is confronted with works of fiction. Another distinction has been the divide between concepts of 'horror' and 'terror', which can be found in writings from the eighteenth century and is still used today.

Similarly, thoughts on how to explain the attraction of such terrifying material have taken as many different forms as the genre itself. As Fred Botting notes, horror appears to contradict itself with regards to the intended affect: "The emotions most associated with Gothic fiction are similarly ambivalent: objects of terror and horror not only provoke repugnance, disgust and recoil, but also engage readers' interest, fascinating and attracting them. Threats are spiced with thrills, terrors with delights, horrors with pleasures" (1996:9). It is this contradiction that many have sought to explain: the essay "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror" by John and Anna Aikin, published in 1773, and Ann Radcliffe's "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (1826) were among the first texts to discuss the paradox of the enjoyment of negative emotions. In 1919, Sigmund Freud, in his essay "The Uncanny", asked himself a similar question and was followed by H.P. Lovecraft and his *Supernatural Horror in Literature* in 1927. These texts have provided explanations ranging from a need to satisfy one's curiosity, to a return to and cleansing of repressed emotions or a feeling of awe and fascination provided by this type of narrative. Many of these theories have been considered, amended and rewritten in the years that followed and the field of horror theory is very much alive today: one only needs to look at the large number of monographs, articles and edited collections that have been published in the last few decades. The question as to why people are drawn to and enjoy gruesome stories and images clearly remains a compelling one. However, horror theory as a field tends to be rather limited, focusing primarily on books and movies, while expressions of the genre can also be found in art, in music, in theatre and in games, forms which have been largely ignored by academia. The objective of the current discussion is to move beyond this limited tradition, instead engaging with another specific genre form, that of performance, or live action, horror.

Yet this prompts the question as to what makes performance horror remarkable, deserving of close attention. In order to answer that, let me take you to New York City, to a place called Nightmare Haunted House, a venue which has been running for a number of years. It bills itself as the city's most horrifying attraction, promising those who go through

its doors the thrill of a lifetime. Every year, Nightmare is updated and a new theme inspires the content, often with input from visitors: what scares them the most, and what would they like to see? Since Nightmare first opened, it has incorporated serial killers, fairy tales, vampires, paranormal experiences, bad dreams and the thirteen most common phobias. Fears are played out right there, right in front of one's eyes. Scenes where the audience sees something horrible happening to someone else, and then it happens to them. No chance to cover one's eyes, or one's ears; *you* are the star of your own horror film; *you* are the victim.

It is this aspect, this confrontation that is at the heart of the form and distinguishes it from the books and films that are so often discussed in the critical literature. Performance horror places its audience at the centre of the experience, often asking (or even demanding) direct input from its spectators in order to create a narrative. It insists on one's engagement with the material through a meeting between living beings. The aim of this thesis is to examine the form and a number of its manifestations in detail and to arrive at some observations as to what the elements are that create such a unique intensity.

In its discussion of performance horror, this study will follow the ideas of Andrew Tudor on separating horror entertainment into different forms. Tudor states that: "[The scholars] ask, in effect, what is it that people-in-general like about horror-in-general. […] The question should not be 'why horror?' at all. It should be, rather, why do *these* people like *this* horror in *this* place at *this* particular time?" (1997:445, 461) The approach suggested by Tudor is too granular and would result in an attempt to define the reasons behind the enjoyment of the genre by every single individual, a nigh on impossible goal. Although most existing horror theory tends to be rather abstract (Noël Carroll, for instance, treats his readers to a 'general' and 'universal' thesis behind horror's pleasures), the fragmented method advocated by Tudor is not preferable, either. Instead, this thesis aims to move away entirely from the "why horror?" paradox, and wants to address one aspect of Tudor's question: what is the attraction of "*this* horror"? The focus will be on the underlying structure of the genre: how do people experience horrific materials? What elements are perceived as particularly frightening, and how are they used by practitioners to scare the spectators?

The reason for this approach is, first and foremost, the fact that it would be impossible to map out the myriad of individual reasons behind the enjoyment of horror. As

is argued by Stanley Fish: even if readers (or, here, spectators) are exposed to the same material, their opinions and experiences of a text may differ greatly: "C. S. Lewis [...] explained his differences with Dr. Leavis in this way: "It is not that he and I see different things when we look at *Paradise Lost*. He sees and hates the very same things that I see and love" (Fish, 1970:148). This difference in perception of the same material complicates the goal of formulating a universal thesis, which would be applicable to all fans of the genre.

Furthermore, the question remains whether a liking for horror is as much of a paradox as is suggested. As is noted by Tudor, "[though it is often said] that liking horror is a bit peculiar, it is in principle no different to asking what kind of people like musicals, thrillers or weepies" (1997:444). Each of the genres mentioned has its own particular attraction to a particular audience. In some of the examples mentioned by Tudor, this attraction seems to originate from a negative and perhaps paradoxical source: when watching a 'weepy', why subject oneself to these sad emotions? Is there any difference in the number of people killed in a war drama or a horror film? Tudor also refers to the changing nature of the genre: "Indeed, precisely the same representation of a monster might be found frightening, repulsive, ludicrous, pitiful or laughable by audiences in different social circumstances and at different times" (1997:457), reiterating both the multitude of views, as well as underlining Fish's point about the difference in experience. Despite these negative views, the horror genre has continued to grow, as has the number of fans, perhaps becoming more accepted in the process. As Botting notes, threats become thrills, horror becomes pleasure. [1] Can it honestly be said that the enjoyment of horror is such a weird pastime if people keep returning to it, if people keep revisiting and delighting in the traditions, rules and formulas that have been done to death? Perhaps one should not question the rollercoaster, should not ask why one wants to ride it, but rather, ask how it makes one feel...

As a result of these considerations, I have chosen to focus on a theoretical approach rather than the use of audience research. As I have argued, too much horror scholarship has been centred on the supposed 'weirdness' of the horror fan, on the idea that something is wrong with those who enjoy the genre and its products. In addition, the use of audience research in performance theory can be questioned in its own right. Any

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[1] See, for instance, Fred Botting's essay on what he calls 'Disney Gothic' in Spooner and McEvoy (2007).

production is an amalgamation of complex decisions made by its creators and of the way in which these decisions and outcomes are received by every single person in any audience on any given evening. As a result, it seems almost futile to try and catch all of these variations through a questionnaire. Audiences may not find an adequate reflection of their thoughts and opinions amongst the questions and answers, which may result in a skewed view of the performance and its reception. With regards to the topic discussed here, the emotional state of the audience after seeing the performance needs to be taken into account, as well. Are those visitors who run screaming from a scare attraction able to give an objective, or any, opinion on the quality of the production they just saw?

In many ways, horror is made by fans, for fans and even about fans. Many of its worst movies have become cult classics, and, in the words of Andy Nyman, the genre is largely critic proof:

> If somebody says to you, "Go and see this movie, it's absolutely hysterical, it's had terrible reviews, but I promise you, you will cry with laughter," you will go. You will not go and see *Borat* because it's had great reviews, you will go because you've heard it's hilarious. If someone says to you, "Oh my God, go and see... *Saw V*. It's a piece of shit, but there's one moment where you'll jump out of your seat," you will go. (2012)

As a result, the way in which the audience is approached and questioned in this scenario may require a different approach based on its consumers. The use of questionnaires and visitor feedback is likely to yield interesting data, yet with the rise of social media and the way in which these productions are often marketed, one may need to be careful as to how to structure and collect data on spectators. A classic questionnaire may not capture the myriad of possible responses that is out there. Instead, the choice was made to focus on a way to capture the form and its elements and to establish a framework through which to discuss this type of work.

The aim of this study is to analyse a variety of live action horror entertainments, focusing on horror theatre (both classic adaptations and original productions), scare attractions and live action role-playing events. What follows is, first and foremost, a close reading of existing literature and a more detailed exploration of the methodology employed here. The theoretical framework presented in this introduction will be the basis for the case studies that follow.

The first chapter, The Haunted Stage, will examine examples of classic horror theatre, focusing on Stephen Mallatratt's adaptation of the novel *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill and *The Haunting*, a recent production written by Hugh Janes which is based on a number of Charles Dickens' ghost stories. The second chapter, The Deadly Theatre, will concern itself with two original productions, *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead*. Although all of these are stage productions, the issues they raise merit a separation into two chapters to fully explore each performance and the questions it asks on providing scares from the proscenium arch.

The two consecutive chapters move to forms which are more immersive in nature. A Bloody Playground, the third chapter, focuses on scare attractions, venues which employ a walkthrough dramatic presentation that includes live actors, animatronics and various effects to scare its visitors. It is this form in which the audience is able (and required) to take a more active role. As such, the chapter will focus on issues of (imagined) audience agency in the immersive environment presented by this type of venue. Finally, in Zombies'R'Us, the discussion will turn to specific performance events, immersive games where the participants take on fictional roles and become part of a horror narrative. This study will look specifically at zombie experiences, as they show an interesting shift in audience agency: participants may choose the role of either victim or monster, and their activity is heightened beyond the experience of scare attractions. By combining theoretical frameworks with experience and practical work, the current study intends to analyse the elements of performance horror events, the experiences they create in their audiences and how these responses are then received and interpreted.

Acknowledgements

Introduction
"Ladies and gentlemen, the tour is about to begin..!"

> What is horror? That is a dangerously misleading question. We should ask instead, what isn't?
> - Christopher Weigl, "Introducing Horror", 2003:717

Frayed white letters appear against a blood-soaked background, accompanied by images of shambling figures and the sound of a chainsaw, a slow pulse and maniacal laughter. Then there is the text: "This fall, you will be tested, mentally, physically, until your blood is shed. Are you ready?"[2] Are the patrons ready for the challenge, ready to subject themselves to this promise? As briefly outlined in the preface, what underpins this discussion is the notion that the experience of live action, or performance, horror is fundamentally different from the experience generated by other horror forms. Performance is there, it is in your face, unavoidable, inescapable. This introduction seeks to explore a definition of the form, as well as its position in relation to existing criticism: although a number of the entertainments discussed here only came into existence fairly recently, it appears that they are taking on the system from the inside, as it were, offering well-known thrills in a new package, pushing the boundaries while at the same time remaining firmly rooted in tradition.

What will be understood as performance horror here is a form of the genre that is closely related to the performing arts, incorporating a variety of stage tropes. The term can refer to actual theatre work, but encompasses a larger number of productions. The key difference between live action horror and other genre forms is its immediacy, its liveness: rather than being merely portrayed in words or on screen, the frightening narrative and effects of this form are played out in real-time, often in close proximity to the spectator. In this way, the audience is brought out of the darkness and thrust into the light; in many cases, they become the focus of the performance, even the protagonist. Before proceeding, it should be noted that this study will only discuss events and venues that are geared towards entertainment. The reason behind this decision is to be able to give the study more of a focus: including 'real' events would

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[2] TerrorTest trailer 2008: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kX7zs9RtVlg [Accessed: May 3, 2011]

mean that a large number of additional issues need to be explored, and it is doubtful whether such a view will strengthen the main argument of the current work. What follows is a closer examination of the term 'performance horror', unpicking and exploring both concepts within the context of existing theory.

Liveness and immediacy

Before examining issues of drama and horror theory more closely, however, it is necessary to discuss the validity of the proposed approach in more detail. Setting out to follow Tudor's advice regarding a form-specific discussion, it will be necessary to outline what makes performance horror worthy of attention: what sets it apart from novels and films? Aleks Sierz, writing about in-yer-face theatre,[3] notes the immediacy of theatre as a form:

> How can theatre be so shocking? The main reason is that it is live. […] When you're watching a play, which is mostly in real time with real people acting just a few feet away from you, not only do you find yourself reacting but you also know that others are reacting and are aware of your reaction. (2000:7)

It could be argued that the element of liveness that is present in performance horror thus affects its audience in a more direct way than film could: as Sierz states, one is surrounded by real people, with real people acting close to you, and real people getting hurt in the same space, as opposed to actions being played out on a screen. This view is echoed by Peter Brook: "The theatre is the arena where a living confrontation can take place. The focus of a large group of people creates a unique intensity" (2008:112).

Peggy Phelan, in her 1993 book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, puts forward that the fact that this liveness is a factor that defines performance as a form:

> Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. (146; emphasis in original)

According to Phelan, once performance is captured, it loses its power and even its identity: a recorded performance is no longer a performance, but instead becomes

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[3] 'In-yer-face theatre' refers to the British drama that emerged in the 1990s, a form that "[crosses] normal boundaries" and "shocks audiences by the extremism of its language and images; unsettles them by its emotional frankness and disturbs them by its acute questioning of moral norms." http://www.inyerface-theatre.com/what.html [Accessed: April 27, 2010]

something else. Even a restaging will always create a different effect: "Performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as "different"" (Phelan, 1993:146). This, in turn, impacts on the reception of live performance and how it is consumed by its audience: "Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterwards" (Phelan, 1993:149). Throughout the piece, Phelan voices her ideas of the distinctiveness of live performance as a form.

Philip Auslander, however, calls into question the validity of this way of thinking which states that live is special, live is unique, and above all, live is better than mediatized, live is better than film. In his discussion, Auslander focuses on a comparison between theatre and the medium of television, drawing attention to the "*immediacy* and *intimacy*" (2008:14; emphasis in original) of TV, as well as the fact that "[u]nlike film, but like theatre, a television broadcast is characterized as a performance in the present" (2008:15). He goes on to note the repeatability of certain types of live performance, in particular long-running or touring immersive productions: "In these cases [of immersive theatre], live performance takes on the defining characteristics of a mass medium: it makes the same text available simultaneously to a large number of participants distributed widely in space" (2008:52). Auslander continues:

> Because [these productions] are designed to offer a different experience at each visit, they can be merchandised as events that must be purchased over and over again: the ostensible evanescence and nonrepeatability of the live experience ironically become selling points to promote a product that must be fundamentally the same in each of its instantiations. The promise of having a different experience at each attendance at an interactive play is meaningful only if each is clearly recognizable as a different experience of the same, essentially static, object. (2008:52)

It would be impossible to ignore Auslander's words in relation to the form under discussion: horror performance borrows heavily from other media, and many of the events fit the mould of a repeatable performance quite perfectly. Whether for a month or throughout the year, scare attractions offer the same experience to hundreds of people a day, with many repeat visitors. The stage version of *The Woman in Black* has now been running in London since 1989, with at least one show daily. Yet despite these concerns, it is the liveness that is the essence of the experience and is exactly what makes horror performance what it is. The influence of both film and television on the productions cannot be denied, nor the factor of repeatability and its impact on how the

audiences interact with the events. However, the horror here based on the scares that the spectators will be familiar with *from* the media, and one they now wish to try out for themselves. Television might provide a certain level of presence, of immediacy and intimacy, yet it cannot put *you* into the action, and it is on this level that horror performance remains so strongly a live experience: it is the audience who are the protagonist, who are the star, who are the victim and the final girl (or boy). They are the ones fighting for survival rather than passively watching, and it is for this reason that the impact of the live experience remains of such importance and lends these entertainments their distinctiveness.

In addition to the presence of live performance, the horror events bring something else to the table, as is discussed by Emma McEvoy: "Theatre and dramatic performance have the potential for introducing potent factors into Gothic work – real space and real time" (2007:215). Commenting on this use of space, McEvoy adds another factor to the intensity which can be created by a horror performance event: "Site-specific performance can bring the audience into the haunted house, materialising the spaces of the Gothic" (2007:220). The spectator is not only told the proverbial stuff of nightmares, but is physically transported into, and thus brought closer, to their fears. As shall become clear later on, this use of space is very important in the framing and experience of such an event.

These separate elements, real space, real time, real presence, real people, in short, immediacy, can be connected to two concepts, which have been put forward by John Morreall in his article "Enjoying Negative Emotions in Fictions" (1985): control and distance. Control is understood as the power an audience can exert over the material, the means by which they can directly influence or manipulate the material presented. Often you hear people talking about how they closed their eyes during a particularly gory part of a movie, or how they had to stop reading a book because it was simply too scary. This is what is meant by control: the option to manipulate the material in such a way that the horrific experience ceases immediately. Such an emergency exit is an option in the case of both novels and films: by closing the book, or closing one's eyes, the horror is immediately shut out. To use Morreall's own words: "When we have this ability to start, stop, and direct the experience, we can enjoy a wide range of experiences, even "unpleasant" ones" (1985:97). His argument is based on the notion that, as long as audiences are in control, negative, (and for the sake of this argument) scary emotions can be enjoyed: "Intense fear – terror – is not enjoyable because in such

a state we lose control over our attention, our bodies, and our total situation" (Morreall, 1985:97). A similar idea can be found in "Power, Horror and Ambivalence" (2001) by Daniel Shaw: "If one were *really* in danger, one would not feel the terror as pleasurable" (n.pag.).

Next to the sense of control, Morreall adds a second concept, distance, stating that: "Control is usually easiest to maintain when we are merely attending to something which has no practical consequences for us, as when we watch from a distance some event unrelated to us" (1985:97). Distance implies the position of the audience in respect to the material. For instance, in the case of a film, the viewer occupies a third person view and is watching the actions of others without actively taking part. Although identification of the audience with the characters is possible and even necessary to fully enjoy the material, it can still be noted that there is a difference between the audience and the actual story. They can identify, but are not actively involved: the protagonists are chased by a maniacal killer, and not the cinema-goer. Morreall's ideas are echoed in the work of Isabel Pinedo, who states that in horror entertainment:

> [T]he element of control, the conviction that there is nothing to be afraid of, turns stress/arousal (beating heart, dry mouth, panic grip) into a pleasurable sensation. [...] [R]ecreational terror must produce a bounded experience that will not generate so much distress that the seasoned horror audience member will walk out. In order to produce recreational terror, the re-creation of terror must be only partial. [...] The experience of terror is bounded by the tension between proximity and distance, reality and illusion. In recreational terror, we fear the threat of physical danger, but the danger fails to materialize. (2004:106-107)

According to Morreall and Pinedo, performance horror can be seen as a more intense and (potentially) more frightening experience. When seeing a character on the screen wielding a chainsaw, a cinemagoer can imagine the feeling of its teeth sinking into their flesh, identifying with the protagonists and shuddering at the idea of such pain. In the case of live action horror, visitors become protagonists themselves: instead of merely watching characters being beset by a maniacal killer, they are themselves chased through dark corridors. Because of the elements of real space and time mentioned by McEvoy, as well as the immediacy that is addressed by Sierz, the feelings of control and distance will be significantly less in the case of such entertainments, thus making the event more distressing.

It should be noted, however, that evidence for Morreall's claims cannot be found in his writing, which is presented as more of a philosophical argument as

opposed to a rigorous academic exploration. As a result, it might seem easy to criticize or even dismiss these concepts, something which has been attempted by Berys Gaut in "The Paradox of Horror":

> [T]he control thesis leaves it utterly mysterious how the mere fact that I can choose to attend or not to an otherwise unpleasant emotion, such as fear, could render that emotion pleasant. [T]he theory's linkage of the enjoyment of such emotions with the control of them seems straightforwardly false. (1993:338)

A fair point, yet when considering psychological research, the validity of Morreall's work can be seen: in the influential study from 1970, "Reduction of Stress in Humans through Nonveridical Perceived Control of Averse Stimulation", James Geer presents the results of tests that show a strong link to Morreall's essay. The research performed by Geer focused on the notion of *perceived* control and its effects on the amount of stress experienced by test subjects upon being administered a small electric shock. Despite the fact that the subjects had no real influence over the experiment, Geer observed that the participants who were informed they could control the duration of the shock showed less signs of stress than those who were simply subjected to the current. In his conclusion, he states that "human beings tend to find less stressful those aversive situations over which they at least believe they have some degree of control... Perhaps the next best thing to being master of one's fate is being deluded into thinking he is" (1970:737-738). Most notable for the current discussion is the fact that Geer's conclusion relates to *perceived* control, thus fully supporting the ideas voiced by Morreall.

Serious theatre, serious games

Morreall's discussion of the concepts of control and distance, however, once more focuses on the study of novels and film. Yet his ideas are not unique; others have sought to examine the relation between audience and stage in the specific context of performance. Most relevant for this discussion is the work of Antonin Artaud and his emphasis on the affect experienced by the spectators: "[T]heatre is only of any worth through a magical and dreadful link with reality and with danger" (Schumacher, 2001:86). In his work, Artaud rejects the ideas of theatre-as-mimesis, of "imitation of life *outside* life" (Schumacher, 2001:xxi). Instead, his theatre should be like life, even surpassing reality to create emotion in its spectators:

> This is the *human* anxiety the spectators must feel when they come out. They will be shaken and irritated by the inner dynamism of the production taking place before their eyes. The dynamism will be directly related to the anxiety and the preoccupations of their entire lives. (Schumacher, 2001:32; emphasis in original)

Artaud is very concerned with those features that set theatre apart from, in his words, writing, and this is a theme that keeps emerging in his work: "What seems to me a first truth above all is this: in order for theatre, an independent autonomous art, to be revived, or simply to stay alive, it must clearly indicate what differentiates it from the script, from pure speech, literature and all other predetermined, written methods" (Schumacher, 2001:124). Instead, "I maintain the stage is a tangible, physical place that needs to be filled and it ought to be allowed to speak its own concrete language" (Schumacher, 2001:103). The language of theatre, according to Artaud, is a specific one, one made up of many different languages:

> The question we are faced is of allowing theatre to discover its true language, spatial language, gestural language, language of attitudes, expressions and mime, language of cries and onomatopoeia, an acoustic language where all the objective elements will end up as either visual or aural signs, but which have as much intellectual weight and palpable meaning as the language of words. (Schumacher, 2001:75)

This language finds its place in the *mise en scène*, which Artaud describes as "taking this word in its broadest sense, regarding it as the language of everything which can be 'put-on-the-stage'" (Schumacher, 2001:77). It is the features that only theatre possesses that, according to Artaud, create the performance event, and it is not just the script that is of importance in the narrative of performance. A rejection of the script in favour of the total language of the theatre was the only means by which the human condition could be adequately addressed and expressed and Artaud's vision of theatre was:

> [A]n attempt to communicate the fullness of the human experience and emotion, bypassing the discursive use of language and establishing contact between the artist and his audience at a level above – or perhaps below – the merely cerebral appeal of the verbal plane. (Esslin, 1977:75)

For Artaud, the theatrical form is based on pure emotion, on involving, assaulting, and surrounding his audience with all means of theatrical communication available in order to tell the story, to get the message across. He sees performances staged during his lifetime as adopting the lifelessness of pure writing, of literature, where "everything which cannot be expressed in words or, if you prefer, everything that is not contained in

dialogue […] has been left in the background" (Schumacher, 2001:103). In order to excite these different, stronger emotions and produce a new kind of theatre, Artaud draws on techniques which appear similar to the concepts introduced by Morreall, as is described by Daphne Ben Chaim: "The major technique to abolish psychological distance [for Artaud] is to do away with the physical distance between actor and audience, or to significantly alter it" (1984:41).

It is this emphasis on using all elements of the *mise en scène* that makes Artaud of such importance to this study. As the case studies will show, more often than not the use of scripted dialogue, or indeed, any spoken word, is not as vital as it would be in traditional productions, or is even dispensed with in favour of (very few) improvised lines. Rather, it is up to all other elements, the space, the costume, the props, the lighting and location, to convey the story to the audience and instil them with fear. While scripting still takes centre stage in the productions discussed in the first two chapters, dramaturgy and stagecraft have an equally important role. This distinction is even more pronounced in scare attractions and zombie events, where scripted dialogue all but disappears in favour of embodied experience.

One of the aspects that becomes a focus for Artaud is the choice and use of theatre space. In a number of his essays Artaud offers descriptions of how he pictures these performances: "The action will unfold, extending its trajectory from floor to floor, from place to place, with sudden outbursts flaring up in different spots like conflagrations" (Schumacher, 2001:116). What becomes instantly apparent is the way in which any physical distance between the spectator and performer and the spectator and the set is obliterated. Audience members are immersed in the production, with the aim to involve but also to disorient them. Again, the emphasis on the lack of a gap between life and theatre is shown. It is these features that can be found in a number of horror performances. The manipulation of space in order to immerse and affect the spectator is key to many of the events discussed here, as will be shown in subsequent chapters.

Despite the apparent similarities, however, Artaud cannot be used as a mere blueprint of horror performance. As Ben Chaim states, "Artaud wants his theatre to be taken seriously, not as amusement or mere entertainment but as a place for profoundly significant events and therefore for an equally profound effect on the spectator, transforming him or her in actual life" (1984:44). Thus the primary goal of much of performance horror, entertainment-to-make-money, prohibits a more direct relation to

Artaud's views, yet at the same time, the connection to the genre cannot be denied. In the words of Artaud himself:

> Audiences coming to our theatre know they are present at a real operation involving not only the mind but also the very senses and flesh. From then on they will go to the theatre as they would to a surgeon or dentist, in the same frame of mind, knowing, of course, that they will not die, but that all the same this is serious business, and that they will not come out unscathed [...] They must be thoroughly convinced we can make them scream. (Schumacher, 2001:34)

Again, the duality of Artaud is shown: the experience described is a deeply affecting, almost a religious one for an audience, aimed to transport them to a better state of being. At the same time, both the ideas and even the vocabulary employed both here and in essays such as "Theatre and the Plague" evoke images of horror. Interestingly, Artaud's visceral physical experience had its limitations, and deliberately so, as described by Ben Chaim: "Theatre can be a kind of surgery on the mind – just that serious- and yet only the game-condition that the spectator knows "that he will not die" permits so serious an operation to occur" (1984:45). Despite Artaud's aim to bridge the gap between theatre and audience, to immerse the spectators completely in sound and image and action, to make theatre into a reality that surpasses life, his shows are essentially safe: "Artaud suggests a radical reduction of distance, but he still wants the spectator to possess the psychological protection implicit in the very situation of knowing that one is in the theatre for the purposes of "serious games"" (Ben Chaim, 1984:49-50).

This idea of serious games creates a link to Pinedo's descriptions of a "bounded experience of recreational terror", cited earlier, and ties in with Johan Huizinga's ideas of performance-as-play, which, in turn, relate strongly to horror entertainment. In his writings, Huizinga defines three characteristics of play:

> [T]he first main characteristic of play [is] that it is free, is in fact freedom. A second characteristic is closely connected with this, namely, that play is not "ordinary" or "real" life. It is rather a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. [...] Play is distinct from "ordinary" life both as to locality and duration. This is the third main characteristic of play: its secludedness, its limitedness. It is "played out" within certain limits of time and place. It contains its own course and meaning. (2003:42-43)

Viewing horror as play provides a framework that incorporates not only the performance element of the experience, but also the participation of audiences and the playfulness of the whole endeavour. Although each form requires rehearsal, the direct

interaction with spectators makes for a performance that is likely to be different each time. The idea that no two performances are alike is already well-established in performance theory, yet it could be argued that in modes of performance horror and other forms of participatory theatre, this change will be even stronger from one event to the next, requiring specific skills from the performers in terms of improvisation, adaptability and audience management.

Yet this playfulness does not merely exist for performers, and Huizinga's ideas allow for an explanation of the emotional playfulness that is exhibited in many shows: although some performances and events will be 'hard-line' horror, setting out to do nothing but terrify the audience, a large number of forms toe the line between horror and comedy, switching from one to the other to provide welcome relief. The title of *Play Dead*, for example, already sets the tone for what an audience can expect. Similarly, actors in the London Dungeons joke with visitors during a re-enactment of a seventeenth century court case or as performers demonstrate the use of torture devices on an unsuspecting volunteer.

Furthermore, Huizinga defines the existence of rules in play: "They determine what "holds" in the temporary world circumscribed by play" (2003:44). These rules operate on two levels when discussing horror performance. Firstly, actual physical rules exist in terms of disclaimers and safety proceedings, relating to health and safety issues. Secondly, on a more abstract level, the rules of horror are tied to the conventions of the genre. A good example of this is a scene from the 1996 movie *Scream*. The character of Randy (played by Jamie Kennedy), depicted as being a die-hard horror fan, is shown at a party where a group of characters is watching the original *Halloween*, actively anticipating and enjoying the scares and thrills. When some of the others start joking about the character of Laurie (portrayed by Jamie Lee Curtis) and the lack of nudity in *Halloween*, Randy states that Curtis always played the virgin in horror movies: "That's why she always outsmarted the killer in the big chase scene at the end. Only virgins can do that. Don't you know the rules?" Referring to the rules that one must abide by in order to successfully survive a horror movie, Randy proceeds to outline the conventions: no sins (no sex and no use of drugs or alcohol), everyone is a suspect, and "never ever ever under any circumstances say 'I'll be right back', because you won't be back."

It is these types of conventions and classic rules that horror audiences will already be familiar with, which they expect to see in a live genre performance. This idea of knowing is echoed in literature on horror fans as both Matt Hills and Mark Kermode

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refer to the existence of in-jokes: "[Horror fans] are not laughing at pain; they're laughing at the movie. Or, more precisely, they're laughing *with* the movie" (Kermode, 2001:132; emphasis in original). Similarly, in his definition of horrality, the connection between horror and textuality, Philip Brophy states:

> 'Horrality' is too blunt to bother with psychology [...] because what is of prime importance is the textual effect, the game that one plays *with* the text, a game that is impervious to any knowledge of its workings. The contemporary horror film knows you've seen it before; it *knows* that you know what is about to happen; and it knows that you know it knows you know. (2000:279; emphasis in original)

This feeling of getting the joke can thus create a feeling of connection amongst fans, fuelled by the perception of those with a love for horror outside of the fandom. As is stated by Kermode: "I was made profoundly aware of the absolute divide between horror fans and everybody else in the world" (2001:128). The idea of community is echoed in Huizinga's discussion of play, where he notes that: "[T]he feeling of being "apart together" in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game" (2003:45). An instance of play contains a feeling of shared experience, which, in the case of performance horror, can take two forms: the lasting feeling of belonging to a fandom, as described by Kermode and Huizinga, and the experience of that particular moment with others. Most performance horror events are to be enjoyed by small groups: scare attractions divide visitors into parties of ten to fifteen people; horror plays work best in a small auditorium with a limited number of spectators. In such a small setting, the role of the audience is an active and participatory one, as protagonists in their own horror narrative. Using the concept of play allows for a way to discuss an experience that includes a certain set of (cultural) rules; that is at the same time serious and just fun; that is participatory as well as individual, and that can be both inclusive and exclusive for each of these individual participants as well as for the group as a community.

The aforementioned insistence on the participation of an audience in live action horror is, perhaps surprisingly, reminiscent of Augusto Boal's poetics of the oppressed. As Boal's theatre emerges from an almost purely political background, it seems hardly possible to see a connection with the scares-for-laughs commercial entertainment provided by performance horror. However, as described by Adrian Jackson, the

translator of Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, "[i]t is fundamental to Boal's work that anyone can act and that theatrical performance should not be solely the province of professionals. The dual meaning of the word 'act', to perform and to take action, is also at the heart of the work" (2002:xxii). It is the action that is of importance here, as well as the role of the audience in Boal's forms, the possibility of stepping in and changing the action. Several of the forms discussed in this study rely on, or even insist on, an involved spectator and it may even be up to the audience to drive the performance through their words and actions. In Boal's words, "all human beings are actors (they act!) and spectators (they observe!) They are spect-actors" (2002:15).

The concept of the spect-actor is discussed in more detail in his *Theatre of the Oppressed*: "In order to understand this *poetics of the oppressed* one must keep in mind its main objective: to change the people – "spectators", passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, into actors, transformers of dramatic action" (1979:122; emphasis in original). In keeping with his political aims, Boal perceives this form as a rehearsal for real action: "Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!" (1979:155) The spect-actors play at, act at, rehearse at overthrowing their oppressors, and in doing so, they will become stronger: "No matter that the action is fictional; what matters is that it is action!" (Boal, 1979:122) Fiction and reality move closer, possibly even merge: "The truth of the matter is that the spectator-actor practices a real act even though he does it in a fictional manner" (1979:141). The ultimate goal is the liberation of the audience, followed by a liberation of the people.

Although these seem lofty goals for performance horror, a form that so clearly links itself to commercial entertainment, some aspects of Boal's ideas do ring true. The insistence on an active audience, an audience which is no longer passive but *has* to participate in order to fully experience the performance does cast the spectators of performance horror as spect-actors. Secondly, although this is not apparent in all forms, the idea of rehearsal for real events and vanquishing the oppressor (the same oppressors who, throughout Boal's writing, are often associated with the image of the monster) resonates with the casting of the audience as victim and their need to escape from whatever threat they will be facing for the duration of the event (or, in some cases, empowering the audience as they themselves become the monster). Although relevant, the ideas of Boal need to be used with some care in the current context. As a result, I

will return to Boal's work in the following chapters in order to discuss and perhaps reframe his ideas in more detail.

In contrast to Boal's political aims, the entertainment value of performance horror which is generated by an active audience is captured more accurately by Kurt Lancaster:

> These kinds of events demand active participation by spectators, which blur the boundary between the performers' space and the spectators' space, as they create the performance event together. Further, because performance-entertainments are more or less improvisational and open ended – not necessarily having predetermined outcomes of actions or forming a single resolution – these performances give people the opportunity to inject their own values and beliefs into the event. (1997:77)

Here, the spect-actor is not a member of an oppressed minority, seeking to empower his community, but an entertainment-loving modern citizen, looking for a thrill by being able to insert himself in the action and thus becoming part of a fiction, and of something that is larger than life (for instance, Lancaster refers to movie theme parks where visitors can play the part of action heroes).

In addition to this personal pleasure of the event, there is an enjoyment that extends beyond the individual. This can be fandom, as pointed out by Kermode, yet it is also promoted by the experience of performance as a form. As noted by Anne Ubersfeld, the pleasure of the spectator is "not a solitary pleasure, but is reflected on and reverberates through others"; instead, it is "made up of all kinds of pleasures", "related to an activity" and can be found in "opaque signs" (2003:237). This concept of the "pleasure of the sign" (2003:238), understood by Ubersfeld in terms of being able to recognise and interpret specific elements of a performance from a personal perspective, is reminiscent of the use of in-jokes in horror, discussed earlier, and the avid referencing between movies and other genre products. Furthermore, the description of the "pleasure of the sign" by Ubersfeld ties in with the idea of "the feeling of being "apart together" from Huizinga: through recognition of the signs (and, if you will, the conventions), an audience member enjoys being able to take part in something bigger than themselves. However, this pleasure can also become a pressure. As is noted by Marvin Carlson:

> [T]he pressure of audience response can coerce individual members to structure and interpret their experience in a way which might well not have occurred to them as solitary readers and, further, which might not have been within the

interpretive boundaries planned by the creators of the performance text. (1993:85)

In terms of horror, this sentiment is echoed in the words of Mark Jancovich: "Within certain contexts, it would be inappropriate (other than in exceptional circumstances) to admit to being frightened by horror films" (2000:32). Not only does peer pressure operate in terms of response to the material, but also to the behaviour during the event: because of the intimacy that is often exhibited in performance horror (a small auditorium, groups of approximately ten people), spectators will not only be aware of the actual show that is being played out, but also of others, and of their own response in relation to others. Actors are not just performing to an audience, but rather, visitors are turning into participants, as they become part of the show and, in that capacity, perform to the other members of the group.

Specifically in performance, as the quote from Sierz has shown, the event is experienced as a group. In terms of horror, where any feelings are likely to be strong ones, the emotions of the group as a whole can have a strong effect on the experience: Stanley Rachman (1974:14) and Jeffrey Gray (1987:21) list "observations (direct and indirect) of people exhibiting fear" and "stimuli arising during social interaction" as a general cause of fear. In addition, Janice Kelly describes the concept of "emotional contagion", which: "refers to the process whereby the moods and emotions of those around us influence our own emotional state. That is, it is the process through which we "catch" other people's emotions" (2001:168). Thus members of the small audience can easily become entangled in the emotions of themselves and others, heightening the overall experience. Furthermore, when being guided through a venue or sitting in on an event with only a small group, it is not uncommon that some form of community spirit emerges: group members will look out for each other and position themselves in much closer proximity to other people than they normally would when in a situation with total strangers. This connection to others in the group is often exploited as some venues will (briefly) separate members of the audience from the tour group: considering this choice within the context of bonding described above and the idea of safety in numbers, it is easy to see how this separation would cause a very immediate sense of nervousness.

In his writings on proxemics, Edward Hall discusses this dynamic in terms of the way in which personal space is ordered and how close one might allow other people to approach them. According to Hall, there are a number of features influencing this process, most notably cultural differences and how well one knows the other person:

strangers will be kept at a distance, while family and friends are allowed to come much closer. Furthermore, Hall notes a change in perceptions of distance and comfort when confronted with anxiety. Whereas one would normally be reserved when interacting with strangers, when heightened emotions are displayed, the normal order of proxemics is distorted: "The greater the anxiety, the greater the distortions" (Hall, 1963:440). For this discussion, this signifies another interesting process in terms of performance horror: when one would normally be reserved towards strangers, the affective emotion in these events that is brought about can break down normal boundaries, and spectators who have never met before can suddenly find themselves physically clinging to each other. Almost without noticing, the audience of live action horror becomes more involved with both the performance and with other participants, creating a small community for the duration of the performance (or, in some cases, beyond). They have invested and have been able to survive the experience, as have those with them.

Horrors of the past: Definitions and theory

With the use of that word survive, one is again reminded of the contradictory nature of the horror genre: how can anyone enjoy materials that present such gruesome images? Who are these strange people who take delight in outpourings of blood and guts? Although the approach chosen here does not rely solely on horror theory and does not deal with the questions typically asked by academics, some of principles used in this field will be helpful as a means to discuss the ideas outlined here. As such, a brief overview of the existing theories is necessary. In the first part of his book *The Pleasures of Horror*, Matt Hills outlines the three most important strands of horror theory: the cognitive, fantastic and psychoanalytic approaches. It is his analysis which will form the basis for the current discussion. The cognitive theory is the first to be addressed by Hills and his writing is largely based on *The Philosophy of Horror*, the landmark publication by Noël Carroll. Although flawed in a number of ways, Carroll's book remains one of the most important works in modern horror theory and the author a pioneer of this approach. In *The Pleasures of Horror*, Hills provides a concise list of the aspects of horror that cognitivists have put forward as the elements that dictate the pleasures of horrific materials:

- fascination and curiosity at impossible, monstrous beings;
- disclosure plots that resemble the 'proofs' of philosophy;
- concerns with power/control; and

- evaluations of morality/creativity. (2005: 23)

The first idea listed is voiced by Carroll and refers to an attraction of horror based on morbid curiosity. It reminds one of the experience with which one might be familiar, that of something (or someone) being so ugly, so revolting, that one simply cannot look away. This theory of fascination resonates with Julia Kristeva's ideas on the abject as described in *Powers of Horror* (1982). According to Kristeva, "[i]t is […] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1982:4). The abject exists outside of order, outside of a system, outside of one's comprehension and, as a result, "[o]ne thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims – if not its submissive and willing ones" (1982:9).

The second view is again coined by Carroll and relates to the idea that, in order to witness the ending of a story, one is inclined to ignore the scary or gory aspects of the narrative or at least tolerate them for the sake of the plot. Carroll's views state that curiosity and fascination are the main motives for the consumption and enjoyment of horror: people are able to endure the horrific nature of the material in order to find out what happens and how the story ends. As such, Carroll's cognitive viewpoints rely heavily on the existence of an actual narrative, a full storyline with beginning and end and moments of disclosure, something which, as I have already argued, is not always present in performance horror.

The third point in the list drawn up by Hills, the "concerns of power and control", are described in the essay "Power, Horror and Ambivalence" by Daniel Shaw: "Much of the pleasure that we take in [horror films] is derived from two sources: 1) Identifying with the horrifying force, and vicariously enjoying the havoc that it wreaks; and 2) Sharing in the triumph that the human protagonists usually achieve over that force" (2001:n.pag.). To Shaw, the idea of possessing such destructive power draws people in: "This is why I propose that we see the horrific force as an embodiment of awesome power, attractive and pleasurable in itself" (2001:n.pag.).

The last idea phrased by the cognitivists relates to the idea of aesthetic distance and a rational approach, assuming that an audience will take a step back in order to appreciate the narrative, the monster and its power, or the performance as a work of art; in short, to appreciate the aesthetics of horror. However, it is questionable whether this is always an option in terms of performance horror: for instance, when inside a scare attractions and being chased by the creatures inside, it is simply impossible to sit back

and take a good, long look. Often, groups of visitors are literally chased through the venue with performers urging them to run from room to room and they are thus kept from expressing any form of appreciation. A second possibility is the simple fact that a visitor might not want to stay and examine the displays, as they are frightened and want to get out. To quote Carroll: "One supposes that fascination would be too great a luxury to endure, if one, against all odds, were to encounter a horrific monster in "real life"" (1990:189).

Hills describes two further weaknesses in this approach: "(i) emotion is theoretically defined as being 'object directed' because it is cognitively evaluative, and (ii) emotion is defined as being 'occurrent', that is, occurring at a given moment rather than lingering like a disposition or mood" (2005:24). Instead, Hills argues that an objectless state of anxiety and a lingering sense of unease or fright (of, simply put, not being able to sleep after watching a scary movie) is likely to occur: feelings of terror are not as bounded as the cognitivists describe them. He proceeds:

> It may be no accident that horror films sometimes thought of as 'classics' of the genre [...] shift from object-directed emotion to objectless anxiety (and monstrous indeterminacy) in their closing frames: this movement incites audiences to leave the cinema, or switch the video/DVD off, while still in an anxious, affective mood rather than having just experienced an occurrent 'emotion'. (2005:27)

A similar sentiment can be found in the article by Berys Gaut. Although Gaut is speaking out against the psychoanalytic theory and the feeling of catharsis, his argument is closely related to Hills' point: "[Horror] films not infrequently leave (and are designed to leave) a lingering sense of fearfulness in their audience [...] This is precisely the opposite effect one would expect if one's fear had been lightened" (1993: 336). Instead of being simply connected to a specific object or occurrence, horror movies (and other forms of the genre) are geared towards inciting lasting feelings of fear and unease. Despite these problems, it should be noted that different forms of performance horror have a different dynamic, and thus the ideas of Carroll and Shaw are still valuable for some parts of the study.

The second theory which is addressed by Hills is the concept of the fantastic, put forward by Tzvetan Todorov as a "structural analysis of a literary genre." Defining the fantastic as "that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature,

confronting an apparently supernatural event" (1975:25), Todorov follows his definition with an analysis of what occurs after this hesitation passes:

> At the story's end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic. If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvellous. (1975:41)

Although this concept of hesitation and a decision regarding the reality of the apparent supernatural occurrence has merit for a number of the forms addressed here, Todorov's theory, too, is not without its problems:

> Just as cognitive theories frame audience pleasure in line with certain assumptions [...] so too does the Todorovian approach to horror construct a restricted discourse of audience pleasure. In this instance, audiences are presumed to derive pleasure from the resolution (or, indeed, non-resolution) of very specific narrative puzzles. (Hills, 2005: 33)

Audience emotion is left out of the equation, as, like the cognitivists, Todorov relies on a rational approach to the horrific subject matter. As stated by Hills, it makes sense to "consider the possibility that audiences do not always cognitively 'master' or intellectually 'resolve' a text. Instead, they may be 'mastered' by a text, that is, allowing themselves to be open to the knowing, game-playing manipulations of an aesthetic artefact" (2005:44). This possibility of being mastered by the aesthetic artefact seems to be extremely likely in terms of the direct and intense experience of a live event, where a spectator will not be able to simply lean back in their seats and passively observe the action. Like the cognitive theory, Todorov refers to the necessity of aesthetic distance in order to resolve the narrative puzzle, a luxury which may not be available.

In addition to this emphasis on rationality Todorov and his followers, such as Terry Heller in *The Delights of Terror* (1987), put a lot of emphasis on the process of reading and the way in which narrative is experienced through text. Although, as will be shown later, some of the methodology used in this study will make use of narrative and reader-response theory, not all of Todorov's ideas are relevant: the actions of reading a book and experiencing a live event each offer a different dynamic and in some ways, it is impossible to bridge the gap between these two forms. However, as noted by Hills, some authors have made an attempt to transform Todorov's ideas: "Noël Carroll has outlined a number of cinematic devices that provoke or sustain fantastic hesitation"

(2005: 38). Although valuable, Carroll's approach provides a new problem in terms of the issues with aesthetic distance and performance horror outlined earlier: is the audience of a horror play or ghost walk able to engage with the cinematic devices in the way that Carroll intended?

Finally, Hills addresses psychoanalysis and considers Sigmund Freud and his ideas of the uncanny. Freud describes how "[t]here is no doubt that [the uncanny] belongs to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (2003:123) and that "the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (2003:124). According to Freud, the unknown can be seen as always frightening, but even stronger is the fear which springs from the uncanny, from that which was once familiar but has now become alien. When these fears of the unknown are repressed, according to Freud, they lead to a contamination of the unconscious, ultimately resulting in psychological turmoil:

> [I]f psychoanalytic theory is right in asserting that every affect arising from an emotional impulse – of whatever kind – is converted into fear by being repressed, it follows that among those things that are felt to be frightening there must be one group in which it can be shown that the frightening element is something that has been repressed and now returns. This species of the frightening would then constitute the uncanny. (2003:147)

In his *Five Lectures on Psychotherapy*, delivered in 1909 at Clark University in Worcester, Mass., Freud discusses possible treatments for this type of repression. By allowing for a return of the repressed, a controlled experience of the repressed emotions (and possible unconscious, unwanted desires), a feeling of catharsis can occur. Thus cleansed from any unnatural emotions or urges, a person can once again return to the existing order. However, as was already noted in relation to the theory of Gaut on movies leaving "a lingering sense of fearfulness" and Hills' ideas on occurrent emotions, it is unclear whether fears can indeed by lightened in such a way. Furthermore, the strong sexual connotations of Freud's original 1919 essay have led to some rather excessive views on the horror genre. An example of this can be found in the work of James Twitchell, who states that all horror is related to incest: "I think that along with all the other phobic explanations for the attraction of horror (fear of insanity, death, madness, homosexuality, castration) the fear of incest underlies all horror myths in our culture that are repeatedly told for more than one generation" (1987:93). Yet, despite the criticisms of Gaut and Hills, the relation of Freud's views to the concept of catharsis as

put forward by Aristotle make it a worthwhile approach to explore in relation to (some of the forms of) performance horror. In this sense, the idea of catharsis is extremely valuable when discussing bounded horror experiences such as scare attractions: spectators go into a venue, are scared out of their minds, and return to normality.

Furthermore, another of Freud's ideas will be important to the current work. In "The Uncanny", he addresses the beliefs held by preceding, ancient generations:

> Let us take first the uncanny effects associated with the omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish-fulfilment, secret harmful forces and the return of the dead. […] We – or our primitive forebears – once regarded such things as real possibilities; we were convinced that they really happened. Today we no longer believe in them, having *surmounted* such modes of thought. Yet we do not feel entirely secure in these new convictions; the old ones live on in us, on the look-out for confirmation. (2003:154; emphasis in original)

He proceeds with a discussion of the differences between the uncanny in reality and fiction: "[M]any things that would be uncanny if they occurred in real life are not uncanny in literature, and [...] in literature there are many opportunities to achieve uncanny effects that are absent in real life" (2003:155-156). One may be familiar with such unfamiliar and frightening experiences, yet fiction can present these in a new light, which may only heighten the fear. Morris Dickstein echoes Freud's views of surmounted beliefs:

> Civilized man, as he grows out of childhood and adolescence, is taught to subdue his fears and superstitions and to accept the notion that society will protect him. We are told that if we behave with rational self-restraint others will do likewise. But on some level we never really believe this. (1996:70)

In *The Uncanny*, Freud is referring specifically to the relationship of primitive man to folk beliefs and fairy tales, and it is exactly this part of one's belief system which might kick in during a horror experience. Many of the performances discussed here rely on and play with the idea of a willing suspension of disbelief: in order to be frightened, one has to believe that the events and monsters depicted in writing or onscreen are (at least for a short period of time) real. Essentially this is only a game of make-believe: "[I]f one really believed that the theater were beset by lethal shape changers, demons, intergalactic cannibals, or toxic zombies, one would hardly sit by for long. One would probably attempt to flee, to hide, to protect oneself, or to contact the proper authorities […]" (Carroll, 1990:63).

The initial response is indeed to examine this phenomenon in terms of Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief, which is defined by M.H. Abrams as the effort of the skilled reader "to go along in imagination with express judgements and doctrines from which he would ordinarily dissent. Such restrained disbelief allows a skeptical age access to antiquated or fantastic ideas […] that would otherwise be intolerable or offensive to the intellect" (cited in Tomko, 2007:242). However, within the frame of performance horror, it is easy to call this concept into question. The willingness of the audience to subject themselves to the experience offers a challenge: are they indeed willingly suspending their disbelief, or are they sucked into the performance and experiencing a genuine emotional response? Are they confident enough to put their rational knowledge to the test when a number of blood-soaked monsters are running towards them? Michael Tomko himself describes the phrase as a "cliché" (2007:241), instead advocating a different terminology, coined by Coleridge himself: faith and unbelief, which "are thus opposed and categorized as belonging to the will. They differ in kind from belief and disbelief, which denote intellectual assent and dissent" (2007:244). According to Tomko, these terms presuppose an action of the will rather than simply subjecting oneself to the work: "Aesthetic reception is predicated on an active gift of self. Second, this gift entails an openness to the other. There is a pressing activity here, but it is a cooperative one with the goal of being led to a vision" (2007:244).

Yet one might question Tomko's idea of an action of the will. In order to fully enjoy the performance, an audience will have to embrace the possibility of ghosts, vampires and zombies, of old castles and damp dungeons. Yet what about Freud's words on surmounted beliefs? Is this suspension of disbelief indeed a willing one? When travelling to a scare attraction or another horror performance, a visitor could mentally prepare themselves for the experience to come, where, for the duration of the tour, they will believe that zombies exist. However, once inside, it is difficult to hold on to that idea. None of the visitors will call the police after visiting the London Dungeons or seeing a play featuring any form of violence, nor make an attempt to alert any other authorities. Yet, whilst inside the venue, an attempt (or at the very least, an urge) to flee or otherwise respond cannot be denied. Despite of the fact that every visitor knows that zombies do not exist, very few will stand around to put this knowledge to the test when a number of creatures are shambling in their direction, and it is this type of response that appears to confirm Freud's ideas on surmounted beliefs. Although modern society

no longer believes (or allows for belief) in evil spirits or monsters, one might not be fully convinced of these matters. The emotional response visitors have to the creatures they encounter inside scare attractions seems to support this notion of a clash between what one knows to be real and what might exist, thus making the experience all the more frightening as the emotional response overrides one's common sense of reality.

Haunted stage, ghostly narrative

Despite the differences in dynamic and the way in which audiences interact with the form, performance horror is firmly rooted in the traditions of the horror genre. Brophy's concept of horrality and Wes Craven's take in *Scream* on the rules of horror clearly point to issues of familiarity: in order to *get* the joke, one needs to know what the joke is, and this particular joke goes back a long way, as is argued by David Punter: "not [...] all twentieth-century horror fiction has its roots in the Gothic: but it is remarkable how much of it does, how much of it relies on themes and styles which, by rights, would seem to be more than a century out of date" (1996:3). As a result, studies of Gothic literature could provide a way of the understanding of the genre. Although dealing primarily with novels, many studies on the Gothic have their merit when discussing contemporary performance horror. In his landmark study *The Literature of Terror* (1996), David Punter lists a number of characteristics of the classic Gothic novel: "[A]n emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense are the most significant" (1). These ideas are echoed by Andrew Smith: "the early Gothic appears to be highly formulaic, reliant on particular settings, such as castles, monasteries, and ruins, and with characters, such as aristocrats, monks, and nuns, who, superficially, appear to be interchangeable from novel to novel" (2007:3). In addition, Jerrold Hogle draws attention to the spaces of the Gothic, something which is of particular interest to the current study:

> [A] Gothic tale usually takes place (at least some of the time) in an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space… or some new recreation of an older venue... Within this space, or a combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story. (2002:2)

Others, like Fred Botting here, have similarly addressed Smith's ideas of the "highly formulaic nature":

> In Gothic fiction certain stock features provide the principal embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties. Torturous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits predominate in the eighteenth century. Spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines and bandits populate Gothic landscapes as suggestive figures of imagined and realistic threats. (1996:2)

In addition, Botting has noted the emotional impact of the genre on its consumers: "Through its presentations of the supernatural, sensational and terrifying incidents, imagined or not, Gothic produced emotional effects on its readers rather than developing a rational or properly cultivated response. Exciting rather than informing, it chilled their blood, delighted their superstitious fancies [...], instead of instructing readers with moral lessons" (1996:4). This view is also expressed by Maggie Kilgour: "[T]he gothic's main concern is not to depict character but to create feeling or effect in its readers by placing them in a state of thrilling suspense and uncertainty. From its origins, the gothic has been defined in terms of this peculiar and palpable effect upon its audience" (1995:6). Often, as is implied by the definitions given above, these effects were achieved in crude ways, offering audiences stock characters and familiar narratives in order to thrill them a little and chill them a little. The goal is still the same in performance horror, yet the means by which this audience affect is achieved can appear as simplistic.

Similar to the conventions used in contemporary horror and harking back to the concept of horrality, addressed earlier in this chapter, these works are about rules and response. Its audience is familiar with the genre, with its ins and outs, its tricks and rules, and for many fans, this is where a large section of the enjoyment can be found. At the same time, this familiarity is often seen as the downfall of the Gothic and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the horror genre. In "Gothic Culture", Fred Botting draws attention to this phenomenon and what he calls 'Disneygothic', a situation of saturation which has rendered the abhorrent normal: "Clothes, puppets, masks, lifestyles, dolls, sweets, locate Gothic images in a thoroughly commodified context in which horror cedes to familiarity" (2007:199). For Botting, it is this that has made the Gothic meaningless: "Domesticated, welcomed, assimilated: 'normal monstrosity' eclipses the possibility of difference and otherness" (2007:200).

In many of his works, Botting raises the argument as to whether the Gothic has become redundant and whether the concept still has any context left: "Gothic, from its inception as a hybrid genre and its subsequent diverse mutations over two centuries, has dispersed itself so widely as to become both meaningless and redundant, a diffusion of significance and affect in the fantasies and anxieties of culture" (1999:141). The same is true, perhaps more so, for contemporary horror. As Punter notes, the Gothic form still exists, but, as Botting argues, it may have reached a point of oversaturation, familiarity and, as a result, the genre might be seen as a parody of itself: "Contemporary horror films involve 'having the shit scared out of you and loving it'. To the point that no one really gives a shit" (1999:146). It would appear that these criticisms are especially true for performance horror: the nature of the form calls for a specific way in which the subject matter is handled, often leaving behind intricate narrative in favour of jump scares, putting a physical response over a psychological one. Scare attractions, in particular, can be said to use shortcuts, simply placing a visitor in a frightening situation without a detailed story or in-depth character development. Reviews of horror plays have criticised the use of scares, or focus on whether or not the play was terrifying enough, often losing sight of the writing and staging of the productions and not engaging with the material on a deeper level than the frights. Indeed, it seems easy to dismiss the Gothic as a jaded form, overly familiar, the audience able to predict exactly what will happen or even *when* a specific moment will occur.

Many critics, however, have questioned Botting's ideas, dismissing the redundancy of the Gothic, and the writings of Alexandra Warwick are of particular interest for the current discussion. In "Feeling Gothicky?" Warwick draws attention to the fact that "it would seem impossible [to announce the death of the Gothic]" (2007:5), instead engaging with concerns regarding modern expressions of the genre. According to Warwick, earlier Gothic texts are mostly concerned with issues of "speakableness" (2007:11) (or the lack thereof): older texts revolved around trauma that remains unspoken, cannot be expressed, "the anxiety of the fragmented subject, of the loss of certainty" (2007:11). By contrast,

> [C]ontemporary Gothic is a manifestation of the desire *for* trauma, not the trauma of desire that finds itself prohibited, but something of a sense that trauma itself is the lost object, that the experience of trauma, and not the healing of it, is that which will make us whole. (2007:11; emphasis in original)

She explains: "It seems that contemporary culture *wants* to have trauma, it is induced, predicted and enacted, persistently rehearsed even when it is not actually present. Far from fearing trauma or experiencing it involuntarily, it is now almost not permissible to be without trauma" (2007:11; emphasis in original). If looking for a motivation behind the existence of these types of entertainments, it would appear that Warwick's ideas provide an explanation for the proliferation of increasingly extreme forms of horror entertainment: a spectator's desire (and the desire of their culture) for the experience of trauma drives them to push themselves to their limit, to pay to be put in handcuffs and become the victim of another, and, finally, to be labelled a survivor.[4] Echoes of these views can be found in Warwick's work, specifically when focusing on issues of audience involvement: the shared experience becomes a driving force (whether enjoying the performance as part of a group, or becoming part of a select group after the event) and the production becomes a challenge, evidence of which can be found in the marketing and responses surrounding many of the performances.

Referring back to Artaud's views on the language of theatre and all it encompasses, another connection emerges with aspects of the Gothic, a genre which, according to Kilgour, "feeds upon and mixes the wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which it never fully disentangles itself" (1995:4). As a result, "[t]he form is thus itself a Frankenstein's monster, assembled out of the bits and pieces of the past" (Kilgour, 1995:4). As has been alluded to in the previous paragraphs, the narrative of performance horror is an interesting mix of simplistic and intricate, of script and effect; in the words of Kilgour, a Frankenstein's monster of different influences: "Made up of these assorted bits and pieces, gothic novels often seem to disintegrate into fragments, irrelevant digressions, set-pieces of landscape description which never refer back to the central point" (1995:5). As a result,

> [A]t times the gothic seems hardly a unified narrative at all, but a series of framed conventions, static moments of extreme emotions – displayed by characters or in the landscape, and reproduced in the reader – which are tenuously strung together in order to be temporised both through and into the narrative, but which do not form a coherent and continuous whole. (Kilgour, 1995:5)

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[4] A prime example of these extreme entertainments is the Blackout haunted house, where audience members are the star of their own torture horror narrative. Those who are able to complete the experience become part of a select group who are defined as 'survivors' of these events. http://jadedviewer.blogspot.co.uk/2011/11/blackout-haunted-house.html [Accessed: June 29, 2012]

It is this concept of a fragmented narrative that is of particular interest here. Although definitions of narrative often seem straightforward, they can become complicated when discussing them in the light of performance events. Take a look at the following definitions from Paul Cobley and H. Porter Abbott:

- 'Narrative' is the showing or the telling of these events and the mode selected for that to take place. (Cobley, 2001:5-6)
- [N]arrative is the representation of events, consisting of story and narrative discourse; story is an event or sequence of events (the action); and narrative discourse is those events as represented. (Abbott, 2008:19)

Both authors state that narrative consists of a means of getting a story across, rather than simply the events that take place. Narrative is story, but it is also representation, it is *how* a story is being told. It is this element that will be important here, as many horror entertainments do not possess a plot or storyline in the traditional sense. Instead, they rely on other means to convey the story as patrons are introduced to a premise ("Vampires haunt this old mansion") and subsequently exposed the experience. Although these events may be seen as not possessing any kind of script or traditional narrative, this does not mean that they cannot be read in such a way. As was evidenced earlier in this chapter when discussing Artaud's views on the language of theatre, performance can draw on many channels of communication. Rather than relying on the use of words and verbal clues, the visual elements of these experiences will become more important.

It will be helpful for a moment to use videogames as an example of another medium where story and script can become (and can easily be perceived as) inferior to its other elements. Rather than a fully-fledged narrative, videogames offer a different kind of experience, telling its story through (inter)action rather than words. This may lead to questions regarding its narrative content, yet as Torben Grodal argues, "that some stories are rather simple in some dimensions is not a reason for depriving them of their status as stories" (2003:147). Marie-Laure Ryan gives a little more detail on this effect: "Games like *Quake* or *Doom* are generally not played for the sake of the story, and the function of the narrative theme is to lure the player into the game, rather than to support gameplay in a strategic way" (2005:13-14). The audience is immersed in the plot, and becomes part of the "embedded narrative", which "connects two narrative levels: the story to be discovered, and the story of their discovery" (Ryan, 2005:16). The plot as represented consists of more than just a storyline and the separate elements of space, sound and human interactions are vital in creating the overall experience. It is

effectively through input from the player that the narrative emerges: without a player, there would be no story, in the same way that in some forms of performance horror, there would be no narrative without the input of the audience.

Many of the features of these entertainments are not mere plot devices, but are used to create a play-world, the form of which will shape the way in which it is perceived and interpreted by its visitors, as Grodal argues:

> The reader/viewer of "traditional" mediated stories needs only to activate some general cognitive skills, including the ability to have some expectations. The story will proceed even without such expectations. The computer story, in contrast, is only developed by the player's active participation, and the player needs to possess a series of specific skills to "develop" the story. (2003:139)

The idea of a constructed and embedded narrative, where the audience is actively participating in and discovering the story, a story which draws on all features of the form, is a technique employed by many performance horror events. As a result, they offer an experience which could be perceived as a living videogame. Yet when discussing the fragmented narrative of a horror performance, it is necessary to focus not just the amalgamation of these elements and the story they create, but also to consider the individual meaning of each feature.

In its reliance on affect and genre traditions, horror performance still offers entertainments that are reminiscent of the Gothic. The use of a narrative that is often fragmented and constructed, then, harks back both to the Gothic, as well as looking forward to modern forms of storytelling, of which video games are an example. Yet issues of narrative, such as presented here, may give rise to questions as to who will be experiencing these stories, and how. As established in the preface, these types of enquiries throw up numerous issues and complications and will not be discussed here. However, it will be helpful to examine the issues of audience motivation, expectation and reception in more detail in order to establish the issues inherent in these kinds of questions. The next section, therefore, will put forward some theories as to how an audience might interact with and interpret a performance.

Dear constant reader...

Perhaps needlessly, but most importantly, it pays to remember the fact that an audience can contain any number of people with any number of backgrounds, and thus any number of responses to the material. As Helen Freshwater states:

> The common tendency is to refer to an audience as 'it' and, by extension, to think of this 'it' as a single entity, or a collective, risks obscuring the multiple contingencies of subjective response, context and environment which condition an individual's interpretation of a particular performance event. (2009:5)

This emphasis on the individuality of a spectator is echoed in some of the writings on reader-response theory, most notably the work of Roland Barthes, Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish. In "The Death of the Author", Roland Barthes notes this shift in the field from source to receptor: "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (1977:148). The reader, or, in this discussion, the spectator is the goal, and their perception is the interpretation, rather than the message that an author may or may not have embedded in the text. Furthermore, a number of theorists have focused on the effect of text on its reader. Stanley Fish states that "[the sentence] is no longer an object, a thing-in-itself, but an *event*, something that *happens* to, and with the participation of, the reader" (1970:125; emphasis in original). Instead of asking what a sentence means, the question should change: what does a sentence do? This effect is often described as a process, and, as Fish states:

> [T]he execution involves *an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time*. [...] The basis of the method is a consideration of the *temporal* flow of the reading experience, and it is assumed that the reader responds in terms of that flow and not to the whole utterance. (1970:126-127; emphasis in original)

Similarly, Iser focuses on the moving viewpoint of the reader, "where the reader is constantly feeding back reactions as he obtains new information, there is just such a continual process of realization, and so reading itself 'happens' like an event" (1978:68). According to Iser, expectations form an important part of this process: "During the process of perception, we always select specific items from the mass of data available to our senses – a selection governed by our expectations" (1978:94). Based on this premise, Iser then defines two categories of "expectation norms", connected to the particular reader and his background:

> (1) The repertoire of social norms and literary references supplies the background against which the text is to be reconstituted by the reader.
> (2) The expectations may relate to the social and cultural conventions of a particular public for which the particular text is specifically intended. (1978:89)

This discussion of expectations and effect is prevalent when applying it to horror. The experience hinges on the idea of something *happening* to its participants, of some affect being created. Expectations are raised and deferred as the event progresses: a fleeting image of a monster at the end of a corridor make an audience aware of the possibility of it reappearing elsewhere, and this time, perhaps, much closer. Additionally, in horror, these expectations extend beyond the limits of the performance into one's perception of the world. As Joseph Grixti states:

> [W]e react to given situations according to how we perceive them, and interpretations are build out of mental constructions of reality [...] which develop in the course of our numerous experiences within our specific milieu. It is these which are challenged or removed when we are faced with the very strange or the 'uncanny.' (1989:153)

Leaving this discussion behind for a moment, it is helpful to follow Fish in his return to the original question: who is the reader? Fish's reader is a "construct, an ideal or idealized reader" (1970:145), which he calls the informed reader. Fish identifies this informed reader as one who:

> 1.) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up. 2.) is in full possession of [...] the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, etc. 3.) has literary competence. (1970:145)

In short, the informed reader displays familiarity with the rules and conventions of text and is thus able to understand and interpret its contents. In terms of horror, one inevitably returns to Huizinga and the concept of the rules of play: the informed reader is to a greater or lesser extent familiar with horror as a genre and a number of its products and underlying conventions: "[Horror] is not an obscure notion. We manage to use it with a great deal of consensus; note how rarely one has cause to dispute the sorting of items under the rubric of horror in your local videostore" (Carroll, 1990:13). Even those people with no interest or deeper knowledge of the genre will be able to point out what is horror, and what it is not. The more one is a fan of the genre and thus adept at reading the texts presented in the performance, the more one will get out of the experience. Yet even the most die-hard horror fan will not get every single reference, thus allowing for different interpretations by different people depending on knowledge and background: "So for each of these readers there will be elements of the repertoire that remain inactive as far as his image-building is concerned" (Iser, 1978:145). The interplay between previous readings, background and expectations thus create the

reading experience: "The pointers and stimuli therefore evoke not just their immediate predecessors, but often aspects of other perspectives that have already sunk deep into the past [...] unfolding the multiplicity of interconnecting perspectives" (Iser, 1978:116-118).

Yet Iser also notes the limitations of text: "An obvious and major difference between reading and all forms of social interaction is the fact that with reading there is no *face-to-face situation*. A text cannot adapt itself to each reader with whom it comes in contact" (1978:166; emphasis in original). The difference between novel and film as opposed to theatre has already been addressed in terms of control and distance. However, at this point of the discussion, another distinction needs to be noted. In his work, Iser talks about the wandering viewpoint of the reader, where their expectations and assumptions of the text change over time as new information is revealed. This idea of disclosure is not dissimilar to the way in which a play will lead its spectators and discloses facts that can severely alter the course of the narrative.

An additional challenge in terms of theatre is the physical view of the audience. As is noted by Ben Chaim: "[T]hough the director can draw attention to specific aspects of the production, it is more difficult to control the perceptual activity of the spectator for the purpose of creating point of view" (1984:65). Marco De Marinis describes another way in which audiences perceive a performance:

> It is, in fact, due solely to the application and proper functioning of the spectator's *selective* attention that the theatrical relationship is actually set into place and maintained; only then is the performance transformed from a confused jumble of disparate elements into a performance text furnished, at least potentially, with its own meaningfulness and coherence. (2003:227; emphasis in original)

A novel can provide a specific description, offering or withholding information from the reader at any given time. Film employs the same strategies, as the screen director is always in control of what his viewers see: what visual information is contained in any one shot, and what does this tell the cinemagoers? In contrast to these forms, the gaze of the spectator in the theatre is not as easily controlled. Rather, a tableau is presented and although, as stated by Ben Chaim and De Marinis, the stage director will attempt to guide the audience in their experience, the success of these techniques is never guaranteed. Furthermore, the experience of a performance extends beyond merely observing and interpreting to an event that employs all the senses, a form of sensation that is not accounted for by the reception theorists. In order to incorporate this, it will

be helpful to turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his ideas on the phenomenology of perception. Here, Merleau-Ponty notes the limitations of science in its descriptions of perception: "[O]nly the methodical investigations of the scientist – his measurements and experiments – can set us free from the delusions of our senses and allow us to gain access to things as they really are" (2008:32). However, according to Merleau-Ponty, this objective perspective fails to encompass the intricacies of experience and perception:

> The things of the world are not simply neutral *objects* which stand before us for our contemplation. Each one of them symbolises or recalls a particular way of behaving, provoking in us reactions which are either favourable or unfavourable. [...] Our relationship with things is not a distant one: each speaks to our body and to the way we live. (2008:48-49; emphasis in original)

Instead, ideas of sensation and perception are an extremely individual activity, which starts and ends within one person:

> All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. [...] I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:ix)

What is helpful for our current discussion is the concrete nature of Merleau-Ponty's observations, not defining "sensation as pure impression. Rather, to see is to have colours or lights, to hear is to have sounds, to sense (*sentir*) is to have qualities" (2002:5). Although Merleau-Ponty defines perception as being primarily individual, he does take into account the experiences and knowledge of that individual, which effect the reception of the object: "To perceive is not to experience a host of impressions accompanied by memories capable of clinching them; it is to see, standing forth from a cluster of data, an imminent significance without which no appeal to memory is possible" (2002:26). His observations also incorporate the wandering viewpoint of Iser and the individual opinion regarding the same object noted by Fish: "[O]ur body has not the power to make us see what is not there; it can only make us believe that we see it. [...] Inattentive perception contains nothing more and indeed nothing other than the attentive kind" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:31-32). In short, the nature of the events or objects perceived is always the same, but will be processed differently by different audiences members, based on their backgrounds and the focus of their attention.

To summarise, in performance horror, one is dealing with an audience that is made up of individuals, who each bring their own expectations and experiences to the

event, thus allowing for a myriad of opinions and perceptions of the same performance. Yet, as described earlier, the intimacy of the shows and the workings between the members of these small groups result in a feeling of shared experience to a point where emotions are contagious and boundaries of personal space are broken, turning a group of spectators into a single frightened entity. At this point, it will be helpful to invoke the modes of the audience, defined by Alice Rayner:

> [The audience] functions as an "I" (and an eye and an ear) with a view toward the object, maintaining a subject/object relation; a "you" as a collaborator with performer and in recognition of the differences of the other; an "it" or "they" as the "telos" or "reason why"; and as "we" in a rhetorical but temporary assertion of a community identity. (2003:253)

As is evidenced by Rayner, it would be impossible to map the expectations and viewpoints of every possible spectator, visitor or participant. At the same time, these individuals create a shared experience as they interact with the production and with each other. With this possibility for so many different interpretations, it becomes clear why the methodology of reading and analysing the performance is needed: by isolating the different elements of the experience and response, it will become possible to try and draw some conclusions about the role of and perceptions by the audience.

Using these aspects of narrative and reader-response theory, I would like to suggest a methodology for the reading of a performance, defining which aspects of the event can be and need to be read. In terms of live action horror, the task will be to isolate and consider the different elements that constitute the performance and to judge if, and how, these help build towards an emotional affect that can influence the experience. A simple example would be an actor in a mask, set to jump out at unsuspecting visitors, which aims to shock the audience and elicit a scream. The primary aim will not be to then evaluate this effect (how successful is the jump in scaring audience members; how much do people enjoy this moment), but these questions may become part of the analyses that are to be found in the following chapters.

　　　Firstly, any scripted elements are obviously significant: the back story or central theme of the production, the script itself and any textual sources inside the venue (for instance, the London Dungeons uses plaques with text at the start of the tour to convey information). It is here that the concepts of reader-response theory can be applied most directly. It should, of course, be noted that the experience of a text will be different in performance as opposed to being read, as the delivery of text through a performer

creates an additional mediation. Furthermore, in these kinds of horror entertainments, actions will not only be described, but also shown: a moving statue or a maniac with a chainsaw are more than simple sentences; they are live, they are life, and in a way reality, if only a staged imitation of reality.

Yet it is not just a script that is part of the show or the only means to convey the narrative; other elements need to be considered that can trigger affective emotion. Whereas some aspects of a performance are directed or only played out in a section of a space, as described by Ross Brown,

> [S]ound [...] whatever events the sources of the individual sounds might represent, is *in totum* an immersive environment. One cannot stand back from it and see the entire picture; one's aural attention does not have the equivalent of sightlines; the theatrical mode of listening does not gaze uniformly, but is, by nature, a state of continual omnidirectional distraction. (2010:132; emphasis in original)

This omnipresence of sound, as described by Brown, results in an interesting dynamic in terms of control and distance. Whereas a spectator can (in theory) stand back from a performance, hide behind others, or shut their eyes to avoid seeing images of pain and violence, the nature of sound as an immersive environment allows no escape. One might be able to cover one's ears, yet the nature and distribution of sound means that one is still surrounded, as opposed to being able to turn away and completely shut it out. In this way, the use of sound, both focused and omnidirectional, can provide interesting insights into the means by which an audience can be scared. This effect is accurately described by Theo van Leeuwen: "Sound never just 'expresses' or 'represents', it always also, and at the same time, affects us" (1999:128).

Similar to sound, space is equally omnidirectional: according to Gaston Bachelard, a space can be experienced in "a state of suspended reading", invoking a variety of emotional responses:

> It therefore makes sense from our standpoint of a philosophy of literature and poetry that we "write a room", "read a room", or "read a house." Thus, very quickly, [...] the reader who is "reading a room" leaves off reading and starts to think of some place in his own past." (1994:14)

The expectations one might have of horror ask for dark caverns, gloomy castles and abandoned dungeons, filled with monsters. Similarly, Western cultural history may add a resonance to buildings and places: a horror event staged in a church will have a different feel than the same performance repeated in a designated theatre space, which can have a

significant impact on the way in which it is experienced by its audience. Spaces for horror can be theatrical; created for the event; converted from practical sewer to intricate maze; they can have a mythology added (monsters and corpses were found in these very corridors) or taken away (once a church, it is now only a husk). The reasons behind the choice and treatment of a space will thus form a significant part of each analysis.

In addition to the use of space, the travel to a space has a resonance of its own. As stated by Richard Schechner, "too little study has been made of how people – both spectators and performers – get to, and into, the performance space; how do they go away from that space? In what ways are gathering/dispersing related to preparation/ cooling off?" (2003:190) Similarly, the question as to how and how far people travelled to the event may influence the experience, as is noted by Susan Bennett: "[O]utside the larger urban centres, limited access to theatre will undoubtedly change an audience's sense of the theatrical event" (1997:102). The area in which the venue is located will equally have an effect on the overall experience: in *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror* by Richard Hand and Michael Wilson, descriptions can be found of those who travelled to the famous theatre. As is noted by the authors, "the journey is a vital ingredient in the theatrical experience" (2002:29) with, in this case, the 'bad neighbourhood' of Pigalle in which the Théâtre du Grand-Guignol is located as a key player. Not only can the journey to a venue thus create a feeling of nervous anticipation in an audience: many events have a pre-show experience in place in order to prepare a visitor for what they will encounter inside.

The importance of these kinds of experiences is not to be underestimated: as quoted earlier, in the podcast by Timothy Haskell, his co-presenter Richard Jordan states that "you want to get [the audience] scared before they even get inside" (Haskell, 2009b). However, it is possible for people to resist this anticipation of fear ("They'll be shutting themselves off."), which makes it all the more difficult to get under someone's skin and truly frighten them (Haskell, 2009b). By literally taking the show outside and adding scary elements before visitors enter the attraction itself, their sense of control and distance are already diminished. Effects used can be simply in terms of set design, lighting and sound, but some are more elaborate: to quote Timothy Haskell: "We stage happenings where a weirdo is bothering patrons and making them feel uncomfortable and then we have a security guard throw them out like they actually weren't part of the event" (2009a).

Lastly, and also related to the pre-performance experience, is the use of marketing materials: how are the events framing themselves and how does this affect a potential visitor? In his essay "Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance", Marvin Carlson draws attention to this aspect of the performance: "Programs often include sketches, literary quotations, or photographs not directly related to the play, but suggesting a preferred interpretive strategy" (1993:91). He continues: "The response theory concept of the "model reader" or "implied reader" has particular relevance here – before ever entering the theatre, or even buying a ticket, that reader must be targeted and sought by appropriate publicity" (1993:92). Flyers handed out to attract visitors to scare attractions often include images of bloody dismemberment, focusing on the violent and monstrous side. By contrast, events such as ghost plays favour more muted images, evoking a feeling of mystery and dread rather than horror. As Carlson states, "what an audience brings to the theatre in the way of expectations, assumptions, and strategies [...] will creatively interact with the stimuli of the theatre event to produce whatever effect the performance has on an audience and what effect the audience has upon it" (1993:97). As such, it will be helpful to consider all influences, both within, before and after the performance to try and create a complete analysis of the way in which the performance itself is experienced.

It is this amalgamation of theory which will underpin the case studies that are to follow. As has been stated, very little to no work has been undertaken on a close reading of horror and contemporary popular performance. As such, old models do not readily apply and the 'why horror' question is best avoided in favour of an examination of a number of performance horror's experiences. Instead, the theoretical model presented here will be used across the next four chapters to explore a number of different forms, each of which presents a different challenge in terms of design. Using Morreall's concepts of control and distance as a basis, the study will move through the case studies from traditional theatre to highly immersive zombie events, charting the position of the audience and the way in which the features of performance are used to create a unique and horrifying experience.

Chapter 1
The Haunted Stage: Ghosting, reality and illusion

> "Do you understand? The attic is not haunting your head – your head is haunting the attic."
> -   Thomas Ligotti, "Purity", 2008:13

As described in the introduction, the current discussion will concern itself with a variety of forms from the perspective of performance horror, moving from traditional stage plays to highly immersive and interactive experiences. In order to facilitate such a discussion, a number of concepts and parameters need to be introduced and in this chapter, and two ghost plays will be used as the basis for such a discussion. *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* are examples of a traditional form of fourth wall drama with a supernatural theme. What is interesting about both productions is the way in which certain elements of narrative and dramaturgy are handled and presented to the audience, even within a conventional theatrical framework, thus creating a unique intensity. Control and distance are manipulated in subtle ways in order to get under the skin of the audience and it is these concerns that will underpin the entire study. As Andy Nyman argues when talking about *Ghost Stories* (discussed in more detail in the next chapter), the use of horror and the supernatural in the theatre is often met with scepticism on the part of the audience:

> 80, if not 90 per cent of your audience are coming, thinking, "Bugger off, you *can't* scare us." They might go in a bit scared, thinking about what they're gonna see, […] [b]ut underneath all that is this thinking of, "Really? It's not scary; it can't be scary, it's theatre." (Nyman, 2012)

It is this scepticism, perhaps, which is the starting point for this discussion. Studies of performance horror are few and far between, whereas articles and monographs which discuss other horror media abound. The more extreme experiences such as scare attractions and live action roleplaying (LARP) openly break the boundaries and invade the space of the audience. Nyman's comments, however, refer to the traditional fourth wall theatre experience. The action is taking place on stage and the audience, as in the cinema, could

consider itself to be removed from the narrative and the fate of the characters. How do creators deal with this scepticism and this distance in order to confront their spectators with a truly terrifying experience?

The next two chapters will look at four productions which take place within the traditional theatre space and examine how these boundaries and issues are negotiated. It should be noted that immersive theatre, a form which similarly makes the spectators the spectacle and involves patrons in the performance, is becoming more and more common, and many productions (for instance, the work by Slung Low Theatre Company and Punchdrunk[5]) often draw on horror tropes. A choice has been made, however, not to discuss this kind of work here as the issues surrounding this type of performance are very similar to those raised in relation to scare attractions. Rather, the aim is to engage with contemporary horror plays, performed in a more traditional theatre setting, and to look into the question as to how spectators can be scared through the fourth wall. The creators of the productions discussed here utilize a variety of means to establish the theatre as a place which is not safe by (ab)using familiar conventions and breaking or altering the boundaries of performance. This process becomes apparent in terms of both context and staging, but also in narrative. As opposed to scare attractions and LARP events, horror theatre has the opportunity to take its audience by the hand and guide it through the story it has to tell.

The first case study used in this chapter is *The Woman in Black*. Taken from Susan Hill's 1983 novella of the same name, the story follows Arthur Kipps, a solicitor who is sent to the remote village of Crythin Gifford and Eel Marsh House, the residence of the late Mrs Alice Drablow. Asked to wrap up Mrs Drablow's affairs, Kipps is confronted with a history that runs deeper than bundles of old bonds. Stephen Mallatratt's adaptation for the stage in 1987 introduces Kipps to the audience in his later years, using the medium of theatre and the help of the Actor to openly talk about and thus exorcise the ghosts that have haunted him since his visit to Eel Marsh House. Like *The Woman in Black*, *The Haunting*

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[5] Slung Low Theatre Company (http://www.slunglow.org) was founded in 2002 and describes itself as "…a company that makes adventures for audiences outside of conventional theatre spaces." Their most notable foray into the horror genre was the production *They Only Come Out At Night*, performed at various locations in the UK and abroad, and dealing with vampire mythology.
Punchdrunk (http://punchdrunk.com/#) was founded in 2000 and aims to create "…a game changing form of theatre in which roaming audiences experience epic storytelling inside sensory theatrical worlds." Past shows have included adaptations of classic Gothic texts such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" in 2005 and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" in 2007 and 2008.

(2011) is another adaptation, in this case presenting five of Dickens' ghost stories for the stage. Adapted for theatre by Hugh Janes, *The Haunting* brings together the plots, scenes, and atmosphere from Dickens' work, but mixes these with a story which is original and personal to the author, creating a blend of adaptation and a ghost play of which the script itself is haunted by other works and experiences. The young David Filde, a new partner in a firm dealing in antique books, is sent to a remote manor where he will spend his time cataloguing the library of the recently deceased owner. Whilst trying to carry out his work, Filde is distracted by a number of seemingly supernatural events and, together with his employer Lord Gray, is forced to face the events that the previous inhabitant so carefully tried to hide.

Both the authors and directors of these productions have longstanding credits of writing, producing and directing for both stage and television. What is perhaps striking is the range of work produced by Mallatratt, Herford, Janes and Wooldridge: three out of four started their career as actors, before moving on to writing and directing, whereas Wooldridge's credits include an incredible range of plays as well as productions for film and television. Despite this range of experience, the plays discussed here are undeniably a product of the theatre in terms of their staging and special effects, and even the script, which repeatedly draws attention to the concept and nature of performance.

Traditional staging and conventional theatre spaces have been used in both productions. After opening in Scarborough in 1987, *The Woman in Black* found a clear base in the Fortune Theatre in London in 1989, where it has been running ever since. In addition, the play has enjoyed numerous national tours. Similarly, *The Haunting* has seen two nationwide runs, each with a different cast. In addition to this use of conventional theatre space, the acting style in both plays can be described as quite naturalistic with an emphasis on the believability of the characters and their emotions within a supernatural narrative. The detailed set of *The Haunting* helps to emphasize this idea, whereas the more basic staging of *The Woman in Black* uses the imagination of the audience and the skill of the actors to draw its spectators into its world.

Both *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* have their roots in a number of historical forms of performance and what will follow is a brief discussion of this lineage. The Gothic drama of the eighteenth century provides a starting point for a close reading of the plays discussed

here. Although this form of drama draws on the tradition of Gothic literature in a variety of ways, its influences are more varied than the familiar romances, as is described by Jeffrey Cox: "As *Gothic* drama, it appeared after and often as an imitation of Gothic novels. As Gothic *drama*, it struck many as an attempt to revive the conventions and motifs of great Elizabethan and Jacobean plays" (2002:125; emphasis in original). Like its literary counterpart, Gothic drama is often seen as a form of low culture, which "needs to be cordoned off so as not to contaminate 'purer' literary works" (Cox, 2001:107). On closer inspection, however, "the Gothic drama, as an immensely successful theatre form, provides us with a way of glimpsing how a number of key social and cultural concerns of the day were represented in a popular art form" (Cox, 2001:109). As is stated by Cox, the form was immensely popular, managing to offer exciting new plays whilst drawing on the Elizabethan and Jacobean traditions, thus creating what he calls "a distinctively modern form of tragedy" (2001:110). The success of the form, for Cox, lies in its ability to "harness a variety of powerful theatrical forces [...] provid[ing] audiences with a vital new form of serious drama" (2002:127). A big part of this "theatrical force" was the innovation in stagecraft: "The Gothic theatre of shock and wonder was arguably the first form to capitalize fully on evolving lighting techniques, new stage effects, and the increasing presence of continuous music behind the action" (Cox, 2002:127). These developments have their implications on the texts discussed here and will be examined in more detail later in the chapter.

Coexisting with the sentimental plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, both forms offered a similar thrill, rooted in the emotions of its audience. As Bruce McConachie argues, sentimental drama used these feelings to edify its audience: "According to sentimental aesthetics, exposure to such feelings on stage would spark a sentimental response in the genteel viewer, who might then use this response to improve his or her own sensitivity and morality" (2006:219). The nature of these emotions, however, differs, as, according to McConachie,

> [S]entimentalism had never arrived at an adequate explanation for evil. If human nature were essentially good, […] sentimentalism could not explain the perseverance of evil in the world. […] [G]othicism offered no complete answer for the evil of [its] protagonists, but it did fix images of horror that fascinated audiences – all the more so because the spectators' sentimentalism could not explain the evil they witnessed. (2006:226)

The emotions of the audience become undirected and an echo can be detected of the points made by Botting and Kilgour regarding the Gothic's insistence on offering emotional impact over coherent narrative.

Similar to its literary counterparts, the narrative of Gothic drama often places effect before plot, thus becoming "an impure generic hybrid, a kind of monstrous form oddly appropriate to the chamber of horrors it displayed on stage" (Cox, 2002:128). It is this emphasis on emotional impact and the lineage of the form, its fragmented narrative and blurring of boundaries and genres, which can be found in the modern plays under discussion here. Eventually both Gothic and sentimental drama appear to have lost their momentum and "the domestic melodrama came to displace the Gothic drama in the theatre," (Cox, 2002:142) a form which centres on heightened emotions and struggles of morality. Up to this day, the form is notorious for its exaggeration and hyperbolic situations, a mode of performance where, as Peter Brooks argues, "[n]othing is *under*stood, all is *over*stated" (1976:40; emphasis in original). What is interesting for the current study, however, is the position of melodrama in subsequent horror forms, as well as its approach to performance and dramaturgy: "Melodrama tends towards total theatre, its signs projected, sequentially or simultaneously, on several planes" (Brooks, 1976:46). Both productions discussed here show similar tendencies, utilising script, effects and staging to create a coherent narrative, where certain dramaturgical decisions obtain specific meaning within their context. As shall become clear, every element of *The Woman in Black*, as every element of *The Haunting*, works together to transport the audience into its world, to interact with its story and its ghosts. Both plays discussed here offer a purposeful return to the Victorian and even the Gothic, presenting the audience with a classic haunted house narrative. The direct references to Dickens in *The Haunting* and the minimalist style of *The Woman in Black* are clearly intended to transport the spectator to this particular era. With this come certain assumptions on the part of the audience, expectations which are acknowledged and emphasised by the productions themselves, evidence of which can be found in staging and publicity materials.

Lastly, the Grand-Guignol theatre of Paris, active during the first decades of the twentieth century,[6] will inform some of the points made in this chapter and the next. Perhaps poignantly, whereas the Grand-Guignol specialised in realist or explained supernatural plots, all modern productions discussed in this chapter and the next can be described as ghost stories. Despite this apparent contradiction, many of the conventions and principles of the Grand-Guignol have found their way into these new plays and I will be taking a closer look at some in this chapter and the next. For the current discussion, however, the performance style of the Grand-Guignol is of particular relevance, as it is here that the lineage of the forms starts to merge. As is stated by Hand and Wilson, "[t]he Grand-Guignol is a form that seems to break away from conventional naturalism as often as it embraces it," (2002:35) as "Grand-Guignol may have had its roots in melodrama, naturalism and the well-made play" (2002:38). Evidence of this borrowing can be found in moments of heightened emotions and gestures and even of direct address of the spectators, whether in words or movements. A look from an actor into the auditorium can have a tremendous effect as he thus acknowledges the audience and invites them onto the stage not only to be witness of, but participate in, the story and violence: "The audience become accessories to the act and, most crucially, willing witnesses" (Hand, Wilson, 2002:36). It is this aspect of witnessing which I will return to later in the following chapters.

"*It must be told…*" (*The Woman in Black*, I)

Unfortunately, as stated elsewhere, little work has been done on this type of drama or on either of the productions discussed in this chapter. Emma McEvoy's 2007 article "Contemporary Gothic Theatre" provides some interesting insights into the possible ways in which to read and interact with this form, as she draws attention to the nature of the form and the close relation between the Gothic and the theatre: "The figure of the theatre, as a site where the past can be performed within the present, and the present within the space of the past, has possessed a particular appropriateness for a mode whose defining characteristic has been its twinning of history and place" (2007:214). The idea of liveness and immediacy are considered of high importance in the experience of the genre in this

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[6] It should be noted that the Grand Guignol saw its heyday in Paris in the time mentioned, but the theatre existed until 1965. In addition, there was an incarnation in London's Little Theatre, spearheaded by Jose Levy between 1920 and 1922 and with great success.

context, offering one the chance of seeing and experiencing as an individual and a group, of engaging in the "communality of theatre experience" (McEvoy, 2007:217): "Theatre [...] has a temporal and material presence that neither the novel nor the film has: the material is both physically present and the action is unfolding in the same time dimension as the audience" (McEvoy, 2007:216). Of particular interest for the current discussion is McEvoy's assertion of the characteristics of Gothic literature: "One of the specialities of the Gothic novel is its power of rendering the material phantasmal and the phantasmal material" (2007:216). As shall become apparent, the way in which the narrative is constructed differs and will become, for want of a better term, less conventional with each of the forms addressed in this study.

Although both *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* offer the possibility of a close reading of their script and the ability to engage with the text as a written record, this is not the only way in which one can interact with each production. The concept of a staged text adds layers to the narrative: rather than text alone, the performance draws on a number of channels of theatrical communication. The words become a spoken text and what is conjured up by the imagination is transformed into the physical representation of locations and characters. In performance, it becomes possible to look beyond *what* story is being told; *how* the story is being told becomes an integral part of the experience. For this reason, the current discussion will engage with each text in a number of ways, involving both close reading as well as paying attention to staging and dramaturgy.

One of the first ways in which to approach either text is through a discussion of the structure of the classic ghost narrative: as Julia Briggs argues, "[ghost stories] leave open doors in the imagination through which unknown, if not entirely unwelcome visitors may enter" (1977:11). These fictional stories provide perhaps a more comfortable frame for their audience to negotiate the supernatural as "[invented ghost stories] have some point to them, whereas only too often genuine experiences and ghostly apparitions in life have no discoverable meaning or application. […] This consequential patterning of the ghost story normally implies that there must be a reason (if not a strictly logical one) for supernatural events" (Briggs, 1977:15). It is this basic reasoning that creates the stories many people are familiar with, where "the behaviour of the traditional ghost resembles that of a restless sleeper whose bed is uncomfortable or who is troubled by guilt or an unfulfilled obligation. There is similarly an illogical logic in those 'spirits created for vengeance'" (Briggs, 1977:16),

a sentiment which is echoed by Smith: "Structurally speaking, the ghost story has often appeared to critics to be highly formulaic and oddly reassuring" (2007:151). Ghost stories offer a form of the supernatural with its own set of rules, making it strangely palatable:

> The ghost story's 'explanations' do not operate to rationalise or demystify the supernatural events, but rather to set them inside a kind of imaginative logic in which the normal laws of cause and effect are suspended in favour of what Freud termed 'animistic' ways of thinking, in which thought itself is a mode of power, in which wishes or fears can actually benefit or do harm. (Briggs, 2001:123)

At a basic level, the plots of *The Haunting* and *The Woman in Black* are surprisingly similar: as part of his job, as his first large assignment, a young man is sent to a secluded house in a remote location to take care of the estate of a recently deceased person. Once there, however, not all is as it seems and the dead do not rest quietly. Both plays use the interpretation of the ghost as the uneasy sleeper with unfinished business: the Woman in Black is looking for revenge for the evils that were done to her, whereas in *The Haunting*, Mary wants, needs, her story to be heard in order for her soul to be put to rest. The structure followed by each play seems to resemble both the tradition of the ghost story and of the well-made play, where the situation is introduced in the arrival of the young man at the new location. A number of hints based in observations and interactions with the locals then introduce the problem of the ghost, hints which are vague at first, but become increasingly clear as the narrative progresses.

In *The Woman in Black*, for example, Kipps encounters a number of tight-lipped local residents who have lived with the curse of the Woman for years, and whose worries he initially shrugs off:

> KIPPS'S VOICE: There seems to be a propensity for leaving conversations to hang in the air whenever Mrs Drablow's name is mentioned. People close up, change the subject or leave the room... (I)

His scepticism persists, even after his first meeting with the ghost in the graveyard. By contrast, the arrival of David Filde is already steeped in the supernatural: his carriage has been held up after a woman threw herself in front of it in an attempt to stop him arriving at the estate:

> DAVID: She said she only tried to stop the carriage to warn me not to come here, though how she knew it to be my destination, I cannot guess. (I.1)

It is here that an important feature of each production makes itself known, namely the use of character types to connect with the audience. As Julia Briggs argues,

> The narrator's scepticism may act as a disarming anticipation of that of his audience. If he himself voices their objections or reservations, then they may be more willing to accept his testimony without question. In fact a background of general scepticism or disbelief is one of the factors that distinguishes the ghost story of the last two centuries from earlier examples, encouraging writers to concentrate on creating an effect of verisimilitude in order to convince their readers of the reality of the world into which the unbelievable intrudes. (1977:17)

At first glance, both *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* can be considered as a two-hander as the plays feature two main (male) characters in Kipps and the Actor and Lord Gray and David Filde, respectively. Although in both plays the ghost is of the utmost importance, I would like to argue that it is more beneficial to consider the ghosts as existing outside the world of the play (or, indeed, the real world). By contrast, each of the real characters represent opposing views, scepticism and belief, and are both pitted against each other and against the (mostly invisible, unrepresented) locals they encounter. In *The Haunting*, Lord Gray remains cynical, unwilling to adapt his worldview yet forced to accept Mary's presence when the evidence piles up. David, by contrast, is a believer from the moment of his arrival, based on the stories related to him by the servants. Where Lord Gray is level-headed and has no patience with the ghost, David is more poetic and open to the idea of the spirit world, leaving the spectator the option to choose a side and find a character they can identify with. As Hugh Janes explains, "[Lord Gray's] attitude needs to contrast that of David who believes strongly in life after death and is religious" (2012).

It should be noted, however, that David's character is somewhat tricky to define. Lord Gray is forced to confront his views as the narrative progresses and he is no longer able to deny the presence of the ghost, yet David's ideas are called into question very early on in the play. In Act I, Scene 1, Lord Gray questions the younger man's commitment to the job:

> GRAY: Nor should your fanciful notions impede on your judgement.
> DAVID: I can assure you, my lord, they won't.

Despite this insistence, David himself later admits "[m]y inventive faculty sometimes runs away with me," (I.1) putting him in the position of a potentially unreliable narrator. The

same becomes true for Lord Gray, however, as the events force him to admit to the possibility of the supernatural. In *The Woman in Black,* the audience sees the main character experience a similar journey: the retelling of Kipps' story means that the spectators see a man who arrives in Crythin Gifford a sceptic with little or no patience for the fanciful notions entertained by the locals. Like the case of Lord Gray, however, he is forced to review his opinions, and the ambiguous ending, the fact that both men have now seen the Woman, drives this idea home with even more force. As an audience, can it be denied what has been seen? Where does a spectator position him- or herself in this debate and to what extent are they able to remain sceptical when their counterpart on stage is forced to change their opinion?

At the same time, the presentation of each of the plays posits a specific reading. Both productions draw heavily on imagery from the nineteenth century as the backdrop for their story. In the case of *The Haunting*, Hugh Janes' use of Dickens' ghost stories creates a direct link to the era. Mallatratt's *The Woman in Black*, however, is based on Susan Hill's novel of the same name, which was first published in 1983. As such, it is a representation of an era unfamiliar to the author, and, like *The Haunting*, can be read as a neo-Victorian production. It is this aspect of authenticity, of being presented with a facsimile rather than a primary source from the nineteenth century that could potentially create a barrier between the material and its audience. The ghosts are ghosts, they exist on the stage and in our world, but at the same time, they are old ghosts. The spectator is transported backwards in time and can take solace in the safety of the past, presented by the spaces created by the sets and described by the actors, in the costume of the main characters and the spectres themselves, the patterns of language and delivery. The reality which is created by *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* may be live, but at the same time they inhabit different times, thus complicating the reading of their ghosts.

The question as to whether both texts can be seen as neo-Victorian, though, requires closer attention. In *Neo-Victorianism* (2010), Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn provide the following definition:

> [W]hat we explicitly seek to invoke in our use of the concept is a series of metatextual and metahistorical conjunctions as they interact within the fields of exchange and adaption between the Victorian and contemporary. What we argue

> throughout this book is that the 'neo-Victorian' is *more than* historical fiction set in the nineteenth century. To be part of the neo-Victorianism we discuss in this book, texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians.* (4; emphasis in original)

Rather than simply describing the past or imitating the writing style of the nineteenth century, the neo-Victorian novel *comments on* the Victorians, in some ways viewing this era through a contemporary lens.

Evidence of this can be found in both plays that are discussed here. In the case of *The Haunting*, this process is relatively straight-forward when one keeps in mind the fact that it is an adaptation of some of Dickens' works, the same man who so firmly embedded the ghost story into British culture. The author, Hugh Janes, describes his work as "a Victorian ghost play" (2012), and further evidence of his vision can be found in the production notes for the script, where Janes states that "the play is set c. 1865" (2011:7) and that "[f]urniture and fittings can be any period prior to 1865, but the Victorian style seems to suit the mood of the play perfectly" (2011:8). It is also echoed in the words of the director Hugh Wooldridge: "As the play was set in the Victorian era, I decided to keep the style of theatricality as much of the period as possible" (2012). Yet it should be noted that the play is not a straight adaptation: rather, it borrows loosely from a number of sources, with its primary narrative based on a story personal to the author: "The initial idea, of a young book dealer going to a lonely house, was mine and based on a late uncle but I needed to know who the ghost was, and that I found in Dickens" (Janes, 2012). As such, the production becomes an amalgamation, sometimes using a mere image or scene from Dickens, sometimes a full plot, yet always providing a vision of the past that is intertwined with a more current source, while putting its roots firmly into the nineteenth century.

The case of *The Woman in Black*, however, is more complex. Although drawing on a number of old-fashioned images, such as the pony and trap and the use of candlelight in the classic photo used for much of its marketing material, the actual events seem to take place long after the Victorian era. In both the novel and the script, one can find off-hand lines which make it clear to the astute reader that both electric light and travel by car are normality. The only near-specific date one is given in the book is from a gravestone, now hardly legible, which reads "190…". When compared to other measures of time given in the source material (the year the Woman, Jennet Humfrye, died, the year her son drowned,

the length of time the town of Crythin Gifford has been haunted), this would put Kipps'
narrative in the mid-twentieth century and far away from the nineteenth century traditions.
Instead, Hill draws the reader's attention to certain key moments in the narrative as Eel
Marsh House insists on the use of older means: one needs a pony and trap to even reach
the Drablow residence, an echo of that which haunts the place. Similarly, although electric
light is installed in the house, both these and Kipps' torch fail, reducing him to the use of a
candle in a child's nightlight. In addition, the text is full of references to some form of past:
Kipps' name appears to be linked to HG Wells' 1905 novel of the same title; the title of one
of the chapters uses the famous 1904 MR James story "Oh Whistle and I'll Come to You";
the events that compel Kipps to tell his story are the telling of ghost stories at Christmas,
putting one in mind of classic Dickens. As a result, *The Woman in Black* seems to exude a
sense of pastness rather than any specific era and appears to exist outside of time.

Yet history is a necessity for both plays. The narrative of both revolves around illicit
love, of differences in class and illegitimate children, and each of the plays represents a
tragic event as the source for its haunting. These tragedies, however, are closely linked to
the time in which the narratives are set and are not a likely occurrence when viewed
through the lens of the values of contemporary society. Without some form of past as the
historical framework, there would have been no reason for Lord Gray the Elder to kill
Mary, as the servant girl was hoping to marry his son, or for Jennet Humfrye to give up her
illegitimate child. Without the past, there would be no ghost in the present to haunt Kipps
and David. As a result, the relation of the audience to these stories changes. I would like to
argue that there is a distance between a modern spectator and a Victorian narrative, yet
neither play leaves much room for nostalgia. In the words of Malcolm Chase and
Christopher Shaw, "[n]ostalgia is experienced when some elements of the present are felt to
be defective" (1989:15), yet here the defect is in the past, a past which is now coming back
to haunt the audience as they experience these stories again and again.

The idea of bringing the past back to life in such a manner is already thoroughly
ghostly and as a result, so is the neo-Victorian form. Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham
argue:

> If we consider these in relation to the neo-Victorian novel, its uncanny nature
> proves clear: it often represents a 'double' of the Victorian text mimicking its
> language, style and plot; it plays with the conscious repetition of tropes, characters,

and historical events; it reanimates Victorian genres, for example, the realist text, sensation fiction, the Victorian ghost story and, in doing so, seeming calls the contemporary novel's 'life' into question; it defamiliarizes our preconceptions of Victorian society; and it functions as a form of revenant, a ghostly visitor from the past that infiltrates our present. (2010:xv)

Rather than being haunted by the figure of the Woman or by Mary, the audience is haunted by time, by the Victorian past in which these plays are set and which is finding its way into the present. There is no comfort to be found in tradition, but rather, the seemingly comfortable past is perhaps more frightening than the present.

In addition to issues of time, a tension exists between the familiar and the strange, between truth and illusion, and it is this tension that points towards the somewhat unique position of both productions in relation to the rest of this study. The discussion of horror theory in the introduction to this study highlights the issues of narrative and the differences between the forms of performance horror which will be examined here. For *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*, respectively, it will be beneficial to return to the theories put forward by Noël Carroll and Tzvetan Todorov. As outlined in the previous chapter, both of these authors discuss ideas which centre around the story as it is presented and the audience's relation to this plot. Whereas Todorov describes a reader who needs to resolve what Hills calls "very specific narrative puzzles" (2005:33), Carroll draws attention to the resolution of the narrative: it is the curiosity of the reader or spectator which controls the response, where the need to turn away from the horrific subject matter is countered by the need to find out how the story ends. In his work, Carroll speaks of disclosure narratives, where plot elements are revealed as the story progresses, keeping its audience on the edge of its seat and enticing them to brave the scares in order to witness the resolution:

> The attraction of these [disclosure narratives] […] are to be explained in terms of curiosity and fascination. However, with these cases, the initial curiosity and fascination found in the genre are developed to an especially high degree through devices that enhance and sustain curiosity. If the genre begins, so to speak, in curiosity, it is enhanced by the consilient structures of disclosure plotting. In such cases, then, what attracts us to this sort of horror – which seems to me the most pervasive – is the whole structure and staging of curiosity in the narrative, in virtue of the experience of the extended play of fascination it affords. That is, as Hume noted of tragedy, the source of our aesthetic pleasure in such examples of horror is primarily the whole structure of the narrative in which, of course, the apparition of

the horrific being is an essential, and, as the universal theory shows, a facilitating part. (1990:190; emphasis in original)

It is worth quoting Carroll at some length here as his explanation draws attention both to the result and the process, alluding to the specific way in which the audience interacts with the narrative for it to have the desired effect.

Each production can be seen as a form of total theatre, where the medium of performance and the way in which this is negotiated in the story shapes the narrative and its perception by the spectators. Both Mallatratt and Janes create a form of meta-theatre, allowing them to comment on the plays themselves, the presence (or absence) and role of the audience, and, more importantly, on the existence (or non-existence) of its ghosts. *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* create a tension between artifice and reality, both in terms of their plot and its resolution (or lack thereof, a point which I will return to) and its interaction and open acknowledgement of the role of theatricality. Although, for example, this idea is not as strong as in the case of scare attractions or the decisions on set design used in *Ghost Stories*, both plays discussed here do negotiate space in specific ways and, through tricks of set and script, draw the audience into their worlds. What is interesting is that the theatricality is openly acknowledged in both productions, further blurring the lines between truth and illusion.

The opposition between the views of the two main characters in each play underpins most of the action. In *The Haunting*, the difference between their perceptions and ideas, perhaps inevitably, leads to confrontation between the two characters. Interestingly, it is in these moments that Janes draws on the language of performance to highlight the doubts of Lord Gray as he questions the younger man's motives, referring to the haunting as a game:

> GRAY: Even here among the worm-eaten beams, and thundering echoes in the empty rooms, I remain sensible to my surroundings. Now, as nightfall releases outlandish shadows to frown out behind half-open doors, I am self-contained. It was therefore difficult to realise the game you played with my perceptions. (I.3)

Soon after, Mary's presence is discussed as being invented as Lord Gray accuses David of staging the entire episode for monetary gain:

> GRAY: I assure you I am not a person to instigate hoaxes. Something like this would require what I believe is termed 'theatricality' of the type commonly associated with cheap music hall or comic opera. I have been to neither. (I.3)

As a result, the concept of the ghost as a fake, as a piece of imaginative trickery, is made apparent to the audience. It is this emphasis on (the possibility of) illusion that is even stronger in *The Woman in Black*. In order to give evidence of this, it will be beneficial to quote at some length from the opening moments of the play:

> *The House Lights remain on and working Lights come up on the stage.*
>
> *A middle-aged man enters. He carries a manuscript. He stands on the stage. This man, whose name is Kipps, will not be referred to as "Kipps" but as "Actor" – even though he clearly isn't one.*
>
> *At the back of the theatre, in amongst the seats, a young man enters. This man, who is an actor, will not be referred to as "Actor" but as "Kipps".*
>
> *The House Lights remain on as the Actor on the stage begins to read from his manuscript.*
>
> ACTOR (*reading*): It was nine-thirty on Christmas Eve. As I crossed the long entrance hall of my house, on my way from the dining-room, where we had just enjoyed the first of the happy, festive meals, towards the drawing-room and the fire around which my family were now assembled, I paused, and then, as I often do in the course of an evening, went to the front door, opened it and stepped outside.
> KIPPS (*from the body of the theatre*): This is intended to be of interest, I take it? (I)

The audience is brought to a theatre in worker state, to a space that is prepared for rehearsal rather than performance. The stage is bare apart from a few basic props and spectators openly see the Actor and Kipps reading, getting ready, getting in and out of costume and character. As the script itself makes clear, the audience is not even supposed to be present:

> KIPPS: You will excuse me. I know that what you read holds particular significance for you. That it is possible it will cause you some distress. But I must implore you: have sympathy for your audience.
> ACTOR: Sir?
> KIPPS: Just now we are alone here in this theatre. These rows of empty seats are unlikely to protest as you hum and mumble through your lines. But believe me, sir – speak them thus before an audience and you'll see them one by one expire with boredom. (I)

It is this presence of, and insistence on, the reality of the theatre that largely informs the way in which the play is experienced by the spectators, and which severely impacts the narrative of *The Woman in Black*. As is stated by Emma McEvoy,

> Each aspect of performance is introduced as such: the Actor comments on the recently invented technique of the sound effect; on the way that an actor may make a wicker basket seem to be a horse-drawn carriage; on the nature of hand-held props. Thus the audience encounters each of these theatrical devices as devices, experiences them both within the central narrative and without it. (2007:216)

The emphasis on the reality of the fictional frame complicates the reading of the text, further blurring the two realms. Despite (or because of) the insistence on the theatricality, it can be said that *The Woman in Black* forces a specific reading from its spectator, bypassing Todorov's notion of fantastical hesitation in favour of a fictional interpretation. This is complicated, however, by elements of staging: "*The Woman in Black* uses some ingenious devices to render problematic its materialisation, effectively using the scrim (the translucent gauze) to present the scenes in the nursery and the graveyard. It suggests the claustrophobic and uncanny atmosphere by literalising the trope of the veil" (McEvoy, 2007:216). The world of *The Woman in Black* is essentially one of make-believe. As an audience, one is forced to acknowledge and interact with the artifice as one follows the development of the Actor and his story from page to stage. His words are the plot and become performative, inviting the spectators into his world and recreating his life, taking the audience (which, remember, is not supposed to be there) along for his journey.

Everything on these travels, however, remains elusive: as Mallatratt, who adapted Hill's novella for the stage, describes in the adaptor's note: "There are anachronisms and geographical inconsistencies within the text. These are not mistakes, but indications of the neverland we inhabit when involved with the Woman in Black" (1989:n.pag.). These inconsistencies, the mists and sea frets, create a country, a location for its audience, that is at once familiar and beyond their reach. This sensation is heightened by the immaterial qualities of the set where the minimal props draw constantly on the imaginative powers of the spectator. The audience is forced to conjure up a lively little terrier mimed by the actors, to visualise the pony and trap based on sound alone, to see the inn and the train and Eel Marsh House in the place of a wicker basket or a single bed and chair. In essence, spectators are asked to conjure up their own ghosts of familiar items and places:

The Lights come up. It's the worker state again, though the House Lights are now down and remain so for the rest of the evening. Kipps is on stage, arranging the clutter of furniture into some order that can pass for a solicitor's office. The skip suggests a large partner's desk. (I)

Yet a tension exists here, too: whereas many elements of the real world are left imagined, the spirit world becomes more detailed. In a way, the world of the Woman and her past, her memories, appears to the audience with more reality. The real world becomes more blurred whereas the world inhabited by the Woman becomes more tangible, invading the narrative, invading the space of the audience (something I will return to later) and invading the present as, in the words of Emma McEvoy:

> Stephen Mallatratt's adaption of *The Woman in Black* is set in a theatre, and the process of becoming an actor is at the outset established as one that is meant to effect an emotional exorcism. Watching *The Woman in Black* the audience is in the theatre it is set in – but because of this self-referentiality the play becomes not so much an exorcism as a summoning up of the ghost. (2007:216)

It is indeed the exorcism of the Woman and the Actor's story which is at the heart of the play:

> ACTOR: May I just say – it is not a *performance* that I wish to give. No. I think we are at a misunderstanding in that respect. I wish to – speak it. No more. For my family, only. For those who need to know. I am not a performer – I have no pretensions to be – nor inclination – but – those terrible things that happened to me – they must – I *have* to – let them be told. For my health and reason. (I)

Similarly, the exorcism is made literal in *The Haunting*, where David and Lord Gray go through the ritual of a séance in order to communicate with Mary and put her soul to rest:

> DAVID: ... It's time to release the spirit of my dear sister.
> GRAY: The cynic and the credulous, hand in hand in ignorance. (II.3)

As pointed out by McEvoy, though, the process of retelling and reliving in *The Woman in Black* does not have the desired effect, nor does the séance in *The Haunting* remove all doubt. Both plays make use of an open ending, which could be characterized as filmic in approach. Much like, for example, the *Halloween* franchise, the evil does not disappear at the end of the play; the ghost is not necessarily exorcised or liberated. The effects linger and may even be of consequence to those present in the auditorium. In *The Haunting*, David wakes up, finding himself in a different place, a different haunting, as he is invited by Lord

Gray the Elder to join a party in honour of his son, a son, whom the audience has already discovered, died in battle several years before. David leaves with this Lord Gray, leaving a bare stage where the audience can now once again hear Mary's voice, asking for help. The question remains whether anything has been resolved, or whether the ritual of the séance has entwined David in the haunting, drawing him away from reality and into the spirit world.

The opposite appears to be true for *The Woman in Black*: rather than the narrative transporting the audience into the phantasmal, it pulls the spirit world into the reality of the theatre:

> KIPPS: Who is she?
> ACTOR: I beg your pardon?
> KIPPS: Your surprise. She is remarkable. Where did you find her?
> ACTOR: I'm afraid I don't understand.
> KIPPS: Your surprise, Mr Kipps – the surprise you found for me.
>
> *Pause*
>
> ACTOR (*puzzled*): My surprise was that I'd learnt my words.
> KIPPS: Yes, yes, you learnt them expertly, but the woman you found – the actress. The woman in black. (*Pause*) Who was she? (*Pause*) You organized it as a complete surprise – you had her come here and go through her part and ... a young woman. With a wasted face. She...
>
> *Silence. The Actor is starting at him in horror.*
>
> ACTOR: A *young* woman?
> KIPPS: Is there anything the matter? You look unwell.
>
> *Pause*
>
> ACTOR (*at length*): I did not see a young woman. (II)

In the words of McEvoy, the exorcism has indeed becoming a summoning up. In the retelling of the past, the past has returned and now has a physical presence, a presence which inhabits the same space as the actors, the same space as the audience. At the same time, the Woman's being remains nebulous: as becomes clear from the abstract, the Actor did not see her and his only image of her exists in his memory. For Kipps, however, reliving or, in this case, living through the memories of the Actor, the Woman becomes real, someone who he has seen and interacted with, with all the possible implications as

they were outlined in the play. The ghost has not been put to rest, but rather returns time and time again. This return can be read beyond the realms of the stage: the Woman returns to Kipps, to the Actor, and to the audience. She does so at the end of the play every time it is performed. With its first performance in 1987 and its residency in London since 1989, the ghost of the Woman materialises over and over, night after night, literally haunting audiences for several decades. Each night, the past comes back to life, a ghost in itself, bringing the spirits of this Woman with it.

So far, I have referred to both productions as classic ghost stories, but this classification requires closer attention. Although it appears easy to use such terminology, describing the plays in relation to horror and the spirit, the concept of haunting throws up more questions than it answers, and it will be beneficial to explore a number of definitions. Many authors have tried to engage with the concept, but it seems to remain as elusive as the phantasmal entities it is set to describe. In the words of Andrew Smith, "[t]he ghost is thus manifested somewhere between the unconscious and the conscious, which explains why its 'reality' is difficult to grasp" (2010:1). Although, like the genre as a whole, one might feel that one could point out a ghost on sight, it is this duality, this existence on the borders of categories, which presents a difficulty in pinning down the essence of ghostliness.

It is this aspect that Maria Del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren draw attention to in their discussion of modern instances of hauntings: "Generally, the ghostly can be said to refer to that which is present yet insubstantial (the spirit rather than the body), secondary rather than primary (a faint copy, a trace, a ghost writer), and potentially unreal or deceptive (a spurious radar signal)" (2010:x). In their definition, they make a distinction between non-figurative and figurative ghosts, "those manifestations, in some form or another, of the returning dead" and "marginalized citizens, invisible terror threats, the illusionary presences of computer-generated imagery (CGI), and the intangible, spectral nature of modern media" (Del Pilar Blanco, Peeren, 2010:x). It is here that one can find a basis for the current discussion as Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren offer a distinction between the returning dead and other, more metaphorical, examples of haunting.

As shall emerge from a close reading of the two plays, haunting and ghosting will appear in either of these forms, both offering the spectator the presence of the spirit in the theatre environment, as well as a number of more subtle (and perhaps more insidious)

elements of ghostly appearances in script and staging. The ghost stories presented in *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* both highlight and contrast the performance experience, and it is this aspect that is discussed by Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle. They offer a definition of haunting that similarly draws attention to the contrast inherent in the term, the tension between the physical and the phantasmal: "to be human is to have a spirit, a soul, a *Geist* or ghost. But the more modern sense of 'ghost' […] involves the idea of a spectre, an apparition of the dead, a revenant, the dead returned to a kind of spectral existence – *an entity not alive but also not quite, not finally, dead*" (2009:160; my emphasis). This duality is extended to another facet of the concept:

> These conflicting senses of the word 'ghost' suggest that ghosts are *both exterior and central* to our sense of the human. Ghosts are paradoxical since they are both fundamental to the human, fundamentally human, and a denial or disturbance of the human, the very being of the inhuman. (Bennett, Royle, 2009:160; my emphasis)

The issue with ghosts, according to Bennett and Royle, is the inability to categorise them. They are both dead and not dead, both us, inside us, and not us. They are both connected to the world and everyday experience, while at the same time serving as a reminder of other worlds and other times: "Ghosts have a history. They are not what they used to be. Ghosts, in a sense, *are* history. They do not, after all, come from nowhere, even if they may appear to do just that. They are always inscribed *in a context*" (Bennett, Royle, 2009:160; emphasis in original).

It is these tensions between imagination and manifestation, between emotion and logic, between psychology and physicality, which are negotiated in each of the plays discussed here. These issues are not just addressed within the narrative and script, but become embedded in the fabric of the performances as each plays with the tensions between reality, illusion and theatricality, drawing attention to its fiction yet presenting it as fact and further blurring boundaries. Theatre as a text and as a mode of production offers its own challenges in relation to the type of material discussed here. In addition, the positioning of both plays as neo-Victorian produces another layer of history: in their productions, Mallatratt and Janes have created the ghosts of a time gone by, reviving the spectres of over a century ago and allowing their audiences to relive these stories. Furthermore, not only are the spirits revived, but also the time in which they existed and, as I argued earlier in this chapter, the era and its values which caused them to become ghosts.

As has already been noted, some authors, such as Andrew Smith, draw attention to the intangibility of spirits: "[I]t is important to note that the intangibility of the ghost can be read as a counterpoint to more palpable monstrous bodies (demons, vampires, zombies, ghouls and so on)" (2007:147). What is of interest for the current discussion is the forced physicality of the ghosts the characters and audience encounter in both plays. In order to facilitate the staging of the play, both the Woman and Mary have been made visible, even tangible, and (in the case of Mary, specifically) given a voice: not only does the audience see her, but they can hear her.

One could argue that this removes any kind of ambiguity from the narrative, guiding the audience away from Todorov's moment of hesitation, yet at the same time, the phantasmal qualities of both spirits are acknowledged. The spectators can see the ghosts whenever they appear on stage, yet at the same time, their existence is denied by at least one of the characters. As discussed earlier, the Actor is unable to see the surprise in the form of the young woman with the wasted face, whereas Lord Gray is unable to see Mary for (most of) the duration of *The Haunting*. In a similar vein, the spirit world takes on a more material form. In *The Woman in Black*, the nursery is the only location presented to the spectators as a set design with any amount of detail; it is the source of the haunting, the anchor for the spirit of the Woman. This is also reflected in the moments at which the Woman appears: the spectators first encounter her at the funeral of Mrs. Drablow, a set which leaves less to the imagination than most of the story.

In addition to the contradictory idea of the physical ghost, metaphorical meanings of the concept of haunting can also be seen in each of the productions. References in Smith and Bennett and Royle to the figure of the ghost as history are addressed in each play as stories are told and retold, reimagined, relived. The past returns to the present and is set to shape the future as the audience are left uncertain about what is to become of Kipps. The spectators have been made aware of the consequences of an encounter with the Woman and will fear for the future of him and his young family. Similarly, the audience has been left with questions regarding David's fate: is he alive or dead? Is he still in the real world or has he joined his sister in the spirit world? What happened to Mary: did the séance indeed set her free to find peace, or has David merely joined her without the desired result? In

either case, the haunting seems to continue and repeat, rather than resolve itself by the actions of the characters.

It is this blurring that draws both productions into the realm of the uncanny. Discussed briefly in the introduction of this study, it will be helpful for the current argument to return to the concept in more detail and its implications for ideas of ghosts and haunting. In his 1906 essay, Ernst Jentsch draws attention to the aspects that categorise an experience as uncanny, and the tension between life and death is high on his list:

> [D]oubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether the lifeless object may not in fact be animate – and more precisely, when this doubt only makes itself felt obscurely in one's consciousness. The mood lasts until these doubts are resolved and then usually makes way for another kind of feeling. (1906:n.pag.)

The hesitation one experiences when an object which appears inanimate suddenly moves is what, according to Jentsch, creates the uncanny experience, especially when the object still retains some of its humanity: "The horror which a dead body (especially a human one), a death's head, skeletons and similar things cause can also be explained to a great extent by the fact that thoughts of a latent animate state always lie so close to these things" (1906:n.pag.). This idea is echoed by Freud in his seminal 1919 text: "To many people the acme of the uncanny is represented by anything to do with death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts" (2003:148). The choice of words becomes important in these discussions, as can be found in Nicholas Royle's *The Uncanny* from 2003, who defines the uncanny as "ghostly" (1) and goes on to say that:

> The uncanny has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality. It may be that the uncanny is a feeling that happens only to oneself, within oneself, but it is never one's 'own'; its meaning or significance may have to do, most of all, with what is not oneself, with others, with the world 'itself'. It may thus be construed as a foreign body within oneself, even the experience of oneself as a foreign body, the very estrangement of inner silence and solitude. It would appear to be indissociably bound up with a sense of repetition or 'coming back' – the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat. (2)

What becomes important in Freud and more modern writings is not simply the distinction between animate and inanimate, between life and death, but rather the tension between

categories, the blurring of boundaries, the liminality: "The uncanny has to do with making things *uncertain*: it has to do with the sense that things are not as they have come to appear through habit and familiarity, that they may challenge all rationality and logic" (Bennett, Royle, 2009:36; emphasis in original). It is this no man's land that both productions inhabit, where clear conclusions regarding events and plot always remain elusive. Hugh Janes describes how the effect he wanted to create in the play was one of "otherworldliness" (2012), whereas director Hugh Wooldridge's aim was "to make the audience really immerse themselves into an unreal world" (2012).

Not only do boundaries between reality and fiction and past and present blur, but this distinction is highlighted, as already discussed, in the staging: by creating ghosts which have a physical presence (and even a voice), a presence which, at times, appears more real than the world the characters and the audience inhabit, it becomes more and more complex to categorise the experience. Not only are the ghosts always visible, but they can influence the physical world, a decision with a number of implications. The spectral and material worlds collide on the stage, as scenes conjured up by the imagination have to be rendered visible: Mallatratt and Janes are forced to show what is only told by Hill and Dickens. It can be said that this aspect impacts on the nature of the ghosts and the audience's perception of them, something which I will return to later in this chapter.

Evidence of the decisions regarding the presence and visibility of the ghosts can be found in both plays. Mary can move objects in the library, alerting David to her existence by manipulating her surroundings:

> DAVID *lights a lamp and looks about. He takes a book from a shelf beside the fireplace, looks at it and replaces it. As he is moving his hand over other books one shoots out with a noise and falls on the floor.* (I.1)

Similarly, the presence of the Woman is experienced not just by the characters, but by their surroundings as well, as becomes apparent in the conclusion of the play:

> *A spot illuminates the Woman in Black*
>
> *The pony and trap draws nearer, we hear a child's laughter, the sound of the band, voices. The spot leaves Kipps and we watch the Woman in Black staring as if the trap is bearing towards her. Then, on a sudden movement from her, we hear the neighing of a startled horse, shouts from the driver, shouts of terror from the child, and then a horrifying crash*

>*There is a second while the Woman in Black remains in spot. Then she is gone.* (II)

The destruction of the nursery and the movement of the rocking chair in the same room also indicate the communication between the physical and phantasmal, again highlighting the role of the Woman and the blurring of boundaries between the living and the dead.

In *The Woman in Black*, in particular, this issue of spectrality is found in another area, namely the spectrality of the self. One of the aspects of the uncanny which Freud draws attention to is the concept of the double, where "a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other's self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged" (2003:142). This discussion is expanded by Bennett and Royle, who state that:

> According to Freud's essay, the double is paradoxically both a promise of immortality (look, there's my double, I can be reproduced, I can live forever) and a harbinger of death (look, there I am, no longer me here, but there; I am about to die, or else I must be dead already). The notion of the double undermines the very logic of identity. (2006:41)

This doubling is most notable in the blurring between the characters of the Actor and Kipps, a process which begins in the opening stage directions of the script:

> *A middle-aged man enters. He carries a manuscript. He stands on the stage. This man, whose name is Kipps, will not be referred to as "Kipps" but as "Actor" – even though he clearly isn't one.*

> *At the back of the theatre, in amongst the seats, a young man enters. This man, who is an actor, will not be referred to as "Actor" but as "Kipps".* (I.1)

This aspect of the production is openly referred to later in the performance. Kipps becomes the Actor, whereas the Actor is asked to draw on his memory to fill in the other characters. It is this process which is highlighted by McEvoy, as well, and continues to be referred to throughout the performance:

> The main characters become disturbing doubles of each other, in a way that plays on the doubleness of acting itself. In *The Woman in Black*, the audience sees both Mr Kipps and the Actor becoming other characters and is made aware of their increasing skill; it also sees the Actor becoming Mr Kipps. Instead of achieving the hoped-for exorcism, Mr Kipps, through the process of performing his story, is forced to talk about himself in the third person, to see someone else become him, and to become other than his self. (2007:217)

Especially after Kipps has entered Eel Marsh House, the stories start to merge and the two voices become one:

> ACTOR: For a long time he does not move from the dark, wood-panelled hall. He wants company, and he has none. He wants lights. He needs reassurance. But more than anything else, he needs an *explanation*. (*Pause*) For he does not believe in ghosts.
> KIPPS: But out on the marshes just now, I saw a woman who – whose form was quite substantial, yet – Oh God – I cannot describe it – I... (*He moves to sit. He takes a moment to compose himself*) The expression on her face... desperate, yearning malevolence... filled me with indescribable loathing and fear. And she vanished in a way that no living human being could possibly manage to do. (*Pause*) I did not believe in ghosts. (I)

In this way, Mallatratt seems to comment on the role of each man, as well as the way in which each is haunted: the two appear to become one as their actions start to complement each other and their stories begin to merge.

In addition, as stated by McEvoy, *The Woman in Black* engages with theatricality, with the process of staging and acting, thus again blurring the categories between fact and fiction:

> *The Lights lose Jerome. Kipps looks with concern towards the Actor, who, in agitation, is dressing as Sam Daily once again. Kipps moves to him*
>
> KIPPS: Mr Kipps, are you alright?
> ACTOR: I – yes. Yes, I am. Jerome was terrified.
> KIPPS (*bringing him into the light*): But you, yourself - it would seem you are in a – a state of emotion… (II)

The Actor is not merely haunted by the Woman, or by his past, but in this process of nightly exorcism, becomes haunted by his memories, his story, by Kipps, his double, himself.

The symbolic meaning of the ghost can occur in yet another context, namely in the context of the haunted text. In his book *Victorian Hauntings*, Julian Wolfreys draws attention to the ephemerality and ghostliness of the medium of the book: "It is a question, then, of phantom texts – textual phantoms which do not necessarily have the solidity or objectivity of a quotation, an intertext or explicit, acknowledged presence and which do not in fact come to rest *anywhere*" (2002:280; emphasis in original). According to Wolfreys, texts can

take on a life of their own, constantly haunting culture with the traditions and history they represent: "We speak and write of texts in strange ways. We often place them in a heritage or tradition, much as we would our ancestors. We archive them, we keep them, we revere them" (2002:xi). Similar to physical ghosts, texts inhabit a strange no man's land between different categories, evading any attempt to pin them down: "Texts are neither dead nor alive, yet they hover at the very limits between living and dying" (Wolfreys, 2002:xii). As a result, according to Wolfreys, "all stories are, more or less, ghost stories. And, to reiterate another principle: all forms of narrative are, in one way or another, haunted" (2002:3). In order to address this characteristic of literature, Wolfreys coins the term *necrobibliography*: "We frequently reanimate the text. We speak of the text as 'saying something', we write that the text does things or makes things occur, as though it had a life or will of its own" (2002:xii). The text had a life before the reader encountered it, a life which might be, in want of a better term, haunted by its own history. Considering Dickens' status as one of the most well-known authors in the UK, for example, it is likely that the use of one of his works will conjure up a different set of images and expectations in the minds of an audience than if the first novel of an unknown author had been adapted for the stage.

This idea of the reanimation of text becomes even more poignant in the world of the theatre, where a script is literally brought to life, revisited and revised time and time again, and it is for this reason it will be helpful to discuss Marvin Carlson and his ideas of theatre as a memory machine: "The retelling of stories already told, the re-enactment of events already enacted, the reexperience of emotions already experienced, these are and have always been central concerns of the theatre in all times and places" (2001:3). Inherent in the medium, the theatre offers a way to interact with a text which is both more real and more ephemeral than the written word. Dialogue is spoken by the characters involved in real time, in real life, yet at the same time, the experience is more fleeting: "[A]s anyone involved in the theatre knows, performance, however highly controlled and codified, is never exactly repeatable" (2001:4).

The liveness, which sets this kind of experience apart from other horror media, only adds to the sense of haunting that is experienced by the audience. Carlson draws attention to the ephemeral nature of performance as a medium, something which can only be shown, but never completely captured. Any restaging becomes haunted by images of previous productions of the same play. This idea gains more weight in a discussion of long-running

productions, with the run of several decades of *The Woman in Black* as a prime example. In such cases, the audience gains the opportunity to literally visit and revisit the play, to see the same script on the same set on the same stage in the same theatre, yet ultimately providing a different experience. This process of reanimation also occurs in the fact that both Mallatratt and Janes adapted existing texts, reshaping and recreating the written word for the stage. The historical setting of each of the productions adds another layer of reanimation, transporting the audience to a different time and place. Finally, the length of the run of *The Woman in Black*, specifically, adds poignancy to Carlson's emphasis on theatre as a memory machine, a place to retell and re-experience: for all these years, its spectators go and even return to the Fortune Theatre to relive the story of Kipps again and again.

It is this experience that to Carlson is a vital part of the perception and interpretation of the audience: "We are able to "read" new work [...] only because we recognize within them elements that have been recycled from other structures of experience that we have experienced earlier" (2001:4). The haunted stage, in a way, needs to be haunted in order for spectators to engage with and make sense of the production they are exposed to, a production they might have been exposed to before in a different way or a different context. Carlson calls this process ghosting, which "presents the identical thing they have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context. Thus, a recognition not of similarity, as in genre, but of identity becomes part of the reception process, with results that can complicate this process considerably" (2001:7). The concept of ghosting as introduced by Carlson may simply appear to refer to a new production of an old script, but its definition encompasses much more than simply a revival of an existing play: "Everything in the theatre, the bodies, the materials utilized, the language, the space itself, is now and has always been haunted and that haunting has been an essential part of the theatre's meaning to and reception by its audiences in all times and all places" (Carlson, 2001:15).

Both plays discussed here are, in some form, adaptations and thus revivals of old, perhaps familiar texts. Ghost stories are almost embedded in British culture, as is shown when one of his stepsons addresses Kipps in Hill's novel: "You must know at least *one* ghost story, stepfather, everyone knows *one*…" (1994:20; emphasis in original). It is this familiarity that will inform a current reading by any audience: a knowledge of (Christmas)

ghost stories, of Dickens and his works, of Hill's novella and its adaptations for the screen, or simply of horror as a genre and the rules and expectations it brings to the table.

"I think I might regret coming here." (*The Haunting*, I.1)

At this point in the discussion, it will be beneficial to turn to two aspects of staging which are of special interest in both productions, offering a new way to engage with the narrative presented. Numerous elements influence the experience and perception of specific performance events and in *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* the use of the theatre space and of sound are worthy of discussing in more detail. Space severely impacts on the audience experience, specifically in the horror genre. The traditional space brings with it traditional expectations regarding the way in which the performance will unfold, both in terms of staging and in terms of the dynamic between audience and production, and spectator experiences are influenced by these expectations. It is this (supposed) distance between spectator and performer which generates a large amount of the scepticism described by Andy Nyman at the beginning of this chapter: the performers are onstage, whereas the audience is (seemingly) safe in the auditorium. Morreall's ideas form the basis of such a discussion, as does his argument that control and distance need to be diminished in order to play on the emotions of the audience, and as such, the contract between actor and spectator needs to be altered. As will become apparent, the other forms discussed in this study take this change in contract to a new level, changing conventions and moving out of the traditional theatre space. *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*, however, are classic plays, following the conventional divide between the performance area and the spaces inhabited by the audience. That said, the boundaries between these spaces are deftly negotiated, both on a physical and symbolic level.

Before continuing with a detailed discussion of the staging of each play, it will be beneficial to look at the use of theatre space in more abstract terms. As mentioned before, and stated by Susan Bennett, the traditional theatre offers certain conventions and, as a result, certain expectations: "Contemporary audiences in theatre buildings are [...] most used to fixed stage-auditorium relationships and the predominance of this convention has led to its necessity for a comfortable theatrical experience" (1997:132). An audience will have certain preconceptions and expectations when attending a performance, especially one

which takes place in a traditional location. Immersive productions will generate a different dynamic, one, as addressed at the beginning of this chapter, which is much closer to the experience of scare attractions. Yet, as has also been mentioned, horror productions can use (and abuse) these preconceptions in order to throw the spectators off-balance, to find a way in and to scare them despite their reservations. In order to explore these techniques, I would like to turn to an analysis of the different areas of the performance space, a relationship which is discussed in some detail by Patrice Pavis, who divides the theatre space into two distinct sections: the objective space, which is "the visible, often frontal space that can be filled and described" (2003:151), and the gestural space, "created by the presence, stage position, and movements of the performers" (2003:152). He goes on to quantify the objective space in more detail, outlining the following areas:

> *The theatrical site*: the building and its architecture […]
> *The stage space*: the area used by the actors and the technical staff […]
> *The liminal space*: marks the separation [...] between stage and auditorium, or between stage and backstage spaces. (2003:151; emphasis in original)

It could be said that, in order to remove control and distance in traditional proscenium, this divide between categories needs to be negotiated and the boundaries between stage space and liminal space need to be erased. A similar idea is introduced by Robert Weimann in his work on Elizabethan theatre. Although his discussion obviously centres on a different type of performance, two of the concepts introduced by Weimann are of interest here, namely the distinction between the *locus*, "a scaffold, be it a *domus*, *sedes*, or a throne, is the one factor that is of key importance," and the *platea*, "a "place" or platform-like acting area" (1987:74). Where the *locus* would be those elements representing a number of specific locations, the *platea* would represent the space inside or outside these settings, taking the form of the inside of a mansion or a scene on the street: "[the] distinction between the *locus* as a fairly specific imaginary locale or self-contained space in the world of the play and the *platea* as an opening in *mise en scène* through which the place and time of the stage-as-stage" (Weimann, 2000:181). As is specified by Weimann, the acting area was thus extended by the use of the *platea* (1987:74) and as a consequence, "both *platea* and *locus* are related to specific locations and types of action and acting, but each is meaningless without the functioning assumptions of the other," (Weimann, 1987:81) both elements working together to

transport the audience to numerous locales. Yet despite this dependency, Weimann characterizes the *locus* as having a symbolic character and the *platea* as a neutral space.

When applying Weimann's concepts to the modern theatre, it can be argued that this distinction is still in place. The *locus*, in contemporary staging, is the stage, the focus of the performance, and evidence of a symbolic agreement, perhaps, between actors and audience: when action happens in the *locus*, the audience is in the dark, quiet, paying attention. The *platea* is the neutral space, the familiar space perhaps, of the auditorium, subordinate to the symbolic power of the *locus*. The traditional proscenium stage is the focus of the performance and the centre of the audience's attention. The unlocalized place of the *platea* can be described as any use that is made of space that is *not* the stage space, i.e. actors appearing in and performing from the auditorium.

It is the manipulation of space that is of importance in both *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*. Through this process the theatre space itself becomes a realm of the uncanny, as can be glimpsed from the words from Emma McEvoy: "Space itself becomes doubled when the actor's space and the audience space become one" (2007:221). Starting with *The Haunting*, the negotiation of space in this play is not so much a physical, but rather a symbolic process with the spectator as a witness. Through this process of witnessing, the audience can be implicated in the action which takes place on stage, bringing them into the stage space not just as observer or even voyeur, but in close relation to one of the characters. Hand and Wilson describe the concept of the witness in Grand-Guignol theatre, discussing the implication of the spectator as witness in the role of "voyeur, the willing witness-collaborator in the act of violence" (2002:44). The power of this device and how it was used in the Grand-Guignol can also be found within the plot of the plays themselves, where it is not only the spectators who see, but where characters themselves become implicated in the violence: a victim can be an observer, "witness[ing] their own killer and, hence, their own demise. The horror can also be located around a *bystander*, who does not come to any physical harm but in the process of *witnessing* is taken to the ultimate horror" (Hand; Wilson, 2002:44; emphasis in original).

It is in the capacity of bystander that one can locate the audience of *The Haunting* as they connect with the character of David and his visions of his sister. What is of particular interest in relation to this in the case of *The Haunting* is the physical presence of Mary. The

play is quite clear in its organisation of the supernatural events and openly discusses these, yet the role of the audience as witness is a dubious one. Despite his acknowledgement of several weird goings-on, Lord Gray is unable to perceive the ghost and the reason behind this is addressed directly by Janes:

> GRAY: You think the spirit is that of your sister?
> DAVID: Yes, and that's why I can see her and you cannot. Though her face is pale and her figure hardly moves, it is dreadful to me, as it comes from the grave. (II.2)

By this internal logic, the audience should not be able to see Mary at all, yet not only do they see her, but at the end of Act II, they see her without the presence of David on stage:

> *They exit, leaving the main door open. After a moment, the door slowly closes and behind it is* MARY. *Blackout.* (II.2)

Mary's presence is associated strongly with family ties and David, because of their blood relation, is (initially) the only person able to hear and see Mary. As Hugh Janes describes: "I wanted to have my ghost explain why she was interred and murdered at the end. Only David can hear and see her at first, because he believes. […] As the truth dawns on Gray it opens his senses to Mary" (2012). Her presence, however, in staging, is not invisible, and at one moment of the play, the audience is even able to see her independently of David, who has left the room. Although there is reference in the script to the ability of Lord Gray to see Mary's spirit near the end of the play, the parameters are clearly set out at the onset of the narrative. The implication would be that the audience is open to an encounter with the ghost, one step ahead of the stoic scepticism portrayed by Lord Gray, yet the casting of the spectator in the role of witness remains an interesting choice.

Of similar importance is the use of the space and the contract between audience and production. Especially in *The Woman in Black*, the familiar contract of proscenium arch theatre is broken the moment Kipps appears in the back of the auditorium, amongst the spectators, one of them. No longer is the action confined to the stage and no longer is the audience, aware that they are present at a ghost play, safe. This idea is driven home in more detail when the Woman first appears at the funeral, making her way to the stage down the centre aisle. In the words of McEvoy, "something about her presentation which is cliché personified or convention materialised [...] Faced with this Gothic convention the audience

knows the conventional response" (2007:217). At the same time, however, the spectators have not yet been prompted, as becomes apparent when looking at the script for the moment of the Woman's first appearance in the theatre:

> *In the centre aisle stands the Woman in Black.* [...]
> *Kipps is clearly momentarily shocked to see her, then steadies himself. The Actor does not look back at her, and we can believe he does not see her, nor know she's there.* (I)
>
> […]
>
> KIPPS: Tell me, that woman... I hope she can find her own way home... she looked so dreadfully unwell. Who was she?
>
> *Jerome looks at him*
>
> The young woman with the wasted face, behind you in the church and then in the graveyard here, a few yards from us.
> JEROME: A *young* woman?
> KIPPS: Yes, yes, with the skin stretched over her bones. I could scarcely bear to look at her... she was tall, she wore a bonnet type of hat... I suppose to try and conceal as much as she could of her face, poor thing.
>
> *Jerome looks frozen, pale, his throat moving as if he were unable to utter*
>
> Is there anything the matter? You look unwell.
> JEROME (*at length; in a low voice*): I did not see a young woman.
> KIPPS: But surely... (*he turns*)
>
> *The Woman in Black appears again*
>
> (*Pointing*) Look, there she is again... ought we not to –
>
> *Jerome grabs his wrist, evidently in an extreme of terror. He avoids looking where Kipps is pointing. Kipps looks at him in astonishment* (I)

Due to her position, the audience, like Kipps, is left to discover her in their own time and perhaps as innocently. It is not until Jerome's response and his reluctance to address or even look at the Woman that the spectators are cued in their reaction to her. Perhaps they do not fear, not until the script and Jerome's actions clearly prompt them to do so, by which point it is already too late. The audience has seen the Woman; they have become implicated in the action and will (potentially) suffer the same fate as all who see her.

In addition to the manipulation of space, sound plays a pivotal role in each of these productions, often becoming a driving force and a means of haunting in its own right. The narrative of theatre, however, consisting of numerous channels of communication, allows for the ghostly to be presented in a different way. In the case of these plays, this is done most notably through the use and presentation of sound. As Ross Brown argues, "sound… is *in totum* an immersive environment" (2010:132; emphasis in original), a statement which is echoed by Theo van Leeuwen: "Sound never just 'expresses' or 'represents', it always also, and at the same time, affects us" (1999:128). Sound surrounds an audience, is ephemeral and cannot be quantified: "Sound […] is seen as immaterial and evanescent: it is not, and can never be, an object which can be grasped and possessed. It can only be experienced and remembered" (van Leeuwen, 1999:195). My argument is that, in lieu of the physicality of the ghosts as they are represented on stage by their respective actresses, sound takes on the role of the spectre, with van Leeuwen's words even reminiscent of the qualities associated with the ghost. In each production, sound is encountered in a number of ways, some of which punctuate this idea of sound as a haunted device.

Thematically, *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* are quite similar, evoking the atmosphere of the classic ghost story, reminiscent of Charles Dickens and Henry James. The staging, however, could not be more different: the narrative of *The Haunting* occurs within a single room, which is presented in much detail on the stage. By contrast, *The Woman in Black* takes the spectator on a journey from London to a remote village and to an even more remote manor house, transforming its sparse set into all of its locations, from a railway carriage to the interior of a homely pub or the inside of cold, dark Eel Marsh House. In order to present these locations, both productions use a soundscape to add to their representations. The source of these sounds is unseen, but their content is closely related to what is portrayed onstage. What is evoked is nothing beyond background noise, but the treatment is slightly different: *The Haunting* employs sound effects which are meant to almost fade into the background. In the words of director Hugh Wooldridge: "It is quite possible that if an audience were asked about these sounds they might say – what wind? What clocks? This would be good, as it would show that the technical aspects of the production did not dwarf the Dickens story" (2012).

Aside from these soundscapes, the voice and delivery of the actor should be considered as a source of sound in its own right within these worlds. As with many other

elements of the plays, the audience take their cue from the behaviour of the characters onstage. A good example is the aforementioned scene which can be found in *The Woman in Black*, after Kipps and Jerome leave the churchyard. Kipps tells Jerome about the young lady with the wasted face, the Woman herself, who he saw during the service. The audience will most likely have seen her as well, but it is in this moment and in Jerome's reaction, that they are really given a measure of how much they should fear her. Here the actor's voice functions as the primary cue for the spectator: the delivery of the lines will have an effect on the reception, prompting an audience to a specific reading and emotion.

The delivery of the script is not the only way in which sound may influence the affect created by each of the plays. As discussed earlier in this chapter, in both productions the decision was made that the ghosts of the Woman and Mary would be visible to the audience, a decision with numerous implications. In the process of adapting both works from page to stage, what is simply described on paper needs to be made visible, and as such, the ephemeral form of the ghost needs to become material. In such a move from the phantasmal to the physical, the ghostliness of both figures is problematized, even negated, as the spectral is "present yet insubstantial." (Del Pilar Blanco, Peeren, 2010:x)

In this process of materializing the ghosts, the decision has also been made that both apparitions are voiced and thus able to tell the audience her own story. This use of audio offers an amalgamation of past, present and future, harking back to Bennett and Royle's notion of the ghost as history. Both *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* relate the source of their hauntings in relation to the past, a story that is discovered via the reading of old letters written by those involved. Through this medium, the main characters learn the truth and, more importantly, the ghost is able to tell her own story:

> [DAVID] *gives* GRAY *the letter from his sister. He starts to read then* MARY*'s voice takes over.*
>
> GRAY. 'My dearest brother, I am sorry I have not written for some months but what I have to say will come as a shock to you…
> MARY. 'I am with child. I know I have done a bad thing but good is to come of it for Captain James Gray, of whom I have written, has promised to marry me…
> (II.2)

A scene very similar to this sequence from *The Haunting* can be found in *The Woman in Black*:

As Kipps speaks the following, he is joined by the voice-over of a young woman speaking the same words. […]

KIPPS / YOUNG WOMAN: He is mine. Why should I not have what is mine? He shall not go to strangers. I shall kill us both before I let him go.
YOUNG WOMAN: What else can I do? I am quite helpless… (II)

Through the use of a voice-over, both women are able to tell their own story to the audience. They revive and relive their trauma (the illegitimate pregnancy and, in the case of the Woman, the loss of the child) through speech, creating a potential emotional connection with the spectator as they hear the tragic stories told by those who lived through them and eventually met with a death that brought neither of these women any peace. The voiced experience is equally important for those characters that are still alive. David puts together a séance to summon up the ghost of his deceased sister, acknowledging her presence in order to set her free. Similarly, the Actor needs to speak his trauma, needs a platform to tell his story to finally be released of the experience and the nightmares it still brings him. The stage becomes, literally, a place of ritual and exorcism.

Most notably, however, both productions present specific instances of what I would like to term auditory hauntings, in which ghosts of the past return only through sound. They are part of the world of the play, part of its reality, but emanate from an unseen source and (especially in the case of *The Woman in Black*) denote an unseen reality. They resonate through history, creating and (re)creating the past in the present, much like a ghost. A prime example of this can be found in *The Woman in Black*: the pivotal moment and the cause of the haunting is the death of the Woman's child as the pony and trap is sucked into the marsh. It is this moment which will haunt both Kipps and the audience as it returns several times during the play, a key scene which is presented to the spectator only as sound:

Fade up sound of a pony and trap. Kipps turns in evident relief, as the sound fades down, changes its apparent direction, swirls and fades as if carried on the mist
[…]
The sound grows near, then recedes. […] *At length, the noise of the pony and trap fades altogether, and away on the marsh is a draining, sucking, churning sound, which goes on, together with the shrill neighing and whinnying of a horse in panic. And then another cry: a shout, terrified sobbing…* (I)

The Actor, Kipps, the audience, all are haunted by the screams of the pony and the child as they disappear into the marsh. In a way it is this moment, this memory which is the key to the play and the explanation to the actions and spiritual presence of the Woman. Perhaps significantly, this key moment is only heard and never seen, only told and never made visible. The same is true for *The Haunting*, where two moments of auditory haunting can be found. The first occurs soon after David's arrival, as he is relating the story told to him by Twitchin, one of the servants.

> *The carriage is heard arriving and then sounds and actions continue as described and built to a frenzied crescendo.* [...]
>
> *Silence. The events have left them stunned.*
>
> GRAY: That was quite a tale, Mr Filde.
> DAVID: Rather more than I expected. Did you hear it too?
> GRAY: The ears of the deaf would have been dumbfounded. (I.2)

It is one of the first moments in which the characters and audience encounter any spiritual activity, and also the first in which Lord Gray is forced to admit to the occurrence. Similarly, the first appearance of Mary is in voice only as she calls out for help to her brother and, as mentioned earlier, the audience encounters the reasons behind her demise in her own voice. A second occurrence of auditory haunting, similar to Twitchin's story, is found later in the play:

> GRAY: Please. (*Takes the report.*) 'The Russians, their lightblue jackets embroidered with silver lace, were advancing at an easy gallop towards the brow of the hill under cover of light cannon.'
>
> *As* GRAY *continues, the sound and lighting take us to the battle.*
>
> Did you hear that noise?
> DAVID: Clearly. (II.2)

What is notable here is the acknowledgement of the instance by the characters. Whereas the sounds related to Twitchin's story appear to be heard, and then accepted, the report of the battle raises new issues. In the actual staging of the play, the sounds get louder as Lord Gray starts to read, only to fade as he enquires if David heard the noise too, transporting the audience back to reality. As Gray resumes his reading, the sounds again rise and continue until the story is told. This acknowledgement draws attention to the potential

artifice of these occurrences, an idea which is taken even further in *The Woman in Black* where attention is drawn directly to the source of its sounds:

> KIPPS: Thank you, Mr Bunce! (*He clicks his fingers to the back of the theatre*)
>
> *Instantly come the sound effects of a London Street: cars, horses, shouts from street vendors, etc. The Actor is momentarily amazed. He listens for a while, then...*
>
> ACTOR: Recorded sound! (I)

The fakery is exposed by the play's own characters, thus complicating the reading of its ghosts: if sound has such an important role in the narrative of *The Woman in Black*, yet is presented as a mere effect, a recording, how is the audience to engage with what they are hearing? As quoted earlier in this chapter, Emma McEvoy draws attention to this aspect of Mallatratt's work, where "these theatrical devices [are encountered] as devices" (2007:216). One could argue that any spectral dimension is removed from the plays. The ghosts are visible and material, their phantasmal qualities taken away. The aspect of performance which can be argued to have taken on ghostly features as a counterpoint to the physical spectres, sound, is openly described as mere effect, the auditory hauntings reduced to recorded noise. Yet it is here that a new question arises, based on a point made by Ross Brown:

> The post-industrial landscape is no longer simply divided into signal and noise, but has been infiltrated by sonic tricks, illusions and puns…
> – A mechanical shutter sound is now more likely to signify the presence of a mobile phone than a camera.
> – A dog bark might be a door bell.
> – Birthday cards play digital samples… (2008:9)

Audiences are familiar with such a disjoint between sound and source. Does the acknowledgement of recorded sound as it is found in *The Woman in Black* declare an instance of the explained supernatural, or does it retain its haunting qualities? Is the reality taken out of the ghost by these lines, or does the emphasis on fakery equally emphasize the ghostly reality? As with the entire narrative, perhaps, an audience is affected by something they cannot grasp, something they cannot hold onto, something which comes to them from the past in order to influence the present. Reality and fiction blur and become one, with the

sounds of their memories, our memories, covering all actions, perhaps resisting all interpretation.

In the next chapter, the clash between past and present, between the heightened Gothic drama and intimate Grand-Guignol, will become even more pronounced as two guides invite their audience into their perception of the supernatural and allow them to take part. In the plays presented in this first chapter, the barriers between audience and performance are largely left intact, both on a physical and metaphorical level. The ghosts return to haunt the spectators from the past, using script, space and sound to get as close to the audience as possible. Many of the issues discussed here will find a new resonance when applied to *Play Dead* and *Ghost Stories*, yet the stage will remain firmly haunted as the barriers are brought down even further and the ghosts of horror continue to haunt the spectators in a variety of ways.

Chapter 2
The Deadly Theatre: Horror theatre and the ghostly space

> "You hesitate. But why? You're in a theater, where all is false and fun."
> - Todd Robbins in *Play Dead*, I.3

The lights go up to illuminate the stage, drawing your attention to a lone man. He might be dressed in a sharp white suit introducing himself as Todd Robbins, and telling you that tonight, with your consent, he will invite the dead out to play. The man might be called Philip Goodman, the parapsychologist, who will fill an evening with *Ghost Stories* he heard from others. The audience will follow these men on a journey into darkness and, with a bit of luck, they will come out on the other side. They will have experienced the supernatural, the unexplainable, the unimaginable, and perhaps their companion is still with them. Perhaps he is not. Sounds thrilling, does it not? Yet how can theatre be frightening? As was mentioned in the previous chapter, many have based their criticism on the inability of theatre to compete with films and special effects technology. Yet the liveness and immediacy of the performance experience thrill the audience in a different way, delivering human contact as opposed to immaterial blood and gore. The question remains, however: if control and distance are key to this kind of experience, how can the traditional theatre experience compete with the more extreme scare attractions? How can spectators be scared through the fourth wall?

The previous chapter contained a discussion and close reading of *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*. Both of these can be classed as neo-Victorian, invoking a bygone era on the stage. Both are classic ghost stories, or adaptations of these: Susan Hill's novella, in the case of *The Woman in Black*, whereas *The Haunting* uses an amalgamation of several of Dickens' ghost stories. Both use their narrative to convey the feeling of fear: the plot, the script, the staging, the medium of performance and the use of space all work together to create unease in the spectator. The discussion of these productions will form the basis for the current chapter and the points raised will serve to both complement and counterpoint the issues of modern horror theatre. Rather than

looking back to the past, two new, contemporary horror plays will be the focus of the discussion: *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead*.

Ghost Stories, written by Jeremy Dyson and Andy Nyman, takes the form of a classic portmanteau horror film, encompassing three stories which are framed by the character of Professor Philip Goodman. Goodman, a parapsychologist, plays the tapes of three interviews to the audience, descriptions of stories he could not explain. As each tape plays, the story is acted out and shown to the audience. All is not what it seems, however, and Goodman may be more involved in the subject matter than the audience first assumed… *Play Dead* is a piece of storytelling theatre, delivering an evening of spooky amusement. Stringing together a number of true stories that deal with issues of death and dying, Todd Robbins indeed invites the ghosts to once more walk among the audience and to show them the dead who live inside them.

Although the creators described here all have some affinity with productions for both theatre and television, the context is different to those of *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*. Jeremy Dyson is most famous as a writer of both fiction as well as television (most notably as part of the *League of Gentlemen* team) and theatre. Andy Nyman, by contrast, is known more for his acting, yet does possess significant directing experience from his work with magician Derren Brown[7] for both television and stage shows of the latter. Although not using it professionally, Dyson has a similar interest in the art of performance magic.

Todd Robbins and his fellow writer Teller show a similar range of experience of a variety of roles onstage and onscreen. Robbins is best known as a sideshow performer[8] and has created and starred in a number of small scale production, whereas Teller is most famous as one part of the magic duo Penn & Teller. In addition to his work with Penn Jillette for stage and screen, Teller has since established himself in a different theatrical context, as director of successful productions of *Macbeth* (2008) and *The Tempest* (2014). In addition to co-authoring *Play Dead*, Teller functioned as the director of the production.

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[7] In addition to his career as an actor, Andy Nyman is well-known in the world of performance magic for the publication of his own tricks. Furthermore, Nyman has worked with mentalist Derren Brown as co-writer and director for both Brown's stage work as well as his television appearances.

[8] The sideshow originated as an additional attraction to the circus or carnival and would present an assortment of human oddities. These could either be in the form of a "freakshow", involving either born freaks, such as midgets or giants, or made freaks, such as tattooed people. In addition, there would be room "working acts", which would perform seemingly impossible stunts, such as fire-eating or sword-swallowing.

Because of the varied experience of the creative teams involved, as well as the strong connections with the field of magic, both *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* draw on a wide range of performance styles. Illusions have found their way onto the stage in each of the plays, as well as additional influences from the classic spookshows and imagery from horror cinema. Elements of these can be seen in the visual style and the use of special effects, as well as certain devices, such as the direct address of the audience (which will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter). Despite these influences, however, the presentation of each performance is quite conventional. Both productions employ a number of devices (for instance, the use of the theatre space) to heighten their effect on the audience, each of which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The venues used, however, one in London's West End, the other an off-Broadway theatre, place these productions squarely within a more traditional theatrical frame.

Both plays have enjoyed significant success. *Play Dead* saw an extended run in New York, as well as the production of an international version, which was staged in Mexico. In addition, a feature film was made during the run in New York City, which has since been shown at numerous film festivals. *Ghost Stories* enjoyed similar successes, with a London run during 2010 and 2011 and a return to the West End stage in 2014 and 2015, as well as productions in Toronto and Moscow.

Following the model of the previous chapter, this discussion will examine the necessary elements for providing a scare from the proscenium arch and will focus on contemporary pieces of horror theatre. Moving away from the dark haunted houses of the Victorian era and its roots in Gothic drama, the plays discussed here instead remind an audience of the golden era of the Grand-Guignol in the first decades of the twentieth century. Nicknamed *le Théâtre des Horreurs* (the 'Theatre of Horror), this form, its traditions and its theorization are a valuable resource in this exploration. For this chapter, the structure of an evening spent at the Grand-Guignol, its link between horror and comedy, and the reality of the horrors that were brought to this small Parisian stage will be of particular interest. More connections to the form can be found and will be discussed throughout this chapter. For now, it will be helpful to delve deeper into the structure of these performances and how they make use of the medium of theatre to convey their story.

And I still tell tales… (*Play Dead*, I.2)

The structure of both productions can be described as a portmanteau narrative, individual stories being told within a bigger framing narrative. Both plays feature a single protagonist who is the focus of the performance, the anchor for the audience, and who tells the spectators the tales he has gathered through a direct address (a closer study of this use of narration will follow later in this chapter). This framework and the use of direct address strongly informs the reading of the performance as the audience are presented with a situation where they are present, expected, and even needed, for the story to play out. Although it can be said that this is true for any performance, the open acknowledgement of this process will serve to make the spectator so much more aware of their role, as well as putting them on the spot and no longer allowing them to hide safely in the dark.

Ghost Stories treats its audience to a narrative which is entirely fictional. The performance opens with the appearance of Philip Goodman, a professor of parapsychology. He introduces himself to the audience and presents the format for the evening: he will talk about ghost stories, but from a scientific and (perhaps) sceptic viewpoint. As he explains, very few supernatural happenings are indeed anything to do with the other side. Yet even in his lengthy career, Goodman has encountered stories which cannot be dismissed as faulty pipes or the wind in the trees, and it is these three stories he will present to the audience for their judgement, to see what they make of the events related by those who suffered through them. The play takes on the structure of a classic portmanteau horror film with three very different narratives, yet all are tied together. A current of guilt runs through each individual story, and it is a restless conscience rather than a restless spirit which creates the haunting in each of the narratives, including Goodman's. In the interview I conducted with Nyman, he discussed his views on this process, arguing that "your actions do have huge repercussions, not in the soul or in the spirit, but what you act out in the world and how you deal with people; it all has huge impact. Those are the ghosts that you leave" (2012), and it is this vision that clearly informs the treatment of haunting in the play.

As already hinted at, the framing device of Goodman's lecture needs to be treated as a narrative of its own: not only does it introduce, inform and (in a way) conclude the three other stories, but it is an elaborate ruse in and of itself. As Andy Nyman, who played the role of Goodman in the first run of the play, has stated: "If you

took the play away, I could do that first twelve minutes at TED[9], I would very happily go and do that, […] and it's all valid, all the science and the thinking of it and the history of ghosts is all true" (2012). The play itself is very much in the form of a lecture, complete with slides, photographic evidence, sound recordings of alleged paranormal events, which are all presented to the audience as a learning experience.

Yet despite this grounding in science, the world of the play itself remains nebulous at best. Nyman stated in an interview with the Culture Show in 2010 that "[i]t's so exciting to not even know where it's set."[10] In its own way, *Ghost Stories* inhabits a neverland which is similar to the one displayed by Stephen Mallatratt in *The Woman in Black*, and its treatment of space is an exceptional one in terms of bringing the audience into its world. It is this use of space, amongst other issues, that I will return to later in this chapter.

The structure of *Play Dead* is both similar to and very different from that of *Ghost Stories*. Although *Play Dead* also includes the single performer-narrator as a framing device for its story, the way in which this tale is presented is quite different. Todd Robbins, rather than taking on a character, portrays himself. It is this decision that comes with a number of implications, which will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter. Famous as a sideshow artist, the narrative that unfolds around Robbins takes on some of the characteristics of a magic performance (including applause cues and volunteers from the audience) and is a lot more tongue-in-cheek than the straight fiction of *Ghost Stories*. Inspired by the classic spookshows, Robbins describes the piece as a playful one: "We included that element in the beginning of *Play Dead*; we wanted to get people embracing the 'play' side of our title. […] it was just spooky fun, that was really what we were going for, spooky amusement" (2012a). Throughout the evening, he will be telling tales to his audience about those who have passed away. Like *Ghost Stories*, it is these stories that will ultimately define the show as Robbins discusses those who have a relationship with death: a religious woman, a serial killer, and spirit mediums, amongst others.

Within these frameworks, both *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* in fact seem to reproduce the framework of an evening at the Grand-Guignol. As is described by Hand and Wilson, an evening in the Theatre of Horror was composed of a number of one-act

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[9] TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design; http://www.ted.com) was founded in 1984 and is a global set of conferences under the slogan: "Ideas Worth Spreading". They are "… a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less)."
[10] Clip available on YouTube; uploaded on March 2, 2010. Original date of broadcast unknown. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMbo-88QhXc [Accessed: April 15, 2013]

plays, alternating between comedy and horror. This structure would create the so-called *douche écossaise*, the 'hot and cold shower': "Not only did it allow the theatre to take its audience on an emotional rollercoaster ride from erotic drama to sex farce and back again, but the horror plays were all the more successful for the comic relief provided by the comedies (and vice versa)" (Hand, Wilson, 2002:11). Because of this framework, "all the plays within an evening's programme should not simply be seen as a series of individual plays, but rather as equally important and interdependent components of the entire theatrical event" (Hand, Wilson, 2002:11). The portmanteau structure of both *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* can be approached in a similar fashion: each segment, each story, in these productions could be presented as a separate piece. It is the presence of Andy Nyman as Philip Goodman and of Todd Robbins which provides a theatrical frame, tying the stories together into a bigger fiction.

As a result, the role of both performers is vital to the performance as a whole, and the way in which their characters are portrayed is a big influence on any reading. Whereas in *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* the two-hander structure means the viewpoint of the audience is reflected in either one of the characters (sceptic or believer), the lone performer here becomes even more important. In a way, they are the anchor for the audience, the constant that the spectators have to hold onto between the scares. In both performances, however, this character may not be who he seems. Philip Goodman is presented as a stereotypical academic, the image one might have of a distinguished professor in tweed, yet the description of his character, given by Nyman, is particularly poignant in this respect:

> So the joy of it is giving your audience all of this and saying, "I am one of you, I don't believe in this shit, blablabla, if you do believe in it, that's great, it's up to you, but let me give you another side, let me give you some useful tools for deconstructing this stuff." […] And then it's only as you go into it deeper that you get those inklings that all is not well. [Yet] we wanted Goodman also to be the bits where you go, "Oh God, I can relax in this," so then when you begin to realise that he's an unreliable witness, that means you've got nowhere to go, ideally. (2012)

Goodman, as a scientist, is supposed to be an anchor; he is the professor and in a world of paranormal activity, a world which cannot be known, he is the only help the audience will have. At certain points during the performance, however, as hinted at by Nyman, moments occur where Goodman seems to lose control, both of the stories and of himself. Spectators might initially believe that Goodman is scientific, Goodman is

knowledge, Goodman is computer slides and facts; that, during the scenes with Goodman, they can feel safe. Yet it is the little moments strewn throughout the play that raise alarm bells: Goodman seems to deteriorate as the performance goes on and the only man who knows and who therefore should be in control becomes unreliable. Not only is he now an unreliable witness, as Nyman argues, and an audience may no longer be able to safely believe what he tells them, but he himself, the only thing that stands between them and the supernatural forces, is no longer safe and could even become a danger to them.

In *Play Dead*, Todd Robbins provides a similar journey for the audience, leaving the spectator wondering who he is, or supposed to be. In contrast to Goodman, who in the capacity of lecturer is confined to the stage, Robbins freely walks out into the audience, bringing volunteers with him and obliterating any fourth wall which may exist. His presence, however, may not necessarily be as comforting. The play opens with Robbins appearing on the stage, addressing the audience, and inviting them to appreciate darkness. He switches off the lights of the stage and auditorium, before lamenting the glow of the emergency exit signs, and switching these off as well. It is at this point that the balance between performer and audience first shifts. In the words of Robbins,

> [B]ecause that's really what the whole thing is, coming out and being charming, and then when those lights go off, and people realise they are truly in a dark room, this man has just turned off the exit lights and they *cannot get out on their own*, that if anything happens, they will be dead. It's significant. (2012a)

The performer has suddenly become a potential source of danger, a feature which is highlighted on numerous occasions and in a number of different ways. As mentioned previously, Robbins freely interacts with the audience and often enters the auditorium to either tell stories or pick a volunteer. The first time this happens is worth mentioning, as Robbins strides out into the audience and proceeds to eat a light bulb. Spectators might be familiar with the longstanding connection between Robbins and the sideshow, yet the moment can still be seen as unnerving: suddenly, there is a man among them who can perform this act, which is clearly coded as unnatural:

> If we drop [the light bulb] on the hard floor, what would happen? It would break. And if we pressed the broken glass against our tender flesh, what would happen? Yes, we'd bleed. And if we should eat that glass? Exactly, it would rip through the lining of our throat and stomach and intestines and we would bleed to death internally. Good. Are we certain of all that? Yes? So this --

> TODD *bites into the bulb, crunching the glass with his teeth. As he eats the glass, washing it down with a bottle of water --*
>
> — raises some questions. (*chews*) (I.2)

This process continues throughout the play, the charm seemingly winning the audience over, yet at each step this is countered by little hints that not everything is alright:

> TODD: Oh, by the way, this is that guy's watch. (*Distracted and distant*) When I meet someone like that... I just... want... to kill them.
>
> *Returning to the here and now,* TODD *mounts the stairs back to the stage.* (I.2)

Throughout the play, Robbins seems to draw attention to this process:

> TODD: Sam, you trust me, don't you? (I.5)
>
> TODD: ... You can trust me. (I.5)
>
> TODD: Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, and that's what you can do with trust. (I.5)

In similar fashion, he appears to play games with the audience throughout the evening, seemingly knowing more about them and their nature than they do about themselves. He is alert, aware of everything that is going on, and of the spectators. His ultimate goal is in sight, and the audience is there to facilitate it:

> TODD: Yes, we have the right people in tonight. Bright, alert, intelligent, mentally impressionable, emotionally pliable, receptive to what I suggest. Perfect. (*aside*) Like lambs to the slaughter. (I.1)

His charming personality quickly becomes less charming as audience members actually disappear for (part of) the duration of the show after being invited onto the stage. Yet the stage persona he does portray is very much in tune with the undercurrent of the show. As described by Robbins,

> Imagine there is a guy who has done a lot of research on ancient alchemetic principles and there is a [cover] that if you want to resurrect someone, it is important that they, in their life, had a relationship with death. […] [I]t seems like an evening of spooky stories but as I tell them, […] there is a little phenomenon attached to each and every one that lets me know that they have come close to the veil, to the edge, and if I find just the right person, and get him talking to the dead, I can rip him open and bring forth the dead. (2012a)

His persona is not just character or stage presence, but, like with Goodman, it becomes a conduit and driving force for the plot and ending of the play: each of the spirits whose tale is told throughout the evening comes back to life at the end. This idea behind the narrative ties in with the surroundings: the audience finds themselves in an old theatre, filled with boxes, each of which contains mementos of specific people. These boxes are present throughout the play and, in a way, inform the stories as the props inside serve as almost an introduction to each tale. Robbins describes the significance of the boxes and their content:

> That was part of the image of my subtext in that the place looks like, the set looks like, you were in an abandoned theatre and that there were no [...] or anything, and that I had pulled up with a van, full of these boxes, broken into a side door, loaded everything in and then I opened for business without the owner knowing and inviting people, and this was set up sort of as a show and it's really an extended experiment on my part; the audience as guinea pig or human petri-dishes. (2012a)

The production moves from a collection of seemingly harmless stories into an experiment, the result of which could physically harm the audience. An interesting process, perhaps, is the use of character or lack thereof in each instance. The use of a performer-narrator to some extent presupposes direct address: Goodman lectures to his audience and asks for input, for responses, whereas Robbins goes one step further and invites volunteers onto the stage. The choice of this use of performer-narrator character was largely informed by the story each wanted to tell. As stated earlier, *Ghost Stories* is complete fiction, including a very dark ending in which Goodman himself is severely implicated. Nyman argues that because of this, the use of a character became inevitable:

> [I]f you start as, "Hello, I'm Andy Nyman, you may have seen me in a few bits and bobs, but actually, I have a degree in this, this is an area that's always fascinated me and that's what I'm going to talk about tonight," whilst that is really interesting and comfortable at the beginning, where it becomes really odd is in the later stuff. (2012)

By contrast, all stories told by Robbins are true, and it is this that defines the choice made in performance. Using his established stage persona from the sideshow, the format offers him a degree of freedom: "[T]here are things that I have from my armoury of lines and gags and things like that that I can pull from so that whatever comes at me, I'm not going to be thrown by it, whereas you have to create a whole new one if you're doing a character" (2012b). In addition, Robbins argues that the direct address format calls for such a degree of reality, of being real with your audience:

"When you break the fourth wall, whenever you say you're someone that you're not, the fourth wall goes back up. It's a very flexible thing, but there's still some little distance between the performer and an audience member, because [y]ou've got a fake person talking to a real person" (2012b).

The structure of both productions appears to be reminiscent of the "specific narrative puzzles", described by Tzvetan Todorov. The portmanteau framework functions almost as a jigsaw, where each story is a new piece of the puzzle of the narrative that needs to be constructed by the audience. With *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* both adhering to the classic formula of the ghost story, the plays become almost reassuring. These narratives possess an internal logic of sorts, and if the reason for the haunting, such as a death without a proper burial, is resolved, the supernatural events will cease and both the living and the dead will be able to rest in peace. The dark, deserted mansion may have its secrets, but as an audience, familiarity with the form will likely mean a spectator will already know what they are before they are encountered.

Both Nyman and Robbins, however, wanted to present their audience with a different experience. They draw attention to the role of a spectator in piecing together the narrative, yet always being one step behind. As Nyman states, "the audience not being able to get a handle on what this show is, and then, "Oh, I know what it is," and by the time they know what it is, something else happens that changes and, "Hang on a second," and then the next thing... So you're always playing catch up, you know" (2012). This is echoed by Robbins, who links this process to the genre: "In horror, you never want the audience to win; you really want them to feel vulnerable from beginning to end, because that's where fear comes in, that's where the scare factor comes in. They know what's going to happen" (2012b). He goes on to say: "That was something we were very proud of with *Play Dead*: no one could get ahead of us. No one got ahead of us, and they didn't know what was coming next" (2012b).

In the interview, Nyman draws also an interesting parallel between the journey of discovery of the audience and the production he and Dyson tried to create:

> That gave birth really to what that visual feel was so when we met designers, […] the idea of what memories feel like; in this sea of blackness, you just get these snatched little things that just recede again as you go for them, so it was about creating something that sort of felt like that, as well, because in our bigger reality, that is the truth of the world we were dealing with, these smashed fragments. (2012)

The audience is presented with segments, fragments, stories, hints, yet is ultimately unable to fully grasp all potential meanings. Not only is the audience left in a position of vulnerability, as they do not (and cannot) fully grasp the narrative as it is presented to them, the impact of this process is significant. This process, in the case of *Ghost Stories*, is partially informed by Nyman's work with illusionist Derren Brown: "Just the way a lot of the stuff was written and broken up so that you're given what you *believe* is one idea, but it's this dual reality thing, that you're then given something else. That really is a very interesting concept, I think, because what the audience is doing is convincing themselves of something" (2012). As is pointed out by Nyman:

> It's much more powerful; it's harder, but it's much more powerful if I can give you a half-truth and you fill in the blanks and go "Oh, I see, that must mean that," where it doesn't, it means that, because you've done that work, you own it. So there's quite a lot in there, so that at the end, where I say, "That is this," where you think, "Oh my God, all those assumptions that I made were wrong!" That's a very different thing from suddenly, "We lied to you"; it's a cleverer lie if you do half the work. (2012)

It is not the creators and actors who present their spectators with this specific narrative; the framework actually heightens the involvement of the audience and, together with the other elements employed by each production, draws them further into the play, minimising control and distance. At the same time, one has to wonder whether an audience presented with such a play on reality and fiction will indeed be able to intellectually master the text or, in the words of Hills, whether they themselves will be mastered by the text.

The dead who live inside me… (*Play Dead*, I.2)

Despite the numerous links with the Grand-Guignol, an interesting disconnect exists between that form and the plays studied here. Whereas the first specialised in realist or explained supernatural plots, all productions discussed here and in the previous chapter can be described as ghost stories. As Mel Gordon argues, "[u]nlike the Gothic melodramas of the nineteenth century, the Grand Guignol – from its inception in 1897 to its humiliating death in 1962 – based its plots on bloody and murderous criminal exploits, which were taken from real life" (1997:vi). This idea is echoed in Hand and Wilson who state that "[a]lthough the Grand-Guignol steers well clear of all things supernatural, it pushes the human subject into monstrosity, extrapolating, as it were, *la bête humaine* into *le monstre humain*" (2002:x). Gordon goes on to say that "[o]nly life

matched the horror of the Grand Guignol," (1997:vi), and it is life which the theatre aimed to display in Paris. *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* present excellent counter-examples to this process with their traditional haunted house narratives. By contrast, although both still tell ghost stories (one only needs to look at their titles), *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* approach the subject matter in a different way and present their audience with contemporary spectres, and both creators draw attention to this process. Nyman describes the principles underlying the creation of the play stating that "the first rule was, it had to be contemporary, absolutely contemporary" (2012).

For a large part, this contemporaneity is due to the subject matter, and it is here another link is found to the Grand-Guignol. As is pointed out by Hand and Wilson, reality often found its way onto the Grand-Guignol stage and some of its plays "drew their inspiration from, among other things, the *fait divers*[11] of the Parisian popular press" (2002:8). Not only was inspiration drawn from real life, but Hand and Wilson describe how the theatre and its staff "sought to exploit contemporary fears" (2002:15) and Gordon signposts the use of modern and real settings, stating that one of the most prolific Grand-Guignol playwrights, Andre de Lorde, "was the first to set plays in operating rooms and insane asylums" (1997:22). In addition, Hand and Wilson list "…lighthouses, rooms in museums, sitting rooms, boats, [and] doctor's surgeries" (2002:32) as some of the possible location for classic Grand-Guignol plays. They note that these are primarily claustrophobic locations suited to the size of the stage available in the Paris theatre. At the same time, the words from both Hand and Wilson and Gordon paint a picture of a theatre which appears to be very much in tune with everyday life: few of the locations discussed are outlandish or completely unfamiliar to an audience. They may be presented with a plot revolving around a crime they have read about, or a new medical treatment that is being tested. The settings of the Grand-Guignol, in contrast to the Victorian mansions of *The Haunting* and *The Woman in Black*, were primarily real and contemporary ones.

The same can be said for *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead*. The stories in the first present its audience with a night watchman, a teenager driving home after a party and an estate agent and his new-born child. The characters and their circumstances are instantly recognisable, if not relatable, for today's audience, drawing on what can be seen as everyday experiences. *Play Dead* moves its narrative one step closer to the

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[11] The fait divers were "short items of news (usually involving violent crime), gory and colourful illustrations of which often graced the front and back pages of *Le Petit Journal* and *Le Petit Parisien*" (Hand, Wilson, 2002:8).

tradition of the *faits divers* as it presents spectators with stories that actually happened: the original version of the play featured sections on Albert Fish, Mina Crandon and Eusapia Palladino, each celebrities in their own way, as well as the more personal story of Dorothy Bembridge. Each of them has a relationship with death and it is this relationship that informs their story and their role in the piece.

Yet this sense of presence is created in a different way in each production, as well. Not only is the subject matter both modern as well as real, each of the pieces unfolds in real time. The same can be argued in relation to *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* as the scenes are played out live in front of an audience, yet at the same time they are presented with a no man's land that is inhabited by ghostly shadows of the past. In describing these plays as neo-Victorian, this creates certain assumptions about subject matter and plot; in essence, they become historical plays. This difference in time and thus in experience between the audience and the characters will have implications for the way in which spectators may experience and identify with the people they encounter within the world of the play. By contrast, because of their use of the performer-narrator, *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* facilitate a dialogue in real-time: the performer is talking to his audience, and the audience are talking back. As a result, not all of the performance is just a performance anymore: certain elements play out in the present, and have effects in the present. As is described by Robbins, "[*Play Dead*] is storytelling theatre with some very strong themes that lead us into performance pieces that are story based, for the most part. I mean, there is a whole talking with the dead section, where we... There is no story; all of a sudden, the story that is being told is the one that is being told in real time as it's happening" (2012b). The distance between audience and performance is removed through the use of direct address, and as a result, spectators are now literally part of the story as it unfolds around them.

This use of temporal presence in the plot, however, has certain implications for the idea of haunting as it is presented in both plays. As was argued in the previous chapter, ghosts are history and it is this history that informs the present haunting. The way in which the figure of the ghost is handled in *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead*, however, creates a very different experience. Like *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*, both feature the presence of physical ghosts which can influence the present, yet their origins and current status are very different. As opposed to the neo-Victorian feel of the work of Mallatratt and Janes, *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* bring their spirits into the present day.

The Woman and Mary may appear, but they appear in a different place, a different era. The stories of Nyman and Dyson and Robbins suddenly become very contemporary as the ghosts are called forward into, quite literally, the realm of the audience, into both the space and time they inhabit.

Like in *The Haunting*, the ghosts in *Play Dead* initially do not show themselves. As Robbins tells each story and discusses each box, events occur to signify the presence of the spirits: Albert Fish's box apparently bites a spectator; the ghost of a former sideshow performer causes an old phonograph to start playing, and Dorothy Bembridge quite literally reaches out to her former friend as her hand rises from her ashes. Yet all these manifestations lead up to a bigger one as the show approaches its end. As is exemplified by this speech, delivered by Robbins, near the end of the play, haunting has become a physical process:

> Because all evening long I've been putting the dead inside of you. Yes. All of you. I have planted *my* dead inside of all of *you*. Albert Fish. Congo, the Jungle Creep. Margery the Boston Medium. Dorothy Bembridge. Eusapia Palladino. I have planted them like seeds in the fertile ground of your souls and they have been growing inside you. And this is what you wanted. I said, "Would you like them to live inside of you as well?" and you all said, "Alleluiah!", so you asked for this, and now it's time to bring them out. (I.10)[12]

An audience member, who was brought up onstage to assist Robbins, appears to be cut open and the ghosts are literally released from his body before they proceed to make their presence known to the other audience members. The issues of control exhibited by Goodman in *Ghost Stories* may similarly mean that whatever spirits might be conjured up by his narrative, the spectators may not be as safe as they thought as the ghosts now exist in their space.

Like *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*, both plays feature the presence of physical ghosts which can influence the present, yet their origins and current status are very different. As opposed to the neo-Victorian feel of the work of Mallatratt and Janes, *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* bring their spirits into the present day. The Woman and Mary may appear, but they appear in a different place, a different era. The stories of Nyman and Dyson and Robbins suddenly become very contemporary as the ghosts are called forward into, quite literally, the realm of the audience, into both the space and time they inhabit. As with Kipps' story, the haunting and exorcism become a performative

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[12] The lines in the play script provided by Robbins are slightly different. The version used here was taken from a copy of *Play Dead: The Movie* (2012), made available to the author by Robbins.

process as the ghosts are called forth through the act of performance. In the case of *Play Dead*, the boxes and their contents serve as a material anchor for this process:

> [If] I had collected all these items, these relics of people's lives, who had a relationship with death, I found that if I can paint word-pictures in the minds of the living, and do it as vividly as possible, these people now live in the minds and the souls of the living. In essence, I'm planting a seed in your imagination that then with the right ability can be harvested and they can actually return for but a moment… (2012a)

Rather than spirits with a tragic history and an agenda, as the spectres encountered in *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*, both *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* play with the following idea described by Nyman:

> I think, to really scare people, as opposed to gross them out or make them look away, you need to hit them where it hurts, really and truly and that's also... whether you believe in ghosts or not [...] It's an impossibly powerful emotion so the idea that it's alive and it's there is so strong; the idea that the sins that you commit are indelibly stamped onto the very soul, the very nature of who you are […] your actions do have huge repercussions, not in the soul or in the spirit, but what you act out in the world and how you deal with people; it all has huge impact. Those are the ghosts that you leave. (2012)

Here, the ghost is seen as an imprint with an almost tangible residue, and it is this residue that Robbins uses as the source for the unholy resurrection of the ghosts discussed in *Play Dead*. This residue can be seen as an emotional one: each of the spirits in both plays is steeped in some strong sensation. As mentioned above, the stories told by Goodman all carry a relationship with guilt, a sense of guilt over actions taken or the things that one did not do. The emotion from Robbins' story mostly springs from circumstances of violence, such as the death of a known serial killer on the electric chair or the murder of a close friend. Where history is the source for the haunting in *The Haunting* and *The Woman in Black*, it is the trauma of recent experience that informs *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead*. As opposed to the clean ghosts of the (neo-)Victorian era, where it should be possible to bury the restless spirits if the truth is known and the burial is carried out, these residues stick, to people, to physical objects, and the trauma is carried forward for tens, dozens, possibly hundreds of years.

This treatment of haunting and emotion is reminiscent of Warwick's description of the treatment of trauma in early Gothic literature, which she describes as defined by its lack of speakableness: "What is unspoken or spoken of as unspeakable in those earlier texts is the anxiety of the fragmented subject, of the loss of certainty. Earlier

Gothic texts register repeated and obsessive concerns with the threat and loss and the impossibility of coming to terms with them" (2007:11). *Ghost Stories*, in particular, follows this model quite closely: with its nebulous surroundings and its ambiguity as to the truth of the tales on display as well as the role of the one who is telling the audience about them, it comfortably inhabits the realm of uncertainty described by Warwick. Goodman may be telling the spectators these stories, but are they actually true? How do they relate to him and his past, and what is the impact of that which (at least for the moment) is left unsaid? It is these ghosts, the ghosts of the trauma that is kept secret, that ultimately cause his current situation.

The case of *Play Dead* in relation to this idea is perhaps more difficult to define. The stories told can be seen as best left unspoken: people may not want to know about the actions of a long dead serial killer, and remembering his deeds only gives him power. In addition, Robbins' student of alchemy knowingly uses the stories and their effects on an unknowing audience: what is left unspoken is his true intent. Rather, it seems *Play Dead* toys with the notion of modern trauma, as described by Warwick: "It seems that contemporary culture *wants* to have trauma, it is induced, predicted and enacted, persistently rehearsed even when it is not actually present" (2007:11; emphasis in original). The fact that almost half the show deals with the trauma of loss and grief and the ways in this can be experienced (and exploited) through the use of spirit mediums (described by Robbins in the play as "a kind of evil") could be seen as an indictment of the ongoing popularity of these kinds of individuals. Audiences seek to play dead, they seek out the dead, as Robbins shows: "So, you wanted the dead back from the grave. Well, here they are! Isn't it fun? No. It is an abomination" (I.10). One might think these experiences, this trauma, is desirable, yet the Gothic unspeakableness might still be the better option.

It should be noted, however, that not all is serious and dark. As argued earlier, not only do *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* share the structure of performance with the Parisian theatre; *la douche écossaise* is similarly important to both productions and highlighted as such by their creators. In the case of *Play Dead*, the process starts with the name, and is continued throughout the performance. Todd Robbins describes the production as "spooky amusement", and draws attention to this mixture of emotions: "That's something we did with *Play Dead* also, is playing with people, bringing them in and shocking them, and bringing them in and shocking them and it's a very strong element

in this kind of performance, or experience, since you're dealing with things beyond just theatre. It's the rollercoaster" (2012a). In his words, you cannot have horror without the comedy:

> They don't know where we're going with it and then when they see exactly what it should look like and it's so horrifying and shocking that it would get laughs and gasps. That's really... With horror themed entertainment, that's what you're looking for, because one without the other is failure. (2012a)

This link between shrieks of fear and joy will become more pronounced when discussing the concept of play, in particular in relation to the experience of scare attractions and live action role-playing in the next two chapters.

You can trust me…

Yet, as is the case with all productions under consideration here, the script and the characters are not the only elements that inform their reception. In addition to the writing and staging of the play, Nyman draws attention to the use of other channels of communication and their inspiration:

> The other thing was, we're both huge Disney fans and Disneyland fans, and the attention to detail of the level of immersion that those parks have is second to none. […] All that stuff there is at the theatre, that is all written into the script […] That wasn't some designer guy going, "Oh, I want..." I mean, that was, down to the smell of the bleach, everything was all us writing in there, "He smells and the audience smells," all of that stuff was all in there, because we had a very, very strong vision for what we wanted to create. (2012)

There are a couple of elements here which draw one's attention. Firstly, there is the use of all five senses, which I will return to in the next chapter. The theatre experience becomes, quite literally, a sensational one as all senses are assaulted by the performance. The same can be said for *Play Dead* as the production plays with the senses of its spectators: through the use of magic, props suddenly come to life and actors instantaneously transform into others. The use of the dark rooms literally puts the audience in the dark, playing on their fears by robbing them of one of their senses. Secondly, there is the influence of the theme park setting on how the visual design of the productions was created, in particular in the case of *Ghost Stories*: Nyman describes the transformation of the theatre into something that uses all the senses and assaults the audience from all sides in order to deliver a very specific experience. This notion of the theme park as complete experience is something I will return to in the next chapter.

Again, evidence shows that the narrative of performance is made up of something bigger than simply its written text, all elements working together to create an even powerful experience. In addition to the reference made here to the complete package provided by Disney, Nyman notes the specific reaction that such an experience brings with it, a reaction he and Dyson tried to harness with *Ghost Stories*:

> It either works or it doesn't, and there's a fantastically no-nonsense-ness about that; there's a no-nonsense about circus and magic and sideshow and pantomime and broad comedy and horror. They're either screaming, or they're not; they're either laughing or they're not; they're either queuing up to go on that ride because it's really scary, or they're not. (2012)

The influence of and connection between performance horror and the theme park can be said to be even stronger in the case of scare attractions and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

As has already been hinted at, it is this approach to narrative and the medium of theatre which links these productions with the ideas of Antonin Artaud, which are evidenced here in a number of ways. Firstly, although the script is a large part of the experience of both plays, the dramaturgy and decisions on design and staging have an even larger impact on the reception. In this way, both *Play Dead* and *Ghost Stories* fully embrace Artaud's ideas on the language of theatre and of using every aspect of the medium of performance in order to convey the narrative. As was made clear in the discussion of Artaud in the introduction, one of his aims was to immerse the audience in a production by obliterating the physical distance between spectator, performers and set: "Theatre means the absence of "theatre"" (Schumacher, 2001: xxi). One way in which this is achieved in both *Play Dead* and *Ghost Stories* is through the direct address and the use of volunteers onstage: the audience is not simply ignored, but becomes an active part of the experience.

In addition, Artaud's idea that theatre provides a reflection of life, that it should affect the audience and that it should, in essence, *be* life, is referenced openly in *Play Dead*. At several points, Todd Robbins refers to theatre as "the holy place where everything is honestly false and fun" (I.8). This quotation encompasses a number of Artaud's theories: the concept of theatre as a religious experience, of something which is real, with the ability to create real affect and (potentially real consequences). At the same time, however, theatre is "false and fun", in a way which is reminiscent of Artaud's serious games: "Artaud suggests a radical reduction of distance, but he still wants the spectator to possess the psychological protection implicit in the very situation

of knowing that one is in the theatre for the purposes of "serious games"" (Ben Chaim, 1984:49-50) No matter how real or dangerous it may seem, ultimately, it is fiction.

Yet as was described in the introduction, Artaud's theatre always retains an emphasis on reality, if only the reality of experience within the frame of a particular performance. By contrast, the plays discussed here openly acknowledge the artifice of the medium. In the case of *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*, it would seem that this approach would break the illusion of the existence of its ghosts: although the use of space might go some way to creating an Artaudian environment, the emphasis on fakery continuously reminds an audience of its status as a 'play'. Similarly, Robbins argues that in the marketing for *Play Dead*, "[w]e were just very honest in like, "It's a show. It's a show," and then we're going to make you forget that. So that was the challenge" (2012b). Despite the fact that these productions thus emphasize their status as a fiction, they still manage to create an Artaudian environment in terms of stagecraft and acting. Actors appear in and use the auditorium, which thus becomes part of the stage; the gap between theatre and life is diminished, if not eliminated. The way in which illusion is presented in *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* moves away from Artaud as they draw attention to the fiction, rather than immersing their audiences in this new world. In a discussion of *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead*, however, the issue of artifice and fakery becomes more blurred: through the use of space and the direct address of their respective audiences, both plays drag the spectator into the fictional world they have created. The boundaries between reality and fiction start to melt away as the productions start to invade the space of the audience and even influence the offstage world.

As noted in the previous chapter, the traditional space brings with it traditional expectations regarding the way in which the performance will unfold, both in terms of staging and in terms of the dynamic between audience and production. Perhaps as a result, many horror entertainments try to renegotiate this divide and to create a new contract with the audience. The contract as presented by *Play Dead* and *Ghost Stories*, in the form of direct address, is one which deserves particular attention. In order to minimise the control and distance in an attempt to really connect with the audience, each of the plays asks them to actively invest in it. This investment is the most obvious in *Play Dead*, where the audience becomes part of the production as they are invited onto the stage and take part in the proceedings. Similarly, *Ghost Stories* takes the format

of a lecture, discussing and questioning the audience, responding to the room. Nyman describes the process he adopted for the play in order to facilitate this response:

> The big achievement is trying to make an audience not feel safe and a lot of that, a lot of the play is designed... The minute you got the audience putting their hands up, and you are talking to them and reacting... If someone sneezed, I would always say, "Bless you," or if someone... Always try and find a place to make a little joke, and it means it's very alive and it's very about you and the people sitting next to you and you are not passive. And the minute you put your hand up... You're committed, you're invested in the piece now… (2012)

This process, especially in combination with the use of volunteers in *Play Dead*, puts one in mind of the active audience. At the same time, as the title card of a recording of *Play Dead* shows: "No audience participants are stooges. It's amazing what people will do when you ask nicely."[13] One may question whether this signifies the existence of a spect-actor, or simply of moving spectators, as the comment seems to imply just how firmly the performer is still in control.

The device of interaction with the audience is something that is found in the techniques used by the Grand-Guignol. Although not always utilised, the plays staged in the Rue Chaptal presented possibilities for heightened contact with its spectators. The intimacy of the theatre certainly aided this, but more direct interaction was also an option: "[B]y the simple acknowledgement of the audience, the actor has not merely demolished the fourth wall, […] but he has also invited the audience onto the stage" (Hand, Wilson, 2002:36). It is this breaking of the boundary between actor and spectator which can be incredibly powerful, both in the realm of performance and when framed in terms of contemporary culture: "Horror theatre, as found in the Grand-Guignol, is an unusual form nowadays and audiences, accustomed to cinema, can be startled by the intense effect of being *looked at* in the flesh" (Hand, Wilson, 2002:37; emphasis in original). In a similar way, the audience of both *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting* becomes a witness. They are able to perceive the supernatural, even if the characters onstage are oblivious to the presence of Mary or the Woman. *The Woman in Black*, in particular, highlights the fact of a rehearsal as opposed to an actual performance, where the audience is not yet present. In their adoption of direct address, though, *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* take the concept of witnessing to the next level, as the audience is able to interact with the performance, to see and to respond. In the words of Nyman, they are no longer just sitting in their seats, but, as in *Play Dead*, may

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[13] Still from the opening credits of *Play Dead: The Movie* (2012).

even be called up to take part, to become part of the performance and be witnessed by others.

"It's so exciting to not even know where it's set." (Nyman, 2012)

The use of space in *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* and, in particular, its manipulation, requires closer attention. The descriptions put forward by Patrice Pavis in *Analyzing Performance* (2003), highlighting the difference between objective and gestural space and discussing the three zones present in the theatre building are particularly fruitful:

> *The theatrical site*: the building and its architecture […]
> *The stage space*: the area used by the actors and the technical staff […]
> *The liminal space*: marks the separation [...] between stage and auditorium, or between stage and backstage spaces. (2003:151; emphasis in original)

The argument posed in the previous chapter is that, in order to remove control and distance in traditional proscenium, the liminal space needs to be negotiated, these boundaries between spaces need to be erased. Both *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* alter the contract with their audience through the use of direct address, but the use of space is equally significant in this process. Like *The Woman in Black*, *Play Dead* codes the liminal space as stage space early on in the performance as the actors appear in or descend to the auditorium, in the case of the former, acting from between or behind the seats; in the case of the latter, communicating and interacting directly with the spectators, going so far as to invite them onto the stage in the role of volunteer. As such, using Weimann's terminology of *locus* and *platea*, it upsets the known balance.

In *Play Dead* and *The Woman in Black*, the *platea* almost immediately is coded as a performance space, losing its neutrality and embedding the audience in the fiction. At the same time, the set design and its impact on audience experience cannot be underestimated. As was argued by Robbins, the set design supports the undercurrent of an experiment of alchemy, of an audience finding their way to this man who has simply taken over an old theatre and put up his boxes in order to now invite people and use them to his own ends in the guise of an off-Broadway show. The space itself and its design inform and heighten the themes presented in the performance, an idea which is echoed in the production of Nyman and Dyson.

In the case of *Ghost Stories*, there is no limit to this process as the entire theatre building becomes a site for its fiction. Upon reaching the theatre building, the posters and other promotional materials only heighten the anticipation of the audience. Once

visitors physically enter the space, they are confronted with something beyond the familiar features. Rather, the entire building has been transformed into a set, complete with soundscape. As Nyman states: "It's already starting, so then when they arrive, and the place looks like shit and it's broken down and you don't quite know what you're going into, and it doesn't feel safe like you're going to a play... They don't know what they're expecting" (2012). Before the performance, the spectators are waiting in this environment; they traverse a horrific landscape in order to get to their seats. Both the liminal space and the auditorium are themed, part of the world of the performance, and the audience is in it, in the middle of it. The safety is removed as the fictional space invades the real space. This is heightened only by the role of this themed liminal space: where the first walk into the auditorium may simply invoke wonder and a sense of dread, after witnessing the performance and hearing the full story, what seemed meaningless at first becomes meaningful when leaving the auditorium. The narrative has been extended into and through the space, and the story impacts on the perception of the real world.

Whereas space becomes even more important for the production of meaning in both *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead*, sound appears to take on a lesser role in the progression of the plot than the noises used in *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*. Rather, both productions provide a soundtrack and soundscape underpinning and (perhaps subconsciously) informing the consumption and reading of the narrative. The sounds of *Play Dead* appear primarily in the form of a soundtrack, punctuating each story with its own score. In the case of Congo, the source is clear and clearly acknowledged as an old phonograph starts to play a calliope tune and is addressed directly by Robbins. At other moments, the music is simply produced by a digital player piano, present onstage throughout the evening, the tracks pre-programmed and the keys of the piano moving of their own accord (and suitably ghostly in their own right). A particularly poignant moment occurs when Robbins discusses the story of Dorothy Bembridge, a close friend and deeply religious woman, who was brutally murdered. Robbins seats himself behind the piano and plays the first few bars of "Amazing Grace". He then turns back to the audience, whilst the instrument continues to play by itself, a moment of almost visible haunting.

Like the set design, the soundscape used in *Ghost Stories* extends beyond the auditorium, drawing the audience into its world long before the curtain goes up. While

having a quick drink at the bar, spectators find themselves in run down surroundings, punctuated by a low score which appears to consists of scurrying rodents and insects, water gurgling through pipes, perhaps a storm in the distance? Played at a volume that made it difficult to even discern the recorded track from the background noises of the theatre, talking people, glasses, announcements, one can wonder how many of those present were even aware of these sounds. It is again part of the idea of drawing the audience into the world of the play and, perhaps, into the mind-set they will need to approach the play with.

Finally, as was noted in the introduction, the role of marketing in the reading of performance horror cannot be neglected. In the words of Marvin Carlson, "Programs often include sketches, literary quotations, or photographs not directly related to the play, but suggesting a preferred interpretive strategy" (1993:91). With horror, the promotional materials serve almost as a blueprint of what to expect and, to some extent, what is expected of the audience. When placed next to each other, the programmes of *The Woman in Black*, *The Haunting* and *Ghost Stories* all display a specific, cinematic aesthetic. Through the use of photographs and images that appear to be steeped in horror conventions, the marketing draws on the tradition of the horror film to convey the content of the plays. The similarities between the promotional material for *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*, especially, are manifold, following the traditional views of the haunted Victorian manor house.

Looking at the marketing surrounding *The Haunting*, as with other productions, a curious mix can be found between the imagery associated with literary ghost stories and the more modern aesthetic of haunted house films. Both the programme for *The Haunting* and *The Woman in Black* use darker colours to exude a gloomy atmosphere. Pictures of old buildings and shadowy figures emphasise a sense of isolation whilst giving the audience a glimpse of what they are in for (and most likely confirming their expectations). At the same time, certain content in both of the programmes offers direct references to factual information and real experience. A discussion of Dickens and his work is included for *The Haunting*, whilst the additional text in *The Woman in Black* draws attention to the culture of ghost hunting and issues of belief and scepticism. The role and enjoyment of fear, as well as the importance of the live experience is similarly featured in the marketing for both productions. A notable difference, however, is the role of the ghost. In the programme for *The Haunting*, the actress in the role of Mary is

billed openly, together with a picture and biography, as is the understudy for the same part. *The Woman in Black*, however, only lists Kipps and the Actor, denying any real point of reference to the Woman and thus emphasising her ghostly qualities. Interestingly, however, the roles of Kipps and the Actor are reversed. As has been discussed at various points in this chapter, it is this reversal that facilitates a blurring and doubling between the two characters, their story and their lives, heightening the uncanny effect of Mallatratt's adaptation.

By contrast, *Ghost Stories* draws attention to the role of its medium: "This is not a film. This is not a game. This is theatre." *Play Dead* appears to highlight its concept of spooky amusement, inviting the audience to play along. *Ghost Stories*, in particular, uses the horror conventions to its benefit in its marketing. As is stated by Nyman,

> [W]e wanted to create something, a marketing, that appealed to a film audience, not a theatre audience. That was the entire campaign, really, was born out of that sort of circus, of drawing those people in, and it really worked, you know. We tried to make it as critic-proof as possible. […] Now that wasn't just about marketing, it was also about saying, "Your opinion, my show." That is as valid, that is *more* valid to me than the critic from the *Times*, because what does he fucking know about horror? (2012)

Every element of the show's marketing, whether flyers, programmes and even TV and radio interviews with the creators appears steeped in this kind of fan narrative. It is no secret that both Nyman and Dyson are massive horror buffs themselves, and as such, a large segment of the promotion appears to consist almost of in-jokes, short articles, lists of favourite horror novels and films, against a background of movie posters and book covers. The programme even includes a trivia quiz. It codes the performance as a show by horror fans for horror fans, inviting the audience to delight in the genre in the same way as the creators do. The link with the *guignoleurs*, the recurring patrons of the Grand-Guignol, is obvious: "The *guignoleurs* clearly identified themselves with the theatre and both understood and participated in the development of its conventions" (Hand, Wilson, 2002:69). Similarly, this type of fan narrative invites a reading based on horror as play.

Worthy of mention are decisions made in the billing of the cast, meaning that *The Woman in Black* and *Ghost Stories* do not include their spirits in the line-up, whereas the ghosts of *Play Dead* and *The Haunting* are prominently featured with biography and photo. In the case of *Play Dead*, this was an inevitable occurrence, much to the disdain of Robbins: "We had [the pictures of the ghost performers] in the program and bios,

and I didn't like that at all. I don't mind having their bios in there, but I didn't want their pictures put in and I didn't want them billed as Eusapia Palladino or Margery or… I wanted them listed as 'Covert Ensemble'" (2012a). The reason for this, according to Robbins, is to keep the illusion alive. The ghosts are not alive; they exist in a no man's land which exists outside of life and which cannot be pinned down, and it will add to the mystery of the play itself. The same will be true for *The Woman in Black*: who is the mysterious Woman, and where did she come from? Only one of the actors was able to see her, as is the audience: will they suffer the same fate as the residents of Crythin Gifford?

The marketing of all four plays draws on influences from the source material, as well as those images and ideas from other media, in particular films, which an audience might be familiar with. The programmes try to retain the air of dread and mystery that surrounds the ghost stories, hopefully presenting the spectators with several more questions as they leave the theatre.

In contrast to *The Woman in Black* and *The Haunting*, both *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* present a narrative that involves more direct contact with the audience and exhibits a move towards work that is becoming more immersive. The spectators are guided into a more active role through the use of the performer-narrator. Yet despite the fact that the spectators are more engaged with the performance through direct address as they are prompted for responses and forced to respond, the concept of the lecture and of someone on stage talking *at* an audience can, in turn, create a distance between performer and spectator. Both productions carefully toe this line between drawing the audience in and alienating them, bringing down their defences before leading them to the inevitable conclusion. At the same time, through the use of that contact with the performer-narrator, as well as the design and use of space and stagecraft, the audience is drawn into the world created by each production. This idea of the created world will be followed up in the next chapter where scare attractions offer a complete themed and packaged experience of fear to their visitors.

Chapter 3
A Bloody Playground: Scare attractions and audience affect

> "Yes, it's scary." – http://hauntedhousenyc.com/newyork/about-2/
> [Accessed: June 23, 2009. Website no longer active]

"Slowly rising from his (or her - I couldn't tell) chair he snatched [the ticket] from my hand and slowly opened the creaking door behind him and beckoned me through," and so the visitor is led into a performance of *The Thirteenth Séance*, designed by Tom Spindler.[14] Does an audience need a more direct invitation into a world of darkness and fright, or a more clear idea of what they are in for? In 2008, the New York City-based Nightmare Haunted House made the following promise to its visitors: "With more special effects, more elaborate sets, and more evil baddies waiting to get you then [sic] ever before, NIGHTMARE: BAD DREAMS COME TRUE will bring your worst night terrors to screaming life."[15] One might wonder why anyone would want to respond to such a grisly invitation, yet it seems difficult to deny that scare attractions are big business. Well-established Halloween entertainment in the United States, with professional organisations and large industry fairs, the phenomenon has been steadily finding its way overseas. The United Kingdom boasts a growing number of horror-themed entertainments, now united with the founding of the British Association of Scare and Haunted Attractions.[16]

Scare attractions are the third of four forms of performance horror that will be explored in this study, and perhaps one of the more striking examples of audience agency and immersion. Although each of the forms of horror performance discussed in this thesis ultimately aims to scare its spectators, these productions also have their specific limitations. It can be argued, for instance, that the use of the fourth wall in examples of horror theatre has an impact on how involved an audience is with the

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[14] http://www.londoneer.org/2010/10/tom-spindler-presents-13th-seance.html [Accessed: Feb. 17, 2011]
[15] http://hauntedhousenyc.com/newyork/about-2/ [Accessed: June 23, 2009. Website no longer active]
[16] http://www.basha.org.uk/ [Accessed: April 12, 2010. Website no longer active]

production, its story and its characters. The live action role playing events, to be

discussed in more detail in the next chapter, change the politics of the performance:

those attending are no longer just a victim, but have the opportunity to take on the role

of the monster, changing real and potentially familiar spaces into the set of a horror

movie. Although maximising immersion (as audience members are the performers,

using costumes and makeup), the way in which fear is produced in such an event will be

very different. Personal stories and shared experience become a big part of the

performance and the events place a higher demand on their audience to invest, both

physically and emotionally. By contrast, scare attractions take the form of a carefully

constructed package, using terrifying themes to create a strong emotional affect in their

visitors. Through careful manipulation of feelings of control and distance, audiences are

brought face-to-face with the stuff of their nightmares and become part of their own

horror story, rather than taking the role of a passive spectator.

The definition of a scare attraction as used in this chapter is based on the way

the venues present themselves: on the most basic level, a scare attraction is a

performance experience that is designed to frighten its audience. The themes and

plotlines of these venues are most often based on a fictional premise, although some,

such as the Dungeons franchise, base themselves on real events and 'horrible

histories'.[17] Using original creatures, famous monsters or well-known movie characters,

scare attractions rely on a number of elements to instil fear in their visitors. The venues

are often presented in a non-traditional space such as a warehouse, an old gym, a farm,

a dungeon-like basement space, etc. It should be noted that often, the contents are not

directly related to the location or purpose of the venue: the old gym may house a

collection of vampires, for instance. Each event is made up of a number of

performance elements, such as live actors, animatronics, theatrical sets and sound- and

light effects. Many of these entertainments are staged during or around the month of

October and operate in correlation with the Halloween holiday season. Some venues,

such as the Dungeons franchise and the London Bridge Experience, are open all year.

The discussion will only concern itself with scare attractions and will not focus

on ghost trains or dark rides. There are many similarities between the two forms, as can

be glimpsed from the following description by Angela Ndalianis of the *Revenge of the*

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[17] The term 'horrible histories' seems to originate from the book series, written by Terry Deary and first published in 1993, and has gone on to include TV series, stage productions, and numerous other media. The franchise is presented as educational entertainment, focusing on the horrible aspects of history whilst teaching the facts.

Mummy – The Ride[18]: "All the classic signs of horror are [present in this ride]: a darkness that harbours the unknown, eerie whispers, passages that appear labyrinthine, stolen souls, blazing fires, and a monstrous Mummy that threatens to bring about our demise" (2010:11). There is, however, a problem with the multifaceted nature of the dark ride, as is shown in the definition given by Ndalianis: "In dark rides, participants board a buggy, train, or boat and enter a dark, enclosed space. The space is themed [...] and the vehicle on track allows the designers some control over the ways the story unravels" (2010:14). These attraction can make use of animatronics or include actors as part of the experience, but more problematic is the position of the audience. Visitors are placed in moving carts, which means there is more opportunity for the designers of the ride to control the experience, as opposed to the freedom of movement offered by scare attractions. The differences between the two forms create specific challenges when defining and comparing them. For this reason, it would appear that a separate exploration of ghost rides has more merit, rather than an attempt to merge the two forms into one definition.[19]

The origins of these types of venues can be traced back to horror theatre as well as the horror film: many scare attractions feature either classic 'set pieces' or characters and plots with whom the audience is already familiar. The specific setup of a walkthrough exhibit can be linked back to Madame Tussaud's famous Chamber of Horrors. Established in Paris in 1783 as *La Caverne des Grands Voleurs* by Tussaud's mentor, Philip Curtius, the exhibit included depictions of famous criminals and torture devices, building on the pre-existing interest in public executions. Tussaud took over *La Caverne* after Curtius' death in 1794 and continued to build on it, when, after a move of the wax museum to London in 1835, it would become known as the Chamber of Horrors. At present, the Chamber still contains its old displays of wax works and implements of torture, and has received an extension in the form of the live action section with the apt title Scream!, a departure from static wax into the realm of the high octane scare attractions which are the focus here.

In addition, it can be argued that, like the stage productions, the form has its roots in classic performance forms. As will be discussed later on in this chapter, scare

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[18] *The Revenge of the Mummy – The Ride* can be found in the Universal Studios parks in Florida, Hollywood and Singapore. The premise is based on the *Mummy* movie franchise directed by Stephen Sommers.
[19] In addition, the so-called Hell Houses, a religious form of scare entertainment will not be discussed here due to the link of these events with (spiritual) reality. For more details on Hell Houses, please refer to Madelon Hoedt. 2012. "Hell to Pay: Christian Haunted Houses and Audience Reception". *Journal for Religion and Popular Culture*, vol. 24 issue 2, pp. 247-259

attractions often use the now familiar blend of horror and comedy from the Grand-Guignol, and incorporate some of its other features. The idea of witnessing is taken to new heights, as is the use of contemporary source material as the horror genre continues to draw on cultural anxieties. At the same time, however, the melodramatic excess of Gothic drama seems to have found its way into these venues as well: in whatever form they present themselves, one cannot describe these attractions as understated or overly subtle.

Before diving into a detailed discussion of the attractions, it will be helpful to provide a brief introduction of the venues that will be looked at in this study, divided into categories based on their contents. Attractions discussed here may use horrible histories, they may have a strong reliance on performance, they may incorporate known movie tropes and characters, or they may purely genre-based, presenting their own story and unique monsters. It should be noted that each of these features will have an impact on the audience in terms of the type of event they will experience. Tie-ins with movies will create a great sense of familiarity in visitors, whereas the 'extreme theatre' events place more of an emphasis on performance elements, or, in the words of Nightmare director Timothy Haskell: "I am a theatre director and approach the haunted house as a theatrical event. [...] Obviously the response I was looking for was fear, but what I was trying to accomplish with it as a production was basically a terrifying installation in keeping with my performance arts roots" (2009a). The implications of each category will be returned to later in this chapter.

The number of case studies used here is much larger than the narrow focus displayed by chapters 1 and 2. The reason behind this is to try and capture a snapshot of the type of work that is being done in the growing scare industry, and to discuss the wide variety of possible attractions and performances that are on offer. The selection was partially based on the location of the attractions (which could be visited by the author), and partially on the theme and vision offered by its creators (such as the views on scare entertainment from Nightmare and AtmosFEAR). Visits were undertaken in the period of 2009 and 2010 to the London, Amsterdam and Edinburgh Dungeons, the London Bridge Experience and Fright Club. Where possible, contact was made with the venues and their creators and information was gathered through the use of email interviews.

Each of the attractions listed below, as well as many other venues, enjoy a considerable measure of success. An attraction like the London Dungeons has been open since 1974 and has continued to expand in that time, moving to a new location on London's South Bank in 2013. Others, such as Nightmare, return each October (or even September) for runs of close to two months, with tickets quickly selling out and patrons queuing around the block. Similar scenes can be seen with many American venues during the Halloween season. Meanwhile, the scare industry in the United Kingdom continues to expand, though often on a small scale, with enthusiasts putting together their own events. These often operate around Halloween, like the US model, but tend to enjoy significantly shorter runs.

Although scare attractions are ultimately performative events, many of those running these attractions do not necessarily possess a background in theatre. Some, such as Timothy Haskell, who is an off-Broadway director, use their knowledge of the medium of performance as a means to provide a different experience to visitors, but many of the attractions are headed by people with different backgrounds. Performance theory can be applied as a means to read and discuss these experiences, yet it would be too easy to assume that these ideas and concepts are knowingly implemented by the creators and directors of each attraction. Rather, the aim of those involved is to use a wide range of theatrical devices and to draw on other examples of the horror genre, such as film, to provide an experience for an audience that is about one thing only: to scare the visitors as much as possible.

The use of space is a large part of this, in particular the use of non-theatrical sites. Each of the attractions discussed here is located in a space which is (for the most part) indoors and is a site that does not resemble a traditional theatre. Often, the spaces are used only for these events, even if they only run for a certain amount of weeks each year. This process allows creators to put more permanent effects and decorations in place, or to spend long periods of time on the design and operation of the sites. As will be discussed in more detail later, the variety of sites used is almost endless: from old gyms and warehouses to basements or subterranean tunnels; anything that will help creators to set the scene and put their visitors on edge. In addition, the emphasis is on a moving, rather than a static audience, which radically changes the dynamic from more traditional performance styles and settings.

The industry continues to grow, with numerous attempts to bring together proprietors and suppliers, to inform and to educate. An example of this is the HEX

Europe initiative[20], with Jason Karl as one of its founders, which seeks to create a database of attractions and suppliers, as well as providing a platform for the industry to unite and educate. The Scareworld magazine[21], again founded by Karl, similarly offers information and in-depth looks at numerous aspects of the scare industry.

The first of the categories listed above is that of horrible histories, with the Dungeons franchise as the most famous of these. With eight Dungeons, one of which is in the United States,[22] the venues classify themselves as "scary, historical, educational attractions."[23] Each instalment features displays which are typical for that city (using Jack the Ripper in London, and Rembrandt in Amsterdam), yet the effects and scenes used are often replicated from one venue to the next. Using a similar historical approach, the London Bridge Experience, open since 2008, is said to be located directly underneath the actual London Bridge. The venue contains two segments: the first, the London Bridge Experience, is an actor-driven attraction which relates the history of London Bridge from Roman times up to the present day. The second part is a visit to the London Tombs, where the frights begin: dressed in hardhats and high-visibility vests, groups are led into the crypts of London Bridge and confronted by the various creatures that inhabit them. Like the Dungeons, the Experience and the Tombs draw heavily on the (imagined) history of the performance space.

Unlike these two attractions, Nightmare Haunted House, based in New York City since 2003, views its scares primarily as a theatrical event with the aim of frightening the audience. Nightmare employs a form of hyperrealism and provides an experience that is mainly actor-driven, organising events for Halloween and other holidays (most recently, Easter).[24] A similar tactic is followed by AtmosFEAR!, described as "the UK's biggest and fastest growing independent location based scare entertainment producers" They are a company that creates immersive theatre experiences for a variety of contractors.[25]

Drawing more on the tradition of horror movies and its characters, Alien Wars was started in Glasgow in 1992. The concept of the attraction is based on *Alien* film franchise, taking a group of participants, escorted by armed US Colonial Marines, for a tour of an "Alien Research Facility", styled on the set of the movies. The Aliens would

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[20] http://www.hexeurope.com/ [Accessed: February 5, 2015]
[21] http://scareworld.co.uk/ [Accessed: February 5, 2015]
[22] www.thedungeons.com Information correct at time of writing [Accessed: April 2, 2014]
[23] www.thedungeons.com [Accessed: August 14, 2011]
[24] http://www.fullbunnycontact.com/ [Accessed: April 2, 2014]
[25] www.atmosfearuk.com [Accessed: August 14, 2011]

inevitably escape and menace, chase and sometimes even capture both the colonial marines and members of the public. Where Alien Wars introduces its visitors into the plot of a single movie, Pasaje del Terror makes use of horror icons from the silver screen to scare its patrons, literally bringing visitors face-to-face with the famous monsters that scared them before on the silver screen.

Bringing a more classic, rather than stylised and performative take on scare attractions, Fright Club in the UK and Terror Test in the US offer an intense experience of traditional horror narratives. The story of Fright Club is rooted in the well-known mad scientist film, whereas Terror Test offers visitors to movie-quality scenes and ultra-realism, with a theme that changes each year.

As can be seen from these brief descriptions, scare attractions offer a wide variety of stories and experiences, incorporating performance, technology, and location to create a unique form. As a result, questions with regards to approach need to be addressed in order to provide a frame that will capture such a range of possibilities. As outlined in the introduction, scare attractions, in particular, differentiate themselves from horror films in terms of the way in which they are experienced, giving their visitors the chance to be the star of their own monster movie. At the same time, they cannot be placed comfortably in the realm of traditional performance: the fourth wall is all but obliterated; a clear narrative is often absent and replaced by a shadow of a plot ("You are in an institution and there has been a zombie outbreak; RUN!"); although reliant on the conventions of performance, a visit to a scare attraction is not regarded as an evening at the theatre. Rather, most attractions consist of a number of rooms, to be navigated by the audience, in each of which (part of) a story is played out by actors. This may take the shape of anything from a detailed monologue to actors jumping out to chase the audience into the next room.

This does not mean, however, that there is no need or desire to tell a story, as is argued by Tash Banks: "The story needs to be strong. Otherwise it's just people jumping out and shouting 'boo'. We want the experience to stay with people in the same way that a good film or play does" (2009). Her views are echoed by Jason Karl of AtmosFEAR!: "Narrative is at the centre of everything we do. Essentially, we see ourselves as horror storytellers, regaling our tales in 4 dimensions (sight, sound, touch and smell)" (2011). What is of interest in Karl's comment is the fact that attention is drawn to the rather untraditional structure of the narrative. He continues:

> Narrative is delivered in 4 dimensions, through the visual appearance of the sets – a wild west cowboy town, or a medieval dungeon, texture – dirty hospital beds, or crumbling pyramid walls, sound - music and sound effects, lighting – is it day or night?, smells – telling you 'where' you are (earth/medical fluid/burning flesh), - costumes, makeup/prosthetics, and most importantly through the dialogue of the scareactors, which progresses the story as the guests through the attraction experience. (2011)

What is clearly shown by Karl is the emphasis placed on channels of communication other than the written or spoken word. Thus the text of a scare attraction becomes much richer: rather than a cerebral experience, a visit is, quite literally, sensational and sensory. Yet the overall structure of the story can be quite traditional, as can be glimpsed from Jason Karl:

> The attraction itself is produced like a film/book/tv show/play in that it has a definite beginning (pre-show) – when the story is 'set up' in the minds of the guests, a middle – the main attraction, and an end culmination which either brings the story to a close, or sets you up for a sequel in another attraction later – and we have done this several times. (2011)

The use of different narrative features creates a different kind of text, yet there is still a story to be told: it is simply the means through which it is presented that change.

Examples of these stories differ between attractions. The Dungeons, for instance, offer a collection of sketches, moving from one tale to the next as the audience moves through the attraction, jumping between places and time periods. By contrast, the London Bridge Experience offers a chronological story, starting with the Romans and Vikings, moving onto Dickens' time and into the present as visitors descend into the Tombs to see what is waiting for them. Whereas Alien Wars takes its audience through a coherent, almost filmic narrative, Pasaje del Terror simply offers encounters with a disparate number of horror icons, anything from Regan in *The Exorcist* to Clive Barker's otherworldly monsters from *Hellraiser* or Tobe Hooper's cannibal family from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Despite these obvious differences in plot and structure, all of the above tell their stories in a similar manner, incorporating every channel of theatrical communication available in order to engage with the audience.

Some of the theories outlined in the introduction will need to be reconsidered when viewed in relation to this wider approach to narrative. In addition, a number of new concepts will be put forward in this chapter to help define and examine scare attractions

in more detail. Firstly, however, it will be beneficial to discuss the potential use of horror theory in relation to the form. Following the model of the introduction, I will once more briefly outline the approaches to this topic and how these approaches function in this particular context. The first theories that will be addressed are the cognitive theory, with Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror* as its main work, and the theory of the fantastic from Tzvetan Todorov. A decision has been made to discuss these two theories together, as they pose similar problems for the current argument. Firstly, both theories address the idea of curiosity, where it is assumed that the monstrous beings of horror, human or inhuman, are a source of fascination for the audience. This idea can be read as related to morbid curiosity, where something is so ugly, so revolting, that one cannot look away. Both movies and novels often contain such moments, and a particular example is the reveal of the monster to the audience in all its revolting glory. However, the curiosity approach becomes more complicated in a discussion of scare attractions: the lack of light and other obstructions make a similar observation and subsequent appreciation of the creatures in the venue nearly impossible.

Secondly, both Todorov and Carroll draw attention to the idea of a progressive narratives and the use of disclosure plots, in which the curiosity of the audience will drive them to finish the story. They argue that a reader will be inclined to ignore the scary or gory aspects of the narrative or at least tolerate them for the sake of the plot. It should be noted that such a narrative is almost completely absent from scare attractions. The Dungeons franchise uses displays based on legends and history, such as Sweeney Todd and Jack the Ripper. Nightmare Haunted House has used nightmares, paranormal experiences and the most common phobias for the various instalments of this attraction. For 2009, Terror Test will use the theme of infection, creating a background story of a deadly virus being released into the general public. In all of these, the themes function merely as a backdrop for the sets and scares. When walking through a haunted attraction, the audience is treated to scenes, not a full narrative with beginning, middle, end and plot. Therefore, the theory that the horror is ignored in order to find out what happened cannot be applied to these venues.

The last problem with the cognitive and fantastic theory is the reliance on aesthetic distance and a rational approach. Both views assume that an audience will take a step back in order to appreciate the narrative, the monster and its power, in short, to appreciate the aesthetics of horror. However, when inside a scare attractions and being

chased by the creatures inside, it is simply impossible to sit back and take a good, long look. Often, groups of visitors are literally chased through the venue with performers urging them to run from room to room and are thus kept from expressing any form of appreciation. A second possibility is the simple fact that a visitor might not want to stay and examine the displays, as they are frightened and want to get out. To quote Carroll: "One supposes that fascination would be too great a luxury to endure, if one, against all odds, were to encounter a horrific monster in "real life"" (1990:189). Although haunted attractions are a game of make-believe, the monsters one encounters inside are as close to real life as it gets. Both the cognitive and fantastic theory require a specific, rational mind-set from the audience, which is hardly feasible in a discussion of scare attractions.

The third approach that needs to be addressed is psychoanalysis, in particular in relation to Freud and his essay *The Uncanny*. Freud describes the fear that is inherent when one is confronted with something alien, or something familiar which has become alien. When these feelings of fear are repressed, according to Freud, they lead to a contamination of the unconscious. By allowing a return of the repressed, a controlled experience of the repressed emotions (and possible unconscious, unwanted desires), a feeling of catharsis can occur. Boal, in his discussion of Aristotle's ideas, states that "the principle aim of tragedy is to provoke catharsis" (1979:25), which is "[a] correction of man's actions" (1979:27). The emotions, and the experience of these emotions, of the spectators are linked to those of the heroes, and "through the purgation of the extraneous, undesirable element which prevents the character from achieving his ends" (1979:32), the spectator can make a better decision.

Freud's concept of cathartic treatment incorporates some of these ideas: in the case of the return of the repressed, the patient would be forced to relive the repressed fears and experiences. The cathartic experience described here, in relation to scare attractions, is closer to the ideas of Aristotle and focuses on the notion of being scared in a (relatively) safe environment. Thus cleansed from any unnatural emotions or urges, a person can once again return to the existing order. Objections have been raised as to whether this theory is valid when discussing books and movies. As stated by Berys Gaut: "These films not infrequently leave (and are designed to leave) a lingering sense of fearfulness in their audience [...] This is precisely the opposite effect one would expect if one's fear had been lightened" (1993:336). Yet this idea of catharsis seems very plausible in a discussion of haunted attractions. A visitor enters the venue, is scared out

of their wits, and then emerges back into the sunlight and the real world: order is once again established.

"Dare you enter?" (Flyer for *The London Dungeons*, 2010)

As I have shown in the previous paragraphs, the idea of "text" within the context of a scare attraction contains a number of different elements. It follows, then, that an analysis based on close reading, as it is offered in chapters 1 and 2, will not be effective in a discussion of these types of venues. Rather than the script, the starting point for a discussion of scare attractions will be the use of space. As opposed to the detailed scripts offered by *The Woman in Black* or *Ghost Stories*, for example, it is the other channels of theatrical communication that take centre-stage in a scare attraction, and out of these, space is arguably the most important. The locations and venues used by these experiences bear little resemblance to a conventional theatre and upon entering a scare attraction, the audience will have left the notion of traditional fourth wall performance far behind. No matter where they find themselves, the space they are in is unlikely to be a traditional theatrical venue, but rather a dungeon, a warehouse, a laboratory or an old museum. Rather than being presented with a detailed plot which is played out on the stage, they need to navigate the space in order to find the story and the secrets hidden within. As I argue above, scripting has its role within scare attractions, yet at the same time, these dialogues are always performed *in relation to space* as actors refer to surroundings or objects, to features or the monsters hidden deeper in the building. The venues offer a full package, consisting of the performance itself, the space (inside and out), the performers and other employees, the gift shop and bar. Each feature of the attraction aims to create a world for its visitors, which they are then free to explore. As a result, the experience of a scare attraction is primarily a spatial and physical one.

This idea of providing a themed experience results in a connection between scare attractions and theme parks. This link does not exist merely in the fact that many parks nowadays include dark rides or actual haunted venues among the entertainments that they offer, but also on a more conceptual level, as can be seen from the following description of Scott Lukas:

> Unlike cinema and theatre, in which audience members passively watch the action on the screen or stage, and unlike the narratives of television and books,

which are static, the theme park uses the immersion of the individual inside an unfolding and evolving drama as the basis of its unique form. (2008:8)

A similar connection can be discerned with videogames, and it will be both of these media that will inform a theoretical discussion of scare attractions. In his paper "Game Design as Narrative Architecture", Henry Jenkins argues that "[g]ame designers don't simply tell stories; they design worlds and sculpt spaces" (2004:121) and draws attention to the ways in which "the structuring of game space facilitates different kinds of narrative experiences" (2004:122). Videogames, like theme parks, offer constructed worlds and agency to anyone willing to immerse themselves in the experience, and many connections exist between the two forms, as described by Don Carson:

> Whether it's a 100 million dollar Disney ride, a 3D shooter, or a kid's entertainment title, it is my objective to tell a story through the experience of traveling through a real, or imagined physical space. Unlike a linear movie, my audience will have choices along their journey. They will have to make decisions based on their relationship to the virtual world I have created, as well as their everyday knowledge of the physical world. Most important of all, their experience is going to be a "spatial" one. (2000:n.pag.)

Carson, like Lukas, draws attention to the importance of space, writing with both theme parks and videogames in mind: "In many respects, it is the physical space that does much of the work of conveying the story the designers are trying to tell. Color, lighting and even the texture of a place can fill an audience with excitement or dread." (2000:n.pag.) Similarly, Talmadge Wright draws a comparison between the themed environments of attractions and games:

> In many ways playing within a virtual game world mirrors those emotions that are found in theme park rides and other types of entertainment found in themed venues – most often, laughter and exhilaration. [...] In a theme park, the thrill of exploring new environments is accompanied by the bodily thrill of the amusement park ride. (2007:255)

Both media, like scare attractions, invite exploration, play, freedom; they invite the visitor into their world. Although operating as single venue as opposed to a collection of rides, scare attractions can similarly be seen as an equally complete form, integrating every element of its design into one horror themed event in much the same way as theme parks do: "[Theme parks] use architecture, geography and modes of performance to reference all of the senses for the ends of amusement. [They] give themselves a place by being spaces of hypersensation" (Lukas, 2008: 67). Lukas describes the theme park

as a "complete form" (2008:11), drawing attention to the use of engagement and escapism and the otherworldliness of the experience:

> [Theme parks] allow people to conceptually travel to other places and other time periods, resulting in sensory and mood orientations that contrast with those of everyday life. […] As the individual is transported she forgets where she once was and instead reorients to the new place. (2008:66)

Such a complete form, then, offers a complete package, and this is a package that starts its work before audiences enter, or even approach, the venue. Not only the experience itself, but what comes before strongly influences the reading of the event, and special attention needs to be paid to the space that is created through the use of marketing materials and the concept of pre-show.

Flyers, guidebooks and theatre programmes "often include sketches, literary quotations, or photographs not directly related to the play, but suggesting a preferred interpretive strategy" (Carlson, 1993:91). In addition, Carlson provides a short description of these programs: "[T]he name of the theatre followed by the title and author of the play, next a listing of the characters [...] and the actors portraying them, and then information on the time and place of the action" (1993:90). Interestingly, the materials provided by the venues seem to be more closely related to films than to the theatre. No information is listed on authors, actors, or other staff; instead, details are given in words and images of the horror that await a visitor, portraying bloody violence and fear. The flyers contain a number of eye-catching invitations, warnings, and challenges:

- We are dying to meet you! Venture into [the attraction] if you dare! (London Bridge Experience, 2010:n.pag.)
- Enter at Own Risk [and] Experience the fright of your life! (Death Trap, 2009:n.pag.)
- Are you brave enough? (Amsterdam Dungeons, 2009:n.pag.)
- Join us on a torturous journey... (Edinburgh Dungeons, 2009:n.pag.)
- Dare you enter? [and] Will you make it out? (London Dungeons, 2010:n.pag.)

The Dungeons franchise, which focuses on edutainment and portrayals of horrible history, publishes guidebooks in addition to simple flyers. These take the form of a high-quality glossy magazine and approach the form of the theatre programme. Although details on performers and crew are still absent, the guidebooks provide background information on the events depicted inside the attraction. The Dungeons have printed both guidebooks related to the individual attractions, detailing scenes from

that particular venue, as well as an overview, which describes the history discussed in all Dungeon locations. The choice of words in each of these again highlights the scary nature of the event: "A warning - in the Dungeon's dark catacombs it always pays to keep your wits about you... some of the 'exhibits' have an unnerving habit of coming back to life..." (London Dungeons Guidebook, 2009:n.pag.). In addition, the overview guidebook draws attention to the sensory experience that awaits a visitor of the Dungeons:

> You will hear the screams of tormented, tortured souls [...] Smell the foul stench of death all around you [...] Feel your way into the darkness as you try to escape [...] Taste the fear, feel your heart pounding and your adrenaline pumping as you venture into your final journey... (Dungeons Guidebook, 2009:n.pag.)

The stories, according to the guidebook, are secondary. It is emphasised that the events described are fact, that the horrors depicted did actually happen. The audience is invited to physically experience these scenes and to become a part of history. These invitations should be taken quite literally; the texts in the guidebooks urge potential visitors to join in the fun: "Will the Plague Doctor pronounce you the latest victim?" (London Dungeons Guidebook, 2009:n.pag.) In addition to these lurid descriptions, both publications are filled to the brim with photographs of torture implements and patrons in situations of physical discomfort and extreme fear. The images adequately mirror the desired response to the scenes played out inside, preparing the audience for their role and giving them a taste of what is expected of them: "The emotional reactions of the characters [...] provide a set of instructions or, rather, examples about the way in which the audience is to respond to the monsters in fiction" (Carroll, 1990:17). The flyers both entice the audience into visiting and prime them as to what they will experience and how they should respond.

As a result, marketing is the first step into the world of these attractions, the first part of the experience of the audience. This, however, is not the only element which takes place before actually entering the venue and at this point, it is interesting to turn to the ideas of Richard Schechner. In his book *Performance Theory*, he describes the idea of a pre-show: "Too little study has been made of how people – both spectators and performers – approach and leave performances. How do specific audiences get to, and into, the performance space; how do they go from that space?"(2003:190) As can be understood from the words of Timothy Haskell and Richard Jordan, this process is very important

when visiting a scare attraction. The experience does not begin when entering the venue; it starts long before. It can be argued that the location of the venue itself plays a part in this. The London Tombs are situated in the spaces below London Bridge and require the visitors to don a hardhat and a high-visibility vest. Although these are not necessary safety precautions, this process has been installed to involve the audience and add to the anticipation of the actual visit (Banks, 2009). In other cases, information of the venue location is not used. The Amsterdam Dungeons are located in a deconsecrated church, where the relic of the Miracle of Amsterdam was held.[26] Features of this church are still visible in the venue itself, such as the vaulted ceilings and the organ. However, visitors are not made aware of this in any way and the building seems to be almost stripped of its identity in favour of fitting in better with the franchise. Given the impact of the use of space on the experience, as well as the position of an audience in this space, as discussed in the previous chapters, one cannot help but wonder what the response of visitors would be if they were aware of this fact. Set firmly in the theme of horrible histories, and incorporating a building with such a rich history, why was this not used in the attraction itself?

Some form of pre-show, as described by Haskell and Jordan, is a more obvious example of the process of preparation. Upon arriving to the venue, visitors are treated to suggestive music, dimmed lights and a designed environment, causing them to brace themselves for the scares that are yet to come. More importantly, the pre-show can be used for a blurring between the imagined horrors and the real world, almost forcing the audience to believe that what they will be subjected to is the real thing. Carroll describes the willing suspension of disbelief that is necessary to be affected by horror novels or movies. In order to be frightened, one has to believe that the events and monsters depicted in writing or on screen are (at least for a short period of time) real. Essentially this is only a game of make-believe: "if one really believed that the theater were beset by lethal shape changers, demons, intergalactic cannibals, or toxic zombies, one would hardly sit by for long. One would probably attempt to flee, to hide, to protect oneself, or to contact the proper authorities" (Carroll, 1990:63). For this discussion, the use of the term willing is particularly interesting. When travelling to a haunted attraction, a visitor could mentally prepare themselves for the experience to come, where, for the duration of the tour, they will believe that zombies exist. However, once inside, it is

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[26] For more information, see: http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/mir/holland.html [Accessed: July 10, 2009]

difficult to hold on to that idea. None of the visitors will call the police after visiting the London Tombs, nor make an attempt to alert any other authorities. Yet, whilst inside the venue, an attempt (or at the very least, an urge) to flee cannot be denied. Despite the fact that every visitor knows that zombies do not exist, very few will stand around to put this knowledge to the test when a number of creatures are shambling in their direction. This response corresponds with another observation of Freud: "Nowadays we no longer believe in [secret injurious powers and the return of the dead], having *surmounted* these modes of thought; Yet we do not feel entirely secure in these new convictions; the old ones live on in us, on the look-out for confirmation" (2003:154; emphasis in original). Although modern society no longer believes in evil spirits or monsters, one might not be fully convinced of these beliefs. The emotional response visitors have to the creatures they encounter inside scare attractions seems to support this notion of a clash between what they know to be real and what might exist, thus making the experience all the more frightening.

It appears that this form of blurring between actual and imagined horrors is readily exploited by the venues on a number of levels. One of the most notable attempts of connecting reality with fiction in this way is the article that was published in various newspapers in November 2007, when the first tickets for the London Bridge Experience and the London Tombs went on sale. According to the coverage, a large number of skeletons were found in a sealed vault by the contractors working on the construction of the venue, which resulted in a series of spooky events (missing tools, defective light bulbs and even disappearances), ultimately causing the crew becoming too scared to keep working at the site. Although this was proven to be nothing more than a publicity stunt, connected to Halloween and ticket sales, the article was readily copied by a large number of media, including the BBC.[27] Another example is Nightmare Haunted House, where linescarers are employed to prepare its audience. To quote Timothy Haskell: "We stage happenings where a weirdo is bothering patrons and making them feel uncomfortable and then we have a security guard throw them out like they actually weren't part of the event" (2009a). Again, the illusion of scares is made very real. It can even be argued that the actors standing outside London Bridge

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[27] Coverage by the BBC: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7072188.stm and the Daily Mail: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-491080/Builders-spooked-skeleton-discovery-tourist-attractions-sealed-vault.html. Others had their doubts about the story, as can be seen in this article from the Londonist: http://londonist.com/2007/11/spook_central_b.php [Accessed: July 5th, 2009]

Underground station with flyers to lure visitors to the nearby London Dungeons[28] and Tombs are another exponent of this. Instead of encountering these ghouls within the defined space of a scare attraction, one finds them in the middle of a busy London street, another case of 'creature meets reality' and of the remaining doubts, as described by Freud.

The importance of pre-show is pointed out by creators and visitors alike. Jason Karl of AtmosFEAR! states that: "Our narratives are driven in a similar fashion in each project. This begins with the marketing – images of icon characters, suggestive tag lines, carefully composed attraction names, websites with beginnings of stories" (2011). Similarly, an interview with Wayne Davis, one of the main contributors to Scare Attractions UK (the main fansite for UK based venues),[29] reveals some of the tension created by the pre-show: "The first [thing a good attraction needs is] a good story and build up to the attraction. If you can set the scene and build some tension before the group enters you've saved yourself and your actors a lot of time and effort inside!" (2011) Davis also comments on the role of location in this process:

> Obviously walking up to a large foreboding castle or dungeon frontage is scarier than a marquee in a field. But if the scene is set properly before entering then your visitors will be in the mood for a good scare and forget what is happening outside. The location of an attraction isn't really something that crosses my mind before entering although stood in a field with a long queue does have a detrimental effect on the experience. (2011)

He does advise caution, however: "A good pre-show can build up the tension in the audience, getting them hyped up before they enter the attraction. [...] However, too much narrative can actually spoil the experience, people want to be scared not talked at for 10 minutes" (2011). As such, whatever comes before should be handled with care as it can hinder the experience when not done well. The same can be said for Davis' comments regarding the long queue, which can be either detrimental or, depending on how the event handles the waiting time, add to the anticipation of visitors. As they move forward, they might be able to catch glimpses of what awaits them, or hear the screams of those already inside, a promise for what awaits those waiting once they enter the venue proper. Even though these practical concerns may influence an audience, I would like to argue that anticipation is one of the first and ultimately necessary ways in

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[28] As of 2013, the London Dungeons have relocated from Tooley Street to a new and bigger venue on the South Bank, near County Hall and the London Eye.
[29] http://www.scareattractions.co.uk/ [Accessed: September 6, 2013]

which visitors to a scare attraction are introduced to and affected by the experience. If executed well, the use of marketing and pre-show can work together to create a sense of dread, of possibility, of what might happen, before even entering the venue. The narrative that is encountered once inside will continue the expectations set up by the promotional materials and the pre-show to then fully introduce visitors to the world of the attraction.

Feel your way into the darkness… (Programme for *The Dungeons*, 2009)

In taking the visitors into their world, the attractions once again draw on the use of space. For the discussion that follows, the concept which is key here is the idea of environmental storytelling: the space the audience moves through is as important to their experience and sense of narrative as any of the words which are spoken, and it is in this way that scare attractions offer their visitors a sensation of the themed spaces of horror. Instead of using text, as stated by Scott Lukas, "buildings take on the position of storytellers" (2008:77). These stories, however, are told in a very specific way: Henry Jenkins describes how "[t]he amusement park doesn't so much reproduce the story of a literary work [...] as it evokes its atmosphere" (2004:123). Rather than building a detailed replica or a direct adaptation, the space is themed and focuses on impressions and experiences rather than full-blown scripted stories: "The most compelling amusement park attractions build upon stories or genre traditions already well-known to visitors, allowing them to enter physically into spaces they have visited many times before in their fantasies" (Jenkins, 2004:123).

Don Carson, in "Environmental Storytelling", echoes this idea: "Armed with only their own knowledge of the world, and those visions collected from movies and books, the audience is ripe to be dropped into your adventure" (2000:n.pag.). Yet at the same time as being ready for exploration, the spaces are always created and always limited: "[A]musement park designers count on visitors keeping their hands and arms in the car at all times and thus have a greater control in shaping our total experience, whereas game designers have to develop worlds where we can touch, grab, and fling things at will" (Jenkins, 2004:123). Visitors are placed in boats or buggies and their gaze, as noted by Ndalianis, is controlled by the designers. As a result, the theme will always remain in place: "In theme parks [...] one is directed physically through carefully arranged physical barriers to move in the patterns expected by the theme designer – one cannot simply wander through a door backstage without being rapidly escorted out"

(Wright, 2007:249). Although many scare attractions follow a strict route and have a similar distinction between audience spaces and backstage, the experience might feel more free: one is not held down in a buggy, but is able to move around and examine the rooms and objects, perhaps even interact with them. The connection between spectator and performance is much more direct and much more intimate as a result, as barriers are removed and (physical) contact takes place between audience and performer and audience and space.

Rather than employing a more conventional script-based narrative, scare attractions emphasise the use of space to tell a story as they physically transport visitors to a world of nightmare. It is here that the liveness and the immediacy of performance come into play: by placing an audience in the middle of these scenes and these spaces, the barrier between spectator and performance is reduced, even obliterated. The control that an audience might have and their distance to the actors and space is altered, which will impact the way in which visitors experience the event and what type of affect is achieved. In order to analyse this process in more detail, I would like to return to a brief discussion of the concepts of control and distance, as put forward by Morreall: "Control is usually easiest to maintain when we are merely attending to something which has no practical consequences for us, as when we watch from a distance some event unrelated to us" (1985:97). Yet, what features are presented in the venues that influence control and distance and how are these experienced by the audience? Obviously, visitors are unable physically to influence the action once they enter the attraction and to start and stop the experience at will. However, most venues have some kind of emergency exit available, where some displays can be skipped (as is true in the Dungeons in the case of the rides and sections that use strobe lighting) or where the scares can be avoided altogether (one can go and enjoy the London Bridge Experience without having to venture into the Tombs). In the case of Nightmare, the actors are trained to spot the difference between "let me out, seriously I want to get out" and "let me out, this is so much fun". Where needed, visitors can be escorted out of the venue (Haskell, 2009a). It should, however, be noted that these exits are not easily visible, as this would break the illusion when inside the venue (and damage the feeling of not being in control).

Another way to break the feeling of control is to use elements of the unexpected. One cannot control what one does not know will happen. The most basic examples of this are simple shock effects, with actors or animatronics suddenly jumping

out at the audience. A more intricate way to deal with this is presented in the case of the London Tombs and Fright Club. The actors in these venues are very active and the props and sets are designed in a way that makes it possible for the actors to really work the crowd. By ducking through trapdoors or moving through the scene, the performers can deliver fright after fright, something which causes visitors to feel a heightened sense of fear, as they never know where the next scare might be coming from. These surprises can take two forms: during my visit to the London Tombs I witnessed one of the actors running around and climbing onto parts of the set, clawing at the tour group through a fence in an attempt to get us. In other cases, actors simply followed the group, keeping level with us without actually doing anything. This created a strong sense of unfulfilled anticipation. A similar effect was reached when encountering an actor who was lying on the floor and slowly crawling forward, seemingly without noticing the group (yet, as a visitor and being aware of the kind of venue we were in, a number of people in our group were waiting for them to lash out and grab us any moment).

This expected grabbing of ankles brings us to the next issue: that of touching. Although many venues have clear rules on this issue, stating that visitors are not allowed to touch the actors, and vice versa, I found that I felt somewhat unsure about this once inside, as in the example of the crawling performer (which is, of course, the desired effect). In the podcast "How the hell you scare people?", featuring Timothy Haskell and Richard Jordan, the issue of touching is briefly discussed. One possible approach to scaring an audience, as described by Haskell, is to make the audience feel as though they are actually in danger. Richard Jordan goes on to discuss this idea in more detail: "Whatever you can do to invade their personal space without actually touching them" (Haskell, 2009b). Exploring these boundaries of distance obviously makes for a more intense experience.

However, this rule is not used everywhere. For some time, Fright Club employed a tactic where visitors would be made aware of the possibility of being touched, but once inside this did not happen (again, unfulfilled anticipation), or the touch would be very light, a mere brush with props such as feather dusters. This decision was made to bring an extra dimension to the otherwise somewhat limited attraction (the space is quite small, compared to some of the other venues) (Banks, 2009). However, when the ownership of Fright Club changed hands, changes were made. These days, the venue employs a more active touching policy. There are several accounts from visits to Fright Club where the visitors were subjected to intentional,

intense contact: a visitor related an experience where one of the actors approached them, put their hands on their head and ruffled their hair.[30] Another story even mentions a visitor getting head-butted (Banks, 2009). Obviously, this account is an example of taking a lack of distance to the extreme and is not always appreciated by the visitors.[31] However, it can be noted that stories like these (whether or not they are true) give a venue a certain notoriety and could add to the feelings of anticipation and fear for future visitors that are familiar with these comments.

Wayne Davis of Scare Attractions UK is very clear on the topic:

In my opinion there should be absolutely not be [sic] any physical contact with the audience. […] Not only do you have the safety of your actors and guests to think of, but also the prospects of law suits if anything "wrong" should happen. I have no problem with an actor appearing inches from my face, just not physical contact. I do find it creepy to be touched in an attraction, but it can often be seen as a way to get away from a bad scare… They can use it to scare you even if the acting or surroundings are bad. (2011)

Jason Karl of AtmosFEAR! draws attention to the Scare School which is run by the company in order to adequately train their actors. On the subject of touching, he appears to echo Davis' concerns: "We have trialed [scareactor/guest contact] on two attractions to date, with carefully choreographed 'touching' allowed, and with a variety of safety measures in place. The response is that guests like it, but of course there are potential problems with it and it is not something we do on a normal basis" (Karl, 2011). Instead, he argues that "[y]ou can make physical contact with tactile effects such as water and air gusts, and we often do this" (2011). A similar idea can be found in the London Bridge Experience where guests are forced to navigate through numerous corridors, feeling along walls or bumping into objects suspended from the ceiling which, due to lighting, are sometimes visible, sometimes in the dark. It seems that many venues use this technique to, again quoting Richard Jordan, get as close as possible without person-to-person contact.

The examples provided in the previous paragraphs discuss control and distance as purely physical properties, placing the audience in a situation where the amount of space between them and the actors or set has been lessened. This process should provide visitors with a feeling of being threatened and ultimately, a sense that they are

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[30] Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wGct0VwsL8; comment by user 'obelysk08'. [Accessed: July 5th, 2009]
[31] Source: http://hauntedattractions.co.uk/index.php?option=com_fireboard&Itemid=147&func=view&catid=5&id=&id=187&catid=5 [Accessed: July 5th, 2009]

unable to control the experience. I would like to put forward, however, that this experience of control and distance can manifest in a different form than just physical dimensions. When looking into the practice of haunted attractions, it is also possible to identify a form of *mental* control and distance, rooted in the idea of anticipation of fear. As Morreall points out, it is easiest to maintain control when there is a distance between an audience member and the event or performer. Although the physical events in a scare attraction do have direct consequences for the audience (actors jumping out at you, etc.), it is still a game of make-believe. 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. Returning to the Haunternet podcast, anticipation of fear is another type of fright that is defined by Haskell. In relation to this, Richard Jordan states that "you want to get them [the audience] scared before they even get inside" (2009b). However, it is possible for people to resist this anticipation of fear ("They'll be shutting themselves off." (2009b)), which makes it all the more difficult to get under someone's skin and truly frighten them. By literally taking the show outside and adding scary elements before visitors enter the attraction itself, their sense of control and distance are already diminished.

The issues of control and distance do not merely operate in the dynamic between audience and performer, but also in the interaction between visitors. When being guided through a venue in a small group (usually ten to twelve people), it is not uncommon that some form of 'community spirit' emerges. Connections between visitors are made on a number of levels, most notably that of mutual enjoyment. During my visit to the Edinburgh Dungeons, when the group consisted largely of visiting families, I even found myself looking out for the children in the group and trying to reassure them where needed. The selection of a leader in the London Bridge Experience is another example: during my visit, the young man who was selected as group leader at the beginning of the tour remained the leader throughout and was eventually teased by the group into entering the Tombs first. In the words of Tash Banks, this selection of a leader "gives visitors a false sense of security and identifies them as a group". This idea of "you're a group travelling through time together, and this is your leader X" makes it easier to draw the audience into the story (Banks, 2009).

Opposed to this, a feature which is employed in both the London and Amsterdam Dungeons is to (briefly) separate members of the audience from the tour group. This mechanism, when examined in connection with the idea of the community spirit discussed above, can be seen as quite distressing: although one is aware that the venue is supposed to be safe, it is difficult to firmly retain this idea when one person from your group, who could easily be one of the friends you are visiting with, is selected to be tortured or die a gruesome death. Some examples: in the new Surgery segment in the London Dungeons (installed in 2009), a member of the group is selected to enter the surgical theatre before the others. When the group is allowed to enter, they find the person strapped to a chair. An audio segment follows, explaining about medieval methods of anatomy and operations, which ends with an account of beheading. At this point, all the lights go out. A scream is heard and the audience is covered with a light spray of water. When the lights are once again switched on, the curtains around the volunteer are closed and the group is ushered out, forced to leave them behind. The concept of separation is explored even further in the Amsterdam Dungeons: at several points in the show, visitors are singled out and asked to enter a room before the rest of the group. In addition, visitors are separated as soon as they enter the Amsterdam Dungeons. A large part of the venue is situated underground and the groups are transported there using two elevators. Upon entering the venue, visitors are asked to divide themselves between these, into a male and a female group, leaving them feeling unsure as to whether they will be reunited when reaching their destinations. When taking into account that a lot of couples visit the Dungeons, the sense of dread is even more immediate.

It can be anticipated that there are other processes at play within a group, apart from the bonding. In the fourth chapter of *The Pleasures of Horror*, Matt Hills notes that the horror fandom is one that consists largely of connoisseurs who take pride in the fact that they are no longer scared by horrific images but are, instead, able to see the genre for its aesthetic merit. Although the aesthetic merit of haunted attractions is marginal, as has been discussed, the notion of not being scared might play a big role. The groups in the attractions are assembled randomly, resulting in an arrangement where visitors are taking the tour together with a number of strangers, as well as friends or family. A feeling of peer pressure might become of importance, related directly to Hills' statements about the connoisseurship of most horror fans, where a visitor might be labelled as weak when they display any signs of being frightened.

In addition to the observations put forward here, neurological research might also provide interesting insights, most notably theories in the area of sensation seeking. The definition coined by Marvin Zuckerman, in his book *Sensation Seeking: Beyond the Optimal Level of Arousal,* is as follows: "Sensation seeking is a trait defined by the need for varied, novel, and complex sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical and social risks for the sake of such experience" (1979:10). Such a description seems difficult to read in relation to novels and films: as has been noted by various scholars, horror narratives are quite conservative (at least on the surface) and often explore very similar themes, thus eliminating the "varied and novel sensations" mentioned by Zuckerman. Similarly, the physical risks are virtually absent: as mentioned before, it is difficult to sustain more damage than a paper cut from reading a horror novel. The social risks, understood by Zuckerman in terms of "shame and embarrassment" (1979:11) are still a possibility as the genre is not held in high esteem by many people. All in all, it is very difficult to apply the theory of thrill-seeking to horror novels and movies. This is different in relation to haunted attraction: the audio-visual stimuli provide the aforementioned "varied, novel and complex sensations", whereas the more immediate danger where there is none (only in extreme cases can a visitor be harmed by either the actors or the installations of the venue) hold up the theory of physical risk. The apparent lack of acceptance of the genre could, once again, account for the social risk involved.

The performance space and its use of environmental storytelling all but obliterate the boundary which would normally exist between audience and performer and audience and narrative. Not only scripted elements, but many factors outside the performance itself will influence the perception by an audience. The link between scare attractions and theme parks draws attention to this, creating a world in which patrons can immerse themselves, becoming the star of their own horror narrative. Each element of the scare attraction, performers, location and space, effects, impact the visitor, leaving them to construct their own narrative from the features which have been presented to them. At times, these stories are explicit; the London Dungeons features a section where one of the performers tells the story of Jack the Ripper. In other venues, patrons are presented with a premise and their narrative will consist of experiences and emotions, to be reported and remembered.

Come play with us… (*The Shining*, 1980)

Yet, as has been noted above, the reliance on landscape only goes so far: more often than not, scare attractions create a completely new world inside their walls. In relation to theme parks, Brenda Brown notes that: "many of these rides are distinguished from antecedents by their greater reliance on fabricated visual landscapes, stories, and engineered sound; in fact, none relies on a preexisting landscape" (2002:264). The experience is impacted by factors that are fictional, by an event that is centred on representation, and the space can be made into something it is not.

It can be argued that this process is influenced by the fact that scare attractions seem to rely on the aesthetics of horror cinema rather than theatre (an idea that will be discussed in more detail) and, as Ndalianis notes: "Since the 1950s, the themes and experiences offered by horror rides most often draw upon a consciousness that horror films have burned into audience's minds over the last century" (2010:13). The themed space is often a created space, and the location and its designation ("This is an infected laboratory") are taken straight from the movies: "Wayne Curtis once described the authentic as "something that looks as you imagine it might"" (Lukas, 2007:82). The horror genre relies on our knowledge of its conventions: audiences are expected to know what a haunted house looks like, or a dungeon, or a crypt. This reliance on authenticity and expectations can define the experience and Lukas notes the importance of the form of the dark ride to play on these expectations and to influence audience experience:

> As the theme park moves further away from the kinetic thrills of the traditional amusement ride like the roller coaster, it builds on the dark ride's potential to use its enclosure and interior design to create a narrative and thematic space. […] Perhaps most significant for the dark ride and its use of sensory techniques is the emphasis on cinematic models. (2008:124-125)

This sentiment is echoed by Ndalianis: "What is fascinating about the horror rides found in today's theme parks is that this intertextuality and intermedia tendency becomes literal: not only are multiple media referenced or alluded to, they are often literally incorporated into the experience" (2010:17). Not only do the contents of the attraction reflect the movies, they actually incorporate the medium, and it is this process that can also be seen in certain scare attractions with the use of characters, but more so in the use of recordings and special effects.

The themed experience is created for the visitors, playing to their wishes and expectations. The space is altered or built to fit, creating a play-world and giving the audience the agency to explore a private, terrifying narrative. This idea of allowing a space to tell a story creates specific demands on the designers. As was discussed in the introduction, although an audience might not be able to define horror, they are able to recognise it and thus approach a space with specific ideas and expectations that can define the experience:

> If you are creating a game or attraction based on, let's say "pirates", you'll need to play your audiences [sic] expectation like a violin. You want to pamper them by fulfilling every possible expectation of what it must be like to be a pirate. Every texture you use, every sound you play, every turn in the road should reinforce the concept of "pirates!" [...] If you break any of the rules, more often than not your team will argue, "we can't put that in there, that's not at all 'piratey'!" (Carson, 2000:n.pag.)

The themed experience is created for its audience, playing to their wishes and expectations. The space is altered or built to fit, creating a play-world and giving the audience the agency to explore a private, terrifying narrative. As scripting often becomes secondary to other elements, most of the narrative that is presented in a scare attraction is told through the quality of the space itself and of its use. Does it create fear, and does it look like the audience would think it should look? Is it authentic or, in Carson's words, is it horror-y enough?

From books, comics and movies, an audience knows what a dungeon should look like: dark and damp, with moisture and moss glistening on the walls. Visitors imagine spiders and rats, prisoners in cells, half-mad with fear of simply being incarcerated in such a place, their chains rattling. Their mind can conjure up a myriad of horrible creatures that might stalk the labyrinthine passageways, what ghosts and ghouls they might find, and the objects they associate with the location: chains, barred cells and windows, and a multitude of torture devices. When one visits a space that used to be a dungeon, one might end up being disappointed: some of the fixtures might be there, but will an empty cell with bars and chains really send the chill up their spine or make them shiver the way they did when they imagined it? Scare attractions can bring their audience to the laboratory, the haunted house, the dungeon; they introduce their visitors to the monsters and critters from the darkest corners of their minds and bring those terrors to life.

Yet is such a themed space experienced in the same way as an actual, lived in space? Wright draws attention to this issue of authenticity:

> Themed environments depend upon a specific limited narrative using film conventions, stereotypes, and fantasy constructions in order to be successful. [...] What is experienced are environments not with the rich complexity of everyday lived symbols, but with only a few symbols or icons that communicate a stripped-down version of a real experience, a safe experience, free from the fear of real challenges to one's bodily or psychological safety. (2007:247-248)

This sentiment is echoed by Jenkins, who states that:

> The most compelling amusement park attractions build upon stories or genre traditions already well-known to visitors, allowing them to enter physically into the spaces they have visited many times before in their fantasies. [...] Such works do not so much tell self-contained stories as draw upon our previously existing narrative competencies. (2004:123)

The same kinds of questions can be raised with regard to a digital environment. The experience across all three forms is based on direct interaction with the medium, even in videogames: when playing, the player's avatar, his or her representation on the screen, acts as the protagonist and the player is thus much more involved in the action: "[E]ven if games may be provided with some symbolic signs, most of the game activity consist in seeing, hearing and doing in a simulation of a real-world interaction" (Grodal, 2003:130). Any scares in the game are aimed directly at the player, similar to the way in which the scares in a haunted attraction are aimed directly at its visitors. The correlation between the two is voiced in a paper by Bernard Perron: "[H]orror videogames are nothing else than Haunted Houses, playgrounds where we come to play at frightening ourselves" (2006a:n.pag.). A similar opinion is voiced by Jay McRoy, which also draws attention to the danger in which players place themselves:

> Survival Horror games heighten this experience by positioning those that play them as active (and interactive) participants in a virtual nightmare. No longer merely spectators, players assume the roles of the frequently imperiled lead characters and, in order to succeed, must rely on their wits, rather than sharpened reflexes, highly developed finger muscles, and impeccable hand-eye coordination. Weapons and ammunition are often scarce, and when a player's character "dies," the game is over; there are no "extra lives." (2006:n.pag.)

Discussing the scares present in horror games, Tanya Krzywinska draws attention to not only the basic shocks, but also notes that:

The element of pre-determination, which lies outside the player's sphere of agency, is therefore linked to the metaphysical dimension in which manicheanism operates. The concept of the moral occult plays a central role in my argument that horror-based videogames are strongly dependent on their capacity to allow players to experience a dynamic between states of *being in control* and *out of control.* (2002:208; emphasis in original)

According to Krzywinska, the presence of a force that lies outside of the player's control adds to the horror experienced by the player. Not only is one playing the game, but the game plays the player, an aspect of horror gaming that more and more designers are trying to implement.[32] Krzywinska's ideas coincide with the control theory of Morreall: the parts of the game experience which cannot be controlled by the player, which put the player in a situation where he is *out of control*, are perceived as frightening and the differences between the experience of movie and game are addressed directly by Krzywinska: "[F]ilms are less able than games to build into their deep structure a concrete experience of being in control and out of control of on-screen events" (2002:216). In addition, games, like scare attractions, rely on an "embodied threat": "[C]ompared to many horror movies, one does not wait until the end to finally face the monster," (Perron, 2009:126) thus creating scares which are much more direct.

Lastly, the issue of authenticity and audience expectations play an important part in the perception of videogames. Not only do the spaces elicit a certain response from a player, but so do the creatures that one encounters, as is described by David Pinchbeck: "[W]hen we see a zombie on screen, in a film or a game, prior understanding of zombies, what they do, how they act, and how we should react to them, not only become available, but influence our responses to them" (2009:84). We enter the attraction with preconceptions of both the space and its inhabitants, yet at the same time, our visit is described by Perron as an "embodied story experience" (2006b:65): "Perception and cognition are [...] not just operations in the head. They are transactions with the world, be it the real world or a virtual one, and lead to actions" (2006b:65). The idea of such an experience implies that the audience approach the narrative with a certain set of expectations. These expectations are then modified as visitors are exposed to the venue and what occurs inside. They enter a world which they can probe and interact with, and the results of these interactions will inform their

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[32] A good example of this is the recent *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories* (Konami, 2010), where the player is given no weapons at all; the only option is to run and hide, at the mercy of the AI. Even more poignantly, the game features interviews with a psychologist and gameplay is modified according to the player's responses to the questions posed in the therapy sessions. Most notably, though, the game itself announced that it 'plays you as much as you play the game.'

approach and decision-making as they progress. A hypothesis about the workings of this unknown world is formed based on these initial interactions and this hypothesis will continue to change as audience test and re-test their ideas while progressing through the play-world (2006b:65).

All three forms (scare attractions, videogames and theme parks) are defined by the agency awarded to their audience in navigating the venue, the play-world which is created for them, creating an experience that is primarily spatial and physical. It is only in scare attractions, however, that the confrontation becomes so important. Where such a clash occurs in a digital environment, it is once again confined to the screen, as is the case with horror movies, and it is difficult to imagine that a meeting with a lovable character in Disneyland will inspire fear. Scare attractions, however, take this meeting one step further, turning it into a confrontation by adding a sense of danger. They create a space that is to be explored, not only to discover a new world, but also to discover a way out.

It is this creation of a world and the manipulation of space that defines scare attractions and leads one back to Artaud's vision of theatre. Artaud's rejection of the idea of theatre-as-mimesis brings more importance to the *mise en scène* and the specific features that performance has to offer, taking the experience beyond writing, text and script. According to Artaud, there should be a theatre which represents life, which *is* life, which does not allow for a gap between life and theatre. Like Artaud's vision, scare attractions put less emphasis on writing in favour of other features of theatrical language, thus creating a complete and sensory experience rather than a detailed plot.

One of the techniques scare attractions use to achieve this is the way in which space is designed and manipulated. It is this process which is reminiscent of the way in which Artaud intended to stage his productions, obliterating the divisions between stage and auditorium and enveloping the audience in what can only be defined as an assault of images and sound. He describes his ideas as follows in *The Theatre and its Double*:

> By eliminating the stage, shows made up and constructed in this manner will extend over the whole auditorium and will scale the walls from the ground up along slender catwalks, physically enveloping the audience, constantly immersing them in light, imagery movements and sound. [...] And just as there are to be no empty spatial areas, there must be no let up, no vacuum in the audience's mind or sensitivity. That is to say there will be no distinct divisions, no gap between life and theatre. (2010:90-91)

Even in the choice of words one can see the connection with scare attractions, and it can be argued that these venues are perhaps the most true to Artaud's aesthetic as they manage to completely eliminate any distance between the audience and the actors, physically dragging them into their world and spitting them out at the exit. The ultimate aim remains different, however: whereas these events simply aim to scare, Artaud intended for the audience to have a different kind of experience, albeit one which often draws on violent and uncomfortable imagery and staging.

In a scare attraction, the audience is surrounded, both by characters and actors, and hemmed in by the space itself. A trip through the London Bridge Experience leads visitors through dark tunnels lined with pipes and building equipment and requires them to carefully navigate both their surroundings and the monsters that might be hidden inside. In addition, the way in which the space is handled, is of note. For 2009, Nightmare used vampires as the inspiration for their attraction, creating the Museum of Vampyric Artifacts (or MoVA for short). Located in an old gym, the attraction featured two stages, if you will: during the day, the museum functioned as just that and audiences could see the exhibits without fear for their lives and with the lights on. At night, the attraction would then transform to introduce the desirable scares and screams, essentially creating a real location for the duration of the run and investing the space with a new meaning.

What has been proposed so far is to view scare attractions as a serious game, and to present them as an experience which is governed by external rules (audience expectations) and internal rules (health and safety guidelines). In addition to this seriousness, however, the idea of the playfulness of the experience cannot be ignored. As the number of attractions continues to grow, it would seem that these kinds of entertainments enjoy a certain degree of success. As such, one can suggest that fear is fun, that escaping certain death is just a game and that, as a result, horror is play. While the first statement undoubtedly rings true, the other two appear to be more problematic. Yet despite the fact that the concept of play is so often equated with mere fun, "[a]s soon as we proceed from "play is non-seriousness" to "play is not serious", the contrast leaves us in the lurch - for some play can be very serious indeed" (Huizinga, 2003:40). As outlined in the introduction, the link between performance horror and play should not be ignored and shows a relation between the two that exists both in physical and more abstract terms. The ideas of Johan Huizinga, especially,

should be taken into consideration when discussing scare attractions, as can be seen from his list of the formal characteristics of play:

> [W]e might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (2003:45-46)

Although Huizinga's ideas were formulated in 1938 and have often been debated since, these basic characteristics still have merit today, and the connection between scare attractions is easy to detect. Although money does change hands, and the venues aim to make a profit, the other characteristics hold up extremely well: the scare attraction adheres to Pinedo's "bounded experience", limited by time and space. It is an activity that is set outside one's normal existence, where one can "come to play at frightening [oneself]" (Perron, 2006a:n.pag.) together with a social group, thus creating a shared experience. The notion of a "free activity" may appear problematic: the path that groups of audience members are to follow when inside the attraction is often planned out and a guide can be used to further limit the freedom of the spectators. At the same time, the form allows for much greater freedom on the part of the patrons. As opposed to a traditional theatre, the visitors of a scare attraction are free to move around, to observe the action from different sides, to volunteer and take part in the performance, to run, to scream. Depending on their actions, they choose how the experience will unfold, even within the framework of rules and guided tours.

Other theorists after Huizinga have used and adapted his ideas, and of these, Roger Caillois will be the most important. In his book *Man, Play, and Games*, Caillois draws attention to the different categories of games, one of which is of particular interest for the current study. As stated by Caillois,

> All play presupposes the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion [...], then at least of a closed, conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe. Play can consist not only of deploying actions or submitting to one's fate in an imaginary milieu, but of becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving. (2001:19)

This form of playing at make-believe is termed mimicry, which:

> With one exception, [...] exhibits all the characteristics of play: liberty, convention, suspension of reality, and delimitation of space and time. However, the continuous submission to imperative and precise rules cannot be observed - rules for the dissimulation of reality and the substitution of a second reality. (2001:22)

Where Caillois explicitly draws attention to the idea of make-believe, Huizinga alludes to the idea of play as illusion both directly and indirectly: "Inside the circle of the game the laws and customs of ordinary life no longer count. We are different and do things differently" (2003:45). In addition, Huizinga discusses the secludedness of play, of its status as different from the ordinary world:

> Play begins, and then at a certain moment it is "over". It plays itself to an end. [...] But immediately connected with its limitation as to time there is a further curious feature of play: it at once assumes fixed form as a cultural phenomenon. Once played, it endures as a new-found creation of the mind, a treasure to be retained by the memory. (2003:43)

Not only do players enter a different world, which may or may not rely on make-believe (a football match in a large stadium is secluded, but not illusory), but the event leaves a lasting impression on the participants, a treasured memory. A game-world is created, experienced and kept, perhaps to be used again on a new occasion, perhaps simply to be remembered. It is this creation of a game-world that creates the connection between play and both theme parks and videogames, as well as scare attractions. Horror requires that you surrender to the experience, that you immerse yourself in its world, and that you play its game.

Again drawing on the connection between the three forms, the rules of horror as outlined in the introduction are firmly in place in each of the media. Despite Caillois' claim that "games are not ruled and make-believe. Rather, they are ruled [or] make-believe," (2001:9) rules will be found in scare attractions. In their most direct form, these rules will take the shape of health and safety requirements, drawing attention to the way in which visitors and performers should behave to ensure the safety and enjoyment of all involved. Yet the perceptions of horror as a genre heavily influence the theatrical experience, and it will be beneficial to remind the reader of Brophy's horrality: "The contemporary horror film knows you've seen it before; it *knows* that you know what is about to happen; and it knows that you know it knows you know" (2000:279; emphasis in original). In a similar fashion, the scare attractions know that you know how horror films work and, as was stated by Carson, "play the audience's expectations

like a violin" (2000:n.pag.). Horror as play has its own rules, the rules of the genre, the unwritten codes that no one can fully describe:

> [T]he "casual" game of tennis that my buddies and I play is really based on an enormously complex set of "rules" - assumptions, traditions, and conventions - that govern our behaviour on the court (whether we are consciously aware of it or not). (Sniderman, cited in Salen, Zimmerman, 2006:17)

This idea of unwritten rules is exhibited in some way by Carroll's words: "[Horror] is not an obscure notion. We manage to use it with a great deal of consensus; note how rarely one has cause to dispute the sorting of items under the rubric of horror in your local videostore" (1990:13). Perron echoes Brophy's attention to "the game that one plays with the text" and cites the ideas of H.P. Lovecraft on the attraction of horror. According to Lovecraft, not everyone is able to enjoy tales of terror:

> The appeal of the spectrally macabre is generally narrow because it demands from the reader a certain degree of imagination and a capacity for detachment from everyday life. Relatively few are free enough from the spell of the daily routine to respond to tappings from outside... (1973:12)

As Perron states, "[r]eformulated nowadays, Lovecraft might as easily have suggested that the appeal of the spectrally macabre demands that one plays its game" (2006a:n.pag.). Horror, and particularly performance horror, invites its audience to join in the fun, to play along and pretend they are really in danger, if only for a little while, and the scare attractions play into these expectations.

The rules of horror also operate in the form of the conventions which so strongly underpin the genre. Confronted with specific scenes or monsters, the audience is likely to know how they are supposed to respond from a cultural perspective. The ways in which this familiarity is handled differ between attractions. Some, such as Alien Wars, clearly embrace their horror movie heritage, inviting the audience into the spaceship from the *Alien* franchise. Pasaje del Terror similarly allows visitors to interact with a number of famous horror monsters: "The unique show brings to life some of the most famous and chilling characters from the horror genre who lure our daring "victims" to a terrifying point of no return! Music and special-effects enhance the hair-raising scenes whilst our heroes pass through Freddy's Boiler-room, Dracula's Crypt and a desecrated cemetery."[33]

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[33] http://www.pasajedelterror.com/ [Accessed: August 3, 2011]

Yet the relation of scare attractions to the horror genre in general is an ambivalent one. When discussing the edutainment scares of the Dungeons and the London Tombs, it can be said that the themes addressed inside the venues position them outside of the genre as a whole: although the horror element is key, it is unlikely that the contents of any of the locations respond to larger trends within the horror genre. Other venues, such as Terror Test, state that they mix "current trends" with their own unique style, whereas Timothy Haskell of Nightmare has said that he follows his own views and does not "comport to the trends of the horror genre" (Carballo, 2009; Haskell, 2009a). Although the links are perhaps not as obvious as in Pasaje del Terror, where visitors go up against well-known movie monsters, genre conventions do underpin many of the attractions in one way or another, as can be seen from the following quote by Jason Karl: "The elements must incorporate reminders of reality, such as textures, smells, architecture and archetypal character types which might remind [the audience] of stories, films, TV shows etc. that they have seen before, therefore can relate to and make associations with" (2011). As with marketing, the conventions can be seen as an indicator, a way to prime the audience as to how they are expected to react, as well as showing them what they can expect from the attraction. The creators know you know that they know you know, and the attractions use this to their advantage.

As opposed to the more traditional theatre pieces, discussed in the first two chapters, scare attractions offer an experience which is closer to a theme park, creating a space and providing a full package of horrific entertainment. With space taking on the role of script, and the audience taking on the role of explorer of this created world, scare attraction provide an embodied, physical and (literally) sensational experience to its visitors. Rather than watching the struggle of others with supernatural occurrences, or providing input in a one-to-many situation, the audience of scare attractions become more of an active participant as opposed to a passive observer as they take on the role of the final girl (or boy) in their own horror story. Yet they are still subjected to these scares, designed by its creators. In the following chapter, the focus will be on a form where the spectators truly liberate themselves as they become part of the performance and the master of their own scares: zombie live action role-playing. In addition, the element of play as discussed here will come to the fore as the idea of a zombie apocalypse survival game is examined in detail.

Chapter 4
Zombies'R'Us: Monstrosity, politics and participation in zombie live action role-playing

> "We are surrounded by the dead, we're among them
> and when we finally give up, we become them!"
> - Robert Kirkman, *The Walking Dead*, Issue #24, 2005:n.pag)

The scene is a dark alleyway, somewhere behind Cardiff Central station. A neon sign of the word 'BRAINS' can be seen in the distance.[34] A number of people wearing high visibility armbands are coming down this little street. They are walking, a normal speed, maybe laughing, joking, talking, yet they are apprehensive. For good reason: before long, a number of figures appear from the shadows, shambling forward. Their breathing is ragged, non-existent; their clothes are torn; they are covered in blood. Gathering speed, they chase after the audience, trying to catch them, perhaps to hurt them, perhaps to infect them. Those with the armbands seem to take no chances as many scream and run, trying to escape the lumbering shapes that are after them, shapes they might just recognise as their friends underneath the heavy makeup and fake blood.

This brief sketch allows a glimpse of the experience provided by one of several zombie live action role-playing (LARP) events, specifically the 2.8 Hours Later event, designed by SlingShot Productions. It is this highly immersive form which will be discussed in this final chapter. As has already been stated, performance horror asks, or in some cases even demands, spectators to invest in their experience, to get involved in creating their own horror story. It is in this chapter that I will draw more heavily on the ideas of Augusto Boal as outlined in the introduction. Participants of LARP are drawn, perhaps even dragged, into the performance and thus become part of the experience. In each of the forms discussed, the audience is asked to take on a more active role, whether through direct address by actors in the theatre, or by moving through and interacting with their environment in scare attractions. In these instances, however, a

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[34] SA Brains (http://www.sabrain.com/) is a brand of beer and markets itself as the national brew of Wales. Established in 1882, its brewery is located in the heart of Cardiff, behind Cardiff Central Station. As such, its iconic sign became part of the route of the 2013 production of 2.8 Hours Later in the city.

certain level of passivity remains as patrons are subjected to the scares provided by script, actors and effects, the audience cast into the role of victim.

By contrast, zombie events change this dynamic and alter the politics of the performance as spectators become true spect-actors, acting as monster, as victim of infection, as survivor, fighting for their life. LARP allows the audience to become that which they are scared of and shapes their experience of the event in a fundamental way. What follows is a more detailed definition and examination of the terminology used. The concept of live action role-playing, which is tied very closely with the genre of fantasy, needs to be explored in more detail. In addition, the way in which these events are structured and the type of engagement they require from their audience is fundamentally different from other performance forms. As a result, a new approach and different critical terms are needed to capture the nature of zombie events, and it is this theoretical exploration that will be the focus of this chapter. This is followed by a closer look at the concept of the zombie, as well as an examination of several case studies, although the focus will be on the work of SlingShot.

A number of (primarily commercial) events that present an interactive, and most often confrontational, zombie-related performance experience will be discussed. The confrontation here arises from the classic scenario of most zombie films: a tragedy befalls humanity as most people are turned into zombies. The last few survivors will have to try and escape the undead hordes in a desperate attempt to save themselves, and perhaps even the future of mankind. As such, these events create a combat-type scenario of survivors versus zombies. In addition to these types of experiences, there exist the so-called zombie walks, in which a group of individuals get together in a public place, dressed as all manner of undead, and infect it with their presence. The essence of these walks, however, differs from the events under scrutiny here insofar as the fact that they are comparatively passive: zombie walks are about being there, as opposed to the survivalist approach taken by the commercial events. In LARP, players are confronted with the horde and actively try to combat them, with the horde fighting back. Zombie walks, by contrast, offer merely a presence rather than an active interaction, as described by Simone Do Vale: "Dolled up as the living dead, participants follow a previously planned route whose goal is crossing each town's busiest spots: malls, parks and main boulevards" (2010:191-192).

The discussion will focus on the work done by Zed Events and two of the experiences they offer (the Mall Experience and Be a Zombie), as well as the 2.8 Hours

Later event, created by SlingShot. Although apparently no longer active, the website of Zombie LARP UK provides some interesting information on the way in which their style of game is run and what is expected of its players. Zombie Survival Weekender and Zombie Boot Camp allow participants a glimpse of a more military style of zombie gaming. The events listed here are perhaps the best known zombie entertainments currently available in the UK. These case studies were chosen as each offers its own unique take on the phenomenon, incorporating a variety of well-known tropes as well as new ideas. The main source, however, has been the work by SlingShot and 2.8 Hours Later as I was able to take part in both the 2013 and 2014 productions of the event in Cardiff, as well as conduct an interview with Simon Johnson, one of its creators. Attempts were made to contact the other companies, but no response was received.

As is the case with the scare attractions discussed in chapter 3, the companies behind each of the events listed do not necessarily possess a strong theatrical grounding. Influences are more likely to originate from horror films and video games as opposed to performance. Any background information available tends to focus on the scenarios and backstories rather than provide an insight into the experience of those involved in the creation and staging of these events. Zombie Boot Camp, for instance, emphasizes the training of the audience and uses individuals with an army background to facilitate much of their event. The concept of LARP will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter, but the group behind Zombie LARP is simply a group of players who enjoy the physical aspect that live action role-playing games provide. The best comparison, perhaps, would be with an amateur dramatics group staging a zombie apocalypse scenario. A similar grassroots approach can be seen in the case of the Zombie Survival Weekender, which is based around the enthusiasm of a select group. Despite this small start, this event continues to grow in terms of scale, number of employees and attendance.

By contrast, Zed Events draws attention to the content of the production, presenting themselves as a company responsible for events management and focusing primarily on what type of experience is offered to those who decide to take part; again, there is no clear evidence of a background in performance. Similarly, SlingShot, the company behind 2.8 Hours Later, is more closely affiliated with events management and interactive forms of theatre as opposed to a background in more traditional performance. The company is behind the successful street theatre festival IgFest[35],

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[35] http://slingshoteffect.co.uk/ourgames/17-igfest [Accessed: February 5, 2015]

founded in 2008 in Bristol. 2.8 Hours Later, their zombie chase game, has evolved from this type of work, with a number of previous street theatre games listed on their website. In the interview, Simon Johnson also emphasized that SlingShot does not have any links to the scare industry nor do they aspire to have any: rather, 2.8 Hours Later grew from other work the company has done and the event has since become wildly successful.

For each event and company, however, the site or space used is far outside the realm of what is considered a traditional performance space. In the case of Zombie Boot Camp and the Zombie Survival Weekender, the events take place outside and are part of a larger remit of survival training, which happens to include zombies. The emphasis here is on the model of an army boot camp or a camping weekend, rather than on performance. Zed Events similarly does not use traditional theatre sites, but here the emphasis is on providing audiences with an experience that is very filmic in nature. The scenarios used are drawn from the classic zombie cinema of George A. Romero and takes participants to the sites of the manor house from *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968) and the mall from *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978). It is against this background that the event will play out and audience are required to act and make choices that will allow them to escape the zombie apocalypse. The sites used are specifically designed by the company to facilitate these experiences.

In the case of 2.8 Hours Later, the zombie chase game can best be described as site-generic, with the event being presented in a large number of different cities across the UK. The story of the apocalypse is told to the audience through a number of scenes, each of which is tied to a location in a city, which participants need to find. Routes can be up to four miles in length, and traversing the space becomes as much a part of the experience as any interactions with performers or zombies. The locations of encounters are carefully selected, but will of course change between cities, or even between runs (the locations used in Cardiff during the run of 2013 and 2014 were completely different). Again, the event mostly takes place outside, in an urban environment, and is ultimately dynamic, using an audience in motion, rather than the static spectator of the traditional theatre.

What is true for all of these events, however, is the level of success. Exposure for these types of experiences continues to grow, with recent coverage on the BBC website as a good example.[36] In the case of 2.8 Hours Later, for instance, the length of

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[36] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-28058437 [Accessed: July 15, 2014]

the runs has been steadily growing, with events selling out months in advance and close to a thousand individuals taking part in the game each night.

LARP is makebelieve for adults on steroids (Stark, 2012:xi)

In the introduction I have already hinted at some of the qualities of live action role-playing, qualities which will be examined in more detail here. Firstly, the aim is to examine some of the existing definitions of LARP, before discussing these in relation to zombie events, in particular. It should be noted that the study of role-playing games and events, and LARPing specifically, is a relatively new discipline. As a result, not much literature is available on this particular topic. However, in any discussion of the form, the starting point is its origins in the Dungeons and Dragons tabletop role-playing games, designed by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and first published in 1974. Taking its inspiration from fantasy literature and fairy tales, Dungeons and Dragons allowed players to put themselves into the action. Every game is headed by the so-called game master, who will guide the story, with the players taking on the role of a number of adventures of different races and with different qualities. Using these abilities, the players will be pitted against monsters and challenges, with the ultimate goal for their characters to survive and get stronger as they progress through the story. These narratives, termed campaigns, can be pre-produced or written by the game masters themselves. This entire process takes place between the imaginations of people, around a table, on pen and paper and acted out with spoken actions and dice rolls. Although game boards are available, these are purely for illustration or to act out small scenes. The grand cities, dark woods or dank dungeons that the players traverse are conjured up as a joined fantasy between participants and the game master as they sit around the table, travelling to distant fantastical lands.

With LARP, the model remains largely the same as one or more game masters create a story for players to interact with. Rather than this interaction taking place indoors, with pen and paper, however, the game is taken outside and the action unfolds in real time. Hitting a monster no longer consists of a roll of the dice, but of actually hitting a monster with a fake sword. The definition put forward by Ethan Gilsdorf provides a good starting point for what LARP is:

> LARPs are all about 24/7 immersive role-play. They take the fantasy a step beyond. You create a character, invent a backstory, put on makeup, dress the part, and physically wander around a real setting, interacting with other players

and making up the banter as you go along. And occasionally you beat the crap out of them. (2009:87)

More basic, perhaps, but equally valid is Lizzie Stark's description: "Essentially, larp is makebelieve for adults on steroids" (2012:xi). What can be glimpsed from both definitions is the idea of interaction, immersion and involvement. The audience becomes a participant rather than a spectator, taking part in aspects of creation and realisation. As a result, it seems more fitting to switch to the idea of a participant or player, a process which is highlighted by Stark: "it's a type of game that tells a story, which is acted out in real time by players who improvise all their lines" (2011:n.pag.). Gilsdorf draws attention to the symbiotic relationship between those who oversee the game and its players:

> Like in D&D [Dungeons & Dragons], behind-the-scenes game masters dream up the LARP's adventures, puzzles, and foes that players will encounter. They're also like theater directors and set designers, adding props and wearing costumes to make the illusions more convincing. (2009:87)

As with the tabletop game, the players take on an active role, but rather than simply describing their character and his or her actions, they now have the opportunity to *become* their character.

From the words of both authors, the link between LARP and the fantasy genre becomes clear. Although many different types of games exist, the fantasy aspect is often retained with games taking place in worlds different from our own, whether in a swords and sorcery, steampunk or horror scenario. In addition, most LARP events offer a collaborative attempt to build and advance a story; combat may be part of the plot set out by the game masters, but there often is no clear winner-loser division. One definition of zombie events, however, taken from the Zombie LARP website, indicates some of the differences between fantasy and zombie LARP:

> Zombie LARP is a physical action game which recreates the thrills and atmosphere of zombie horror movies. The dead are returning to life and eating the flesh of the living. The question is: what are you going to do about it? (http://zombielarp.co.uk/what-is-zombie-larp/)

What is found here is, firstly, the emphasis on the game aspect, the idea that rather than a collaborative effort, the event can be won or lost. It also simplifies the narrative: many traditional LARP events can run for multiple days, with campaigns growing, developing over time and sometimes taking years to complete. By contrast, many zombie events

compact their plot into that one question: "The zombies are coming; what are you going to do about it?"

As a result, the question arises whether live action role-playing might not be an adequate label for the zombie events described here. If called *zombie LARP*, what does this mean for the form under examination? Do all elements indeed contribute to create such an experience? In order to answer this question, it seems helpful to break down the definition into its separate components, starting with 'live action'.

The events discussed here consists of a live experience, which may appear an obvious thing to point out. Throughout this study, attention has been drawn to the role of liveness in performance horror and its impact on an audience, and the works of both Gilsdorf and Stark draw attention to this aspect in relation to LARPing. Quoting a player, Gilsdorf states that: "There was a physical reality to it all. When a monster bore down on you, it was literally bearing down on you, and in real time" (2009:95). Stark similarly draws a comparison with computer games:

> Computer games, with their realistic scenery, are nothing compared to a larp. Sure, a computer character can wear cool armor and swoop through the detailed landscape of the game world, but in a larp, players actually stalk down their enemies in the woods… (2012:xi)

The live action element is key for the experience, and changes the dynamic of performance. In plays and scare attractions, the creative team will still have the upper hand as they choreograph an experience for their audience. Their role changes, however, in the context of zombie LARP: rather than performer, they become facilitator, and the audience become players, participants. They are no longer subjected to the scares aimed at them, but become part of the experience (and, as will be shown later in this chapter, can become part of the scares themselves). With all forms discussed so far, it has been shown that the audience becomes more involved in order to aid the effects the creators are trying to achieve. What sets LARP apart, however, is its insistence on this immersion: the audience is responsible for their own experience. If they do not play, they will have no experience:

> But no matter what the LARP genre - espionage, historical reenactment, science fiction, swords-and-sorcery - the concept is the same. The directors set the story in motion, but there is no script. The better an improv actor you are, the more fun you'll have. (Gilsdorf, 2009:88)

With the delivery of a detailed plot on the stage, or a complete themed package in a scare attraction, there is little work left to do for an audience. Zombie events, however, need an active spectator: the games of 2.8 Hours Later are, literally, city-wide and require players to move from location to location and using their wits to gather information and ultimately escape infection. A passive audience is impossible as they would not make it past the first location.

This notion of active investment also relates to the second aspect of the concept, that of role-playing, the idea of taking on a persona that is not your own. The term is closely examined by Michael Hitchens and Anders Drachen in their paper "The Many Faces of Role-Playing Games" (2008). In their article, they set out to find a definition of the term, a process which is problematic enough within their specific remit and, as will be shown, becomes more problematic still when discussing zombie events. As part of their paper, Hitchens and Drachen discuss existing definitions of the term, and it is worth quoting two of these here:

> [A role-playing game is] any game which allows a number of players to assume the roles of imaginary characters and operate with some degree of freedom in an imaginary environment. (Lortz, in: Hitchens, Drachen, 2008:5-6)

> A role-playing situation is here defined as a situation in which an individual is explicitly asked to take on a role not normally his own, or if his own in a setting not normal for the enactment of the role. (Mann, in: Hitchens, Drachen, 2008:6)

The sources used by Hitchens and Drachen correspond with the views of traditional LARP described above. They stress the agency of the player and the participants' ability and freedom to design and embody a fictional character In addition, they draw attention to the fantastical nature of this role and the potential for an unfamiliar setting. Indeed, adopting the character of an orc barbarian, an elven mage or a Victorian time traveller seems to connect very well with the criteria set out by both authors quoted above.

Genre, however, presents an issue here. When considering the definition of zombie LARP mentioned earlier, what roles are there for a player to take on? Any mythical warriors or creatures do not belong to the possibilities as the games play out in a world which largely resembles our own. Is the role of survivor in the zombie narrative as clearly defined, and as clearly different (in the words of Mann: to explicitly take on a role) as that of a dwarf warrior? Or is there even another role for the audience to take on beyond the label of 'survivor'? It seems that zombie LARP awards its participants much less freedom of choice, and that the role-playing aspect may not be as clearly

defined for this particular form. This lack of freedom might be due to one of the definitions of the horror genre taken from Daniel Shaw, who quotes Robin Wood in stating that: "Normality comes in conflict with the monstrous, and it is "the relationship between normality and the monster that constitutes the essential subject of the horror film" (2001:n.pag.). The horror occurs when normal life is disrupted as a result of the presence of an abnormal entity, entities, or influence. Where fantasy, as the name shows, might transport its audience to any number of fantastical settings which may or may not be related or connected to their day-to-day experience, horror is most often grounded in a realistic setting or at least offers the possibility for reality.

Tzvetan Todorov's model on genre and the fantastic provides a means to clarify this distinction. As discussed previously, for Todorov, "the fantastic, we have seen, lasts only as long as a certain hesitation" (1975:41) and at the end of the story, the reader will make a decision based on what they have read:

> If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous. (1975:41)

The uncanny includes those works in which "events are related which may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected" (Todorov, 1975:46), whereas "[i]n the case of the marvelous, supernatural elements provoke no particular reaction either in the characters or in the implicit reader. It is not an attitude towards the events described which characterizes the marvelous, but the nature of these events" (Todorov, 1975:54). Using Todorov's framework, classic swords and sorcery fantasy finds itself squarely in the genre of the marvellous: supernatural events, magic spells and potions and the existence of other races are readily accepted as part of the narrative and are not seen as out of place.

By contrast, the zombie narrative offers an experience that is close to Todorov's definition of the uncanny: the events may not have happened, but they *could* be true, they *are* possible. Most of the productions discussed here pick up on this and present participants with a scenario which focuses on the decline and decay of society as they know it. This idea is embraced by the organisers of these events: descriptions on websites include the notion that the event functions as "survival training for the zombie apocalypse", making sure that "you'll be ready if this happens". Since the success of

Max Brooks' *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003), many people have their own survival plan, and some of these have even been adopted on an institutional basis. Peter Dendle describes the activities of some online communities:

> The line between reality and fiction often seems blurred in some of these individualistic communities, which (drawing inspiration from Max Brooks' successful and imaginative 2003 book *The Zombie Survival Guide*) argue about ranged vs. close-quarter weapons, fuel types, and defensible terrains. […] While most of these zombie fans state explicitly that zombies do not really exist at the current time, they admit that zombie outbreaks are a possibility. (2007:53)

Another example of this process can be found in the paper from Stephen Boluk and Wylie Lenz and their description of a document entitled "Zombie Attack: Disaster Preparedness Simulation Exercise #5 (DR5)" as published by the University of Florida as a similar hybrid between fact and fiction (2011:1-2). Although these types of documents can easily be seen as jokes, a tongue-in-cheek aside to set the mood, they are telling all the same. The fact that all companies under discussion here use real life settings only confirms this idea. Is the event a work of fiction, a fun game to play, or rather a rehearsal for the apocalypse that will surely come?

As previously suggested, the insistence on reality presents consequences for the behaviour of the players. Rather than the freedom described by Lortz and Mann, it can be argued that such a setting imposes limitations and draws specific responses from the players. Do they experience the same freedom as they would in a fantasy scenario in the creation of a character and the way they act within the story? Do they even have a character? One could question the impact of the rules of horror and of familiarity with the concept. The zombie narrative has become a classic of the genre with its own formulae and archetypal characters. Is the player in a zombie event offered the same freedom as a participant in a fantasy game, or do they feel they are offered this option? To what extent do the participants take on a role and adopt a fictional character?

I would like to put forward the suggestion that the realism of the setting and the familiarity with the story create a certain imposition on players. Rather than freely choosing and creating, it seems more likely that they perform a version of themselves, perhaps stronger or more heroic, but a version which is not as alien to them as the aforementioned orc barbarian or time traveller. In addition, given the now classic zombie lore, a character type could be adopted: dressing up by players is often part of the events and many references to other zombie narratives can be found within these motley crews. The freedom of fantasy becomes limited and the question changes from

"who is this player?" to "who should they be?", or, perhaps more specific, "who do they feel they should be?" according to the rules of the genre. The players are simply the players, not a mixed band of humans, elves and dwarves, and as such, they are still the same type of audience, albeit an active one.

This situation and the behaviour of the players call into question the use of LARP as terminology in relation to zombie events, but perhaps it is too early to make such an assumption. In the conclusion to their paper, Hitchens and Drachen list a number of characteristics, which, for them, define the essence of a role-playing game:

1. Game world
      A role-playing game is set in an imaginary world…
2. Participants
      …are divided between players […] and game masters…
3. Characters
      ...are defined individuals in the game world, not […] only as roles or
      functions
4. Game master
      At least one, but not all, of the participants has control over the game
      world beyond a single character.
5. Interaction
      …a wide range of options… usually including at least combat, dialogue
      and object interaction.
6. Narrative
      …some sequence of events within the game world. (2008:16)

As has become clear from the discussion up to this point, some of these criteria present difficulties when trying to apply them to these zombie events. The game master is the one in charge, but the relation between them and the players is often symbiotic as disputes are discussed and settled or people work towards the outcome of a certain game event, rather than a strict top-down relationship. There is little or no room for character, at least not in the sense in which this is understood by Hitchens and Drachen in their definition of the term. Due to health and safety, combat interaction is highly regulated in zombie events, also because these tend to be commercial ventures as opposed to the more grassroots 'let's get together' approach of many LARP groups.

Because of these issues, I propose an amendment of the qualities ascribed by Hitchens and Drachen. It could be argued that the terminology should be dismissed outright, but the use of environment in the narrative, the liveness and activity of the participants and their entry into a world which may be very much like their own, yet

different, leave enough of a framework to facilitate a discussion of these events. Taking the above list as a basis, I would like to put forward the following categories:

    [Fantasy LARP   -   Zombie LARP]
    1. Game world   -   Real world location
    2. Participants -   Consumers
    3. Characters   -   Performance of self
    4. Game master -   Facilitator
    5. Interaction -   Immersion
    6. Narrative   -   Environment

Although there still exists an insistence on an active audience, the relationship between creator, or game master, and player will be different due to the commercial nature of the event. As a paying audience, participants will be expecting a certain standard of quality in experience and production values. As such, the terminology of consumer and facilitator seems more appropriate. As argued above, issues of genre and reality impeach on the freedom of the players to be where and who they want to be. The fantastical setting and characters become, rather, a version of their world and of themselves.

Finally, as with scare attractions, the narrative of many of the zombie events boils down to the occurrence of a zombie apocalypse and the participants' battle for survival. Interaction with actors is possible, but there will be less dialogue than one might expect in a LARP setting, where players are in character constantly, interacting with each other. Again, the reality of the experience changes the dynamic between players and between players and their surroundings, and it is these surroundings that take on a pivotal role because of the use of plot. The environment they traverse takes on the role of a storyteller as players need to hunt for locations or clues and move from place to place in 2.8 Hours Later. The Mall, produced by Zed Events, takes a different approach as players need to fight their way to the roof of an old shopping centre, overrun by zombies. The roof is where the helicopter is which will transport them to safety, and traversing the building becomes the narrative.

Yet, although I have chosen the description of zombie LARP here, is this the same approach chosen by the events? Taken from their individual websites, the descriptions below show how each production depicts itself.

- Zed Events: How would you survive the zombie apocalypse?; Zed Events provides the most realistic zombie survival experiences in the UK
- Zombie Survival Weekender: Information on Survival Kits, Equipment Lists, Terrifying Tales, Skills Share

- Ram Training: Zombie Boot Camp amongst training/survival camps; it is billed as a Zombie Combat Event with "military trainers who will help you prepare Plan B"
- 2.8 Hours Later advertises itself on the website as "the city wide zombie chase game."

Three out of four offer an experience that seems close to the way in which something such as paintballing is marketed: a physical activity that takes place in a specific location or space. The promotional material includes references to corporate events or stag and hen parties, offering a packaged deal of zombies as a commodity. Interestingly enough, the same three clearly show an insistence on reality. The experience is not for laughs, it is not fun; it is necessary and vital for future survival. What if the zombie apocalypse was to happen *now*; did you receive the right training, are you ready? Yet despite the fact all three might present a possibility, zombies (at this point in time) do not roam the streets, they are not real, and the experience is still an imaginary one.

By contrast, 2.8 Hours Later first and foremost markets itself as a game, as a way of having fun. Simon Johnson of 2.8 Hours Later made it very clear in the interview that they focus on play, on an experience in which the participant can "live intentionally" (2013). He continues, "play is playful, and is completely of the moment," (2013), and according to him, it is a way of allowing people to be completely (in the) present. In addition, Johnson draws attention to the way in which he and the company run the event. "We provide players with a context, with tools, to create their own narrative. The experience will always be a personal one; what we do is to help create the memory and add meaning" (2013). Perhaps it is not a role, but any spectators will most certainly be participating, and, more importantly, playing.

We ARE the Walking Dead (Kirkman, 2005:n.pag)

The participants may be playing, but as what? Having explored the concept of LARP in some detail, it is necessary to pay some attention to the figure of the zombie and its role in these events. A (very) brief history of the creature, as described by Boluk and Lenz, paints a picture of a specific kind of monster:

> Responding to the specific technological and cultural anxieties of each historical era, the evolution of the modern figure of the zombie can be roughly divided into three generations: the Haitian voodoo zombie, George Romero's living dead, and the pathologized, infected humans who behave *as if they were living dead*… (2011:3; emphasis in original)

The zombie has always been the subject, rather than the object, as argued by Sarah Lauro and Karen Embry: "In its history, and in its metaphors, the zombie is most often a slave" (2008:87). The zombie started out as the zombi of Haitian legends, a person who may not be dead, but rather controlled by the powers of another, as described by Kevin Boon: "The zombie of Haitian legend, the dead risen to work the sugar plantations and serve the needs of the Nganga (Haitian medicine men) and farmers" (2007:35). In its adoption by George Romero and American popular culture, its role began to change: "In its passage from zombi to zombie, this figuration that was at first just a somnambulistic slave singly raised from the dead became evil, contagious, and plural" (Lauro, Embry, 2008:88). The quiet worker would now attack, infect and reproduce itself. As a result, the figure seems to gain in power yet at the same time remains mindless and is often equated with the dark side of capitalism: "As a nonconscious, consuming machine, the cinematic zombie terrifies because it is a reflection of modern-day commercial society, propelled only by its need to perpetually consume" (Lauro, Embry, 2008:99). Dendle describes a similar role for the zombie:

> Whether zombies are created by a vodun master or by a mad scientist, the process represents a psychic imperialism: the displacement of one person's right to experience life, spirit, passion, autonomy, and creativity for another person's exploitive gain. In this sense, the zombie has served variously as a tool of empowerment and social change, as well as one of complacent reinforcement of the status quo, in its 75-year history as a cinematic icon. (2007:48)

Lauro and Embry argue, however, that the figure of the zombie straddles this divide of power, and that "[t]he zombie is currently understood as simultaneously powerless and powerful, slave and slave rebellion" (2008:98): "As such, the zombie metaphor (like its mythological parent, the Haitian zombi) is not purely a slave but is also a slave rebellion. While the human is incarcerated in mortal flesh, the zombie presents a grotesque image that resists this confinement – animating his body even beyond death" (Lauro, Embry, 2008:90).

What becomes clear already are the changes that have occurred to the zombie and what it represents since its first appearances. One thing, however, always remains at the forefront: zombies, in a way, are the most human of all the classic monsters. As Simon Pegg describes: "Where their pointy-toothed cousins [vampires and werewolves] are all about sex and bestial savagery, the zombie trumps all by personifying our deepest fear: death. Zombies are our destiny writ large" (2008:n.pag.). Zombies are death personified: they are the living dead and as such a prime example of the abject, as Kelly

Hurley argues: "They violate categories, most notably (and alarmingly) breaking down the distinction between human and inhuman, human and animal" (2007:137). As in Kristeva's definition, the abject is about breaking boundaries and subverting order; it is that which should not be. The zombie body is deceased, yet still moving; often, it is wounded, yet these wounds have no consequences other than heightening the feeling of revulsion: "The body's secretions and excretions are abject, breaching the boundary between the (seemingly self-contained) body and the external world" (Hurley, 2007:138) It is this process that is described in detail by Fred Botting:

> Zombies are distinctly abject figures in form and effect: dead, rotting flesh, ripped skin, mutilated features, broken limbs and bodies that continue to move as though they were alive, these nonbeings are without any redeeming features- compassion, feeling, intelligence, or wit- and remain intent on reducing every living thing to their level, feasting relentlessly and mechanically on the blood, brains and bowels of other beings. Just as one cannot love one's abjection, casting it out in order to survive, so one cannot love one's zombie, contrary to some critical assertions. Abject, they manifest what is most revolting, abhorrent, and unbearable in living beings, the elements of life and death that must be ejected for life to continue apart from death. Zombies resolutely remain cross borders, severing body and mind, will and action, instinct and meaning. They have nothing to do, nowhere to go, other than consume without thought, meaning, or feeling. (2010:187)

Although, as Pegg points out, zombies are closer to humans than vampires and werewolves, it is not a desirable state of being, or a balance that is possible:

> Humanity defines itself by its individual consciousness and its personal agency: to be a body without a mind is to be subhuman, animal; to be a human without agency is to be a prisoner, a slave. The zombie(i)/e is both of these, and the zombie(i)/e (fore)tells our past, present, and future. (Lauro, Embry, 2008:90)

The shape might be human, and they may still move upright (if possible), but there is no consciousness. Loss of self, of agency, is inherent to becoming a zombie: "To succumb is to become, and once you have become a zombie, self is lost irrevocably to the other" (Boon, 2007:35). According to Lauro and Embry, it is this aspect that makes the zombie so frightening a creature:

> Nowhere is this drama more acutely embodied than in the model of the zombie attack: for the zombie is an antisubject, and the zombie horde is a swarm where no trace of the individual remains. […] There is the primary fear of being devoured by a zombie, a threat posed mainly to the physical body, and the secondary fear that one will, in losing one's consciousness, become a part of the monstrous horde. (2008:89)

This idea is echoed by Kim Paffenroth: "Zombies are the only humanoid threat that will bring about the end of civilization by turning all of us into them" (2011:18). Yet, although a human may become a zombie, the primal difference, the loss of self, of the individual, of the rational, creates a rift which cannot be bridged, as Gerry Canavan argues: "The audience for zombie narrative, after all, never imagines *itself* to be zombified; zombies are always other people, which is to say they are Other people, which is to say they are people who are not quite people at all" (2010:432; emphasis in original). In fact, any interaction between the two is problematic: "The zombie's mutilation is not one we can easily imagine for "ourselves," however that "we" is ultimately constituted; the zombie is rather the toxic infection that must *always* be kept at arm's length" (Canavan, 2010:433; emphasis in original). Canavan takes his point even further; interaction is not just problematic, but impossible: "Zombies – lacking interior, lacking mind – cannot look; they are, for this reason, completely realized colonial objects. Zombies cannot be recognized, accommodated, or negotiated with; once identified, they must immediately be killed" (2010:437).

All of this information pertains to the zombie horror fans are familiar with, the undead monster that roams streets, cities, countries, slowly shambling and mindlessly feeding, inching ever closer. It is this narrative that is followed by the events: the scenario of the looming apocalypse, with the audience cast as participants. Most common, and perhaps most obvious and (arguably) natural, spectators take on the role of survivor, navigating and trying to escape the post-apocalyptic landscape whilst fighting off the zombies. The abject body of a mindless creature would not appear to be a desirable state to be in. A number of events, however, particularly Zed Events' Be a Zombie and SlingShot's 2.8 Hours Later, offer the players a chance to play at being (un)dead, to be the monster.

The state of being Other is clearly coded by scholars as being undesirable; why then would participants choose to take on this role? There are a number of ways in which to approach this question. As described previously, many of these events toe the line between reality and fiction, ultimately presenting their activities as a form of preparation for the inevitable. Undertaking survival training in order to be safe when the apocalypse hits can be seen as one possible option in a future overrun by monsters. As such, becoming the zombie is the other side of the coin. Images of the apocalypse tend to present infection as the final state of being as survivors are ultimately overrun and

assimilated by the zombie horde. The training offered at these events supposes that the participants will be among the last men and women on Earth, but what if they are not? Being a zombie may be a rehearsal for a future that is ultimately inevitable: "In the end, no matter what we do or how we live, we too must die and come back and be just like them. Zombies are our only possible future, our already actual present; zombies inherit the earth" (Canavan, 2010:441). Death will always be the conclusion to any life, and the undead will always have a stronger position.

Daniel Shaw's essay on the relationship between horror and feelings of power provides a different approach to this question. Shaw identifies the question of disgust and fascination, stating that: "The problem is to explain how we are *both* attracted to *and* repulsed by the monstrous threat that such a [monstrous] force embodies" (2001:n.pag.; emphasis in original). He argues that:

> Horror films are, in my estimation, most fundamentally power struggles between human protagonists and monstrous or psychotic antagonists. Much of the pleasure that we take in them is derived from two sources: 1) Identifying with the horrifying force, and vicariously enjoying the havoc that it wreaks; and 2) Sharing in the triumph that the human protagonists usually achieve over that force. (Shaw, 2001:n.pag.)

Using Shaw's argument, the desire to be the monster is no longer a strange one. Players might want to play dead and take delight in being the 'bad guy' in terms of the power this position brings. Adults rarely get the chance to dress up and pretend; doing so in the company of other people, setting out to scare, offers its own attraction. What is not to like about being the one who makes people scream, as opposed to being the one who is made to scream? I will return to these issues of power later in the chapter.

In addition, it can be argued that Botting's idea of the Disneygothic rings particularly true in this context: perhaps the zombie is no longer as much Other as they once were. In the move from controlled zombi and the victim of (possibly) radiation to infected humans "who behave *as if they were living dead…*" (Boluk, Lenz, 2011:3; emphasis in original), the modern zombie is perhaps more human than any of its predecessors, the Other becoming the other, the distinction fading. The zombie has been appropriated and, as a result, domesticated, much like Michonne, a character from *The Walking Dead*, has done with her charges. In both the comic and the series, she is

first seen leading two zombies on chain leads[37]: the one who feeds on living flesh is controlled by humans, the former colonial subject now in control of others like her.

When combined with the resurgence of popularity of the zombie in recent years, and its seemingly ubiquitous appearances in books, comics, films, videogames, it would seem that the zombies have turned into the consumer product they themselves set out to consume. Instead of being frightening, a dark harbinger of death, the monster has lost its teeth. Taking the game *Plants vs. Zombies* (PopCap Games, 2009) as an example, the zombie horde has been appropriated and turned into a set of cute cartoon characters, which can be seen in the game[38] and even bought as plushies.[39]

Yet is this development simply a question of submission, power and domestication? If the zombie apocalypse is indeed our future, it might be useful for humanity to adopt a different approach, and a number of recent media offer a new opinion. Rather than a mindless monster, they show what could be seen as the human zombie, a zombie which retains or recovers a semblance of humanity. Although other examples exist[40], the process appears to have started with *Shaun of the Dead* (Wright, 2004), the zombie romantic comedy (or zomromcom) starring Simon Pegg and Nick Frost as best friends Shaun and Ed, fighting their way through a zombie invasion. After numerous hardships, Ed gets bitten and turns as a result. At the end of the film, Shaun can be seen sneaking into the shed at the back of his house. It is here that he keeps Ed, now a zombie, to still be friends and engage in the activities they both enjoyed when Ed was still human (primarily videogames). Despite being a monster, Ed retains some of his old characteristics and capabilities, enough for Shaun to regard and treat him as the friend he used to have (albeit one he has to keep chained in the shed). A similar moment occurs when Shaun's stepfather, Phillip is revealed to be bitten and later turns. He and Shaun settle their differences before Phillip turns into a zombie, and rather than being shot, he is left behind. These moments, however, are offset with scenes such as a large scale zombie attack on Shaun and Ed's favourite pub, where the undead are almost joyously killed to the tune of Queen's "Don't Stop Me Now".

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[37] Michonne as she is first introduced in the comic, on the cover of Issue 19: http://i3.squidoocdn.com/resize/squidoo_images/800/draft_lens18767723module154550805photo_1321618883walking-dead-comic-issue- and the TV series: http://cdn.bleedingcool.net/wp-content/uploads//2012/03/michonne.jpg?f6a06b [Accessed: Nov. 19, 2013]
[38] http://www.walls360.com/v/vspfiles/photos/9151-2.jpg [Accessed: Nov. 19, 2013]
[39] http://www.pvzstore.com/plants-vs-zombies-plush-and-toys/zombie-plush-toy-9-inch.html [Accessed: Nov. 19, 2013]
[40] George Romero's *Day of the Dead* (1985), for example, features such a character: "Romero includes in this film a "smart" zombie, Bub, who shows himself in many ways to be preferable to the more evil humans, Rhodes and Logan". (Paffenroth, 2011:21)

The film *Colin* (Price, 2008), reportedly shot with a £45 budget, takes a different approach and shows the zombie inside us. Title character Colin joins the ranks of the undead early on in the film and the viewer is then offered a glimpse of the world from the perspective of the undead. He is, however, a zombie with distinctly human characteristics, who seems to remember faces and people from his previous life, following a girl who resembles his friend Laura and ultimately finding his way to Laura's home.

Yet *Colin* is not alone in this approach: Isaac Marion's novel *Warm Bodies*, released in 2010 and adapted into a film by Jonathan Levine in 2013, similarly draws attention to the idea of a possible cure. The story of *Warm Bodies* is told through the internal monologue of R, a male zombie in the early stages of decay. The now traditional need for cannibalism is described, and a reason is offered as to why a zombie always goes for the brain: it allows them to briefly relive the feelings, thoughts and memories of their victims. It will prove to be human emotions, in particular his love for the living girl Julie that ultimately cures R of his zombie-ism. The loss of humanity is not irreversible, and it is that exact same humanity that will revive the dead. The approach in the BBC miniseries *In the Flesh* (dir. Campbell, Thomas; 2013) is more practical than the power of love. After a zombie outbreak, global governments have been able to isolate and find a cure for the virus, or at least, to suppress the violent urges that come with it. The undead exist together in rehabilitation facilities, where they get their medication, as well as group therapy, to deal with memories of their violent acts during the outbreak, with the ultimate goal to reintegrate them into society.

The zombie, however, is not the only monster that is moving away from its monstrosity. Franchises such as *True Blood* and *Twilight* have offered a similar return to humanity for the figures of the vampire and the werewolf. Differences between these monsters and the zombie remain, however, as both vampires and werewolves have not only been normalized, but also sexualized. The connection between the vampiric and the erotic can be traced back to Stoker's *Dracula* and has found a new home in a variety of more current novels. Teen novel series *Twilight*, for instance, shows an image of the vampire as a desirable boyfriend with the female main character wanting to be bitten, wanting to become like him, a living corpse. By contrast, the zombies in all examples given above are still other and separated. In *Shaun of the Dead*, Ed is kept in a shed at the back of the garden; those cured of the virus in *In the Flesh* are described as "rotters" and discriminated against; and although R in *Warm Bodies* finds love with Julie, he only does

so after being cured. The immortal body of the vampire, while dead, remains preserved and desirable. By contrast, the rotting corpse of the zombie needs to be avoided at all costs and can only become wanted when cured.

This raises the question as to what qualities about the zombie make it so easy to re-humanize them, as films containing cures for vampires or werewolves appear few. As Pegg argues, drawing on Romero's specific type of undead in comparison to the more recent fast zombies: "The absence of rage or aggression in slow zombies makes them oddly sympathetic, a detail that enabled Romero to project depth on to their blankness, to create tragic anti-heroes; his were figures to be pitied, empathised with, even rooted for" (2008:n.pag.). Paffenroth, again drawing on Romero's films, takes the argument one step further, drawing a comparison between the living and the dead: "The living and undead are repeatedly equated in these films, and where any comparison is made, it is usually to the detriment of the living, who are shown to be more cruel and deadly to their fellow survivors" (2011:22). In her paper, she states that "[t]here is, in other words, nothing very complicated or mysterious, ultimately, about zombies," (2011:19) that it is just us. Paffenroth raises the question which state is more desirable, as the survivors "are constantly fighting each other as well as the living dead, who show no tension or disagreement among themselves" (2011:20). Is it perhaps better to be undead than living?

In his conference paper "Searching for Redemption in the Withered Flesh of My Future Self," Lee Miller raises similar concerns:

> [Zombies] are a culture of inclusion. Everyone is welcome to join the zombie collective. […] Compare this to the aggression and exclusivity of every survival group you've ever seen in any film. […] Even after the world has ended, these groups are engaged in popularity contests as they are trying to survive. (2013:n.pag.)

Miller identifies the development of the zombie figure from Haitian proto-zombie, to Romero's classic zombie, and the zombie 2.0, the infected human in films such as *28 Days Later* (Boyle, 2002) and *World War Z* (Forster, 2013), and proposes a new type: the proto-zombie, "zombies that seem to know what they are, that yearn to be more, or perhaps less" (2013: n.pag.). It is these zombies that are portrayed in the films described above, them and their semblance of society, a society that seems better than the one the survivors (and we) have:

> Zombies have taken a higher road, recognising that we are all the same under
> the skin, and anyway skin will soon be falling off and exposing us for what we
> are, so we might as well get along nicely. And what is fascinating to me is that all
> this harmonious coming together occurs after death. Once the breathing stops,
> the ability to see the bigger picture starts. (Miller; 2013:n.pag.)

Rather than the distinction between us and Other, made by Canavan, there is no distinction, not beyond the one made by humans: "What makes a zombie, a zombie? The answer is as obvious as it is sad – we do. Zombies are not different from us. They are us" (Miller; 2013:n.pag.). Arguably, it is this process, or the other side of this discrimination, that an audience member is capable of experiencing when taking on the role of the zombie. They are able to embody the other, to embody the abject monstrosity and as such change the dynamic of the performance. Perhaps there is no need to kill the other, after all. Not just yet.

It is through this process of the audience taking on the role of the undead that Boal's ideas on the theatre of the oppressed really come into play. As described in the introduction to this study, Boal's approach to performance is primarily political and centres on the idea that theatre is not just the realm of professionals: everyone can, and should, act. This type of performance views the theatre as a weapon of liberation, positioning itself against the ideas of conformity present in traditional forms of theatre:

> "Theatre" was the people singing freely in the open air […] It was a celebration
> in which all could participate freely. Then came the aristocracy and established
> divisions: some persons will go to the stage and only they will be able to act; the
> rest will remain seated, receptive, passive – these will be the spectators, the
> masses, the people. (Boal, 1979: Foreword)

Boal's theories pit themselves against this division between audience and performers, between actors and spectators. Rather, those present at the performance are transformed into spect-actors, active contributors in the theatrical event who are able to join those on stage, to participate and to change the course of the action.

The fact that some of the events discussed here offer participants the opportunity to become the zombie is where this entertainment intersects with Boal's ideas. In taking on the role of the undead, the participant of the zombie event becomes a spect-actor as the scares are no longer aimed at them; they become the master of their own scares. Non-actors take action and are thus able to participate in the performance. Not only in terms of agency, but also in terms of politics, this role is the closest to presenting Boal's ideas. The political position of the zombie is contested, as described

above, and is both oppressed and empowered. The zombie is the Other, not us, and excluded from the moral majority. In the process of events such as 2.8 Hours Later, however, participants have the opportunity to engage with the Other and ultimately become them as they dress up and don their makeup. The Other is embraced and embodied, and the powerless zombie-as-slave becomes a powerful participant in the theatrical process. The monster has becomes us.

The criticism could be levelled that the audience of zombie events is not necessarily part of an oppressed minority, but rather of an established middle class that is seeking entertainment. In practice, however, it seems that this question is more complex. During the interview (2013), Simon Johnson drew attention to a number of developments he and the company observed regarding their 'players as zombies' scenario. First of all, he explained the game itself is seen by its creators as a comment on the current economic situation in the United Kingdom. The scripting and the characters the audience encounters are a representation of social collapse, offering a satire on how such an event would be handled by public services as traditional facilities start to fail and fall apart. It is the confrontation between the individual and the establishment and an indirect commentary on the current political and economic climate of the UK. Participants become part of the performance and are able to act upon the scenarios presented to them. They are capable of making choices and decisions which will affect their role and future within the performance as well as influence their relationship to the characters they encounter; they have become spect-actors.

Another way in which this political engagement is shown is through the individuals who take part in the event by volunteering as zombies. Johnson (2013) describes how a feeling of community exists those who play as the Other, forming new friendships and bonds and taking parts in other projects. Certain players create their own form of "horde", or help others they barely know travel to the next 2.8 Hours Later event in a different part of the country. In addition, Johnson (2013) explains the possible psychological impact of the role on participants. Through the embodiment of the Other, of the monster, people who may, in normal life, have little to no influence or lack a certain amount of confidence can be empowered. They are placed in a position where they have the ability to affect others by scaring them, and to enjoy an experience that is not part of their everyday lives. They are able to participate, embracing the power of the monster, and to take something away from it.

A similar process of empowerment appears to be taking place with regard to those who sign up as volunteers. Alex Noble, who works with the company as a zombie performer and trainer, during the 2014 run of 2.8 Hours Later: Asylum in Cardiff, talked about the gender divide of those who sign up as players and as zombie volunteers. Whereas the numbers for male and female players are more or less equal, Noble stated that more women tend to sign up as zombies volunteers, even mentioning a divide of five female volunteers for each male. It could easily be argued that this simply has to do with the nature of the event, the aspect of acting and dressing up, yet the disjoint is significant enough to be noted.

In these ways, zombie performance can be read as a political act. Rather than passively witnessing the theatrical events, the participants can actively alter the course of the narrative, whether as player or as zombie. As is described by Boal: "[T]he world is revealed as subject to change, and the change starts in the theatre itself, for the spectator does not delegate power to the characters to think in his place" (1979:155). As a player, they take part in a political satire and are able to influence the action. As a zombie, participants are able to embody the Other, thus obliterating any of the usual barriers between "us" and "them". Similarly, players undergo the same transformation if they cannot escape the horde and become a zombie. In this way, the process of infection becomes a political act.

In addition to the application of Boal's work, the ideas of Antonin Artaud are again relevant to this form of performance. As the audience is transformed into a performer, the gap between life and theatre, which is so vital to Artaud's vision, is eliminated completely. The theatrical experience becomes life for both the participants and participants-as-zombies as they interact with each other and with the environment. Locations which may at first appear familiar have been transformed into a dangerous post-apocalyptic landscape: players are surrounded and nowhere is safe. As is the case with scare attractions, the audience traverses a number of locations. In the process, they discover and construct the story for themselves against a familiar backdrop of infection and (un)death as many of the scenarios used by these events relate directly to classic zombie narratives; the links to the work of George A. Romero, in particular, are strong. Script is often bypassed in favour of a narrative that places its emphasis on interactions with actors, monsters and spaces.

All events use specifically appropriated locations, whether outdoor (such as Zombie Boot Camp and the Survival Weekender), or indoor, as with Zed Events. The story takes place in a real, if adapted, space, again adding to the possible reality of the scenario, with little to nothing that is not planned to interrupt the player experience. By contrast, SlingShot made the decision to indeed stage 2.8 Hours Later as a city wide zombie chase game, using, in the words of Simon Johnson, "the idea of the city as a space of entertainment, a play space" (2013), to their full advantage. There are a number of conditions for their choice of location: as this is a touring production, the script is tailored so that "the city is interchangeable. We look for areas with a certain look and feel that will provide a backdrop for the experience" (2013). Staging 2.8 Hours Later in various outside locations, which change when the event moves between cities, creates certain challenges for the creators. This strategy, however, offers an additional experience according to Johnson, who states that "it is more powerful to make use of the real world, to allow the players and game to riff off the city and vice versa. It lends additional value to the narrative" (2013).

As players traverse the city, they will have an experience that is likely to be unique to them. They may be playing in unfamiliar surroundings and thus actively exploring, or they might experience the event in their hometown, discovering areas they have never before seen. Familiar locations may obtain a new resonance once the zombie apocalypse has taken over, even after the event. The player experience is extremely important and Johnson stresses the value of the personal experience of the players. The intention is that the company provides them with the tools to create their own stories, and the use of real life locations adds to this. On their journey, players may encounter other people who are not part of the game. Within the real world where people go to and from work or do their shopping, in the words of Johnson, "they are special, a select group; they know something the 'normal people' do not know about and may not be aware of" (2013). The interaction with the location, with the actors and the other players creates a personal narrative for each of the participants, whether player or zombie.

Yet it is not just on the level of theatrical communication that the ideas of Artaud are interesting for this chapter. In the essay "Theatre and the Plague", Artaud uses the outbreak of bubonic plague and the progression of the disease as a metaphor for what, according to him, the effect of theatre should be on the sensibilities of its audience:

"Like the plague, theatre is a powerful appeal through illustration to those powers which return the mind to the origins of its inner struggles" (2010:20). The plague is a disaster, yet one which shakes things up. Infection creates chaos and it awakens the sensibilities of those living amongst its ruinous effects.

What is interesting for the current discussion is that Artaud's description of the effects of the plague is very close to both the physical and mental consequences of becoming a zombie and the previously discussed loss of humanity and of self. As a result, it is worth quoting his words at some length:

> [T]he only two organs really affected and injured by the plague, the brain and lungs, are both dependant on consciousness or the will. We can stop breathing or thinking, [...] make it conscious or unconscious at will. [...] We can also speed up, slow down or accent our thoughts. We can regulate the subconscious interplay of the mind. We cannot control the filtering of the fluids by the liver, the redistribution of the blood within the anatomy, by the heart and arteries, control digestion, stop or speed up the elimination of substances in the intestines. Hence the plague seems to make its presence known in those places, to have a liking for all those physical localities where human will-power, consciousness and thought are at hand or in a position to occur. (2010:12-13)

Boluk and Lenz draw attention to Artaud's ideas and its relation to the zombie state: "His description of plague's de-subjectivizing power, the way in which it infects those organs that lie at the very core of an individual's identity, uncannily anticipates the way in which zombie violence is so persistently focused around the brain" (2011:6). According to Artaud, the plague "intensifies, strikes deeper, increases its resources and means of access in every ramification of our sensibility" (2010:14). It is here that the plague, for Artaud, equates to theatre:

> [W]e can consider the plague victim's disturbed fluids as a solidified, substantial aspect of a disorder which on other levels is equivalent to the clashes, struggles, disasters and devastation brought about by events. Just as it is not impossible that the unconsumed despair of a lunatic screaming in an asylum can cause the plague, so by a kind of reversibility of feelings and imagery, in the same way we can admit that outward events, political conflicts, natural disasters, revolutionary order and wartime chaos, when they occur on a theatre level are released into the audience's sensitivity with the strength of an epidemic. (2010:16-17)

Artaud's ideas on the creation of a type of total theatre in which all dramaturgic elements work together remain strong in this context. Startling imagery and strong emotions are unleashed on the spectators in the form of an assault on the senses, in much the same way as they would be overwhelmed by a crisis such as a violent outbreak. As their sensibilities are shaken up and they are made vulnerable to 'infection',

the spectators are made susceptible to this new kind of theatre, and will be enriched and enlightened by the experience. From chaos emerges (a new) order, and a new way of living and experiencing.

Not only does Artaud's theatre resemble the plague through its means of performance, but according to Artaud, like the plague, theatre has the ability to infect: "For if theatre is like the plague, this is not just because it acts on large groups and disturbs them in one and the same way. There is both something victorious and vengeful in theatre just as in the plague, for we clearly feel that the spontaneous fire the plague lights as it passes by is nothing but a gigantic liquidation" (2010:18). He continues: "If fundamental theatre is like the plague, it is not because it is contagious, but because like the plague it is a revelation, urging forward the exteriorisation of a latent undercurrent of cruelty through which all the perversity of which the mind is capable, whether in a person or a nation, becomes localised" (2010:21).

According to Artaud, the plague is not an enemy, but ascribes power and brings clarity. The disease targets the will-power and the organs associated with it, it targets the audience's sensibility and as a result, it transforms them. The plague does not kill; rather, it eliminates that which is bad, it cleanses and renews. Infection becomes revelation, a deeper understanding and a higher state of being. The diseased/deceased, embodied by the figure of the zombie, seems to emerge as a guide: infection by the plague will lead to new sensibilities and potentially to a better co-existence, to empowerment, and, strangely, to enlightenment and a new way of experiencing. The embodied performance of the zombie transforms the experience of performance itself.

It is in relation to this final form of entertainment that each of theories discussed throughout the study come into their own. Any sense of Morreall's control and distance is completely removed as players come into physical contact with monster as they navigate the space, or even transform into them. Boal's spect-actor rises once again and appears to be able to make a politic change as the subject changes into the monstrous object of power. It is this object that, historically, has been coded as subject, as Other. The zombie has always been a figure to bring out certain social anxieties and concerns and has been seen as both slave and as fighting the oppression. They have been coded as the mindless consumer and the victim of global capitalism; in other contexts, zombies are depicted as capable of overthrowing this same economic system as they rise and leave society in ruins. There is the thread of infection, of a virus taking over and of

governments and countries crashing down. When seen in relation to the current economic downturn and the seemingly universal failings of those in any position of power, the zombie is almost a protest, its emergence a means to satirize just how powerless government can be in the face of an actual crisis. Horror has always tapped into the cultural anxieties of each era, and zombie fiction has often been a way to bring these issues of demise and oppression to (undead) life. If a person is confronted with these struggles and this feeling of powerlessness in the light of a foe which cannot be vanquished, might the monstrous not seem preferable? Might the zombie not offer a more peaceful, even utopian society, when compared to the quarrels of the survivors? The undead will inherit the earth, and this inheritance provides immortality, an immortality that will infect, spread and ultimately transform, for better or worse.

Conclusion
Feeling out of control

> "[Horror fiction] shows us that the control we believe we have is purely illusory,
> and that every moment we teeter on chaos and oblivion."
> - Clive Barker, "The Bare Bones: An Introduction", 2003:14

Horror is dead. The Gothic is dead. It is something that has been repeated in scholarly literature again and again in the last few decades. These statements on the supposed decline of the genre are echoed in this quotation from Fred Botting, used in the introduction to this study: "Contemporary horror films involve 'having the shit scared out of you and loving it'. To the point that no one really gives a shit" (1999:146). According to many critics, all horror can offer is the 'same old-same old', to reuse and overuse the familiar tropes of the genre. In a manner of speaking, this is true: once more invoking Brophy's concept of horrality, in order for horror to know that its audience knows, the audience has to have been taught at some point or other. Its spectators must have seen and learnt in order to recognise and respond appropriately. In his 1996 work *The Literature of Terror*, David Punter draws attention to the link between modern horror and classic Gothic, showing just how far back this tradition goes: "This is not, of course, to say that all twentieth-century horror fiction has its roots in the Gothic: but it is remarkable how much of it does, how much it relies on themes and styles which, by rights, would seem to be more than a century out of date" (3).

Both of these quotations might appear overly negative; even Punter refers to the idea that current horror media are "out of date". Rather, it would seem that the genre as a whole, and the productions discussed here, are built on the rich tradition of both the Gothic and horror. The echoes of Victorian ghost stories are clear in *The Haunting* and *The Woman in Black*, as well as a nod to the aesthetics of the haunted house movies from studios such as Hammer. Both *Play Dead* and *Ghost Stories* draw on the intimacy and reality presented on the Parisian Grand-Guignol stage, taking their fictional narratives from real life sources. Madame Tussaud and her wax works paved the way for the modern day scare attractions, even incorporating a section of live action scares in the

museum in London. Finally, productions such as 2.8 Hours Later use the now iconic figure of the zombie, perhaps consolidated by George Romero and his films, but dating back to the twenties and thirties as the monster first appeared in works such as William Seabrook's novel *The Magic Island* (1929) and the film *White Zombi* (1932).

All of the productions discussed here use the past of horror, yet in doing so, they create something that is unmistakeably distinctive. Rather than considering the connection of modern day horror to the Gothic as "out of date", each performance draws on the rich traditions of the genre to offer the audience a unique experience. Unique, indeed, they are: despite the link with forms such as the Grand-Guignol, the tradition of horror in performance is relatively new and as a result, it is ever changing and developing. What has been offered for reflection here is a snapshot of the original work that is being created, to show the timelessness of horror and the Gothic, as well as the timelessness of performance as a form. Each of these productions is an example of a specific type of work, of new developments that may be more artistic, or more extreme. They are examples of a field that keeps growing and developing. Yet this innovation might be considered as traditional in its own right. With the advent of new media, from stage to screen and beyond, horror has often been at the forefront of its development. It is this success of the genre, and of the form of performance horror in particular, that raises the question as to whether liking horror is 'weird', as it has often been seen by scholars and society alike? Can these performances safely be placed in a niche, or are they part of an ongoing process of horror taking centre stage?

Simultaneously traditional and thoroughly modern, it was posed at the beginning of this exploration that performance brings something unique to the horror genre, something that is perhaps missing, or at the very least different, from other forms such as novels, film and art. The confrontation between live actor and live audience, between the monstrous and the victim, that is at the heart of performance horror, distinguishes it from the discussion of other products of the horror genre that have been the focus of most critical works. Horror performance places its audience at the centre of its experiences, often asking (or even demanding) for their input and involvement. The hypothesis underlying this project is that the form provides a unique and distinctive experience for its spectators and to prove this theory through the analysis of a number of case studies. In addition, the aim of the thesis was to try and map how this kind of audience affect might be created. Central questions to the research were: how are the

productions written, presented and structured? What were the intentions of the creators and how did they achieve their goals; what decisions did they make? What elements can be discerned and discussed in each production? How do they create the necessary tension and how do they work together to create these narratives? How can these stories be defined, and what elements work together to make them frightening?

The reason for this approach was to move away from existing scholarly work and to discuss a form that has had little to no attention from academia up to this point. In addition, the question most often asked in horror theory is "why horror?" Why does the genre even exist and what is the attraction of such gruesome images? As was discussed in the preface, more often than not, responses are highly personal to each individual, and to try and give a universal answer to this question is an almost impossible task. Secondly, I would like to argue that such a stance is far from useful: what can be gained by questioning the genre's existence, as opposed to exploring the products it has given rise to? This was the approach adopted for this study: to examine and analyse these performances in order to gain new insights.

In doing so, however, it was necessary to find a way to study this type of work. As has already been stated, there is little to no work available on the specific link between horror and performance, nor on these types of productions and the level of immersion required. Although works on immersive performance are starting to appear, such as the recent *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (Palgrave, 2013), the first task of this study was to establish a theoretical framework to allow a discussion of performance horror. Borrowing from a number of fields, most notably drama theory, horror theory and game and play theory, a means was created to discuss the form. Based on this methodology, as outlined in the introduction, a number of case studies were selected to be examined and dissected. This decision largely dictated the overall structure of the thesis, with the theory presented in the introduction and a chapter devoted to each type of case study, moving from fourth wall productions based on adaptations of classic ghost stories (*The Haunting* and *The Woman in Black*), to more modern, original work (*Play Dead* and *Ghost Stories*). The other two chapters present the more immersive forms of scare attractions and live action zombie role-playing, with a focus on audience as victim in the case of scare attractions, and audience as performer/monster/political being in the case of the zombie performances. The choice of case studies was based on accessibility and visibility of each production: is this

well-known, something which draws a big audience, rather than something which exists in the margins? In addition, each form presents a move along the continuum of control and distance, established in the introduction as a key element in defining these experiences.

Both the preface and the introduction refer to the lack of work on this particular form, as well as there being little to no precedent for this approach. Instead, a new theoretical model needed to be created, and one was established based on a number of fields. Firstly, attention was paid to the unique nature of performance as an experience, thus validating the hypothesis underlying this study. A number of ideas were introduced as a means to discuss each case study, most notably the theories of John Morreall, Antonin Artaud and Augusto Boal, as well as classic horror theory, play theory and the concept of horrality from Philip Brophy. Finally, the nature and structure of performance was discussed as a means to examine each work.

In his work, Morreall seeks to answer the question as to how audiences can enjoy negative emotions, positing that as long as events can be controlled, and are at a distance, spectators are able to experience them as being unrelated to themselves, and as such, they are able to enjoy even distressing or gruesome narratives. It is this barrier which is removed by performance horror, as the audience itself becomes the victim. It is here that Morreall's ideas intersect with those of Artaud and Boal. Artaud describes a new way of expression and making performance, enveloping spectators with sound and light and completely inserting them into the action, moving away from script-based productions to a form of total theatre. Boal, in turn, focuses on the notion of an active, participating spect-actor as opposed to the passive spectator, allowing for a discussion of the politics of performance and of the new role for the audience.

Although each performance examined here can be placed within the confines of the horror genre, classic horror theory, with its insistence on traditional narrative, is not as easy to apply. Each of the important theories (cognitive, fantastic and psychoanalytic) approaches the genre from a viewpoint that is steeped in story, in particular, a story that is told in words. Early on, it has been established that performance, in much the same way as Artaud's idea of total theatre, draws on a myriad of features to create its narrative. Beyond script, the delivery, staging and sets, costume, as well as the choice and use of lighting, sound and space, drastically inform the narrative and the reception of a production. As a result, although some of the ideas are still valid in specific

situations, horror theory did not provide an adequate way to discuss and analyse these productions. In addition, the genre and its traditions, conventions and playful nature may elicit a specific response from an audience. Brophy's concept of horrality, which assumes both a knowing audience and a knowing product, is a perfect way to harness this idea of familiarity and cued responses, as well as a means to approach the playfulness of the genre. Because the film, or book, or play, knows that the audience knows, these media can play with and subsequently subvert expectations. Using this framework as a basis, each of the case studies was then discussed in the light of the proposed ideas: in what way are control and distance, as well as staging and audience, handled and manipulated? Which elements of performance can be identified, and how are they used to create the narrative of the play, beyond the written and spoken word (if a traditional script is used)?

The first chapter focused on two classic ghost plays which are the closest to traditional fourth wall theatre that any of the productions get. With its roots firmly between the heightened drama of the Gothic and the intimate staging of the Grand-Guignol, *The Haunting* and *The Woman in Black* leave the barriers between audience and performance largely intact, both on a physical and metaphorical level. With their ghosts returning to haunt the spectators from the past, the plays create an otherworldly atmosphere. They are the first examples that show the importance of staging over script: the use of space and sound, in particular, heighten the presence of its ghosts and make the eerie script all the more eerie when it is transported to the stage.

By contrast, both *Ghost Stories* and *Play Dead* adopt a lecture format, as opposed to the classic scripting of the other two plays. As a result, the two involve more contact with the audience, both in the form of direct address from the performer-narrator and the use of volunteers on stage in the case of *Play Dead*. The audience is prompted for a response and cannot simply hide in the dark, a darkness which itself is not safe. Both productions break the fourth wall and severely manipulate space, drawing the spectators into the fictional world.

This idea of a created world in which visitors can immerse themselves becomes even clearer in the case of scare attractions. Eschewing a traditional theatre, audiences are brought into a space that is almost entirely created, which provides them with a full package of horror entertainment. From marketing and the build-up provided by the pre-show to the attraction itself, every element is geared towards frights and terror.

Rather than the use of a script, scare attractions rely on the space to tell a story, letting the audience establish for themselves where they are and what is likely to happen, drawing on genre conventions in doing so. Visitors are not watching others struggle with supernatural occurrences; they themselves become the focus and the victim of the scares. At the same time, however, spectators are still subjected to the ideas of the creators as they are led through each attraction.

The complete liberation of the audience occurs in the case of zombie live action role-playing. Any sense of Morreall's ideas of control and distance is completely removed: players inhabit the same space and come into physical contact with the monsters that are after them. Rather than being safe in a dark auditorium, simply being spoken to, audiences are required to navigate spaces and transform into true spect-actors as they set their own course within the narrative of the zombie apocalypse. Yet they still have choices to make: will they escape, or will they choose to be a monster, to be a zombie and to join the ranks of the undead, avoiding the rivalry and hostility that is so common amongst survivors? The possibilities behind each experience are truly individual and seemingly endless as it is up to the audience to decide how to navigate, how to approach, and ultimately, how to create their own story of immortality, as the last hero standing or as the inescapable undead.

The work presented here is a foray into a new area, both in terms of performance and horror theory. As such, it will pave the way for more research as the tools and theories presented here can be re-examined or used as a means to study emerging forms of immersive performance within and outside of the horror genre. It provides a showcase for a new type of audience who are able and willing to insert themselves into the action, a movement which is also apparent in more mainstream productions. The number of immersive theatre productions, or certainly their success (in terms of duration of a run, visitor numbers and media exposure) seems to have risen sharply in recent years, with the work from the company Punchdrunk as a prime example. Much is yet to be discovered about this new and exciting field, and the aim of this study has partially been to add to this discussion.

Not only does horror performance offer new ideas on what performance can be, but also on how one can think about genre and performance. This thesis has drawn on concepts and ideas from a wide variety of sources and fields in order to establish a new way to engage with these types of works. As such, the current work can contribute

to this discussion and formulation of terms as the areas explored here are not necessarily genre specific. Furthermore, the thesis is very different from a lot of existing work on the horror genre, in particular, as none of the topics under consideration here have been explored (yet) in such depth in the field of horror theory, or in this way. The concepts of control and distance could provide a valuable way in which to examine both existing and new genre works, not only in relation to performance, but also, for example, in videogames, in particular with the advent of virtual reality technology.

The discussion of the theoretical framework is strongly informed by the case studies of each chapter, and a few words need to be said on the choices made. The reasons behind the selection of productions are outlined in each chapter and the choice and use of case studies lends the current work a distinct focus. The primary incentive behind the choices made was to avoid any possibility of clouding its conclusions: this is an entirely new area to explore, and the first task would appear to be to find a vocabulary and an approach, to even begin to analyse something as complex as a scare attraction. One of the first steps beyond this thesis would be to shift the focus from these specific forms and to broaden the number of productions under discussion.

A similar point could be made regarding the use of interviews and the opinions of the shows' creators. Obviously, the views expressed are those of individuals and are not necessarily indicative of larger trends. However, the material provided by these interviews has proven incredibly rich and insightful in providing new perspectives on the productions discussed here. Furthermore, it would seem that speculating about certain aspects of each performance, when these questions could be answered by its creators, is counterproductive, and as a result, the interviews have become integral in the discussion of each case study.

Lastly, it can be argued that horror is often not very highly regarded, and the present work may be considered as genre specific. The same could be said for the performances as each is both commercial and popular: how much theory can one apply to a production which offers scares-for-money? It would seem, however, that these notions are somewhat erroneous. The theoretical framework established in the introduction and expanded throughout the chapters has provided an excellent way to discuss these popular and commercial events, as well as opening up new avenues of research within and outside of the horror genre.

The results of the current work will provide opportunities for further discussion of certain areas. The idea of the embodied experience, as discussed here in relation to scare attractions and zombie LARP, could be further explored in order to incorporate the ways in which an audience is injected in and experiences the action. Particular attention could be paid to the more extreme productions, such as the briefly mentioned Blackout NYC.[41] The concept of ritual is something which keeps cropping up in relation to horror and will be an interesting topic for further research. The genre itself can be seen as ritualistic and transformative, in its potential of a rite of passage, as well as its formulaic nature. Furthermore, many of the productions discussed here present rituals in some form or other, with (the idea of) séance and exorcism being at the heart of each of the plays discussed here. By contrast, scare attractions and zombie productions offer a transformative experience of being a survivor, as well as the potential for a physical transformation into victim or monster.

Finally, as was stated in the preface of the study, I made a very deliberate choice with regards to the treatment of audience opinions. Applying the framework established to the audience and using it to find a way to gain useful data is a definite possibility for future research. The theoretical model could also be developed further and be applied to performance events that go beyond a specific genre.

The result, then, is a foray into an exciting new form of a well-established genre, a form which has been evolving and growing exponentially over the last few decades. The industry continues to grow and gain momentum, with more and more horror productions and scare attractions, as well as revivals of older forms. The research and analyses presented in this work provide a new approach on how to examine this type of performance. In addition, some of the ideas put forward here can be applied to immersive theatre that exists outside of the horror genre. Horror keeps evolving, as do its manifestations, much in the same way that performance has been changing and innovating ever since its beginnings. The aim of this thesis is to start a similar process for the study of these forms.

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Appendix A: Production details

Chapter 1: The Haunted Stage

- The Woman in Black
http://www.thewomaninblack.com/

First performance: December 11, 1987. Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough

Cast for first performance:
Actor: Jon Strickland
Kipps: Dominic Letts
The Woman: Lesley Meade

Directed by Robin Herford
Designed by Michael Holt

The play moved to various theatres in London, before finding a home at the Fortune Theatre, where it has been running since June 7, 1989. It is still being staged at the Fortune Theatre in 2014 and has toured the UK at various times since 1989.

- The Haunting
http://www.kenwright.com/index.php?id=1154
http://hughjanes.co.uk/haunting.php

First performance: November 2, 2010. Theatre Royal, Windsor

Cast for first performance:
Lord Gray: Paul Nicholas
David Filde: Sean Maguire
Mary: Hannah Steele

Directed by Hugh Wooldridge
Designed by Simon Scullion

The play enjoyed a brief run in London in 2010. It was revived at the Theatre Royal in Windsor on February 7, 2011, before touring the UK in 2011 and again in 2012.

Chapter 2: The Deadly Theatre

- Play Dead
http://www.playdeadnyc.com/ [website no longer live]

First performance: November 10, 2010. Players Theatre, New York City, New York

Cast for first performance:
Narrator: Todd Robbins
Margery: Charlotte Pines
Eusapia: Geri Berman
Albert Fish: Don Meehan
Girl: Drea Lorraine

Directed by Teller
Designed by David Korins (Scenic Design); Thom Weaver (Lighting); Leon Rothenberg (Sound)

The play enjoyed a successful run in New York, and was revived (with a different cast) for a run in Mexico City in 2011. During its original run in New York, a recording was made of the show, which is currently touring film festivals across the United States as *Play Dead: The Movie* (http://playdeadthemovie.com/)

- Ghost Stories
http://www.ghoststoriestheshow.co.uk/

First performance: February 4, 2010. Liverpool Playhouse, Liverpool

Cast for first performance:
Professor Philip Goodman: Andy Nyman
Night Watchman: David Cardy
Student: Ryan Gage
Businessman: Nicholas Burns

Directed by Jeremy Dyson, Sean Holmes and Andy Nyman
Designed by Jon Bausor

After its run in Liverpool, the play transferred to London in 2010, first to the Lyric Hammersmith, followed by a longer run in the Duke of York's Theatre. It closed in July 2011, but was revived in London in the Arts Theatre in February 2014 with a new cast. In addition to the UK, the show has played in Toronto and Moscow.

Chapter 3: A Bloody Playground

- Alien War
The official website for the attraction is no longer available, as the attraction has now closed. Fan pages, however, can still be found.
http://www.harryharris.com/aboutaw.htm
http://www.alienscollection.com/alienwar.html

Opening date: 1992
Venue/locations: Glasgow; London.

The attraction first opened in Glasgow, before a smaller version toured across the UK. It was installed in London in the Trocadero Centre as a permanent attraction, but closed in 1996 after flooding. Its final run was between December 1999 and January 2000, when it was briefly revived in Glasgow.

- **AtmosFEAR!**
http://www.atmosfearuk.com/

Opening date: 2001
Venue/locations: Various across the UK

AtmosFEAR! refers to a company, rather than one attraction. They have worked at many different venues and with many different companies. In addition, they focus on promotion and education in order to strengthen the scare industry in the UK.

- **The Dungeons Franchise**
http://www.thedungeons.com/

Opening date: 1974
Venue/locations: London; Blackpool; York; Edinburgh; San Francisco; Amsterdam; Berlin; Hamburg

The Dungeons remain perhaps the best known scare attraction in the UK. Since the opening of its first venue in London's Tooley Street in 1974, the franchise has continued to grow and now consists of eight venues in four different countries.

- **Fright Club/ Death Trap**
http://www.londonsdeathtrap.com/

Opening date: 2008. Name changed to Death Trap in 2009.
Venue/locations: Southbank, London

Opening to generally bad reviews, the venue was given an overhaul in 2009, when it was given its new name. The venue was reported to have closed its doors in 2012, although the website is still online.

- **London Bridge Experience**
https://www.thelondonbridgeexperience.com/

Opening date: 2008
Venue/location: London Bridge, London

Since its opening, the venue has received a number of awards. In addition, they have been running a special Halloween event called Phobophobia since 2010.

- **Nightmare NYC**
http://hauntedhousenyc.com/

Opening date: 2003
Venue/locations: Various venues across New York City, primarily the Lower East Side.

Like most US venues, Nightmare changes its venue and theme on an almost yearly basis, and operates specifically around the Halloween season. In addition, it has been staging events for other holidays in recent years, most notably Christmas and Easter.

- **Pasaje Del Terror**
http://www.pasajedelterror.com/

Opening date: 1988
Venue/location: Blackpool

Rivalling the London Dungeons for longest running attraction, the Pasaje del Terror has its base in Blackpool, but enjoyed a run in London between 2009 and 2013.

- **Terror Test**
http://terrortest.com/

Opening date: 2006
Venue/location: Lumberton, Mississippi, US

Like Nightmare, and most US-based scare attractions, Terror Test operates in conjunction with the Halloween season, as opposed the UK-based venues which are open all year.

Chapter 4: Zombies'R'Us

- **2.8 Hours Later**
http://2.8hourslater.com/
http://www.slingshoteffect.co.uk/

Opening date: 2010
Venue/locations: Various cities across the UK

As a city-wide zombie chase game, 2.8 Hours Later tours across the country. Its plot is not changed on a strict year-to-year basis, but the production has evolved since it was first staged. Changes have been made to both the script and the game mechanics, with a huge overhaul for its 2014 season.

- **Zed Events**
http://www.zedevents.co.uk/

Opening date: 2012
Venue/locations: Reading; Warrington; Lake District

One of the first large scale events to start operating in the UK, Zed Events offers a variety of cinematic zombie experiences, including an escape from a deserted shopping mall and an overnight stay in a lonely mansion.

- **Zombie Boot Camp:**
http://www.zombiebootcamp.co.uk/

Opening date: 2011
Venue/locations: Near Kidderminster

Zombie Boot Camp, operated by Ram Training, provides military training, followed by an experience of fighting zombies, effectively getting participants ready in case the zombie apocalypse should hit.

- **Zombie Survival Weekender:**
http://zombiesw.co.uk/

Opening date: 2011
Venue/locations: South Wales

Taking a realistic approach that is similar to the Zombie Boot Camp experience, the Zombie Survival Weekender takes participants on a weekend long camping trip filled with training in survival skills and bushcraft, as well as fighting zombies.