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What do Audiences Do? Negotiating the Possible Worlds of Participatory Theatre

Abstract: Questions around what audiences do are becoming ever more complex as innovative modes of participation are developed in contemporary immersive, interactive and intermedial theatre. Drawing on examples from Uninvited Guests, Void Projects, Punchdrunk, Blast Theory and other contemporary theatre practitioners, this article suggests that new models are needed in order to reason about the experience of the contemporary theatre audience. It proposes that the philosophical framework of Possible Worlds Theory, as used by digital theorists to elucidate the reader's experience of hypertext fiction, can also provide tools and a language which recognise and validate the complexities of spectatorial practices in participatory theatre. The article uses digital theory and several applications of Possible Worlds Theory to reveal some implications of active spectating as it explores what it means to manoeuvre between successive states of immersion and interaction through an aesthetic process.

Keywords: Possible Worlds Theory, spectatorial practice, ergodic, hypertext, virtual worlds, intermedial performance

> Theatre is the enactment of possible worlds. It is performed in a middle space owned by neither author nor reader. It is a space for negotiation. (Grumet qtd. in Prendergast 141)

At the end of the 2012 production of *Babble*, by the UK performance group Void Projects, audience members were asked to strap on a pair of angel wings, launch themselves from the top of a tower and fly away across the sea. Everyone complied.

This live work was set in a virtual world of Second Life, the online role-playing community that grew to popularity in the early 2000s. The audiences were avatars, as were the actors. The performance, which took place in a virtual library on an island in the world, was a contemporary re-telling of Jorge Luis Borges's prophetic 1941 story, *The Library of Babel,* about an infinite and non-sensical collection of books. *Babble* could be experienced from any computer, but

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it was also shown at big-screen presentations in performance venues in 13 countries worldwide, where real-life audiences gathered to spectate and interact with the virtual piece as part of a three-day festival of 'cyberformance' produced by digital theatre pioneers UpStage (New Zealand).

Following instructions from avatar performers, the 'in-world' audience of *Babble*, also in the guise of Second Life avatars, found their way through a vast virtual building. They witnessed fragments of performances as they went, but also interacted with sounds and objects based on Borges's fantastic vision of a never-ending library of books comprised of all possible permutations of arrangements of letters and grammatical marks. The piece required its avatar audience to undertake a series of in-world tasks – from finding books and writing notes, which became part of the performed texts, to dancing with robot librarians and flying – as they explored the labyrinthine environment. Consequently the audience *discovered* the experience of Borges's story, rather than reading about or watching it. Furthermore, as each avatar audience member participated, their activities became part of the performance experienced by the real-world audiences in the venues across the world.

Everyone who attended Void's *Babble,* in virtual or real life, encountered a spectatorial practice that required them to continuously switch role from onlooker, to participant, to designer, to witness, to writer, to actor. The function of each audience member became increasingly slippery and transient as they became involved, as a legitimate partner, in the generative process of the performance. The nature of their participation in *Babble* meant that they were no longer audience, in any traditional sense of the word, yet neither were they truly co-creators with the artists who had generated the experience and set its limits.

Contemporary performance work, particularly immersive, participatory and intermedial theatre, requires its audience member, as a condition of their attendance, to become an active partner in the aesthetic process; their spectatorial practice is personal, particular to the circumstances and, most importantly, makes a tangible difference to the artistic event. The consequence of the growing significance of such participation is that a grey area, between the activities of production and reception, is opening up and demanding attention. What audiences do in this liminal zone between making and receiving art subverts conventional understandings of the fundamental processes of dramatic practice and calls for new approaches to reasoning about spectatorial roles. In this article, I explore issues raised by contemporary spectatorial practices and consider ways of thinking about them by drawing on the conventions of historic Possible Worlds Theory and current digital creative writing practices. The aim is to open up a discussion about new kinds of models which may be employed in considering the contemporary experience of participatory theatre.

Fig. 1: An avatar audience member browses through a book in Void Projects' *Babble*. Photograph by author.

Dilemmas about the role of the participatory audience in theatre can reflect dilemmas about the interactivity of the participant in the digital environment. There are processes for involving the participant that are common to both performance and online creative writing, and I am suggesting that recent scholarship concerning digital practices can elucidate some of the issues that are foregrounded in performance work which incorporates the activity of the spectator. In drawing this parallel, I make use of the recently reinvigorated philosophical perspective of Possible Worlds Theory to explore participatory practices which formally inscribe the spectator into the world of a performance. Over the past decade, digital theorists, including Marie-Laure Ryan, Alice Bell and Raine Koskimaa, have appropriated Possible Worlds Theory to consider how narrative worlds are created through a reader's interaction with hypertext fictions, which are text works located in the digital environment. This use of the theory provides a workable methodology for interrogating how a reader's relationship to literary narrative is influenced when their participatory action, through activating hyperlinks, is able to influence the operation and meaning of the author's text. I am seeking to adopt this approach to unpack the changing dynamics between performance and spectator that are triggered in participatory performance work, through which the action of the participant influences the event produced. I will refer particularly to the work of UK company Uninvited Guests, as well as to a number of other contemporary practitioners.

Possible Worlds Theory developed originally from the work of 18th-century metaphysician Gottfried Leibniz, who suggested that God conceived of infinite possible worlds before choosing the best of these as the actual world for us to inhabit (Ronen 5). Subsequently the idea was generated that reality is composed from a multiplicity of distinct possible worlds comprising all that *is*, and all that *could be*. In the 1970s, Leibniz's concept became associated with two key schools of thought, relating to narrative semantics and to modal logic, and both of these have been used in the application of Possible Worlds Theory to digital theory. The narrative semantic, or abstract, approach provides a way of considering the nature of the imaginative immersion in a fictional text, commonly experienced in encounters with novels, plays and films. The modal approach, also called the concrete approach, is predicated on the individual experience of the lived world and considers the singular point of view as the significant determinant in establishing the existence of a 'world' (Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* 101). Hypertext fiction, constructed as it is with its narratives organized as a network of linked pages, includes *both* stories in which the reader becomes immersed as if it were a print novel, *and also* structural interactive devices, notably hyperlinks, which they must negotiate and which give them a personal perspective on the text. Therefore both abstract and concrete applications of Possible Worlds Theory have a relevance to the reading of hypertext fiction. It is the combination of these two processes, the immersion in the narratives and the reader's interactive engagement with structure, which provokes the distinctive experience of reading an interactive digital fiction. Raine Koskimaa argues that 'hypertextual' reading operates as an actualization of a world-creating process. He notes that the act of reading a hypertext fiction is a process of bringing a text into being through choosing to select certain links rather than others and actively creating an individual route through the text. The activity of hypertextual reading cannot be accurately described as an individual interpretation of an author's text, because each individual is doing more than simply interpreting – in each case their activity is actually bringing about a new text, particular to that reader in content and duration. This process constitutes what the work *is*, because "any single reading is just one possible actualization" (Koskimaa).

Reading as a process of actualisation can be observed in any fiction located in the interactive digital environment, from Stuart Moulthrop's seminal Gulf War novel, *Victory Garden* (1990) to Paul La Farge's 2012 immersive 'hyper-romance' *Luminous Airplanes*. The earliest example of hypertext fiction, Michael Joyce's *Afternoon, a story* (1987), provides an illustration of how such a reading experience lends itself to Possible Worlds analysis. This work is a text-based domestic mystery concerning a father's search for his missing son and ex-wife, after witnessing the aftermath of a car crash which he fears has killed them. *Afternoon, a story*

is composed as a network of 539 pages of text connected through 905 links. Each reader will access fragments of the multi-linear story in different sequences. What they read and understand about the lives and deaths of the family will depend on *how* they activate the links embedded in each page, which connect to different narrative pathways. Consequently, the fictional 'world' generated by *Afternoon, a story* will vary according to how each reader actualises it.
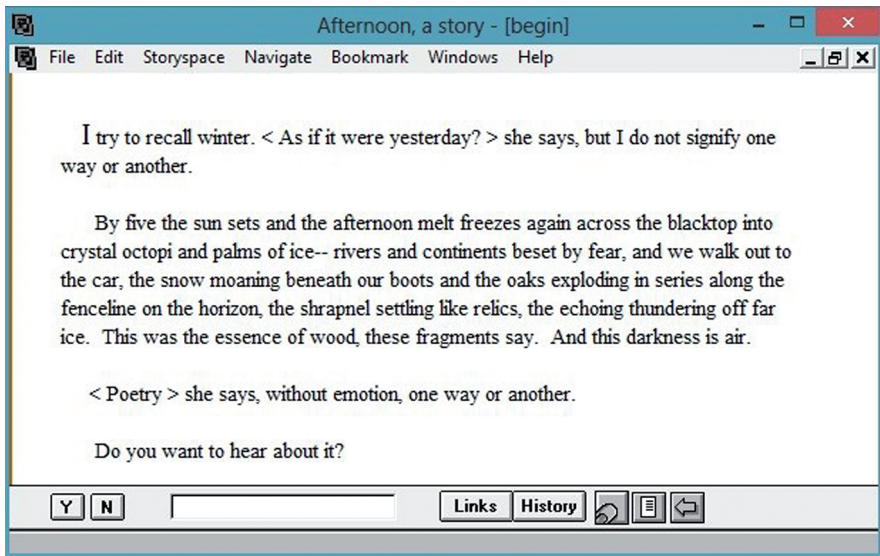
Fig. 2: *Afternoon, a story* (1987), by Michael Joyce. Photograph by author.

The image above shows the first page of *Afternoon, a story*. There are 21 words on this page that are hidden hyperlinks and that, if clicked, lead the reader to new pages which in turn lead onward to different narrative strands in the network. The text produced through the reader's individual interaction with the hyperlinks is validated, according to Possible Worlds Theory, not as an interpretation of the author's text, but as an 'actualised' textual world.

In outlining the difference between conventional and hypertextual reading, Espen Aarseth's notion of the 'ergodic artwork' is relevant. He uses the term 'ergodic', which is derived from the Greek words for 'work' (*ergon*) and 'path' (*hodos)*, to describe a "non-trivial effort required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (1). The concept of 'ergodic textuality' identifies texts that require a degree of specific agency – something beyond, for example, the turning of pages – in order to be read. Hypertext fiction provokes an ergodic process as each reader responds in a 'non-trivial' manner to the multiple possibilities proposed by

the text by making strategic decisions about their reading process and activating hyperlinks. Extending the notion of the ergodic to performance provides a means of defining a mode of participation that requires a meaningful effort on the part of the spectator in order to 'actualise' the performance work. The nature of the ergodic response may take various forms, from contributing narrative material, as the work of Void Projects demonstrates, to selecting a personal route through a site-related work and consequently determining its order and duration.

The significance of Possible Worlds Theory here is that it provides a systematic way of reasoning about these individual ergodic experiences by conceptualising them as processes which actualise immersive worlds. It provides a methodological framework that responds to spectatorial and reading practices distinguished by their interactive and generative qualities. As Alice Bell argues, "Possible Worlds Theory [...] is able to accommodate the multi-linear hypertext fiction structure rather than attempting to manipulate it into a pseudo-linear format" (*Possible Worlds* 26). The structure of a hypertext fiction is multi-linear and any theoretical analysis that emphasises one narrative line or another misrepresents the complexity of the form and its processes. For Bell, Possible Worlds Theory lends itself to the analysis of plural, ambiguous and user-activated narratives of hypertext fiction because it is "fundamentally concerned with the relationship between different worlds – both real and imaginary – and their respective constituents" ("Ontological Boundaries" 68). In a similar manner, the theory responds to the issues at stake in participatory performance, where operations are radically unstable and the generation of the aesthetic event is influenced by the different permutations of spectators' ergodic responses. In discussing the similar processes at work in performance and hypertext fiction which lend themselves to Possible Worlds Theory, it is useful to itemise the common features shared by the two forms. These may be summarised as follows:

– active interaction of the individual reader / participant is required for the production of narratives;
– the reader / participant is continuously aware that alternatives to their experience of the work are possible, and that these alternatives can lead the work to manifest itself in different ways;
– the work has characteristics of indeterminacy and plurality, yet this systemic flexibility operates within a precisely pre-scribed, operationally robust, model;
– the act of participation involves a material and tactile mode of operation executed by each individual;
– the personal experiences of each participant are relevant to the experience created.

The strategies of reception practiced by the reader of any hypertext fiction resonate with those of the audience member of an explicitly interactive or immersive performance, who similarly has to negotiate a relationship with the different possibilities of the piece as they engage with it. Performance productions that exhibit these ergodic features are diverse in range and scale, but share a quality of provoking their spectators to actively choose how they engage with the possible worlds of the work. An example is the work of Punchdrunk, the UK company that has become widely known over the past 15 years for events that invite spectators to specific locations and task them with exploring the site and the performance presented within it. Their 2013 production, *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable*, directed by Felix Barrett, was presented in a vast four-storey former Royal Mail sorting office in London. Each individual spectator was encouraged to engage personally with the work and to explore it in any order they wished. Consequently, spectators experienced different performances depending on the routes they took through it. A much earlier example is provided by US playwright John Krizanc's influential political thriller, *Tamara* (1982), which was performed continuously during the 1980s and 1990s in country houses in the US and beyond, and was a forerunner of much contemporary immersive work. *Tamara*, based on the life of Polish artist Tamara de Lempicka, required its actors to perform simultaneous scenes in separate rooms and its spectators to choose which rooms and characters to visit. In both these cases, the composed content of the works exceeded what could be experienced by the single spectator. In *Tamara* this excess is apparent in the play script, which bears a resemblance to a hypertext fiction in its organisation of parallel narratives.

Other examples of performances that are composed around a framework that demands the spectator's ergodic response include works by Blast Theory, Tim Crouch and David Leddy. In Blast Theory's *Uncle Roy All around You* (2002), the spectator's 'non-trivial' response to the work is inscribed both through their act of walking through London in search of Uncle Roy's office and through their virtual voyage through the digital game that underpins the work. By contrast, Crouch's *The Author* (2009) provides an ergodic experience, without requiring the audience to move around, by radicalising the rules of the theatrical encounter. There is no stage in this production and the actors, who are seated in the auditorium, continually address the people in the neighbouring seats in a manner which implies that they share responsibility for the emergence of the theatrical event. "YOU FUCKING SAY SOMETHING THEN" (23), says 'Chris', played by Chris Goode, at the end of the initial monologue, which establishes the work's theme about the theatre and its relationship with reality. The ambiguity about the mimetic status of this performance keeps each spectator on a knife-edge, never knowing if at any moment they may become central to the emerging performance. The nature of the

ergodic experience of the spectator here is concerned with the business of work-
ing out their relationship to the complex assemblage of truth and fakery that
unfolds unpredictably around them. In Leddy's 2006 play *Susurrus*, a domestic
drama about a contemporary opera singer and his family is interwoven with the
story of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The work operates
like a radio play because each spectator is required to listen to it on an audio
device. However, this production was presented in numerous city parks, where
spectators were given maps to follow as they walked around and listened to the
play. Here the ergodic experience was concerned with map reading and operating
the audio device, but also with the effort of relating the cognitive experience of
the play's narrative and the worlds of its characters to the physical experience of
exploring a landscape. In the case of Void's *Babble*, the ergodic task included
adopting an avatar and negotiating the complex protocols of Second Life in order
to experience the performance. In all these instances the spectator does not
simply complete the work of art in the interpretative sense described by Marcel
Duchamp; rather, they are required to forge the work afresh at each performance
through inscribing it with their ergodic activity.

The capacity of a narrative work to instigate a creative process is explored by
Umberto Eco, who was amongst those who pioneered the use of Possible Worlds
Theory in the analysis of fiction. He described the literary text as a "machine for
producing possible worlds" (246), and argued that the reader's engagement with
a fiction involved their exploring the possible worlds of the narrative text and
drawing on their own life experience, as well as their reading experience, to
speculate about the text. Eco outlined three types of possible worlds activated by
narratives or fabulae:

> 1) The possible world imagined and asserted by the author;
> 2) The possible sub-worlds imagined by the characters of the fabula;
> 3) The possible sub-worlds imagined by the 'Model Reader'. (qtd. in Klaver 46–47)

Eco's taxonomy acknowledges the ambiguous nature of the unfolding fictional
text and the fact that the reader may take different routes or "inferential walks"
(214) through it, which concern "individuals and properties belonging to different
possible worlds imagined by the reader as possible outcomes of the fabula" (218).
This abstract approach, which was also adopted by theatre semiotician Keir Elam
(99), uses the notion of possible worlds to reason about the imaginative processes
triggered by fiction. Modal philosophers, however, use the theory to explain
relative values of truth statements, revealing that something true in one possible
world might not be so in another. Modal logician David Lewis proposed that all
possible worlds exist as real alternatives to one another and become actual

through the agency of the person speaking from them. The difference between a possible world and an actual world for Lewis is fundamentally concerned with the perspective of the person inhabiting it. The term 'actual', as Bell explains, "operates indexically to reference the context in which a statement occurs" (*Possible Worlds* 21). Thus, Lewis's explanation of the terms 'actual world' and 'possible world' establishes the significance of the point of view, the lived experience, of the person occupying their actual world. Furthermore, his theory denies the existence of one real actual world having a privileged status in relation to other possible worlds; in his modal universe, there is no original world that serves as a reference for others – "Our actual world is only one world among others. We call it alone actual not because it differs in kind from all the rest but because it is the world we inhabit. The inhabitants of other worlds may truly call their own worlds actual, if they mean by actual what we do" (Lewis 184). Both Eco's and Lewis's applications of Possible Worlds Theory prioritise the significance of the individual's position in terms of the object of contemplation. However, from the perspective of Lewis's modal logic, it is the individual's point of view that converts a possible world into an actual world.

The spectator of participatory performance may be immersed both physically and imaginatively in the worlds of the production and therefore the two different applications of Possible Worlds Theory are both relevant, each providing its own way of considering the nature of their experience. Eco's abstract approach suggests that the world of the author figure takes priority over the "sub worlds" (218) of the reader – or, in my extrapolation, spectator – who remains external to this world as they imaginatively engage with it. Lewis's modal application does not sanction a hierarchical differentiation between different worlds – neither the world of the spectator, nor of a performer, nor even of a character in a play, may be considered more or less authentic than the other. Rather, they function as equivalent alternatives, different possibilities whose actuality depends on the circumstances of viewing. As Elizabeth Klaver explains, the application of Lewis's modal logic to theatre means that "a play in performance under these rules is just as existentially real as the real world. In fact, following Lewis, the fabula, the performance, and the real world of the audience would not differ at all in manner of existing" (50). The concrete application of Possible Worlds Theory has an affinity with the kind of theatre that demands the audience's active participation and challenges the traditional separation of the real world of the audience from the world of the performance, whereas the abstract application lends itself to conventions in which the audience remains external to the performance and engages imaginatively with the fictional world. Performance work which does both of these things, like hypertext fiction which actively *and* imaginatively involves its reader, can benefit from both applications of Possible Worlds Theory

because together they can encapsulate the complex dynamics emerging from the systemic re-positioning of the audience. Uninvited Guests' 2012 production *Make Better Please* provides an example of such work.

Make Better Please, by Uninvited Guests

Productions by Uninvited Guests frequently depend on individuals responding to the mise-en-scène in a personal and ergodic manner and entering into a specific and complex negotiation of their position in terms of the work. The conceit of *Make Better Please*, which is a frightening portrayal of the state of the world today, is that real actions by spectators can be framed through the company's invented rituals in a manner that makes a difference to each night's performance, and maybe to the world beyond.

From the moment we all entered the theatre for the performance at Parabola Arts Centre, Cheltenham, in 2012, and were invited to join the performers for tea, biscuits and a read of the day's newspapers, we were implicated as co-creators of a fantasy. Split into groups, we were asked to discuss the stories that angered us and then to join the cast in acting them out. The performers, Lewis Gibson, Jessica Hoffman and Richard Dufty, seemed interested not only in the news stories themselves, which differed from performance to performance, but also in people's relationships to their stories, which emerged as they related them. Consequently, the actual worlds of individuals were folded into the production. This initial part of the performance developed into performed portrayals of certain media figures by the performers: "I am Boris Johnson, is there anything you want to ask me?", demanded Dufty, provoking some tentative questions from the audience. When he 'became' David Cameron, the then UK Prime Minister, the questioning became more pressing. Loud rock music, drums and sound, lighting and smoke effects were incorporated into the portrayals, which gradually took on a ritualistic quality, with the audience seated closely round the action, involved no longer as participants but as witnesses to a pagan-style ceremony to rid the world of its evil. The intensity of the performance built to a point where Dufty stripped and replaced his trousers and shirt with a bizarre costume sculpted from newsprint into a grass skirt and giant phallus. Transformed, he started to speak in tongues, then strutted and shrieked, abasing himself as he took on the character of a shaman seeking to absorb all of the wrongs of the world into his body. At one point he demanded that everyone throw their tea over him; we complied, playing our part in this ritualistic performance to 'exorcise' the bad news.

On a practical level, the activities we became engaged with – direct actions like throwing tea, eating, chatting to neighbours, wearing masks, making notes

and role playing – introduced different modes of participatory practice to the event, which meant that the dynamic between the performance and its spectators was unpredictable and continuously changing. Our ergodic responses became part of the material of the performance, crafted and manipulated through continuously changing states as the work progressed. Like a hypertext fiction, the work had the capacity to demand, and respond to, different practices of participation and in so doing presented different modes of immersive experience. The unique contributions of the spectators at each performance ensured that the content was unpredictable, yet always able to be retained within an overall 'authored' structure, as Maddy Costa elaborates in her discussion of two of the company's productions: "Where the control comes with *Love Letters* and *Make Better Please* is in their meticulous construction. In each case, the Guests have built a very precise architecture, and then invited audiences in to do the decorating. Some nights the walls will be splatted with red and black paint; some nights they'll be swathed in pastel-coloured silks". The performance required that I, as a spectator, negotiate wave after wave of mixed messages about my relationship to the work and continuously reposition myself, mentally and physically, in terms of its evolving processes. One moment, the mode of engagement called for was that of a witness to an extravagant ritual – here I was external to the world of the performance, watching and imaginatively engaging with the possibilities it presented in a manner that can be conceptualised through an abstract appropriation of Possible Worlds Theory. Then something changed and I suddenly felt like a voyeur, uncomfortable with just observing. Then I became a participant in the performance, entering into its world and adopting it as my own and consequently, in accordance to a concrete conceptualisation, converting the possible worlds of the work into my own actual world. Sometimes I was addressed by a performer representing a famous figure, which consequently positioned me securely as a spectator in the conventional manner. This security was undermined when I was addressed by a fellow participant who had become involved in the performance and whose emotional investment in the assumed reality of the situation was complete and disarming as they told their personal story; because they were not acting, neither could I 'simply' spectate and I found myself repositioned again in a shared, actual world.

We come to see ourselves, through the world of *Make Better Please,* as both represented and representing. The faux naiveté of the title operates as a rallying cry that calls attention to theatre's capacity to involve and implicate its audience. Through our immersion in the world of the performance we are both part of, and party to, the artistic process. We are implicated through our actions, and increasingly find ourselves unable to identify the boundary between the real world and the fantasies enacted, unable to say how much we believe and how much is make

believe. This is analogous to the hypertextual experience – in both forms, although we are aware that our contribution has an impact on the performance or reading, we have no way of knowing the extents or limits of that impact. Just as the production, like hypertext fiction, seeks for and depends on our participation, so too it delivers ambiguous messages as to the significance of our involvement. It is in this unsettled zone, where expectations of normative relationships between ourselves and an evolving artwork are confounded, that *Make Better Please* locates itself. It interrogates how stories can be told and how meanings can assert themselves in a context characterised by a slippage between production and reception.

Possible Worlds Theory provides tools and a language that reflects and validates the singular and personal experience of the work and responds to the continuous re-positioning of the spectator provoked by the performance. As *Make Better Please* progresses, its authored content and structure, like Eco's fabula, starts to dominate and the spectators' stories become subsumed; *Make Better Please* may have requested and incorporated our contributions, but ultimately the show evolves beyond our input and influence. The continual use of participatory strategies implicates us in proceedings, but our agency is increasingly circumscribed by the force of the performance's dramatised rituals.

The problems of awarding agency to a participant and then limiting the impact of that agency are also apparent in the operation of hypertext fiction. In a similar manner, hypertext fiction invites participation through its interactive structure, but can then restrain the influence the reader has on the emergence of the text through strategic use of hyperlinks which tactically limit the available options. As Stuart Moulthrop, digital writer and theorist, points out, the potency of interactive involvement with a work is dependent on how much choice the author gives the reader through the design of the hyperlinked structure:

> The [hyper] text gestures toward openness – what options can you imagine – but then it forecloses: some options are available but not others, and someone clearly has done the defining. The author persists, undead presence in the literary machine, the inevitable Hand that turns the time.

What purports to be creative involvement for the reader of hypertext, and by implication a reduction in the authority of the author, can also be interpreted as a sophisticated manipulation of the reader. Interactive mechanisms give the reader the impression that they are more involved in the production of the reading experience than is in fact the case.

In a similar manner, *Make Better Please* presents the pretence of interactivity; the implication that the audience is responsible for the performance text is partly illusory, as the spectator's contributions are strategically delimited by the produc-

tion. Furthermore, participatory practices in both hypertext fiction and this performance also demonstrate how, through becoming implicated in the production, the external perspective, that critical aspect of reading and spectating, becomes compromised. In the case of *Make Better Please*, the complexity concerning the role of the participating spectator is exposed as the work provokes us to enact a crisis in spectating through manipulating our proximity to its content and operations. The spectator of the performance is in a radically unstable position, both outside and inside the production. The psychological and physical moves that the spectator has to make in response to the performance can be conceptualised through Possible Worlds Theory. Ryan elaborates two operational modes of engaging with fiction, which relate to the concrete and abstract applications of the theory, using the analogy of telescopes and space-travel: "In the telescope mode, consciousness remains anchored in its native reality. In the space travel mode, consciousness relocates itself to another world and, taking advantage of the indexical definition of actuality, reorganizes the entire universe of being around this virtual reality" (*Narrative as Virtual Reality* 103). To adopt this metaphor, *Make Better Please* offers both space-travel *and* telescope modes to its spectators, who continuously readjust their position in terms of the work. It becomes problematic, therefore, to evaluate a performance as though from a stable external vantage point – all we can elaborate is what it *did* to us.

A challenging moment in *Make Better Please*, when my point of view on the fictional world was abruptly altered, came towards the end of the show. We were each given and asked to wear masks made from copies of photographs of people who had recently died, taken from newspaper obituary pages. The music increased in volume and a smoke machine and red lights enhanced the rock gig atmosphere as we were asked to whisper the name of the dead person to Gibson while he banged manically on a piano. Our act of naming the deceased was framed as a ritual to summon their 'good spirits' into the room so as to exorcise the evil from the world. Gazing at the performance through the eyes of a 'dead person', I became aware of the ambiguity of my position – caught between being centred in the world of the performance as participant and being external to it in my own actual world. This experience of being repositioned by the events of *Make Better Please* functioned as an emphatic reminder of how our point of view on a performance is vulnerable and subject to continuous change, according to changing perspectives engineered by the production.

Conclusion

I have suggested that certain interactive dynamics that are set up between spectator and performance, as exemplified by *Make Better Please*, share important qualities with those played out between reader and text in the digital environment and specifically in the operation of hypertext fiction. The application of Possible Worlds Theory to interaction in hypertext fiction lends itself to the framing of the spectators' ergodic encounter with a performance as a 'world-creating' process. Possible Worlds Theory acknowledges and legitimises the spectators' performative acts and provides a methodology for formally reasoning about how performance may be contingent not on the audience as abstract or symbolic concept, but far more specifically on the particular individuals present at any one time. The spectatorial practices invoked in the performances examined here provoke a reconsideration of the concept of audience, as they produce distinct reflexive roles for 'participants' that fall somewhere between spectating and performing and that are essential for the operation of the work. However, they also foreground the wider implications of explicit interactivity: participation in these performances may invite the spectator's involvement, but it also entangles them in immersive processes over which they have little control, because the possibilities for their participation are so circumscribed by the machinery of the productions that they provoke a double experience for the spectator, of being both an active creative partner in the performance and yet also constrained and compromised through it.

The contemporary exploration of participation in theatre is bringing about a change in what we understand as performance and, along with this, what we understand of the roles, responsibilities and vulnerability of the spectator. The surge in new techniques being explored by performers, scenographers, writers and directors is outrunning the language and concepts we use to discuss them. Possible Worlds Theory has been applied to hypertext fiction and used to examine the complexities that emerge when the reader engages with the production of the text. Recent scholarship by digital theorists is significant beyond its immediate field because it suggests new and important ways to unpack the complex shifts in the spectator / performance dynamic that are set in motion by participatory theatre.

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