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An Examination of Propositionality and Immersion in Theatre

James Sharpe

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy.

Department of Music, Humanities and Media

The University of Huddersfield

January 2021

Declaration

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a University or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text.

James Sharpe

January 2021

Abstract

This research project examines ‘propositionality’ within theatre, specifically within the two theatrical environments of immersive theatre / performance and proscenium arch theatre, in order to offer an alternative perspective for viewing theatre. Permeating the thesis is the research question: what *is* being actuated within the interplay of objects and/or things in theatre and performance? An examination of how objects communicate actualization offers a method for exploring an audience member / participant’s willingness to immerse. To do so, I insert myself as participant, spectator, performer, researcher, interviewer etc., and use Object-Oriented-Ontology’s (OOO) flat ontological placement to analyse the entertainment of propositional lures created by the interacting qualities of theatrical objects. It offers propositionality as an alternative means of theatrical analysis to semiotics positing that semiotics cannot effectively analyse the difference between a sign in proscenium arch theatre and a sign in immersive theatre.

In chapter one, I define and explain what propositionality is as a means of analysis, and how the enactment of propositional claims differs within the two theatrical environments. In chapter two, I explore and analyse how propositions are enacted and agreed in the performances of Riptide’s *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* (2018), *The Lucky Ones: Lailah* (2018), *The Great Gatsby* (2019), *The Murdér Express* (2019), *Romeo & Juliet* (2019) and *Dorian* (2019) and the effect that the acceptance of sub-propositions has on one’s willingness to immerse in a theatrical world.

Acknowledgements

To all the people that have made this project possible, I offer my sincerest thanks. Firstly, I would like to thank my collaborators and friends Sean Sewell and David Field for helping create *Forget Me Not* and sparking my interest in this research. Without their ideas, goals and guidance, the performances would not have been as greatly received as they were, and, I would have been unable to follow my intrigue in this field. This thesis has only been possible because of you both. The co-supervision I have received during the project, flitting back and forth from Eric Hetzler to Franc Chamberlain, has been extremely beneficial. I feel immensely privileged to have received both your counsels and support throughout the project. Your guidance has created the conditions for theatre propositionality to develop into a means of theatrical analysis which I had not envisioned back in 2016. To all the lecturers and colleagues in the Drama department at the University of Huddersfield that have been assisting my learning and development since 2013, when I commenced my undergraduate degree, I cannot begin to thank you all for the time, journey and memories. Thank you to all artists and theatre makers that I discuss within this thesis. Without your creativity, there would be no artefacts or performances for me to analyse and the possibilities and limits of propositionality could not be explored. I would like to give a special mention to Riptide's Artistic Director, Alexander Palmer, for your generosity in allowing me to work closely with you and interview you for the purposes of my research.

Special mentions must also be paid to my partner and family for your ceaseless support and patience that has kept me inspired throughout the past four years. My true inspiration has always been my family's hero, Derrick Sharpe. Thank you Derrick for the lifetime support, guidance, and assistance you provided with getting me to this point in my life. Without you, and Tim, I

would not have achieved the things I have achieved. I dedicate this research to you both. Thanks for the memories.

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Preface

Interest in this research derived from personal exploration into the immersive, and the state of immersion, within the final year of my undergraduate degree at the University of Huddersfield.

Through my own experience of interacting with audience members, as a performer, in an immersive style performance and environment, I came to question how audiences become immersed in what they perceive and experience.

Naively, I thought it possible to create a universal template depicting the exact process that audiences go through to become immersed in a theatrical experience.¹ I presumed that in immersive theatre, and even immersive-style performance, immersion and belief were one and the same, since, per Locke, there is ‘no immediate belief’ just as there is no immediate immersion. My research proved that audience-participants become immersed via assenting to observed propositions. The term ‘proposition’ is stipulated regularly throughout this thesis and a thorough unpacking of the term shall occur in the ‘Proposition’ chapter, but it shall become clear that propositions are to be viewed as *sharable objects of cognitive acts and attitudes*. Sharable objects (propositions) *lure* those who entertain them into a “different way of feeling their world” (Gaskill & Nocek, 2014, p. 6). My research showed that this different way of feeling, whatever the specific feeling / emotion, leads to immersion. That way of feeling may even be the sensation of immersion itself, and entertaining, engaging, and interacting with the sharable object impacts on one’s state of immersion. Both the sensation and state of immersion is not binary as Biggin

¹ See Appendix 1.

elucidates (2017). Therefore, if the process of immersion is non-binary, then what are the steps or layers that audiences go through to reach a state of immersion in a theatrical world?

This question intrigued and excited me. I found myself researching neuroscience and cognition to unpack what process our brains go through to reach the sensation of immersion. I learnt that the brain creates meaning through neurons; the electrochemical aspect of neurons allows them to transmit messages and signals to each other (Eagleman 2015; McConachie & Hart 2010; Bear 2016; Gazzaniga 2009). However, I discovered that there was not a feasible way to test the process of immersion within a brain without a portable fMRI machine. Until a portable fMRI machine is available for this area of research we will not know for sure how the brain is perceiving fictional immersive experiences. Similarly, there was no feasible way to state that a process was *the* universal process for all immersive-style performances and all audience-participants through qualitative research methods. Bruce McConachie states, in his book *Engaging Audiences*, that “theatre and performance scholars will need to move beyond postshow interviews, audience’s surveys, and similar methods, however, to deploy the tools of experimental linguistics and neuroscientists that can clock the language recognition in milliseconds and take pictures of the brain thinking” (McConachie, 2008, p.16). Not only are audience surveys not a strong enough model to identify any true scientific findings but there could also be areas of bias in the answers – be it a desire to please the author or perhaps not wanting to commit themselves to an extreme answer – but I shall delve more into this in my thesis. Yet, what came out of this line of enquiry was the notion of ‘propositionality’.

My usage of the term ‘proposition’ within this thesis derived from research into ‘belief’. Specifically, from Henry H. Price’s book, *Belief* (1969). Price suggests what it means to believe (in and that,) something and its relation to knowledge along with the various sorts of evidence

we have for our beliefs. He discusses two modes of analysis to consider belief: ‘occurrence analysis’ and ‘dispositional analysis’. Occurrence analysis is the traditional approach to belief in which belief is regarded as a mental act or occurrence. Dispositional analysis, on the other hand, is viewed not as an occurrence, but as a disposition. Price compares this view of belief to be like having an interest “in cricket or a disdain for gardening” (Price, 1969, p.20) since, like these, a belief shows itself, or manifests, as an occurrence in certain situations, but it is not itself an occurrence.

Price uses the term ‘proposition’ from the outset of *Belief* to both analyse occurrence and dispositional analyses. For example, “[w]hen we say of someone ‘he believes the proposition *p*’ it is held that we are making a dispositional statement about him” (Price, 1969, p.20). However, he never states what *he* means when using the term. The implicit semantic meaning I derived, on first reading, is that when Price speaks of ‘believing a proposition’, he is referring to an object, thing, or concept. In studying Price and other philosophers’ views on belief, inter alia Plato, Aristotle, Locke, and Hume, I theorised how the state and sensation of immersion occurred for audience-participants in theatre, specifically immersive styled performance. Using qualitative audience-participant feedback from performances of *Forget Me Not* – an immersive-style devised piece created by Sean Sewell, David Field and myself – I created a hypothetical template suggesting a process for how audience-participants within immersive styled theatrical performances, worlds and/or environments, became immersed in said events.

Forget Me Not was originally created for our final year project of our BA undergraduate degree at the University of Huddersfield with the aim of exploring the telling of stories through different performance languages in an immersive environment. The piece is set in the day room

of the fictional ‘Forget Me Not’ nursing home (for Alzheimer’s and Dementia sufferers) and the audience-participants are welcomed into the home by a nurse whom asks them to sign their name in the visitor’s book, take a seat wherever they choose and help themselves to refreshments. There are eight round tables spread out in an oval shape around the performance space with chairs for both audience and performers to use if they so choose.² For the duration of the performance there are only three patients in the day room, the characters, ‘Malcolm’, ‘Alf’, and ‘George’. All three of the men suffer with either Alzheimer’s disease or a form of Dementia. ‘George’ is the youngest of the three and the only one who is aware they are all in a nursing home. ‘Malcolm’ and ‘Alf’ are older than George and have deteriorated quicker than him too, for example, they both believe they are at the local Working Men’s Club (WMC) – not in a nursing home – and are initially unaware of their disease.

The audience-participants are invited to follow the day-to-day lives of the three men and can actively converse with the characters/performers if they so choose, or, they can passively watch the story as it unfolds around them at either a table, or in the middle of the performance space. The production explores the telling of the character’s stories through immersive style performance, naturalism, physical theatre, tableaux, song, dance etc. The performance always ends in the same way, with the character ‘Alf’ mistaking an audience member for his son and then becoming very distressed when he realises where he is. The nurse quickly and abruptly tells everyone to leave so she can tend to ‘Alf’. The stage lights do not go off and the audience must

² The *Forget Me Not* performances were performed in a square studio space but staged similar to theatre-in-the-round. It was staged with eight round tables spaced out in an oval shape around the studio. There were four-five audience members per table, with additional seats at each table for the performers to go and sit with the audience members. The space in the middle between all the tables was used as a performance space but audience members could freely enter and exit the space if they chose too. For a visual depiction of the set, performance space and layout, please view the Appendix 2.

let themselves out when they are told it is time to go. The performance is left as if the home and the characters still exist inside that performance space even when there is no one there to view it.

The template I created was a sort of offspring to *Forget Me Not*, yet it was flawed on two counts. Its creation arose from audience-participants' responses to a questionnaire that I created regarding their immersion and belief in the fictional world of the *Forget Me Not* performances. However, most participants that experienced the performances and took part in the questionnaire knew me personally, and so there potentially could have been a high ratio of bias in the gathered data due to social desirability bias (SDB). SDB is when a respondent provides an answer that differs from their personal belief or attitude. This occurs "if subjects change their answers for impression management (to look better to others)" (Larson, 2019, p.534). My friends, family, acquaintances, colleagues etc., may have been answering the questions how they thought I would like them to answer because social norms were perhaps suggesting a particular answer was socially preferred (2019:534). The second mistake was only asking questions to audience-participants within one specific show – *Forget Me Not*. The template could not be used universally for all immersive-styled performances since all it could suggest is a potential process for how audiences perceive and engage with *Forget Me Not*.

Despite its flaws, creating this template led to a deeper line of enquiry: 'propositionality'. The interpretation of Price's *Belief* meant that 'believing a proposition' was referring to an object, thing or concept. By this logic, when audiences believe something in theatre, they are believing in objects. This notion makes no reference to what I deemed the most important aspect of a theatrical performance: the actor. Believing something is human-oriented – as far as we know only humans 'believe' – but that does not mean that humans only believe in (/ that) humans (exist); one can believe in ghosts, spirits, gods or aliens. Other than humans, concrete and

abstract concepts and objects give rise to interpretations, meanings and beliefs. An object within theatre can perform similarly to that of an actor as we know from the Prague Semioticians – who put forward the idea of the dynamics of objects (Bogatyrev 1936; Honzl 1940) – and actor-network-theory (ANT). ANT “doesn’t designate a domain of reality or some particular item, but rather is the name of a movement, a displacement, a transformation, a translation, an enrollment.” (Latour, 2005, pp.64-65). ANT socially associates entities with one another, be they human or non-human. But how does an object (socially) perform? I argue that it performs through ‘propositionality’. This is the basis from which my investigation begins.

Propositionality is like ANT in that it offers an understanding of how social interactions operate yet is distinct from ANT since my usage of it is (mainly) in participatory theatre practices (such as immersive theatre) where the sensory dimension differs to that of conventional theatre practices. I am analysing propositions and the impact that objects have on immersion through this specific lens: propositionality in both the forms of immersive and proscenium arch productions. ANT will therefore not be explored any further in this work. Propositionality can highlight the difference in the *effects* of a proposal within the forms and can be used to ask questions which continually need to be asked, rather than presuming the answers. Questions such as what happens in this scenario? Why? What do we gain? Etc. Studying propositionality in theatre allows us to offer proposals for answering these questions but does not directly answer them. This work proposes in a way that theatre proposes. It echoes it. It plays with it. And as this thesis develops, it will become clear that *anything* (including actors and humans) are objects, and that objects connote propositions.³ This thesis posits objects as equal to humans in terms of

³ “OOO means “object” in an unusually wide sense: an object is anything that cannot be entirely reduced either to the components of which it is made or to the effects that it has on other things” (Harman, 2018, p.43).

being – as Bryant (2011) does – and proposes a flat ontology within theatre adding to the field of materialist-semiotics.⁴

Introduction

Title

“An Examination of Propositionality and Immersion in Theatre.” The title establishes that a detailed inspection of the concepts ‘Propositionality’ and ‘Immersion’ shall be undertaken. An inspection which determines the essences of these terms within the context of theatre, since I am interested in how theatre lures and affects one’s way of feeling. This research is neither practice-based nor practice-led, as a creative artefact is not the basis of my contribution to knowledge, and the research does not lead to new understandings about *a* practice. Instead, a thorough study of a multitude of practices, creative artefacts, performances, texts and interviews in theatre shall be explored. This exploration predominantly occurs from the perspective of an observer / audience / participant as opposed to a creator / performer / actor, although the theatre-makers position is discussed too. The research mostly places *me* as an observer / audience / participant in various theatrical performances as a tool to analyse the concepts of propositionality and immersion, but again, there are discussions where other beings take on the role of spectator. My position as subject in the case studies and research places me in the ‘examination’ process. However, whilst I am placed in it, I am not at the centre of it. Instead, I use my experiences to

⁴ See pp.31-32 for an explanation of what is meant by the equality of objects and humans i.e., a flat ontology, per Bryant (2011) and other ontological realists.

articulate propositionality. In doing so, I must take on the position of the viewer to both pose and answer the research question. Whilst my work here defines the concepts of ‘propositionality’ and ‘immersion’ and narrows their meanings, my point of arrival is for others to understand the concept of propositionality within theatre and performance as a means of analysis. I hope that these examinations can offer theatre theorists, academics, practitioners, artists, critics, spectators and so on, an alternative perspective for viewing and analysing theatre.

Research Question

The aim of the research is to comprehend what *is* being actuated within the interplay of *things* or *objects* in theatre and performance. Theatre is unequivocally reciprocal, but what *is* being proposed by the art to its audience, and how *is* that *thing* being proposed? How is the *proposition* being enacted and agreed? In the works that will be discussed, understanding the *what* and *how* of the performances’ specific proposition(s) is key to deciphering what *is* being actuated. Deciphering how objects communicate actualization offers a method for exploring an audience member / participant’s willingness to immerse.

Interest in this research derived from personal exploration into the immersive, and the state of immersion, within the final year of my undergraduate degree at the University of Huddersfield. Through my own experience of interacting with audience members, as a performer, in an immersive style performance and environment, I came to question how audiences become immersed in what they perceive and experience. What grew out of this line of inquiry was the notion of *propositionality*. Yet, how does the concept of immersion relate to propositionality?

Propositions exist in all forms of theatre and performance, and likewise, all theatre is propositional. But as this thesis shall prove, the proposition's *possibility* differs in various forms of theatre depending on its *qualities*. And this is where the concept of *immersion* meets propositionality.

Identifying the differences in theatrical signs and what *is* being actuated in participatory performance practices (e.g., immersive theatre) as opposed to performances with more orthodox or traditional audience arrangements (e.g., proscenium arch theatres), helped me to choose the most appropriate examples of performances to spectate and participate in to analyse and contextualise my work. By 'traditional' audience arrangements, I am describing specifically proscenium arch theatres, not *all* theatres that might be described as 'traditional' or having traditional audience arrangements within the field, such as arena or thrust stages – despite the thrust conjuring images of the first theatres built by the ancient Greeks. The chosen performances which describe themselves as *immersive* in some way, all appear to promise a representational inclusion within the work itself and demonstrate a sensory dimension which is not accessible in traditional arrangements. Whereas the chosen performances which took place on a proscenium arch stage were there to be passively observed with no special attention paid to the tangibility of the art, requiring a greater theatrical distance.

It is worth noting that whilst this study only analyses performances and works that belong within the practices of immersive theatre / immersive styled-performance and proscenium arch theatre, there exists an extensive volume of work between these spaces and poles. Hybridised practices and performances which blur the boundaries between performance / installation / ritual / game / dance / circus / performance art etc., are perhaps more common in contemporary theatre than performances which are solely framed within one genre i.e., immersive theatre or proscenium

arch performance. For example, the umbrella term of Applied theatre which encompasses a multitude of theatre practices such as Theatre in Education (TIE), Prison Theatre, Forum theatre, Disability theatre and so on, structure participatory theatre experiences for audiences / participants to provoke change. Yet, one would not define these practices which make use of different elements of theatre performance(s) as *being* immersive theatre as they had moments of explicit participation or *being* proscenium arch theatre because they were performed on a proscenium arch stage. Performances can overtly interact with audiences without belonging to the genre of immersive theatre e.g., in performance art, such as Marina Abramovich's *The Artist is Present* (2010), and likewise, performances staged on a proscenium arch can be interactive with an audience and not be restricted to the confines of the stage space e.g., stand-up comedy, magic, musicals etc. However, this thesis uses the poles of immersive performance and proscenium performance as a tool to demonstrate the differences in propositionality when spectators' perspectives are altered from active to passive, tangible to intangible. This leaves scope for further projects to be examined which interrogate theatrical works that unsettle spectators' perspectives in hybridised systems.

The term 'propositionality' has been used in other areas of research, such as, pragmatics, language and cognition, but this is the first study to make use of the term 'propositionality' in relation to theatre and performance. Sperber & Wilson (1986), Wilson & Sperber (2002), Carston (2010), Golding (2016) all discuss propositions and propositionality to explore *communication*. Golding (2016) even includes the term in his title: *Beyond Propositionality: Metaphor in the Embodied Mind*. Previous works on inferential communication, such as Sperber & Wilson (1986), for example, emphasise the dominance of propositions in communicating meaning. Golding's thesis (2016), however, explores how non-propositional information

contributes to inferential communication, and he focuses his study on metaphoric utterance comprehension. For Golding, “any account of communication and cognition must incorporate both propositional and non-propositional information” (Golding, 2016, p.9). I also use the term ‘propositionality’ to explore communication. More specifically, the communication of theatrical objects. Propositionality is the term I have chosen to describe a method of theatrical analysis. A method that supplements *semiotics*. For me, theatre semiotics is a branch of *theatre propositionality*. Analysing propositions and their possibilities within theatre and performance gives us a way of thinking about theatre slightly differently. We can currently use semiotics to analyse signs and symbols on stage, but I shall argue that semiotics cannot effectively analyse the *difference* between a sign in proscenium arch theatre and a sign in immersive theatre. I am not claiming that semiotics is context insensitive. After all, Mukarovsky states that:

the theater is not inevitably bound to any of its components and that therefore the freedom of regrouping in it is inexhaustible.
Nor are the individual components of the theater bound by anticipated and unchangeable relations, as it might often appear from the standpoint of rigid convention. There is not a pair of components, no matter how related they may be, whose relation cannot be set in motion.

Mukarovsky, 1977, p.208

Mukarovsky highlights the dynamic theory of theatre here, as Bogatyrev (1936) and Honzl (1940) do too. Veltrusky following Mukarovsky’s transformability of theatre – the concept of theatre has an ‘elastic core’ – “reminds the reader that different theatre models [...] manifest vastly different structurings of the basic sign systems” (Pladott, 1988, p.292). Prague Structuralism and semiotics is consequently context sensitive meaning that it allows for the discussion of possibilities and interpretations. Where it falls short in effectively analysing the difference in a sign between the two forms is in its sensory dimension. For example, in *Forget Me Not*, porcelain cups and saucers are laid before the audience-participants on their chosen

table. The participants can fill their personal porcelain cup with tea from the teapot on the table if they so choose. Now, if this cup was a cardboard cup, then semiotically the cardboard cup does the same thing as the porcelain cup: it serves as a sign of a cup. Yet, a cardboard cup does not have the same effect as a porcelain cup: the sensory dimension is different. The porcelain cup evokes something that is beyond a simple signifier because it is tangible, and the real-object (its executant “I”) always retreats.⁵ The porcelain cup also holds the possibility of bringing with it memory associations to personal experiences of drinking from old-fashioned china with members of the older generation – possibly in a nursing home! Propositionality pinpoints the materiality and tangibility of objects and how they proposition audiences in a way that differs from a simple signification.

Propositions differ from simple significations due to *how* they are enacted / claimed. Victor Turner’s *The Anthropology of Performance* (1988) teaches us that most theatrical performances “belong to culture’s ‘subjunctive’ mood” (1988:101). Turner quotes Webster’s definition of ‘subjunctive’ as “the mood of *were*, in ‘if I *were* you.’” (101, emphasis in original). Audiences therefore perceive theatre as if it were true / real / believable etc. One may assume that the claims made by theatre companies, productions and performances only exist in the realm of possibility and supposition; in what Stanislavski calls the *magic if*. Yet, what happens if theatrical objects propose a thing to be accepted in the quasi-indicative or indicative-mood? I.e., as an actual occurrence, state or fact etc. Is this possible in live performance? If so, how is the proposition enacted and agreed? Do audience members accept a proposition as being actual because it was proposed as such? At the heart of this thesis, it will be claimed that in the form of

⁵ OOO and Harman use Ortega y Gasset’s ‘*The Executant “I”*’ to explain how the inwardness of an object is never accessible. One only sees a sensual-object of the real-object when perceiving objects. See pp.35-36 for an explanation of ‘*The Executant “I”*’.

immersive theatre, the object that proposes the thing to be accepted is in the indicative-mood.

The implied realism of the form makes the claim that an object *is* the thing it stands for.

From this research we gain an alternative perspective for analysing how audiences perceive and invoke meaning in theatre. If one analyses theatrical objects in both proscenium and immersive theatre, one can gauge the limit of the subjunctive-mood in these forms. It opens for discussion how things are proposed to audiences in these forms; what is being proposed; how the proposition is enacted and agreed etc. all of which might be different forms of propositions: big and small propositions etc. And how does a spectator distinguish them from each other?

My contribution to knowledge is an offering. An offering of an alternative perspective for viewing and analysing theatre.

Context

There is a specific branch of propositional analysis, or ‘propositionality’, that this research refers to. Prior to its exploration though, one must understand what a proposition *is* within this context. It will become clear (particularly within the ‘Proposition’ chapter of this thesis) that propositions are the *sharable objects of cognitive acts and attitudes* and that they operate as *lures* which create possibilities via a *network of sub-propositions*. Treating propositions in this way enables a means of discussing and analysing theatre ‘propositionally’. But how does this differ from past and current analytical approaches?

There already exists a multitude of theoretical approaches, both systematic and critical, for studying and analysing theatre.⁶ The origins of which are rooted in structuralism and semiotics. The general theory of semiotics was developed by Ferdinand De Saussure (1916) as a theory of language. Theatre semiotics arose as a subdiscipline from semiotics and “can be considered the first major general theory of theatre that attempted to encompass all aspects of the medium” (Balme, 2008, p.82). As a discipline, theatre semiotics investigates the use of signs within theatre. Pioneering the structuralist school of thought were the Prague Semioticians (1928-1948): Mukarovsky (1936a; 1938; 1966), Veltrusky (1941; 1942a; 1942b; 1973), Bogatyrev (1936a; 1936b; 1938; 1940), Honzl (1940; 1943) etc.

What all the Prague Schools’ contributions, as well as Pierce’s theory of signs, miss out, is *what* the sign(s) propositioned. Semiotic analysis allows audiences to interpret signs for meaning and understanding, but it does not propose or proposition anything to them. Propositionality is not a form of semiotics, semiotics is a branch of propositionality. So, let us say there is a ‘Proposition of the Sign’, which is semiotics, and this inherently proposes that the signifier corresponds with the signified. This is not a proposition within logic, as the relationship between the two is arbitrary, but this proposition works through the agreement of the writer and reader / speaker and

⁶ Approaches such as *poststructuralism* - which emerged in the 1960s from French philosophy due to the likes of Derrida (1978 [1968]) and Jean Francois-Lyotard by building upon and rejecting the ideas of structuralism - and *psychoanalysis; phenomenology* - based and developed from the nineteenth century philosophical positions of Husserl, particularly Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* (1970 [1900]), it is concerned with direct experience and emphasises the perceiving subject and consciousness. For phenomenology in theatre see States (1985) -; *cultural materialism* – influenced by a Marxist view of art and philosophy, cultural materialism “identifies economic material factors as the determining forces shaping society” (Balme, 2008, p.87). For cultural materialism in theatre see Williams (1980) -; *theatricality* i.e. a “mode of perception” (Burns, 1972), posits that things are not inherently theatrical, “but rather are rendered as such by a combination of aesthetic conventions” (2008:90); *performance theory* – the foundations of which derive from Richard Schechner in the 1960s (see Schechner 2003) and transcend the theatrical text and dramatic theatre to all representations and manifestations of performance such as sport, ritual etc.

listener / actor and spectator. In linguistics, this is the word as we know from Sperber & Wilson (1986), Wilson & Sperber (2002), Carston (2010), Golding (2016) etc.; in theatre, as briefly touched on earlier, it could be the word, the object, the body, etc. and the actor / spectator accepts the proposed correspondence between sign and referent. The other type of propositionality offers an alternative approach to semiotics; that the object does not signify but represents/symbolises/imitates etc. all of which might be different forms or attitudes of propositions. Yet, in theatre, specifically immersive theatre, the proposition is *not* about representing or imitating, but a claim that the object *is* the thing it stands for.

Immersive theatre is mainly the genre of theatre that will be investigated within this thesis. There are various theatrical works and performances discussed which are not defined as being a part of the form of immersive theatre. Instead, these performances align with other forms and genres such as site-sympathetic theatre, spite-specific theatre, promenade theatre, environmental theatre, pervasive theatre and so on.⁷ Or, they may have immersive-like qualities by being interactive with the audience in some way. These styles of theatre and performance will then be compared with proscenium arch performances which maintain the performer-audience divide between stage and auditorium. The genres and styles of the proscenium stage performances are not the same. The styles differ from romantic Shakespearean comedies to contemporary inspirations from classic texts.

As the thesis develops, reviews of the forms and styles of theatre mentioned here shall unfold. It will also become clear how research into the topics of *performance analysis*, *immersion*, *theatrical signs* and *propositions* differ from the work that already exists in these fields.

⁷ These terms shall be explored and defined as the thesis progresses.

Rationale for Performances

Since this project mostly places me as an observer / audience / participant in various theatrical performances, I chose to attend and examine performances which were either presented as immersive in their style (and not always / necessarily their form) or performed on the traditional proscenium arch stage. A thorough description and exploration of the field of immersion in theatre shall come later, but the most famous active theatre company that is associated with the term ‘immersive’, is Punchdrunk. Unfortunately, it was not feasible for me to attend a Punchdrunk show during my research period as all their shows were being performed in either Thailand or New York. Instead, I chose the longest running immersive theatre show in London: The Immersive Ensemble’s, *The Great Gatsby* (2019). For my other immersive-styled case studies, I decided to choose productions which did not meet all the requirements that comprise the form of immersive theatre, per Machon’s *scale of immersivity* (2013, pp.93-102), yet were tangibly accessible to the audience and consisted of immersive-styled qualities to see if this affected propositionality’s limits. Firstly, I chose Funicular Productions’ *The Murder Express* (2019), as it incorporated a more passive audience arrangement that differs from *The Great Gatsby* (2019) and from immersive theatre as a form – plus, it was advertised as an ‘immersive dining experience’ and I wanted to explore if the addition and consumption of food affected the quality of the theatrical claims and proposals – and secondly, I chose to work closely with a theatre company that would let me interview *how* and *why* they made their work. As a researcher living in West Yorkshire, the Leeds based site-sympathetic theatre company, Riptide, was ideal. Riptide’s artistic director, Alexander Palmer, was not only local to me and had a willingness to be interviewed and studied, but their pervasive-theatre productions of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* (2018), and *The Lucky Ones: Lailah* (2018) actively attempted to blend quotidian objects with

theatrical ones during the day-to-day lives of its participants.⁸ Exploring how audience-participants assess the objects before them and accept the enactment of the proposition(s) allows for a discussion of how propositionality can explore one's willingness to immerse. Therefore, Riptide, specifically their 'Lucky Ones' productions, were the perfect choice to examine propositionality.

For the proscenium arch environment case studies, I chose the RSC's *Romeo & Juliet* (2019) and Proper Job's *Dorian* (2019). My rationale in choosing Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* was to contrast contemporary immersive-styled performances which do not have 'conventional' audience arrangements, with what one may consider a 'traditional theatre text'. In the same vein, selecting the RSC as the performing theatre company seemed appropriate since they could be considered to almost exclusively perform Shakespeare's work 'conventionally', or 'traditionally'. Similarly, to Riptide, Proper Job's *Dorian* (2019) was chosen for its locale. *Dorian* (2019) was performed at a local proscenium arch theatre i.e., the Lawrence Batley Theatre in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. I have also worked with Proper Job theatre company on their LAB projects which are aimed at helping adults with their communication and confidence skills for employability through theatrical workshops.

Methodology

For this research I will be using a mix-method approach. I, as spectator and performer, have experienced many theatrical productions and experiences in my lifetime. Within this thesis, I

⁸ By 'pervasive' theatre / experiences, I am referring to experiences which instill a sense of play in their participants. See pp.79-80 for a detailed explanation of the difference between immersive / pervasive experiences / theatre and the connection that pervasive theatre has to gameplay and the *magic circle*.

have chosen to discuss aspects of propositionality, including how it operates as a means of analysis, in both immersive and traditional environments. This project started as a purely phenomenological investigation, but now it includes various perspectives that are not always from the first-person point of view, but initially, back in 2016, I gathered qualitative data in the form of questionnaires and interviews to the immersive-styled performance *Forget Me Not*, which Sean Sewell, David Field, and I devised and performed. These first-person responses helped develop my understanding of the field of immersion in theatre and performance; improved my ability to gather and analyse data and phenomena; and, enabled me to develop a theory of propositionality which explores the willingness, state, and quality of one's immersion in theatre. As previously mentioned, my initial findings were limited to the *Forget Me Not* (2016) show, and so in order to broaden the scope of my research, I shifted my focus from trying to grade the states and process of an immersive sensation within *a* show, to exploring the propositional qualities of objects in immersive and traditional theatrical environments. In doing so, I firstly decided to not include my art and practice from the research process so that my desirability bias had been removed from the interviewees. But I soon realised that this did not account for the bias and different interpretative communities of the audiences attending the external performances. So, rather than creating specific focus groups to gather the qualitative data, or interview whomever attended my chosen performance case studies, I decided to place myself in the role of the spectator / participant in both immersive and traditional audience arrangements. This is not to say that other perspectives are not considered – there are interviews and theatre blogs which are key to my exploration and analysis of propositionality – but for the most part, the discourse this thesis creates has developed from my responses and direct experience of specific theatrical performances. My position as subject in the case studies and

research places me in the ‘examination’ process. In doing so, I feel it prudent to note *my* identity at this stage since it could be argued that this impacts on the research and how it is presented and perceived. To both pose and answer the research question, I must take on the position of the viewer. Does my position as subject impact on the research? Alongside this question, there is the question of to what extent one’s positionality is the same as politics: is it the same or different? My identity and politics could be different from another audience member, participant, reader, and so on. My identity can be defined as young, educated, white, male, and so on. And my politics could be described as left-wing. However, whilst I am placed in the research, I am not at the centre of it. Instead, I use my experiences to articulate propositionality. And whilst acknowledging subjectivity is essential, human beings also experience things similarly. One’s race, gender, health condition etc., does not negate experience, but *how* one interprets is separate. I mention this to declare my awareness of the potential limitations of using oneself as a barometer and to acknowledge doubt. This method and thesis offer informed ideas about propositionality in theatre, but there is a difference between an idea e.g., the participant’s proposition – which in most situations is *my* entertainment of a possibility, or *my* analysis of objects – and a fact e.g., the readers’ acceptance of these ideas and proposals. Also, since my contribution to knowledge is an offering of an alternative perspective for analysing theatre, it is my hope that propositional analyses of performances are undertaken by individuals with varying positions and identities. However, the investigation of politics and identity is not within the scope of this research project.

Since I am largely formulating an approach to analysing propositionality in theatre based on my own experiences, the questions posed in this thesis are questions *about* (my) experience and so a contextualist position that uses phenomenology as an approach and method is used. Yet, the

philosophical and ontological position of this work does not solely belong to contextualism. For the gathering of qualitative data and research I have also used other methods. I constructed semi-structured interviews for Riptide's artistic director, and for audience members that attended the third lot of *Forget Me Not* performances in 2018. These interviews asked what the conditions were that allowed *x* to happen. Throughout this thesis, I am trying to pinpoint what the causality of *x* is. Therefore, I decided to combine a phenomenological method with a speculative realist research method. Speculative realism combines a realist ontology with a constructivist epistemology. This may appear that I am leaving out the relativist way of being which is phenomenology and the study of phenomena, but I do not. Both contextualism and limited realism gain a theory of knowledge through constructivist epistemologies. Whilst speculative realism is flat and neutral and maintains that there is a world that we can never truly know, phenomenology maintains that one cannot escape one's position in the world, only one's shared reality. As theatre is experiential, I have blended these positions and methods to propose plausible explanations about theatrical experiences in both immersive and proscenium environments.

In the immersive environment, I chose *The Great Gatsby* (2019) by The Immersive Ensemble and *The Murder Express* (2019) by Funicular Productions, and outside of the field of immersion and form of immersive theatre, I chose the RSC's *Romeo & Juliet* (2019) and *Dorian* (2019) to explore if propositionality *still* works as a means of analysis in traditional audience arrangements and if / where it breaks down or reaches its limits. The analysis of propositionality within these specific performances are of my personal and direct experience, since, at all these performances, I was an audience member. The specific term one might use to describe my role as audience member arguably differs between the two environments of the immersive and proscenium. In the

proscenium arch performances, I was sat in an auditorium passively spectating the action. Whereas, in the immersive theatre production, I was an active participant in the action and narrative. Machon describes how “the naming of ‘the audience’ as such becomes a vexed term” (2013:98) and lists several terms for the audience that are used by artists in the field of immersion. “These include Barrett’s ‘comrades’, Howell’s ‘audience-participant’ Lundahl and Seidl’s ‘visitors’, Holdsworth’s ‘co-creators’, Mercuriali’s ‘guest-performers’, Stevens’s ‘playing-audience’ or Wilson’s “‘attendant’ audience” (2013:99). My preferred choice is Howell’s ‘audience-participant’, and in the immersive and pervasive arrangements discussed, this is the term I shall use as Machon (2013) predominantly does. Augusto Boal’s term, ‘spectator’, also combines the duality of spectating and acting. Boal used the term for an individual engaged in Forum Theatre. Yet, as White pinpoints, the notion of a passive spectator was “to be less than a man, less than fully human” (cited in White 2013:20) for Boal. This thesis does not place spectatorship within the framework of negative perception – just as Rancière’s *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) challenged this perception – but it does posit that participation and tangibility in immersive works affect the enactment of theatrical propositions and *lures*. The other aspect of this research interviews Alexander Palmer (Founder and Artistic Director) of Riptide about how he facilitated immersive experiences for his audience in the pervasive-theatre performances of Riptide’s *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* (2018) and *The Lucky Ones: Lailah* (2018). We discuss how Riptide used objects to create propositions to be accepted within these productions.

Structure

This thesis is split into two main chapters. Both chapters have various subchapters and case studies which explore different yet interwoven intentions. Chapter one, “What is Propositionality?” discusses and pinpoints the foundation for propositional analysis in theatre. The introduction has already posited theatre propositionality to be an umbrella term for materialist-semiotics, placing it among semiotics as a means of theatrical analysis. Chapter one expands on this and defines a theory of theatre propositionality as a means of analysis within the specific theatrical environments of immersive theatre and/or performance, and proscenium arch theatre. This chapter deliberates the dense theory that underpins theatre propositionality.

Firstly, the ontological placement of theatre propositionality as a flat ontology is explained and justified. Theatre propositionality treats everything within theatre as objects. Analysing theatre through this lens allows for the consideration of how the qualities of an object propose a specific thing to be considered. Then, a thorough examination of the term ‘proposition’ within the context of theatre propositionality is gradually arrived at: propositions are *sharable objects of cognitive acts and attitudes* and they operate as *lures* which create possibilities via a *network of sub-propositions*. Once propositionality has been defined, the two theatrical environments which are to be investigated in chapter two – immersive theatre and proscenium theatre – are described. Chapter one ends by explaining how the propositional ‘lure’ and claim that is made in an immersive environment differs to that of a proscenium via its *actuality*.

In chapter two, “Exploring Propositionality”, the thesis explores *how the actuality of propositions* functions in its enactment and agreement and what the consequences of these agreements are. Chapter two includes the bulk of my practical research as artist, participant,

spectator, interviewer and researcher. The chapter begins by explaining the catalyst that commenced my exploration into propositionality within the field of immersion and theatre. It discusses my practice at an undergraduate level and how my misconceptions and mistakes led me to develop the conditions for an overall theory of propositionality that are interrogated in this thesis. Afterwards, the analysis of my five chosen performances / case studies begins. The order and placement of these performances was not chosen on a chronological, synchronic, or diachronic basis, but on a thematic one. That being said, each case study does tend to analyse theatrical objects chronologically as they were directly experienced by audience-participants and me. ‘*The Lucky Ones*’ chapter produces the most diversity in the temporality of its structure due to its lengthy time-specificity.⁹ *The Lucky Ones* productions took place over the course of a month, and whilst the objects do tend to be analysed in the order that Ladley (2018) experienced them, there are occasions within the interviews with Palmer where our dialogue skips backwards and forwards to specific moments within the month-long experience.

The thematic structuring of the case studies is due to the productions’ performance styles. The first performance and case study to be explored is a theatrical performance which most closely resembles reality. As the case studies progress, each one becomes more theatrical and artificial in its performance style. It is my contention that propositionality thrives and is most fruitful in environments and performance styles whose (quasi)indicative claims are the more forcefully vivacious. As the *aesthetic distance* increases and audience members develop a greater awareness of fictionality, the number of *sub-propositions* decrease meaning that propositionality develops more limits in its ability to propose further things and discussions to be considered.

⁹ Wakefield defines ‘time-specificity’ as the “experience of the passing of time through performance” (Wakefield, 2016, p.33).

‘*The Lucky Ones*’ chapter examines the documentation I have gathered and researched through interviews and blogs and uses that documentation to explore how interacting qualities of specific theatrical objects from *The Lucky Ones* productions proposed things to be considered. It also explores the concept of sub-propositions and their relation to a production’s main-proposition. This case study, along with ‘*The Great Gatsby*’ chapter, helps to identify what ‘the goal’ of immersive theatre and performance is, for me. ‘*The Great Gatsby*’ chapter also shows how one’s state of immersion can be affected by the changing conditions of a proposition. This chapter analyses the two interwoven intentions of location and scene and how the theatrical objects within those intentions facilitated immersion through transportation and absorption for me as an audience-participant. Similarly, ‘*The Murder Express*’ chapter further elucidates how shifts in a proposition’s conditions can affect and effect one’s immersion and engagement in a theatrical world, but also, it explores how sub-propositions do not always have to aid the main proposition for immersion to occur. Finally, the ‘*Romeo & Juliet* and *Dorian*’ chapter examines the limitations that propositionality has as a means of analysis in proscenium work compared to interactive theatrical experiences.

In the conclusion I stipulate how I have answered my research questions and addressed my specified aims and objectives. I reiterate my contribution to knowledge and explain the significance and implications of propositionality as a means of theatrical analysis within the context of this work and in wider concerns by proposing potential further questions and studies that are possible because of this paper.

Chapter 1 – What is Propositionality?

1.1 Ontological Placement and Justification

Before discussing and exploring propositionality in immersive theatre, the ontological placement of the work to follow must be asserted so that one understands how theatrical objects are to be viewed and analysed throughout. The lens in which this research will peer through is the lens of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). OOO is a form of flat ontology which places *all* objects – human and nonhuman – as equal in terms of *being*; all objects have an executant “I” (Ortega y Gasset). For Bryant, “the *being* of objects is an issue distinct from the question of our *knowledge* of objects” (Bryant, 2011, p.18). The question that ontological realists – Harman, Morton, Bryant, Bogost, Latour, Bennett etc. – are interested in is the question of object, i.e., what *are* substances? Due to philosophy being governed by an epistemological realism rather than an ontological one (i.e., Plato, Kant, Locke, Russell etc.), the question of objects has been how we *know* the object through the nature/culture split; what is its relation to a subject or human? What effect does it have on things? Etc. Starting with a flat ontology as OOO does, one can see that “the difference between humans and other objects is not a difference in kind, but a difference in degree” (Bryant, 2011, p.26). Bryant’s *The Democracy of Objects* “attempts to think the being of objects unshackled from the gaze of humans in their being-for-themselves” (Bryant, 2011, p.19).

It may seem strange to view theatre through the lens of a flat ontology rather than epistemology since theatre is experiential; in theatre *sensual* objects are perceived by the gaze of humans.

However, as Bryant proclaims, a democracy of objects “does not entail the *exclusion* of the

human. [...Humans] are rather objects *among* the various types of objects that exist or populate the world” (2011:20). When a human enters a theatrical world, they are subjects to it, yet subjects are objects *among* objects. What an ontology of objects declares is that subjects are not “constant points of reference related to all other objects” (2011:22). I am not the first to apply sociomaterial perspectives such as Bryant’s to theatre. Frank Camilleri (2019) draws the ideas of Latour’s ANT (2005), Barad’s ‘agential realism’, – which offers a framework for understanding the role of both human and nonhuman in scientific practices (2007) – and Delanda’s assemblage theory (2006; 2016) which emphasizes the multifunctionality of assemblages, i.e. that objects can “serve different functions in other environments and circumstances” (Camilleri, 2019, p.4), to re-discuss performer training in theatre and performance. Camilleri also makes good use of Ihde’s post-phenomenological perspective to think about the ways we look and think about performer training. Ihde “combines phenomenology with pragmatism within a technoscience context that is sensitive to the situated materiality of lived experience” (2019:20-21). Where Ihde becomes relevant to Bryant, OOO and this specific research is through his foregrounding of an organism/environment model as opposed to subject/object model (Ihde, 2009, pp.9-10). Still, in theatre we are a subject and an object, perceiving, experiencing, analysing and translating *sensual* objects for *our* understanding, knowledge, belief, judgment, entertainment and immersion.

On the epistemological front, the subject/object distinction has the curious effect of leading the epistemologist to focus on propositions and representations alone, largely ignoring the role that practices and nonhuman actors play in knowledge-production. As a consequence, the central question becomes that of how and whether propositions correspond to reality. In the meantime, we ignore the laboratory setting, engagement with matters and instruments, and so on. It is as if experiment and the entities that populate the laboratory are treated as mere means to the end of knowledge such that they can be safely ignored as contributing nothing to propositional content, thereby playing no crucial role in the production of knowledge. Yet by ignoring the site, practices and procedures by which knowledge is produced, the question of how propositions represent reality

becomes thoroughly obscure because we are left without the means of discerning the birth of propositions and the common place where the world of the human and the nonhuman meets.

Bryant, 2011, p.24

This passage from Levi R. Bryant's *The Democracy of Objects* beautifully explains why a flat ontology must precede epistemological questions for such epistemological questions to be answered. How can one answer the question of how propositions represent reality if we do not have an accurate representation of reality? Yet, this passage illuminates much more than simply advocating ontological realism. It also elucidates how ontological realism can answer the epistemological question. The answer lies in the misconstruing of propositions. OOO offers a flat ontology and therefore a means for understanding how propositions represent reality. Propositions, as one shall see, are translatable objects; it is the quality / qualities of an object which denotes the proposition. This abstract concept will be unpacked and defined in the next chapter. A definition of propositions and other relevant terms is required to understand how OOO relates to propositions and propositionality in theatre. Firstly though, the intricacies of OOO's origins, theory and development need to be outlined to understand what objects are within this materialist framework.

One of the leading exponents of Object-Oriented Ontology is the professor of philosophy at SCI-Arc in Los Angeles, Graham Harman. In Harman's, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (2018), he suggests that he has been using the term OOO since the late 1990s, publicising the term "in a lecture called "Object-Oriented Philosophy", [which was] later published in [his] book *Towards Speculative Realism* [(2010)]" (2018:279). The 'extensive

influence’ of OOO, listing its broad philosophical ontology, did not begin until the ‘first conference on the topic’ which was ‘held at Georgia Tech in Atlanta in April 2010’ (2018:8). This novel movement does not only consist of Harman, – yet he will be the main source of focus in this thesis – there’s also Ian Bogost (2006; 2012), Levi R. Bryant (2011), Timothy Morton (2013a; 2013b) etc. whom also deploy the principles of OOO in new combinations and fields.

OOO by no means only entails new ideas previously undiscussed in philosophy, in fact, it is a Heidegger-influenced school of thought¹⁰. Heidegger, of course, is not the only influence. An ‘object’ for Heidegger was the thing reduced to a human’s perception or use of it, and the word ‘thing’, meant the hidden thing, in its own right. Husserl (1970), Brentano (1874), Twardoski (1977) and Meinong (1983), (to name a few), albeit not all phenomenologists, referred to ‘objects’ in a much broader sense; a sense that is “nearly as broad a sense as OOO” (2018:42). The main principle of OOO, is that objects exist independently from human perception; objects are not ontologically exhausted through relations with humans and/or other objects. But what does OOO consider an object? “OOO means “object” in an unusually wide sense: an object is anything that cannot be entirely reduced either to the components of which it is made or to the effects that it has on other things” (Harman, 2018, p.43). For Harman, *everything* is object-oriented that is irreducible in both directions. This does not exclude humans or even events – despite Manuel Delanda’s (initial) objections¹¹. Harman posits that other philosophical stances exclude things from being objects by using the notions of *undermining*, *overmining* and *duomining*. Within his own work, *Dante’s Broken Hammer* (2016:176-182), he explains that

¹⁰ Harman (2011). *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*.

¹¹ I include ‘initial’ since DeLanda has since ‘partially revoked’ (Harman, 2018:52) his objections regarding objects and events in *The Rise of Realism* (2017) which was published with Harman.

“the underminer is a thinker who eliminates objects by telling us what they are made of; the overminer gets rid of them by telling us how they appear or what they do; the duominer does both at once” (Hickman, 2018). All three ‘mining’ techniques for describing objects do not include a definition or description of the real object; what remains outside of its constituents, appearance or function. For describing objects, Harman posits the ‘Quadruple Object’ theory (Harman, 2018, p.80).¹²

As briefly mentioned, objects and their qualities (to the OOO thinker) can either be *real* or *sensual*: “real objects and qualities exist in their own right, while sensual objects and qualities exist only as the correlate of some real object, whether human or otherwise” (2018:80). Whether an object be real or sensual, OOO thinkers believe that an object cannot exist without qualities, and its qualities cannot exist without objects. A Real-Object can have either Real-Qualities or Sensual-Qualities, and a Sensual-Object can have either Sensual-Qualities or Real-Qualities: there are four possible combinations. As Harman does in his book, I shall abbreviate the four combinations to their first letters for simplification e.g., RO-SQ stands for a Real-Object with Sensual Qualities. The development of the four possible combinations not only derives from Harman’s understanding of Heidegger and Husserl, but from his extensive study of the Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset, and his essay “An Essay in Esthetics by Way of a Preface” (1914). In this essay, Ortega discusses ‘*The Executant “I”*’ (1975:131-134). This discussion illustrates “that every non-human object can also be called an “I” in the sense of having a

¹² Please see Appendix 3 for an image of ‘Figure 1 – The Quadruple Object’ which depicts a table of RO/SO/RQ/SQ. “There are two kinds of objects and two kinds of qualities: real and sensual, in both cases. [...] Since objects cannot exist without qualities and vice versa, there are only four possible combinations, indicated by four lines between the circles [which can be seen in appendix 3]” (Harman, 2018, p.80).

definite inwardness that can never be fully grasped” (2018:70). In Ortega’s words (and I quote at length):

“I” means, then, not this person as distinct from another, nor, even less, people as distinct from things, but rather all things – men, things, situations – inasmuch as they are occurring, being, executing themselves. Each of us is “I” according to this, not for belonging to a privileged zoological species equipped with a project-making apparatus called consciousness, but more simply because he *is* something. This red leather box that I have before me is not an “I” because it is only an image I have, and an image is exactly not what is imaged. Image, concept, etc., are always *image, concept of...*, and that *of which* they are in image is the real being. There is the same difference between a pain that someone tells me about and a pain that I feel as there is between the red that I see and the being red of this leather box. *Being red* is for it what hurting is for me. Just as there is an I-John Doe, there is also an I-red, an I-water, and I-star.

Everything from a point of view within itself, is an “I”.

Ortega, 1975, pp.133-

134.

I include this – which is also one of the reasons why Harman appreciates the essay – because it pinpoints that fundamental aspect which makes a being (which does not have to be a *living* or *conscious* being) ‘real’¹³. The inwardness of an object, human or non-human, is what Harman and OOO calls a RO. The ‘image’ *of* an object, human or non-human, is what OOO calls a SO. There is more to Harman’s development of the four possible combinations, which he explains in his book, but for understanding how objects and their qualities relate to propositions, we need not invest our scope any further into this development.¹⁴

Objects have an “I” *and* they have qualities. ROs have both an “I” and qualities (these can either be *real* or *sensual*), and SOs have only either RQ or SQ; they do not have an “I” since they are an ‘image’ of a RO which has an “I”. Objects are not separate from their qualities as originally

¹³ This opposes Husserl’s view. For him, only conscious beings can have an “I”; inanimate objects only role are to be objects for a thinking-mind.

¹⁴ Heidegger, Husserl etc.

presumed through research into analytical philosophers; there is no bundle-theory of objects per Hume. Theatrical objects therefore have an “I” too; they are occurring objects that have an agency within the theatrical world. Every object – human and nonhuman – within a theatrical world and environment has an equal being. Schechner’s fifth axiom teaches us this: *all production elements speak their own language*. He poses the question “why should the performer be any more important than other production elements?” (Schechner, 1994, p.xl). And it is the same question which is relevant and ever present today in philosophical trends, phenomenology, ecology and so on. So then, how does OOO’s opinions regarding objects relate to propositions within theatre?

1.2 Proposition

As I have already stated: propositions are the *sharable objects of cognitive acts and attitudes* and they operate as *lures* which create possibilities via a *network of sub-propositions*. I shall now unpack what this statement means and how I arrived at a definition of the term proposition within the context of theatre propositionality and this thesis.

The term has many uses which leads to many definitions. McGrath and Frank in their essay “Propositions” for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* explain that:

The term ‘proposition’ has a broad use in contemporary philosophy. It is used to refer to some or all of the following: the primary bearers of truth-value, the objects of belief and other “propositional attitudes” (i.e., what is believed, doubted, etc.), the referents of *that*-clauses, and the meanings of sentences. [...]

The best way to proceed, when dealing with quasi-technical words like ‘proposition’, may be to stipulate a definition and proceed with caution, making sure not to close off any substantive issues by definitional fiat.

McGrath & Frank: 2018.

I shall heed McGrath & Frank's advice and proceed with caution in defining propositions. This definition will not encompass all the roles propositions perform, but one that will be used throughout this thesis to explain the *type* of propositionality I am exploring in immersive theatre. Since I have already quoted McGrath and Frank, here is their stipulation of the term:

“propositions, we shall say, are the sharable objects of the attitudes and the primary bearers of truth and falsity” (2018). This definition incorporates propositions as meanings i.e., propositions express attitudes via sharable objects/types/universals, and as bearers of truth-value i.e., the proposition is what is true (or false). For McGrath and Frank, propositions are two-fold: they use *sharable objects* to express a theory of meaning and a theory of truth. Interestingly, Turner shows that theatre is typically expressed and accepted as *if* it were true rather than being true. Propositions, however, operate differently, “flourish[ing] best in the indicative mood of the cultural process” (Turner, 1988, p.102). How then, can a proposition exist indicatively within a subjunctive cultural process such as theatre? The definition that will be arrived at will claim that theatrical propositions are expressed (quasi-)indicatively but are still accepted by the receiver in the subjunctive-mood; as if it were true. But before jumping ahead, there is more information to draw from McGrath and Frank's definition. What is significant about their definition, is that it does not specify language or sentences as the mode for expression, but the *sharable objects* of attitudes. This rather ambiguous phrase allows a proposition to be expressed and accepted/rejected by physical and abstract objects, not only semantical language. This is key to how propositionality functions and behaves and so it shall be defined, but its consideration needs deferring briefly whilst continuing to analyse McGrath and Frank's stipulation.

McGrath and Frank's definition of the term excludes thought- and utterance-tokens as being propositions because “presumably [they] are not sharable, [nor] concrete events or facts, which

presumably cannot be false” (2018)¹⁵. This is relevant because the definition I shall arrive at includes ‘object-tokens’ as propositions. A token is often considered as the relation of instantiation or exemplification of a type. In linguistics, a type can be considered as an object: abstract objects such as numbers and sets, rather than properties and relations (Wetzel:2002). A token then is an instance of a type. For example, if one were to utter the phrase “grass is green” twice, there would be two utterance-tokens of the same utterance-type. The reason that tokens cannot be disregarded from this definition of propositions, and the analysis of propositionality within theatre, is because of contextual utterances that contain indexicals. Indexical signs are when the signifier is caused by the signified. The most commonly used example of this being smoke signifying fire. Atkin explains in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*’s “Pierce’s Theory of Signs” that “if the constraints of successful signification require that the sign utilize some existential or physical connection between it and its object, then the sign is an *index*” (Atkin, 2010, n.p.) (emphasis in original). Professor Cohen of the University of Washington offers an example within his lecture notes that shows how sentence-tokens express propositions:

For sentences containing indexicals, at least, it does not seem that one and the same entity can be both a meaning and the bearer of a truth-value. Let S = the sentence-type ‘I am hungry now’. S is unambiguous: it means that the person who utters it is hungry at the time of utterance. So S should have a single meaning. But if the meaning of S is the proposition that S expresses, what proposition might that be? The problem is that different tokens of S express different propositions. Bill’s utterance of S at midnight expresses the proposition that Bill is hungry at midnight. George’s utterance of S at noon expresses the proposition that George is hungry at noon. Bill uses it to say something true; George uses it to say something false. So the meaning of S is not the same as the proposition(s) it expresses. Hence, if we want to preserve propositions as the bearers of truth-value (as I think we should), then we need to find other entities to be meanings (at least for sentences containing indexicals).

¹⁵ They discuss the consequences of their definition in the article, but we shall not focus our attention on those here. See McGrath, M. & D. Frank. (2018) "Propositions" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* for a discussion of the consequences in contemporary usage.

Putting aside the search for a separate entity to take on the role of meaning for a moment, what Cohen clearly demonstrates with this example is that sentence- and utterance-tokens express propositions in utterances that contain indexicals. For these indexical utterances, the sentence- and utterance-type contains a meaning which is not the same as the proposition expressed by the utterance. What happens then with propositional content – in the form of tokens – which isn't in the form of a sentence i.e., objects; abstract and concrete objects? Tomasz Wiśniewski in *Complicite, Theatre and Aesthetics* discusses how theatrical objects, such as that of a chair, illustrate an object's "fluctuating semantics" (Wiśniewski, 2016, p.168). Wiśniewski provides examples from Complicite's *A Disappearing Number* and *The Master and Margarita* where "the chair frequently participates in depicting different means of transport" (2016:169). In the former, "a particular arrangement of chairs delineates a plane, a taxi or a train" and in the latter, "the tram [...] where the Master encounters Margarita" (169). This exemplifies the transformability of DeLanda's assemblage theory of objects. Now, suppose there are two chairs on a stage which are used within a scene to depict a bench in a park – similarly to that of *The Master and Margarita*. The same two chairs are then used in a later scene to depict a car. The chairs are positioned in the same place and arrangement creating an 'object-token', yet the proposition expressed differs from scene-to-scene due to its situated-utterance. This can be seen in the National Theatre's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2012) where the half a dozen white boxes on stage depict and construct different meanings in different scenes due to their situational interactions with objects. In one scene a white box conveys a seat, in another a television, or a fish tank. And this is down to the interacting qualities of the theatrical objects within the particular situated-utterance. The performer interacts with the white box by sitting on

it depicting a stool. In a latter scene, the white box lights up and depicts a television. The interacting qualities of the performing objects and their situated-utterance informs the audience of the proposition's difference in expression. In the hypothetical chair example then, the sensual objects – the image of the chairs – ‘contain’ or signify the meaning of the *proposition* in the form of an indexical, yet express different propositions¹⁶. The two chairs which depict a park bench propose that the current scene is located within a park. Whereas the token of the two chairs in the latter scene depict a car, proposing that this scene is located within a vehicle.¹⁷ The signified meaning of the *proposition* is (currently) an unidentified entity which Cohen states needs to be found, and the proposition expressed is its truth-value. However, objects in this context do not contain a truth-value. This type of propositionality removes the question of truth / falsity and replaces it with acceptable / unacceptable since propositions are not things to be deemed true or false by a receiver but are considered possibilities which can either be accepted or rejected.¹⁸ Accepting or rejecting a possibility leads one to feeling differently about the perceived reality.

The chair example presents an object-oriented depiction of Cohen's example. If one transfers the terminology associated with the philosophy of language over to an ontology of objects, then the

¹⁶ The word ‘contain’ in this context is not directly transferrable from a philosophy of language to an ontology of objects; a sentence has components to which it is made, and this is where its meaning lies. An object, on the other hand, cannot be reduced to the components of which it is made; it does not ‘contain’ a meaning, only an “I”. An assemblage can be reduced to its components as Camilleri (2019) explains, but an object itself cannot. When I refer to an object containing a meaning, I am referring to the signified meaning interpreted by the perceiver.

¹⁷ The aesthetics of these scenes would propose more than a ‘main-proposition’, such as location, to its audience. The objects would also propose ‘sub-propositions’ too which will be explored in more detail throughout the analysis of the perceived performances and interview with Alexander Palmer. For this example, only the main-proposition is necessary for its understanding.

¹⁸ Gaskill and Nocek (2014) pinpoint how Whitehead viewed a proposition as a lure – a possibility – in his *Process and Reality* (1929). When we entertain the possibility, we feel differently about the experience and world. This shall be expanded on in detail shortly.

‘object-type’ (the two chairs) – which OOO refers to as the sensual object – contains a meaning, and the proposition(s) it expresses are contained in the ‘object-tokens’ – the tokens of a sensual object. The proposition expressed is its ‘acceptable-value’, rather than truth-value. Obviously, it could be true or false that either scene is set within a park or a vehicle, but truth and falsity relate to judgements of propositional statements rather than objects. Whether something is true or false is unknown without the offering of other propositional content to support the judgement, be it in the form of the word, body, another object etc. What is expressed by the object-type and object-tokens is that the perceiver performs a cognitive act of the sharable objects to either accept or reject the proposal offered. The sharable objects in the cognitive act of experiencing a sensual object are the qualities of an object. It is an object’s qualities which denote a proposition as either acceptable / unacceptable or a meaning to its perceiver.

To qualify the insertion of acceptable / unacceptable in propositions, I shall briefly move away from utterance and object tokens for a moment to discuss *lures*. Gaskill and Nocek in *Lure of Whitehead* fortify that propositions are not rooted in truth and falsity, but in possibilities, and use Whitehead’s “lure for feeling” in *Process and Reality* (1929) to do so:

Whitehead defines a proposition as a “lure for feeling”: not a statement about the world to be judged true or false, not a tool for unveiling the truth behind appearances, but a possibility that draws those who entertain it into a different way of feeling their world.

Gaskill & Nocek, 2014,

p.6

Whitehead’s conception that a proposition *lures* indicates how propositions can affect an individual’s feelings towards their surroundings if said individual entertains the qualities of the proposal. A proposition offers a possibility to “those who [*choose*] to entertain it”. The insertion of *choose* in Gaskill and Nocek’s notion pinpoints how acceptable / unacceptable is relevant to

propositionality. Accepting or rejecting the lure of a propositional possibility leads the thinker “into a different way of feeling their world”. For example, in *Forget Me Not*, tea and biscuits are offered as propositional lures. The drinking of the tea is a fragment of a possibility that complements / supplements / facilitates one’s engagement in the theatrical world. By accepting the possibility / proposal, one has a fragment of the fictional world. One becomes immersed in that detailed fragment which leads to a “different way of feeling [the perceived] world”. It shall become clear that in immersive theatre this different way of feeling is immersion through transportation and/or absorption; it is the blurring of boundaries between the theatrical and the real. Also, it shall become evident that a lure which affects feeling occurs through detailed fragments of objects which come together creating a network of sub-propositions. There is a lot that needs unpacking in these sentences, and the argument is very delicate, but before we can arrive at this point, caution must be maintained.

Moving back to the previous discussion where terms within the philosophy of language were being transferred over to object-oriented ontology, one sees that utterances cannot be completely cast aside in the discussion of propositions. According to Michael Bennett, “the utterance of propositional content in theatre is tripartite: 1) an utterance in theatre, is a subject/predicate of an unpronounced *indexical*¹⁹ pointing to a specific state of affairs, 2) performs a *function* in that the counterfactual condition is projected forward in the type of response/action, and 3) is a part, functions as, or *is the event*, itself, that the audience is there to witness. There is a fourth element, too, and that is that *metaphorical interpretation* is the outgrowth of the tripartite structure” (Bennett, 2018, p.148). Theatre is deceptive; it makes us think that propositional

¹⁹ Bennett is referring to Pierce’s Index or Indexical Sign within his three sign modes: *symbolic sign*, *iconic sign* and *indexical sign*. An indexical sign is a mode in which the signifier may not resemble the signified object, yet it is directly connected to the object in some way e.g., fire and smoke; a mole and mole hill. These examples are elaborated on in “Pierce’s Theory of Signs” (Atkin, 2010).

utterances *are* the fictional world of the play, when veritably, propositional utterances function *within* the fictional world of the play. However, “*outside* of the world of the play—to the audience—the utterances of the propositions contained in theatrical statements function as, and are, the theatrical event, itself” (2018:149). A few aspects of propositional content in the form of utterances can be elucidated by Bennett here. However, the focus of propositional content in this thesis is not in the form of theatrical utterances, but as object-types. Object-tokens are to be considered within propositionality yet do not consume a lot of attention, since, within the analysed productions, object-tokens are quite rare. The RSC’s *Romeo & Juliet* does make use of object-tokens via a large and partially-open-faced cube which is the focal point of the set. This shall be analysed in due course.

The definition of the term ‘proposition’ is still no closer to being stipulated within this context, but one has not ruled out propositional tokens from the definition as McGrath and Frank do with utterance-tokens. Whilst continuing to proceed with caution, it is time to closely examine their definition: propositions “are the sharable objects of the attitudes and the primary bearers of truth and falsity” (2018). To begin unpacking this, let us start with the latter part of their definition: *the primary bearers of truth and falsity*. As previously mentioned, propositions for Whitehead are “not a tool for unveiling the truth behind appearances” (2014:6), so why are they the primary bearers of truth and falsity for McGrath and Frank? What does their statement mean? It means that when p is held true, it does not *have* to be true. In this case, the object of an act or attitude of holding something true is viewed as the bearer of truth and falsity. Nuchelmans offers an example of this in *Theories of the Proposition* (1973). He states that “one of the uses of the expression ‘--- is true (false)’ is to state the outcome of a critical examination. The open place in this sentence frame may be filled by such phrases as ‘What he asserted’, ‘That Zeno is the father

of dialectic'. What these phrases stand for we may call the bearers of truth and falsity, the possessors of truth-values" (Nuchelmans, 1973, p.3). 'That Zeno is the father of dialectic', for example, is the object of said attitude, which means it is the bearer of truth and falsity, as it is *being* held true. These examples by Nuchelmans are very useful for understanding what the bearer of truth is i.e., the proposition. Yet, these examples are dedicated to linguistics; they are verbal statements which designate objects and/or entities fitting the propositional role. Within theatre, verbal statements or utterances are not the only form of propositional content in play; the proposition works through the agreement of the speaker / listener actor / spectator. This could be the word, the object, the body, etc. and the actor / spectator accepts the proposed correspondence between sign and referent. In theatre then, we can use Whitehead's notion of the "lure for feeling", which is caused by objects and the elements of the production, as the possibility for considering psychological or *cognitive* propositions occurring within the mind of its audience. Cognitive propositions are capable of being true or false, but it is the entertainment of that capability which leads us to feeling differently about the thing, object, world etc. Defining propositions from this perspective is crucial to understanding how the specific type of propositionality operates for audiences in theatre.

Scott Soames, in *Cognitive Propositions*, states that:

propositions *aren't* things we *interpret*, they *are* the interpretations we give; propositions *aren't instruments* we *use* to carry information, they are the information carried; and propositions *aren't* things we *endow* with intentionality; *they are inherently representational entities capable of being true or false, independent of any actual use to which we put them.*

Soames, 2014, p.479.

We do not interpret propositions, we interpret signs. Propositions are the interpretations we give (to signs). Propositions are the information carried – and of course that information is open to

interpretation as we know from the Prague Semioticians – not the ‘instruments we use to carry information’. It is not the sign-vehicle²⁰ nor the object that are the proposition; they are means in aiding how we are able to entertain the proposition. The proposition is a representational cognitive act. Soames (2014) offers an example for the reader which is helpful for understanding how we (mentally) *perform* propositions; the inclusion of this example is essential as it explains how propositions are *cognitive acts*:

Propositions are repeatable, purely representational, cognitive acts or operations; to entertain one is to perform it. When I perceive or think of a certain ball B as red, I perform the act predicating redness of B, which is to represent B as red. The act itself represents B as red in a sense similar to that in which some acts are said to be intelligent, stupid, thoughtful or irresponsible. [...] For an act to be one of these is for it to be one the performance of which involves behaving intelligently, stupidly, thoughtfully, or irresponsibly – which is how intelligent, stupid, thoughtful or irresponsible agents often act.

Soames, 2014, p.480.

Relating this to an audience member’s/participant’s perception within a theatrical production, the example cleverly depicts that what the individual perceives, is performed as an act within the individual’s inner realm. When I consider Malvolio’s infamous yellow stockings in *Twelfth Night*, I perform the act predicating yellowness of the stockings; to think of Olivia’s abhorrence for the colour yellow, I perform the act predicating abhorrence of yellow etc. We can see how this relates to McGrath & Frank’s definition – propositions are the ‘sharable objects of the attitudes...’. My opinion, belief, judgment, assertion, thought, knowledge etc. of a ball being red, or Olivia’s detest for the colour yellow, may differ from yours. For Soames, it is not any of the attitudes held that represent p to be a certain way; it is its objects. The *things* that are believed, judged, asserted etc. about a ball being red, or Malvolio’s stockings is what represents

²⁰ My use of the term ‘sign-vehicle’ comes from Albert Atkin’s “Peirce’s Theory of Signs” (2010) in *SEP*.

things being a certain way. They have truth conditions ‘independent’ of agents’ stance towards them. Soames uses this as the “basis of a naturalistic epistemology of propositions. [...] any organism that can perceive or think of things in its environment as being certain ways can bear these attitudes to propositions, whether or not it can predicate properties of propositions” (2014:481). Propositions are therefore to be considered as the *sharable objects of cognitive acts and attitudes*. We have cautiously arrived at a definition of ‘proposition’, but we need to continue cautiously to explain the properties of propositions and the type of propositionality to be explored in this thesis.

Before moving on, it is worth mentioning the ‘objection’ that Soames outlines to propositions being *acts*: “*Propositions can’t be acts because propositions aren’t things we do!*” (2014:481) (emphasis in original). Soames disputes this objection by explaining how our misunderstanding derives from our intuition of propositions: that we take propositions to be ways of thinking of things. Soames ‘modifies’ this habitual position so it becomes: propositions are acts of thinking of things as being various ways. Soames’ modification of the position of propositions allows propositions to be *performative*.

There are two types of propositional content when cognizing things: *representational content* and *cognitive content*. Representational content in theatre “imposes conditions on the world necessary for truth”, and cognitive content in theatre “imposes conditions on the mind necessary to entertain it” (2014:482). “Every proposition represents the world as being some way, and so imposes conditions it must satisfy if the proposition is to be true [or in our case *acceptable*]. Propositions also impose cognitive conditions on agents who entertain them. Because the two types of content are partially independent, they generate *representationally identical but cognitively distinct propositions*” (2014:498) (emphasis in original). Both forms of propositional

content exist within the fictional world of the theatre despite it being an internal piece of information, rather than an utterance. Propositional content can only be understood by an audience if it belongs in a specific space and time or space-time. This does not contradict Bennett's tripartite structure – the utterance of propositional content *in theatre* – as the bipartite contents of propositions also occur in theatre. Representational and cognitive content within theatre similarly 'is a part, functions as, or *is the event*, itself, that the audience is there to witness.' Is this the case? Are the audience witnessing *cognitive* propositional content? How can it be possible to witness cognitive propositions? The conditions imposed on both the theatrical world and mind of the participant are caused by the qualities of objects witnessed by the audience. It is the quality / qualities of objects which causes cognitive propositions; the performance of an act within the mind of a spectator. As previously mentioned, this thesis will operate through the lens of Object-Oriented Ontology, however, one must firstly look backwards to analytical and continental philosophy to (a) validate Soames' notion that propositions are acts, and (b) understand how propositions occur and exist in other contexts.

In Russell's *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903), he affirmed the existence of propositions and viewed them as concrete objects, not as senses per Frege²¹. Russell states:

...a proposition, unless it happens to be linguistic, does not itself contain words: it contains the entities indicated by words. Thus meaning, in the sense in which words have meaning, is irrelevant to logic. But such concepts as *a man* have meaning in another sense: they are, so to speak, symbolic in their own logical nature, because they have the property I call *denoting*. That is to say, when *a man* occurs in a proposition (e.g. "I met a man in the street"), the proposition is not about the concept *a man*, but about something quite different, some actual biped denoted by the concept. Thus concepts of this kind have meaning in a non-psychological sense. And in this sense, when we say "this is a man," we are making a proposition in which a concept is in some sense attached to what is not a concept. [...] The confusion is largely due, I believe to the notion that *words*

²¹ Frege meant 'sense' as the thought expressed by *x*, as opposed to a sensation as touch or taste. The 'sense' of a sign is where the "mode of presentation is contained". (Frege, 1892, p.37)

occur in propositions, which in turn is due to the notion that propositions are essentially mental and are to be identified with cognitions.

Russell, 1903, p.47

Russell cleverly elucidates two properties of a proposition here. (1) words signify the concept of the intended proposition but are not *the* concept of the proposition. (2) a proposition is the *thing* denoted by the concept. We can better understand point (1) if we think of Saussure's "Linguistic Value from a Conceptual Viewpoint" (pp.114-117), within *Course in General Linguistics* (2011), regarding the 'signified' and the 'signifier'. Russell applies this equation outside of linguistics, to propositions. Saussure demonstrates how one, either the signifier or the signified, leads to the other. Initially, a concept is 'empty', it has no referent; it holds no value without its relationship to/with other similar values. Without them, the signification would not exist.

Similarly, a proposition, cannot exist without the entities it entails to signify, and as Russell explains, we use words to indicate the entities of a proposition.

For topic (2), the *thing*, which is denoted by the concept, i.e., the proposition, for Russell, is the same as what Frege calls the *sense*. They are both the mode of presentation/information carried of the concept/referent or entities, per Saussure. The difference being is that Russell views a proposition to be a concrete object, and Frege views a proposition to be the sense of a sentence. The other crucial delineation gathered from Russell's statement is that propositions *do not* have to be linguistic: "...a proposition, unless it happens to be linguistic, does not itself contain words...". This validates Soames' position that propositions are *acts* and allows propositions to be viewed as *performative*.

The comparison to Saussure may unintentionally suggest that propositionality is the *same* as semiotics: it is not. Yet, propositions are *connected* to semiotics and signs. For me, semiotics is a

branch or mode of propositionality. As mentioned earlier, humans do not interpret propositions, we interpret signs. What is a ‘sign’ then? This may seem a digression – as we have not arrived at the type of ‘propositionality’ referred to – but it is a necessary one to aid our understanding.

Peirce, within an excerpt of one of his letters to Lady Welby in 1908, defines a sign “as anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its Interpretant, that the latter is mediately determined by the former” (Peirce, 1998, p.478). There are therefore three inter-related parts that make-up a ‘sign’: a sign, an object and an interpretant. Confusingly, the overall sign consists of an element which is also called a sign. The element of a sign refers to its *signifying element*. Peirce uses many synonyms to refer to the *signifying element* of a sign but for this research we shall use the term *sign-vehicle* as Atkin (2010) does.²² The sign-vehicle is the element of a sign crucial to its functioning as a signifier. The relationship between the sign-vehicle and the object is one of determination; it is the object that determines the sign. Atkin states that “Peirce's notion of determination is by no means clear and it is open to interpretation, [...] it is perhaps best understood as the *placing of constraints* or conditions on successful signification by the object, rather than the object *causing* or *generating* the sign. The idea is that the object imposes certain parameters that a sign must fall within if it is to represent that object [e.g., an actor used to signify a tree on stage imposes conditions on their gesture and body to represent a tree – we shall expand on this example shortly.] However, only certain characteristics of an object are relevant to this process of determination” (2010). What Atkin helps us see here is that when objects determine signs, they impose conditions necessary for representation. The object does not generate the sign. If the sign is to succeed as a sign it must show the causal connection between it and the object.

²² “Peirce uses numerous terms for the signifying element including “sign”, “representamen”, “representation”, and “ground”” (Atkin:2010).

Additionally, Pierce suggests that the relationship between the sign-vehicle and the interpretant is also one of determination; the sign determines an interpretant. It does so “by focusing our understanding on certain features of the signifying relation between sign and object. This enables us to understand the object of the sign more fully” (2010). The interpretant then, is the sense made of the sign; the sense derived from the relation between sign and object. The overall sign therefore addresses the perceiver and is translated or developed within the mind of the agent perceiving.

It would be imprudent to discuss how signs operate within theatre without discussing the Prague School of thinkers. We know that for Pierce a sign is anything which is determined by something else and that there are three inter-related parts which constitute the overall sign. As Rokem points out²³, the Prague School’s idea regarding the dynamics of objects and the sign in theatre is based on Petr Bogatyrev’s argument that “any item of nature, technology or everyday use can become a sign whenever it acquires meaning beyond the bounds of its individual existence as a thing in and of itself” (1936a; 1976:14). The ‘anything’ and ‘any item of nature, technology...’ in Pierce and Bogatyrev’s depictions of signs, shall here be referred to as objects. What both criterion for a sign allow, and this is particularly apparent for the Prague School as they tailor their focus into theatre-theory, is that everything on the (theatrical) stage is a sign. The aesthetics of objects in theatre then, mean that an object can be treated as a sign of an object but also as a sign of a sign.

Using a theatrical example, one can see how a theatrical sign communicates at least two levels of the sign at the same time. Imagine a stage with an actor performing the universal theatrical sign

²³ Rokem, F. (1988). “A chair is a Chair is a CHAIR: The Object as Sign in Theatrical Performance” in *The Prague School and its Legacy* (1988) pp.275-288.

of a tree i.e., stood with their arms raised above their heads creating a V-shape through the gesture. The object [actor] can be treated as a sign of a tree whilst simultaneously as a sign which points to one of the signs characterizing the type, style, nature, shape etc., of the tree; a sign of a sign. In Pierce's early account of signs, he deemed signs to have an infinite semiosis: "further signs both proceed and precede from any given sign" (2010) and you can see how one could think this when an object in theatre can function as a sign of a sign. Bogatyrev and the Prague School's belief is that "no theatrical costume, no piece of theatre scenery, or likewise, any other theatrical sign (declamation, gestures, and so on) always have a *representational* function" (1938; 1976:33-4). If theatrical signs do not always have a representational function, then there is a limit to the number of signs in theatre which opposes Pierce's account. The Prague School coincides with Pierce that "all theatrical phenomena are signs of signs, or signs of material objects" (1938; 1976:47-8) – everything on stage is a sign – but there are not infinite signs of signs.

What is also evident due to the Prague School, and is depicted within the tree example, is that the materiality of the object is relevant as the actor is physically present on the stage; the material presence of the actor still exists whilst they signify a tree and as they do / do not signify specific characteristics pertaining to the tree. The materiality of the object exists and is crucial to the relation between sign and object, but the thing itself does not generate the sign. When spectators behold real objects, they do so "not as real material objects, but only as a sign of signs, or a sign of material objects" (1938; 1976:34). The consequence of this means that the number of permutations and possibilities for a sign is profuse, yet not infinite. This "rich semiotic potential is the source of the *versatility* of the theatrical sign" for Pladott (1988:294).

It is clear that signs and semiotics are connected to propositionality in theatre. If everything in theatre is a sign, the sign must be active within proposals to spectators. Due to this, it is easy to confuse them as one and the same. Semiotic analysis allows audiences to interpret signs for meaning and understanding, but it does not propose or proposition anything to them.

Propositionality is not a form of semiotics, semiotics is a branch of propositionality. As explained earlier, the other type of propositionality offers an alternative approach to semiotics; that the object does not signify but represents/symbolises/imitates etc. all of which might be different forms or attitudes of propositions. Yet, in theatre, specifically immersive theatre, the proposition is *not* about representing or imitating, but a claim that the object *is* the thing it stands for.

1.3 Immersive

Before explaining how an object *is* the thing it stands for and arriving at a definition of propositionality within immersive theatre that uses the application of OOO, another detour is required: a definition for the form of *immersive theatre*. When defining immersive theatre, the obvious place to start is Josephine Machon. There are a few aspects that need to be separated to avoid confusion when discussing immersive work. What does immersion mean as a noun and verb? What is it to describe something as immersive? What does the term imply when associated and conjoined to theatre? What is the difference between immersive experience and immersive theatre? All these key semantical distinctions are covered within Chapter One of Machon's book *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (2013). Machon paved the way for thinkers to consider how to use the terms 'immersion' and 'immersive' appropriately within the forms of theatre, computer technologies, game studies etc. Therefore, to

understand what ‘Immersive Theatre’ is and what the term implies one must first understand what it means to ‘be immersed’ in something. Machon states that “to ‘immerse oneself’ or ‘be immersed’, means to involve oneself deeply in a particular activity or interest. ‘Immersion’ thus defines the action of immersing or the state of being immersed” (Machon, 2013, p.21). Machon goes on to say how “these definitions help to highlight how immersive experiences in theatre combine the act of immersion – being submerged in an alternative medium where all the senses are engaged and manipulated – with a deep involvement in the activity within that medium” (Machon, 2013, pp.21-22). These definitions by Machon do not “highlight” however how deeply involved one can become in these mediums however which is what Gareth White explores in his article *On Immersive Theatre*. For White, the term “immersion implies access to the inside of the performance in some way” (White, 2012, p.221) however he believes that the access available to audiences in Immersive Theatre is still limited.

When discussing the origins of the usage of the term immersive within art, Machon states that “it is difficult to ascertain exactly when ‘immersion’ first began to be used as an all-encompassing artistic experience and even more so to pinpoint when ‘immersive’ was first applied to theatre practice. The term ‘immersive’ was initially assigned to computer technologies and theorised around telematic environments in the 1980s.” (Machon, 2013, p.58). Machon goes on to explain that the term is also used in game studies and that it is perhaps more useful to look for definitions of immersion in game studies to arrive at a definition of immersivity in the theatre. Due to the advancements in digital technologies the term ‘immersion’ can be overused to describe traditional theatre performances which use digital technologies, as ‘immersive’, “as the technical details are able to draw us more deeply in to the action and emotion on stage.” (2013:58).

Reverting to theatre though and searching for the terms first use “in relation to visceral and physically inhabited (non-telematic) theatre”, Machon, as previously mentioned, states that there “lacks an incontestable source”. (2013:63). Morris and Lingwood of Artangel claim to have been using the term as:

an adjective to describe work since the physical theatre of *La Fura Dels Baus* at the Royal Victoria Docks in 1983, [and, for Robert Wilson’s performance installation *H.G.* in 1995. So,] in this respect shades of the ‘immersive’ have described interdisciplinary, sensory and participatory performance work occurring in places outside the traditional theatre venues for some while. [...] Yet ‘immersive’ is now explicitly used beyond digital and live art practices and is more widely applied within a completely different performance context; one which arises from the physical and visual theatre of the 1980s, and is attributable to a range of companies such as De La Guarda, dreamthinkspeak, Punchdrunk, Royale De Lux, Shunt, Sound & Fury or WildWorks etc. These immersive practices owe more to landscape as location and architectural inspiration, installation art (in visual, sculptural and sonic fields) and festival environments than it does to digital practice.

Machon, 2013, pp.63-65.

These ‘shades of the immersive’ occurred before the terms ‘site-specific’ and ‘site-sympathetic’, along with the (now) less common Sensory or Landscape theatre, were applied to this style of work and theatre companies with similar mission statements. For example, the Artistic Director of Riptide, Alexander Palmer, who worked with Punchdrunk for *The Drowned Man* (2013), describes Riptide as both ‘immersive’ and ‘site-sympathetic’. Riptide of course was not one of the ‘first-wave’ of theatre companies playing with ideas of the immersive during the turn of the millennium, but it exemplifies how the definitions of terms surrounding immersive techniques have advanced in the short period of the past couple of decades. The description of *something* as being *immersive*, is still a highly commercial bandwagon trend in cinema and gaming experiences, but theatre companies now have a wider vocabulary for describing their work.²⁴ So,

²⁴ For example, *Secret Cinema* have created ‘immersive’ cinematic worlds of Shakespeare’s *Romeo & Juliet* (2018), Fleming’s *Casino Royale* (2019), Netflix’s *Stranger Things* (2020) where audiences are invited to a secret location

with all the varying terms surrounding this type of work, what constitutes the form of immersive theatre?

1.4 Immersive Theatre

Machon states that “immersive theatre establishes a special kind of presence – visceral in every respect, being both embodied and noetic. In the realm of theatre, it can be understood that [the] feeling of ‘being there’ is fact; the audience-participant *is actually there*, physically inhabiting the fantasy world created” (Machon, 2013, p.61) (emphasis in original). The pivotal criterion for immersive theatre is its audience. A participant’s physical body responds with the imaginative and sensual environment they find themselves in. Machon goes on to state that “in immersive theatre the audience-participant-performer-player is anchored and involved in the creative world via her or his own imagination, fused with her actual presence, fused with her bodily interaction with the physical (and sometimes virtual) environments and other human performers” (Machon, 2013, p.62). What Machon emphasises is the corporeality of immersive theatre. The ‘audience-participant-performer-player’ has access to the inside of the performance through a deep cognitive and bodily engagement with the art.

This defers back to White’s point regarding the limitations of the ‘inside’ of a performance. Simply because there is a bodily engagement with a piece of art and that the creative world is fused with the participants presence, what / how much access is available for the participants?

White (2012) draws on examples from performances by two pioneering theatre companies within the genre of Immersive Theatre – Punchdrunk and Shunt – and defines immersive theatre

to dress up and watch their favourite films come to life. First-person and open-world narrative computer and video games such as *Battlefield V*, *Halo 5: Guardians*, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* etc., describe and market themselves as ‘immersive’ gaming.

in relation to environment. In 2008, Nield deemed the leading company working within the 'idiom' of 'immersive theatre' to be Punchdrunk (Nield, 2008:531) and "by 2011 they could be called 'immersive theatre pioneers Punchdrunk'" (Arnott, 2011 cited in Biggin, 2017). White explains, how these leading companies manipulate interior environments and encourage audiences to pursue the inside of the desired immersive experience. He uses Heideggerian ontology to show what is 'concealed' and 'revealed' in an immersive experience: "the essence of truth is, in itself, the primal strife in which that open centre is won within which beings stand and from which they set themselves back into themselves" (Heidegger, 1993, p.180). Heidegger's conception of truth depicts the 'unconcealment' of things in their essence and the 'strife' Heidegger refers to "is more explicitly explained as the conflict between 'earth' and 'world': between the concealed and the revealed" (2012:232). For White, strife occurs in immersive work "with the apprehension of the spectator participant in a process that is unlike everyday lived experience, but where the material of everyday lived experience – our bodies and our social selves – comes forth as world" (2012:233). However, he does not deem this to be the audience discovering the inside of the work, but "the inside of what is employed in the work of art as it becomes world" (2012.233).

Like White's work on immersive theatre, Jarvis' *Immersive Embodiment* (2019) allows us to see why immersive experience is desirable. He contends that the reason immersive experiences are desirable are for participants to "*feel more fully with the body of another*" (Jarvis, 2019, p.3) (emphasis in original). Is this onto-relational desire to feel like / play as / become / be, someone or thing other than ourselves our goal or intention when we experience immersive work as a participant? If so, then one can see why immersive experiences have become so popular, as, for Jarvis, "immersion involves myriad strategies that seek to realize the promise of a position

beyond the confines of one's body, its immediate locale or its finite set of lived experiences" (2019:10). It is the implicit promise of feeling more and/or fulfilment that companies and creators must deliver on if they are to achieve (what – if one believes Jarvis – could be described as) 'the goal of immersive experience'. Additionally, to White's work, Jarvis also shows that there is a limit to the spectator's, or audience-participant's, immersion as he argues that some, innovative and boundary-querying hybridized practices which incorporate immersive work in theatre, virtual reality, video gaming etc., are simply "giving new and varied expression to the unrealizable promise that we might *become the other body*" (2019:4) (emphasis in original).

Nield also draws on spatial elements within the form of immersive theatre to suggest "whether a piece of work might be defined as *immersive* or not" (Biggin, 2017, p.3) (emphasis in original). She describes the form as one in which "the audience inhabit the space of play alongside the actors [...] within a tricked-out space" (2008:531). Biggin, explains, how Adam Alston "defines *immersive* to emphasise audience engagement rather than any particular theatrical form or shape, but that engagement remains unavoidably framed by spatial boundaries, occurring in reaction to the performance space" (2017:177) (emphasis in original); Alston states that *immersive* "is a term that can be applied to a range of practices in a range of contexts, so long as an audience engages with an environment that prompts the perception of immersion's cues" (Alston, 2016, p.71). Academics consider environment and site-specificity to be key to the form of immersive theatre i.e., Machon (2007; 2013), White (2012), Pearson (2010), Biggin (2017), Alston (2016) etc. and Schechner (1994) and Aronson's (2012) work in the form of *Environmental Theatre* is

applicable to interactivity between space and the attention of the spectator²⁵. Of course, space and environment are not the only lenses to view the *immersive* through. There's also perceptual embodiment, interactivity, emotional stimulation, cognition, game play, digital performance and media etc. all of which, are widely researched areas within the genre of immersive theatre and immersive experience: Jarvis (2019), Alston (2013), Dixon & Smith (2007), Gardner (2012), Gordon (2013), Jenkins (2012), Krasner (2006), Machon (2011), McConachie (2008; 2010; 2013), Salen & Zimmerman (2004), R. Shaughnessy (2012), N. Shaughnessy (2013), Zaiontz (2014) (to name a few). The common theme running through most of the academics' research into the *immersive*, in both its form and sensation, is the company Punchdrunk. But how do Punchdrunk describe their work?

The "immersive theatre pioneers Punchdrunk" describe their accomplishments and work on their website, stating that:

Since 2000, Punchdrunk has pioneered a game changing form of immersive theatre in which roaming audiences experience epic storytelling inside sensory theatrical worlds. Blending classic texts, physical performance, award-winning design installation and

²⁵ "Schechner's "Six Axiom's for Environmental Theatre" (1967, revised 1987) emphasise a reciprocal relationship between the space and the gaze of a spectator:

1. The theatrical event is a set of related transactions;
2. All the space is used for the performance;
3. The theatrical event can take place either in a totally transformed space or in "found space";
4. Focus is flexible and variable;
5. All production elements speak their own language;
6. The text need be neither the starting point nor the goal of a production. There may be no verbal text at all. ([1973] 1994: ix-li)" (Biggin, 2017, p.185).

unexpected sites, the company's infectious format rejects the passive obedience usually expected of audiences.

Punchdrunk, 2000.

Despite Arnott calling Punchdrunk “immersive theatre pioneers Punchdrunk” in 2011, Punchdrunk are still not calling themselves that. They are only suggesting that they have “pioneered a game changing form” of *it*. They have achieved this by establishing immersive theatre as a form in which rejects the “passive obedience” of traditional theatregoing. The form of immersive theatre is now associated with the presentational form of promenade theatre and environmental theatre, and one could argue that this is due to Punchdrunk’s commercial success and reckoning. Punchdrunk are most well known for their performance of *Sleep No More* which is an adaptation of *Macbeth*. This adaptation, unlike traditional performances of Shakespeare, allows the audience to move freely within the theatrical world; they can watch what they want to watch and go where they want to go. Erin Sullivan, one of the editors in *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, summarises Punchdrunk’s style here: “Punchdrunk typically applies a multi-sensory, noir-aesthetic to its interactive retellings of classical drama, dance, music, and film” (Sullivan, 2015).

The company Shunt are also well-known in the form of Immersive Theatre and similarly to Punchdrunk adapt classic texts for their performances e.g., Zola’s *Money (L’Argent)*. Shunt like to use interior spaces that are usually hidden from the public e.g., underneath London Bridge Station (which they inhabited for 6 years) to create specific atmospheres and moods for audiences that complement their work. Here is an excerpt from White’s article describing Shunt’s first performance at the Station:

For *Tropicana*, the first piece shown there, the audience were led in small groups from this room into a further space that appeared to be a large lift, thereby creating the illusion

of descending further below the station. Thereafter, they were walked along an extensive series of dimly lit arches, at the end of which they found a spot to watch the beginning of ‘the show’. This series of *coups de théâtre* – the theatre disguised as a storage room, the fake lift, the long, long walk into the depths of the normally invisible space under the station – was an adventure into the interior of the industrial city, and was key to creating the atmospheres of mystery and unease and the contrasts between the airy and the subterranean that the piece exploited.

White, 2012, p.224.

Shunt and Punchdrunk both use site-specific and site-sympathetic locations. Both companies explore the experience between the subject/object divide and performer/audience relationship. The difference between the two companies however is that Punchdrunk want their audiences to hunt down the immersion and the inside of the performance whereas in Shunt’s work “the performance is usually ‘delivered’ to the audience in a more sustained and consistent way: they are not required to seek it out or to wander through it unguided” (2012:229).

Neither company is making claims that they can provide a new realm of experience unlike traditional theatre forms however they are creating performances with a much deeper audience involvement and impact in the work. An example of this would be that there is not a “new realm of experience” created in Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More* that was not available in Michael Boyd’s 2011 RSC production of *Macbeth*, however the audience can seek out specific moments and interactions in *Sleep No More* but could not in the RSC production. Boyd’s production of *Macbeth* was performed in the then, newly built, Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre famously holds a thrust stage auditorium. Thrust stages are often used to increase the intimacy between performer and audience, as evident in Boyd’s 2011 production. Despite this, participation and interactivity are almost non-existent in Boyd’s *Macbeth*, and, in orthodox theatre, (such as thrust staging,) unlike in site-specific work i.e., *Sleep No More*. Schechner states that “although the audience is present at an orthodox theater

performance, ‘presence’ is a way of saying ‘as absent as can possibly be arranged.’ Feedback is kept to a minimum. [...] The orthodox theater is a closed system discouraging feedback. It is closed not only because whatever happens on stage is already known by the actors, and nothing is supposed to change this prearranged ‘score’” (Schechner, 1994, p.72). In the New York production of *Sleep No More*, the action and design spans over five floors, and the audience-participants can move freely and leisurely for up to three hours: exploring independently and/or collectively the space, environment and performance. The actors and performers enact their prearranged ‘scores’, just as the performers in Boyd’s *Macbeth* do, yet the audience has the freedom and opportunity to seek out a specific one-on-one moment with a performer (if they so choose or are chosen). This does not mean that Punchdrunk’s presentational form of promenade is more engaging than Boyd’s production, or indeed that it offers a ‘new realm of experience’. It simply means that the audience’s agency to affect the rhythm of the performance, the theatrical world and its impact, is greater than that of the RSC production and traditional theatre forms.

An article by Iain Aitch for the *Arts and Humanities Research Council* stated that Punchdrunk “were among the first in theatre to recognise and act upon the fact that younger audiences are as used to the narrative arc of a video game as they are that of a play, film or television programme. After all, what could be more immersive than a world you have to keep your eyes on, lest your character get killed? And what could be more experiential than a world that you can interact act with, change and control?” (Aitch, 2015). As Punchdrunk say themselves – they have “pioneered a game changing form of immersive theatre.” (Punchdrunk, 2000).

Punchdrunk and Shunt immerse their audiences in a “very literal way” (2012:225) and have become very successful because of it – “with respect to their ability to attract large audiences

over long runs; their garnering of critical attention; and their use of large-scale, maze-like found spaces as locations for extensive environmental performances” (2012:223).

Rose Biggin, in her book, *Immersive Theatre and Audience Experience: Space, Game and Story in the Work of Punchdrunk*, again, draws on immersive-style performances by Punchdrunk, and guides the reader through the various aspects of immersive experience: “the emotional, the physical, the *sensation* of immersion in place, space and story” (Biggin, 2017, p.5). Biggin explains what is actually meant by being ‘immersed’ across different contexts and states that “immersive experience is not a felt/non-felt binary but a graded and temporary state, defined (somewhat paradoxically) by the existence of its boundaries. By uncoupling ‘immersive experience’ the sensation and ‘immersive theatre’ the form, [she] argue[s] for a distinction between content, form and effect” (2017:5). This key distinction between immersive experience as a sensation, and immersive theatre as a form needs to be made when discussing immersive work to avoid blurry definitions and blending terminologies together. Biggin’s nuanced model offers a means of understanding immersive experience, and a framework to better analyse immersive experience.

Biggin lists the many theoretical approaches to audience immersion within theatre and performance studies, film, television, and cultural studies; in immersive theatre – the form (mostly via Punchdrunk, however the approaches to audience interactivity and engagement are applicable beyond, just, Punchdrunk) – and immersive experience – the sensation – via cognition, philosophy, aesthetics, computer games and game play. Both Biggin’s and White’s research into the immersive and aesthetics most coincide with this thesis. White’s interrogation of aesthetics through Heideggerian ontology is akin to OOO. Whilst the difference between Biggin’s research and this thesis is that her book “is interested in how immersive experience is

situated in theatrical production” (2017: 16), and this research is interested in how objects propose sharable cognitive acts to its audiences which in turn helps facilitate immersive experiences situated in theatrical productions. The process of an immersive experience is influenced by propositionality and how the proposition is enacted and agreed. Biggin, herself, states that “immersive experience exists as a series of graded states. It is a temporary phenomenon rather than a felt/non-felt binary that exists in relation to, and as a result of, the overcoming of various barriers” (2017:208). Some of the various barriers that must be overcome for an immersive experience to occur are defeated by the acceptance of a proposition caused by the qualities of an object.²⁶ It is the aesthetics of objects, both in and out of the form of immersive theatre that shall be explored and analysed.

1.5 Proscenium Arch Theatre

As previously stated, semiotics cannot effectively analyse the difference between a sign in a proscenium arch theatre and a sign in immersive theatre. This is due to what Ronald Naverson calls *scenographic distance* (2001). Naverson calls upon Daphna Ben Chaim’s concept of aesthetic distance which posits this as “the underlying factor that determines theatrical style in the 20th Century” (Naverson, 2001, p.3). Ben Chaim’s continuum of the distance specific practitioners in 20th Century theatre “strive to create for their audience” (2001:4) along with her definitions of aesthetic distance elude to how the fictionality of theatre can be enforced –

²⁶ Barriers to immersion occur in various concepts, not only via proposals from objects. For example: “barriers to immersion arise when one way of engaging with the show becomes coded as the ‘better’ or ‘correct’ way.” (Biggin, 2017, p.81).

particularly in proscenium theatre. The proscenium arch frames the action of a play in theatre and the application of this to theatre in the late 18th and 19th centuries created the notion of an imaginary fourth wall through which audiences could view a narrative as a passive attendee. The framing device of the proscenium arch distinctly separates performers from audience and facilitates the potential for grand theatres and larger audiences creating a potential for a variety of aesthetic distances. Ben Chaim's continuum suggests that the greater the aesthetic distance, the greater the audience's awareness of fictionality. When experiencing theatre in this style, one's perception of the fictionality of theatre is greater than that of immersive theatre. The suspension between the fictionality and non-fictionality of theatre for audience-participants in immersive events (even those with large architectural environments) is suspended closer towards *the real* / non-fictionality since the aesthetic distance between space, place, story and performer is constantly changing whereas in proscenium these (usually) remain the same throughout the performance. The perceived theatrical objects are viewed through a frame in proscenium and are analysed semiotically, whereas in immersive theatre and for audiences whom Naverson describes as *postmodern audiences*, the distance and relationships between objects are (potentially) constantly shifting; audiences may come into direct contact with sensual objects.

The aesthetic distance of the proscenium arch is not all so one-sided as it would seem. It does not always create a greater awareness of fictionality and aesthetic distance. Naverson states that "extending scenery through the proscenium arch – in effect breaking the fictional boundary – and decreasing the proximity to the audience, can decrease aesthetic distance" (2001:10). He further explains that:

the trend of mid-20th century American theatres (particularly university theaters) of painting these "picture frame" prosceniums dark coloured or building theatres with

unadorned prosceniums reveals and attempt to reduce the aesthetic distance. This attempt to mitigate the fictionality of the proscenium stage mirrors the rise of actor-centered psychologically realistic texts in the mid-century, which still predominates in America today.

Naverson, 2001, p.9.

This passage is still relevant almost twenty years on since the production of “psychologically realistic texts” still dominates American theatres to date as evident with *The Ferryman* (2019) at the Bernard Jacobs Theater in New York, which first premiered at London’s Royal Court Theatre in the spring of 2017. Despite the lavish interiors of both theatres, the designer Rob Howell frames the action with a stone-grey proscenium which helps to reduce the aesthetic distance between audience and production. This design technique would presumably place *The Ferryman* at a ‘normal’ degree of distance on Ben Chaim’s continuum, meaning that director Sam Mendes – of the four-time Tony Award winning show – can suspend his audience’s perception between a state of non-fictionality and fictionality which is closer towards *the real* than the fictive.

This thesis is not stipulating that the form of immersive theatre is more real or believable for audiences than theatre framed within a proscenium. Belief does not mean, guarantee, or lead to reality. Previously, I stated that the implied realism of immersive theatre makes the claim that an object *is* the thing it stands for. There is an implied realism in a multitude of theatrical productions, styles, genres, texts, performances etc., and this is also the case for performances framed within a proscenium. Yet, semiotics cannot effectively analyse the *difference* in a sign in proscenium arch theatre and immersive theatre. In a proscenium arch theatre, the watched performance is a kind of text which can be read and analysed in a similar fashion to printed text, even though the audience members do not have it written down. The signs and symbols onstage

are representative of a shared reality. Whereas in immersive theatre, signs and symbols are still active but due to the bodily presence and corporeality of the audience-participant in the theatrical world and environment, the signs within the qualities of the shared objects are tangible, material and *actual*.

1.6 The Actuality of Propositions

Now the styles of performances that are to be analysed are explained, the type of propositionality of which will be analysed can finally be defined. Since this type of propositionality makes a claim that an object *is* the thing it represents, let's call it 'The *Actuality* of Propositions'. This term is flawed since *actuality* refers to the state of existing in reality, yet the world of theatre is fictional, but, in immersive theatre, the audience exists within the created fictional reality. There is a corporeality or embodiment for the spectator in immersive theatre which is not the case for proscenium arch theatre. In the fictional world of the proscenium arch theatre, the spectator may be present cognitively or emotionally in the fictive world, but they are not bodily present in the way a participant is when they are immersed. In immersive theatre, the audience are present, they have a being, and the propositions and claims offered for acceptance are ones of *actuality*. Therefore, the term - the actuality of propositions - suits the requirements for this research. Within the separate forms of theatre then, there are different but overlapping sets of propositions. These shall be interrogated in depth during the analysis of the chosen performances, but first examples ought to be offered.

Consider again the theatrical tree example from earlier: imagine a stage with an actor performing the universal theatrical sign of a tree. The shape and gesture of the actor's body are the 'signifier(s)' and the object tree is the 'signified'. Semiotically, the actor is signifying a tree. The type of propositionality being explored is an extension of this. The proposition that is being offered to the audience is 'this is a tree'; 'this' being the shape and gesture of the actor; the actor's whole body. A performative proposal exists then, via the actor's shape and gesture. This type of propositionality makes the claim that an object *is* the thing it represents. It is up to the audience whether to accept or reject the proposition. To accept the proposition, the spectator must perform the act of thinking of the actor's shape and gesture as representing the tree; the spectator predicates that the actor is a tree. If we remove the question of truth / falsity from Soames' definition of propositions and replace it with acceptable / unacceptable, one can see that the representational content of the proposition – 'this is a tree' – has imposed conditions which are necessary for *acceptance*.

The spectator can either accept the proposition or reject it, yet both have consequences. It is also worth mentioning that if one neither accepts nor rejects the proposition 'this is a tree', one can still follow the narrative and understand the dramatic action. This is because the sign still exists through the branch of propositionality we know as semiotics. Firstly, the sign still exists in the scene because the object [actor] is still graphically depicting that it signifies a tree regardless of whether the spectator has accepted 'this is a tree'. Secondly, the sign still exists in the scene regardless of whether the spectator has read or understood the sign because the object [actor] still functions as a tree for the performers and within the performance. The sign therefore only needs to be read/understood if the spectator is to follow the narrative and dramatic action. If one has understood the dramatic action, they have read the signification of the material object [actor]

as the material object [tree].

So, what are the consequences of either accepting or rejecting the proposition ‘this is a tree’?

That depends on the relationship between the art and the spectator. Is the relationship purely cognitive, bodily, or *both*? In the proscenium arch theatre, the addressee of ‘this is a tree’, is the spectator. Whether the spectator accepts or rejects the proposition, there are no consequences for the scene itself, as it will presumably continue as rehearsed whether an audience is there to view it or not. The consequences lay with the spectator. Let’s start with rejecting and then oppose it. A rejection of the proposition does not necessarily mean a rejection of one’s interpretation of the sign, but most likely does. When rejecting a proposition, you are unable to, or you are choosing not to accept the proposition: one cannot accept ‘this is a tree’. The consequence is that you do not engage with the work to the same level of vivacity as someone who does accept ‘this is a tree’. There is a lack of belief, or perhaps a lack of suspension of disbelief, that the object before you *is* a tree. This consequence lays with the spectator’s cognitive interactivity with the art.

In forms of participatory theatre, such as immersive theatre, the addressee of the proposition ‘this is a tree’ is not (only) the spectator but (also) the character signified and proposed by the fictional world and stage figures. The consequence of rejecting the proposition in this world is not only cognitive, but also bodily. There is a corporeal consequence which occurs for the participant which could affect and diminish their presence, involvement, engagement, immersion etc., in the fictive world. Conversely, when we accept the proposition ‘this is a tree’ in immersive theatre or in an event where our relationship with the art is not only cognitive, the consequence could be one of an increased sense of presence, involvement and so on; it helps to facilitate an immersive experience and sensation in the participant.

The next step is to consider how propositions of this type are made. How do spectators distinguish them? Audiences can interpret the signs of a theatrical performance, production or event yet not be immersed *in* it. This is where the actuality of propositions differs to semiotics. As we know, propositions are the acts of cognizing things i.e., the information carried and the interpretations we give. This thesis argues that the interpretation(s) given are not our understanding(s) of signs but our translation(s) of *objects* and their *qualities*. As seen from examples, other than utterances it is objects that propose things to audiences in theatre. In chapter two, there are five sub-chapters which investigate the translation of objects via six performances / case studies. Each case study – other than *Forget Me Not* (2016) since this explains my practice which led to the idea of propositionality and is not an examination of propositionality – will be sustained by the application of Object-Oriented Ontology (as defined in chapter 1.1). Embedding this ontology within the case studies works as a thread that links the chapters of the thesis together. For example, the ‘Quadruple Object’ theory will be referred to throughout these case studies to stipulate how the *qualities* of objects propose things to be considered. Exploring how the actualities of propositions functions and the effects these have on the participant(s) will provide us with an alternative perspective for viewing objects and invitations within the form of immersive theatre.

Chapter 2 – Exploring Propositionality

2.1 *Forget Me Not*

The catalyst that started my investigation into propositionality within immersive style-performance was the production *Forget Me Not* (2016). *Forget Me Not* is an immersive styled devised piece created by Sean Sewell, David Field, and myself (James Sharpe). For a synopsis of *Forget Me Not*, please revisit the ‘Preface’ section of this thesis.

It was the audience’s first interaction(s) within the theatrical space of *Forget Me Not* (2016) that sparked my interest in propositionality. When the audience-participants enter the *Forget Me Not* performance space, the ‘nurse’ says to them: “Please sign the visitor’s book”. The nurse is stood next to a table on which is a book and pen. Accepting the nurse as *being* a nurse, is the first proposition to be enacted. In accepting that, the rest follows too i.e., in signing the visitor’s book, the proposition is that this book is a visitor’s book, and the participant, in signing it, accepts that proposition. Furthermore, they also then accept the related proposition that they are both visitor, and spectator. This opens the analysis to include the vital distinctions about what is being proposed, and how it is being proposed, and how the proposition is enacted / agreed. There is also the question of whether this remains both at the same time i.e., is the book both a prop and a real visitor’s book? Does the spectator remain a spectator while accepting they are also a visitor? The participant views a SO and signs the RO thus accepting the actuality of the proposition that the object before them *is* a visitor’s book; by signing it they affirm it is a visitor’s book and become both visitor and spectator/participant in the space-time of this fictional world. Though, one cannot rule out the possibility that some audience-participants only signed the book because

they saw other audience-participants sign it, or, because they thought their participation in that act was part of the show, or even because they thought they would not be allowed in otherwise, and so on. If this were the case, then that affirmation would not be given by those particular audience-participants. The participants would however still be viewed as both visitor and spectator within the theatrical narrative by the performers and audience-participants that had assented to that proposition. And if we view (immersive) theatre as object-oriented, then the objects within (immersive) theatre cause the actuality of propositions to be accepted or rejected.

As previously mentioned, the purpose for creating *Forget Me Not* was not bound to this line of inquiry. It was simply to explore the telling of stories through different performance languages in an immersive environment. Propositionality was not the first consideration to develop out the production. My initial thoughts surrounded belief. During my master's degree, I created a questionnaire for audience members to fill in after experiencing the performances of the *Forget Me Not* show on the 11th and 12th November 2016. I used the show as a tool; I placed the audience into a fictional world and then explored their beliefs of what they deemed to be *real*. I then compared my research alongside the results, quotes, and statistics of the audiences' own phenomenological experience to try and answer the question: what do we believe when we are immersed in a theatrical world? The questionnaire consisted of nine questions all requiring personal responses and reflections to the piece of theatre they experienced. The questions surrounded the topics of belief/immersion and reality. Sixty-six questionnaires were filled in by individuals who experienced one of the three performances of the *Forget Me Not* show.²⁷

²⁷ Please see Appendix 4 for the data responses to the post-show questionnaires related to the *Forget Me Not* performances.

I will not go through all the responses and statistics from this original line of questioning since they are *mostly* irrelevant to this present study. What is relevant, is that immersion and belief were developed and achieved by audience members participating in *Forget Me Not* (2016) by assenting to the network of (sub-)propositions laid before them, and that they made decisions pertaining to their reality and existence in the fictional world via probable and demonstrative reasoning. These notions are how my practice led to propositionality. I shall now explain how.

The main proposition of *Forget Me Not* is that the theatrical world you (as audience) are in is a nursing home. In entertaining that proposition, you knowingly or unknowingly disregard anything that does not signify a nursing home. The aim of this proposition that Sean, David and I created, was to blur the quotidian and theatrical world via immersive-styled performance and to provide a theatrical experience of a nursing home, not an authentic one. The three of us did not define *Forget Me Not* as being immersive theatre, or at least a performance that is part of the form of immersive theatre, since the production did not contain all the qualities within Machon's *scale of immersivity* (2013, pp.93-102). Whilst the performance did have the 'in-its-own-worldness' that immersive theatre requires, we did not try to remove all the objects and signs that suggested the location and setting was not a nursing home. We did not perform the show in a functional nursing home, make the exterior of the building appear like a nursing home, or even transform the theatre studio into wholly looking like a nursing home. Whilst we manipulated the audience's arrangement within the space to appear like a day room, and poured liquid trichlorophenylmethyliodosalicyl, aka TCP antiseptic liquid, inside vases which contained flowers and placed them on each table to make the studio smell of antiseptic – a smell the three of us associated with nursing homes – the studio still looked like and resembled a studio. In the post-show interviews to the *Forget Me Not* performances in 2018, some participants said that

they did not ‘buy’ that they were in a detailed reconstruction of a nursing home. And this was not our intention. We only meant to blur the boundaries between the worlds implicitly asking the audience during the performance to disregard those elements which did not align with the main proposition. For some immersive performances complete immersive experiences are necessary, but not all, like *Forget Me Not*. Therefore, all the gaps between worlds do not have to be filled for immersion to occur. For performances such as the pervasive theatre shows of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* and *The Lucky Ones: Lailah*, the reduction of those gaps is important, and it was this realisation that allowed me to understand what I deem ‘the goal’ of immersive performance / theatre to be.

The post-show data gathered also showed how the audience-participants’ specific thoughts, feelings, state and quality of immersion etc., differed. Question three of the post-show questionnaires to *Forget Me Not* (2016) asked ‘did you experience any kind of change when...’; the participants could then select from a selection of multiple-choice responses related to moments and scenarios within the performance. Here are those options with a percentage of how many of the sixty-six individuals who completed a questionnaire felt that they experienced a form of change at these moments:

- 1 – As you signed the visitors’ book? = 34.84%
- 2 – As you were deciding where to sit? = 28.78%
- 3 – When you decided whether to have tea/biscuits? = 25.75%
- 4 – When the actors started speaking? = 27.27%
- 5 – When the stories began? = 45.45%

6 – Other/No Shift Change? = 6.06%

This question had the most variation in its responses as individuals experienced change and began to be immersed or believe in a proposition under different circumstances, theories, and evidence. It is worth noting that two of the four individuals who chose option six, also chose other options too meaning that they were circling ‘Other’, not, ‘No change’. The other two out of four individuals only circled option six and therefore I have assumed they were suggesting ‘No change’. Thus, meaning that 3% of people chose ‘Other’ and 3% of people chose ‘No change’.

This was an extremely interesting range of responses and it strongly suggested that people did or did not assent to certain propositions and either believed or did not believe in an aspect of the performance. Whatever the change may be after the audience members signed the visitors’ book, one can deduce that twenty-three-people decided on whether they believed in the proposition of having to sign their name. They either assented to the notion, and that assenting became a belief in the concept and reality of the nursing home, or they did not assent to this act and signing their name simply was the action of signing their name with no assent to immersion and belief.

A change and decision were made by 94% of the audience members after specific moments in the performance. This strongly suggested that there was no immediate belief; immersion does/does not occur through assenting/not assenting to the propositions laid in front of you.

Regarding the 3% of people who experienced no change at any of the moments listed in the questionnaire, perhaps they didn’t experience a change in their beliefs as they were immediately immersed and believed in the reality of the performance as soon as they entered the space – meaning that Locke and I would be incorrect i.e., that immediate belief and immersion is possible. Or maybe they did not form any decisions or lively impressions from any of the

propositions displayed before them. What is interesting is that the two people who experienced no change were also part of the four people who experienced no change when crossing the threshold between the foyer and performance space in Question two of the questionnaire. This leads me to believe that on viewing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, and overall experiencing the propositions before them there still was not enough reasoning or evidence for the individuals to assent to those propositions and commit to believing in them. However, the two people who marked 'No change' on both questions, two and three, also both stated that they had 'complete conviction/highest possible degree of belief' in what was happening during the performance in response to question one, which asked: 'did you at any point in the performance believe in what was happening?' These two individuals therefore had complete conviction in the reality of the performance, or part(s) of the performance, yet did not register *any* form of change upon entering the performance space, nor, through cognitive, utilitarian, and explicit participation with the components of the theatrical world itself. If one goes by these two people's responses, the quality and state of one's immersion in a theatrical world does not differ dependent on the entertainment of possibilities – the acceptance of propositions and their lures. Yet, if one follows the 97% majority of responses to these questions, then this aligns with the idea that an individual's state of immersion and belief is developed by assenting to the network of (sub-)propositions laid before them, and that they made decisions pertaining to their reality and existence in the fictional world via probable and demonstrative reasoning.

As one can see in the responses to question three, the highest percentage of experienced change was when the narrative began. Every audience-participant can hear the characters speaking within the performance, and the theatrical action is what audience members pay the most attention to in theatre productions. Whereas in *Forget Me Not*, not every single audience-

participant would have drunk the tea, eaten a biscuit, signed the visitors' book, and decided where to sit – that decision may have been made for them by their friend, or perhaps it was the only seat available. It is therefore possible and reasonable to suggest that those percentages are lower than when the narrative commenced, because those possibilities were not always entertained. Noticing this pattern in the questionnaire responses made me think that the state and quality of immersion could be affected by the entertainment and acceptance of propositional lures and propositions. The importance of my practice, *Forget Me Not*, and the initial data gathered, cannot be understated in arriving at the completion of this thesis, and in the development of a theory of propositionality as a means of analysis in theatre.

Not only was this how my practice led to propositionality, but how my research method was chosen too. Unfortunately, as I alluded to in the methodology section of this thesis's introduction chapter, sub-propositions are not empirically testable by their very nature. Even if quantitative data were gathered on sub-propositions within theatre performances, the data would not identify the qualities and effects of an agreed proposition. Quantitative tests would only show *something* about people's experiences and not the possibilities that propositionality offers. That is why I decided to explore my direct experiences within the differing theatrical environments, so that I can suggest further proposals for viewing theatre.

In the next chapter, the first case-study for exploring and analysing propositionality in theatre commences. The analysis of *The Lucky Ones* is supported by the application of object-oriented ontology.

2.2 *The Lucky Ones*

On the 29th of August 2019 I interviewed Alexander Palmer, the artistic director of Riptide, regarding how they used objects to propose things to their audiences within their productions of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* (2018) and *The Lucky Ones: Lailah* (2018).²⁸ Riptide is a site-sympathetic and immersive theatre company based in Leeds. Palmer states that:

[Riptide's] mission statement is to make extraordinary experiences for audience members and [that their] work tends to fall under two brackets. The first is large immersive performances that take over one venue and invite [around] two hundred audience members at the same time into the space - in those spaces [they] create worlds, and this is like a Punchdrunk or Shunt performance. The other strand of [Riptide's] work is more intimate; it's one and one based. [...Riptide] like to think of [them]selves as dealing with the intimate and epic at the same time. Fundamentally, [they] put the audience at the heart of every experience [they] make, and that goes through making the work to how it feels; you should feel like you are at the center of the piece.

Palmer, 2019.

The Lucky Ones is one of Riptide's more intimate experiences for its audience participants as most interactions are one-on-one based. It is a month-long experience for individual audience members who do not see or converse with other participants, only with performers. Yet, *The Lucky Ones* is also epic. Not epic in Brecht's sense of the term, but epic in scale and duration. Riptide tailors the performance to and around a specific audience member. There are "a series of individual, bespoke performances which take place over a few weeks, across a city. These durational experiences are pervasive and take place alongside the audience members lives. In this way [the] city becomes the backdrop, the members of public become extras to your

²⁸ When referring to both *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* and *The Lucky Ones: Lailah*, it shall read as *The Lucky Ones*.

personalised narrative” (Riptide, 2018). *The Lucky Ones* utilises the city of Leeds as its canvas to immerse participants into their own private world, game, story, performance and production.

Whilst Riptide define themselves as a site-sympathetic and immersive theatre company, do both *The Lucky Ones* productions belong within the form and genre of immersive theatre? Riptide’s website states:

Game-changing theatre company, Riptide, have created a groundbreaking new form of theatrical experience.

Step into an immersive adventure that augments your surroundings for a month. The Lucky Ones is a new form of experience for one audience member at a time.

This experience is part theatre, part video game, part escape room.

It starts with something being delivered to your home, and from there the narrative unfolds.

Riptide, 2018.

Did Riptide create a ‘*new form* of theatrical experience’? That is debatable. Incorporating game play into theatrical experiences is not a new thing. It is my contention that *The Lucky Ones* productions are ‘pervasive experiences’ or ‘pervasive performances’. Whilst Riptide (claim to) create immersive theatre, *The Lucky Ones* does not classify as part of that specific genre because it loses the ‘in-its-own-worldness’ associated with the form (Machon, 2013). It is not “its own unique environment” (2013:93) as it takes place in the people of Leeds’s quotidian world. It is more analogous with pervasive theatre as it instils a sense of play in its participants. What Riptide are doing here is stretching the concept of the *Magic Circle*. Developed from Huizinga (1938) and Caillois (1958), Salen & Zimmermann’s *Rules of Play* (2004) defines the concept of the magic circle as its understood in game theory today; that “idea of a special place in time and space created by a game” (2004:95). Stenros states that the magic circle is:

useful in describing the difference between play and non-play; a handy metaphor that acts as intellectual shorthand for a more complex set of social relations. Yet when taken too literally, it can cloud our understanding of how play is bounded. The metaphor of magic circle stands for a border between play and non-play.

Stenros, 2012, p.1.

The border between play and non-play is constantly shifting in *The Lucky Ones* and it is never clear whether one is in or out of the narrative which makes it porous rather than rigid. The three criterion of a tripartite system which composes the magic circle metaphor are all stretched. Riptide stretch the space of the gamed experience to the geographical location of Leeds, West Yorkshire; they stretch the time of the game to a month-long experience; and they stretch the social relationships of the participants within the gamed experience since any one / thing could be part of the performance. It certainly has gaming elements then, but it is still theatre as it has performative elements too – this shall become clear throughout the discussion of the performances. I am therefore not going to define *The Lucky Ones* as immersive theatre, nor an ‘immersive adventure’, but a pervasive experience which is constantly “keyed” and “unkeyed” (Goffman, 1974).

Riptide’s aim with *The Lucky Ones* was to “see what theatre could be”. When asking Palmer for a summary of *The Lucky Ones*, he did so by describing the common format of theatre. “The theatre is traditionally a two-hour experience in one building where it’s very formulated and you know what happens. [They] wanted to experiment with what happens when that two-hour experience is stretched over the course of a month and what happens when you’re not asked to go to one location, you’re asked to go to many, and actually, you are the location; wherever you are, the performance comes to you.” (2019). One can see the appeal for adventurers and thrill seekers, but how does one pitch a month-long performance to its audiences? Riptide

“propositioned [*The Lucky Ones*] as an experience made by a theatre company. [They] found that proposition difficult because [they] couldn’t reveal what [*The Lucky Ones*] was about without spoiling it. Part of the experience is that you’re going into the unknown; that you’re signing up for something that you don’t really know what it is and only through doing it do you find out more. [...] And by doing that, you’re rewarded for your bravery.” (2019).

To sell the month-long mystery of *The Lucky Ones* to audiences, Riptide did so by selling “a feeling”:

The Lucky Ones is the feeling you get when queuing for a rollercoaster, it is that gripping series you devour in a week, and that podcast you tell all your friends about. It is surprising. It is magical. It is unexpected.

Where your city becomes the backdrop and your choices directly influence your story. You become the hero in your own narrative as your decisions blur the boundaries of reality and fiction.

Riptide, 2018.

The focus and analysis will be of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* which was Riptide’s first attempt of creating a month-long experience in March 2018, yet aspects of *The Lucky Ones: Lailah* shall also be discussed.²⁹ Facets of these storylines will unfold and become clearer as the analysis of the use of objects within *The Lucky Ones* continues, but Palmer explains the process of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* as “a month-long personal experience that you get a letter on day one to say that ‘this is day one and that anyone you meet from now could be part of the performance’. You then get drip-fed clues and objects and you’re asked to go certain places that will extend the narrative in some way or give you choices that might change the narrative or invite new happenings to come into your life.” (2019). Palmer was reluctant to provide a synopsis of the

²⁹ *The Lucky Ones: Lailah* was a lot shorter. “It was only two weeks and Lailah was an AI. There was much more focus on moral tests and she is there to learn from you and you’re basically her human teacher, [that is the] concept of it. And through your moral choices in the experience does she learn right from wrong.” (Palmer, 2019).

productions' plot due to the "no spoilers" world that fans of these types of experiences adhere to, even though *The Lucky Ones* shows are not scheduled to be performed again. Reviews of the shows similarly, and intentionally, do not divulge too much information of the narrative itself but rather the shows process and format as Palmer did in my interview with him. Ladley (2018) appears to be the only reviewer who is happy to share detailed descriptions of their own experiences. Ladley's blog shall be discussed in detail shortly. Firstly though, I shall turn to Thorpe's review of *The Lucky Ones* on *The State of the Arts* online, for her synopsis of the performance:

Before you know it, you find yourself playing the lead through an espionage-themed series of events: participants allow 'Capital Experience', a company within the roleplay that has a dystopian, Orwellian, 1984 feel to it, to manage your happiness. They contact you via text, email and mail. They arrange to meet you for clandestine parcel swaps whilst surreptitiously taking photographs of you. The images are pinned to a notice board in a city centre flat that you're ordered to ransack for clues about a wayward 'Capital' employee. And all this is prefaced with the ominous phrase: "Your happiness is our primary concern". Very creepy. But also, very thrilling.

Thorpe, 2018.

Whilst this synopsis describes *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*, there are many similarities between the plot of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* and *The Lucky Ones: Lailah*. The fundamental difference between them being, in *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*, one must ultimately decide whether to put one's faith in the fictional company, 'Capital Experience', or in Lucy, a scorned ex-employee of the fictional company and one's relationship manager with which one communicates. And in *The Lucky Ones: Lailah*, the character 'Lailah' is an AI rather than a human, and one must teach her right from wrong. As Palmer says, one gets "drip-fed clues and objects" throughout the experiences which culminates in a final decision that shapes the ending of the performances' narratives.

The analysis of Riptide's employment of objects allows for the consideration of how propositions are enacted and agreed by both performer and audience. This analysis opens the discussion of what / who is enacting the proposal, and who is accepting it, as well as *how* the performing object – be it human or non-human – expresses the claim to be accepted. For immersive work such as this, I will show that the 'how' is indicative, that is, claimed as *actually being*; fact. Turner states that "propositions flourish best in the indicative mood of the cultural process. They depend upon conventions of codification, verbal or nonverbal, most of which lie below the threshold of conscious awareness of members of a given group, on tacit agreements between speakers that they be true." (Turner, 1988, p.102). The actuality of the propositional claim enables this discussion to transcend beyond pure identification of the sign and referent. The actuality of the claims that the production creates and makes lead to further *sub-propositions* which help make up aspects of the greater proposition.³⁰ These claims also allow for an interesting discussion of the *roles* that objects perform in both theatrical and quotidian worlds.

Before moving on to the analysis of specific objects, it is useful to understand how the productions of *The Lucky Ones* operated. During the interview with Palmer, he stipulates that there were seventy-five audience-participants taking part in *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* experience. Riptide used four company members and assigned around twenty participants each to a team member. That team member was then responsible for "any direct conversation via SMS messaging [and] a wider team was put in place for larger spectacle elements [...] or any package drops which required a larger team" (2019). Each four team members had the same script for their interaction with the participants as Lucy. The conversations could and did veer off from the

³⁰ See pp.88-93 for the discussion on sub-propositions.

script depending on the participant's level of engagement; they could ask questions and talk about things that *they wanted* to talk about. Yet, there was a framework for the interaction and at certain dates and times, all the participants for all team members would need to know a specific piece of information, or a package would need sending out to the participants etc. Palmer explains that the decision of when to release the relevant information to the participants was entirely up to the team member and where their conversation is with the participant. If the relationship between Lucy (team member) and participant has developed quite quickly, and the conversations have become personal, then the required information may be divulged earlier than to a participant that has not interacted as often or in as much depth with their team member (Lucy).

Since Lucy was portrayed by four different team members, each participant's experience could differ – and not only because *they* responded differently – since the team members may respond to certain lines of enquiry or questioning differently to another. Palmer reveals that:

The initial week is getting to know each other and as a Lucy you can kind of manipulate what you pick out from the audience members, based on your own experience. For example, one of our artists Joe knew a lot about the rise in technology, the history of AI and all that kind of thing. So as soon as anyone touched up on that, he was straight in with those kinds of information. [Another one of the artists,] Lily, was a lot more human and light touch – Lucy was supposed to be human. Although, there was a question mark over whether she was because of how robotic her lines were.

Palmer, 2019.

If the audience-participants accept the proposal that the individual they are texting and communicating with *is* Lucy, then all audience-participants who take part in a 'Lucky Ones' experience and discuss their experience with another participant once the production has finished, would (presumably) believe that they communicated with the same Lucy as the other

participant. Yet, each interaction with an individual participant is its own performance and each performance is by default different and bespoke. Reverting to Bennett for a moment: “*outside of the world of the play—to the audience—the utterances of the propositions contained in theatrical statements function as, and are, the theatrical event, itself*” (2018:149). The theatrical statements received as a personal sensual object in the form of a direct text message retroactively become / *are* the theatrical event itself. In *The Lucky Ones*, as Palmer outlines above, the topic of conversation and the responses to the topic of conversation could differ depending on which artist within Riptide has been allocated to each participant. The audience-participant (Real-Object) perceives an image of ‘Lucy’s’ message to their personal phone. Each image or *sensual object* (SO) received and perceived will differ to other participants since the interacting agents i.e., performer and audience-participant, differ in each performance. This throws light upon the network between objects and acting agents and how objects perform and propose things to their perceiver. If an object is changed then the theatrical journey and experience of the audience is changed.

Connoted Propositions via Objects

The Questionnaire

Due to the disposition of *The Lucky Ones* taking place alongside the audience participants’ day-to-day lives, the purchasing of a ticket differed in style than typical theatre productions. The format is still the same with contemporary performances – bought online via a website – but the procedure is not only a transaction but an application. For both productions of *The Lucky Ones*, audience members are applying to be a participant that receives a unique and individual

experience; applying to be one of ‘the lucky ones’. The application process is probably the aspect that differs the most between *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* and *The Lucky Ones: Lailah* – this difference shall be expanded on in due course. In both productions, it is within the application process when the participants are confronted with their first object.

Palmer explains that for *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*, “as soon as you’ve booked your tickets, you’re sent a questionnaire. As soon as we know you’re a part of it we send you over thirty questions to determine [certain things, such as] house-keeping stuff [for example] your phone number, email address, postal address so that we can contact you, and also more specific questions. It started quite easy such as ‘where do you go on a Friday night?’ those kinds of low-level questions and ended with ‘what’s your relationship with your mother?’, ‘are you scared of death?’, ‘what’s your biggest fear?’ all those kind of things, so that we can tailor the experience to you. So that you and your best friend would have completely different experiences.” (2019). This initial object is perhaps one of the most influential acting agents throughout the entirety of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*. Although, this is not entirely due to the object acting in and as itself, but as a human-oriented placeholder. The questionnaire (*q*) is an object whose qualities propose many ideas to be considered within the mind of the participant. How the participant responds to the sensuous qualities of the object shapes the experience they shall receive from Riptide and shapes their life throughout the month of March 2018.³¹ By applying real qualities, which are personal to the participant, to the object *q*, the participant adds meaning to the object within our human investment. For example, Riptide sent “people to restaurants [in their] area based on their food tastes” (2019), the knowledge of which arose from the questionnaire. This gave the participant a

³¹ In some cases, Palmer suggests that the show could have affected the personal lives of the participants once the experience was over. For example, one participant ended a long-term relationship, and another quit their job.

new place to eat in their neighbourhood. The volume and quality of human investment that is given by the participant to this initial object does shape the level of experience provided by Riptide and the participant's life throughout the month.

The questionnaire is not only impactful through a human-oriented perspective, but from an object-oriented one too. Taking a step back to before a participant adds their own ideas, qualities, experiences etc. to the object, the sensuous qualities the object holds are proposing things to be considered, even if one does not know what those *things* are yet. When you're asked to complete a questionnaire for back-ground information pertaining to yourself from Riptide, which includes personal and intimate questions, one can assume that they will be using this information to tailor the experience to you; your likes and dislikes etc. Yet, one does not exactly know the significance of the object. How great or small a role this object and information will play within your experience. Simultaneously then, the qualities of the object are propositioning two things to the participant. The first thing proposed is mystery and the second is a soon-to-be discovered mystery or puzzle; the real untouchable object³². Riptide calls these proposals 'locked doors', and Palmer suggests that the entire 'Lucky Ones' experience is a locked door "because tomorrow you know that something is going to happen, you just don't know what it is." (2019). Riptide's notion of 'locked doors' is fused to causality within the story, i.e. the story that is revealed as the narrative moves forward. For Biggin, causality can have either a positive or negative affect on the audience in immersive theatre contexts depending on how the offerings of meaning and discovery are proposed and interpreted. Causality can "provide a means for

³² The object will eventually become known to the participant throughout the performance, but only as a sensual object. The real object is always unreachable.

immersive experience (as one discovery or encounter leads seamlessly to another) or raise barriers to immersion” (Biggin, 2017, p.123).

The proposition that the questionnaire is a locked door is a *sub-proposition* not the *main proposition* and is produced in the perceiver because of the qualities of the object. Sub-propositions are propositions which make up part of the greater proposition. The enactment of this proposition by the object and its qualities is twofold; it both proposes and is used as a sign (representatively) of mystery. The qualities of the object propose x to the audience participant = the questionnaire proposes mystery to the audience participant, and similarly, the qualities of the object denote x = the questionnaire denotes mystery. These are not the only sub-propositions expressed by the questionnaire though. Riptide use the questionnaire to create multiple sub-propositions generating cognitive acts in the mind of the participant. As defined earlier, propositions are *sharable objects of cognitive acts and attitudes*. Some of the sub-propositions that are proposed and denoted by the object are to complete the questionnaire, questioning what the significance and consequence of completing the questionnaire is, and so on.

The main proposition and the actuality of that propositional claim is that the questionnaire (SO) *is* a questionnaire; this is a questionnaire regarding the participant’s personality, likes, dislikes, history, relationships etc. It does not only represent and function as a questionnaire within the realm of a theatrical space or environment, it *actually* is the thing it claims to be. The interaction between the participant (RO) and the qualities of the questionnaire (SQ) is what makes the claim to the RO.

This can also be seen in *The Lucky Ones: Lailah*. As previously stated, the application process differs between the two separate productions of *The Lucky Ones*. During *The Lucky Ones: Lailah*, the booking process still involves a questionnaire, but the format of this isn’t a personal

email. Palmer explains that “you [must] do a kind of exam. You go into this exam hall and you complete a questionnaire. It was specifically designed like an A-level exam. You had to write your name on the front...it looked like an exam paper. It was done in silence, there were invigilators there, there was a big clock at the front, and that was more like an aptitude test. You were given some scenarios and you said how strongly you agree from 1-5” (2019).

During this application process – which is already a part of the performance (there are actors playing the roles of invigilators and participants) despite it being pitched as the *thing* that allows participation in the experience – all applicants had to take part in a sort of ‘aptitude test’ and they gathered together in an exam hall to take part. This was proposed as an exam; there were exam conditions relative to the exam. The test did not simply represent a test as it would if the narrative of a proscenium arch performance signified that a prop / theatrical object stands for *the* test in that world. The sensual object (the test) *actually* is the thing its qualities and the qualities of other sensual objects are proposing it to be.

“[The] results [of the exam] went into our systems to personalize the experience, but some audience members were told they had been ‘unsuccessful’, and they were shipped out in front of everyone.” The applicants discovered that they were either successful or unsuccessful there and then, and “there were also plants in [the exam that were told they were unsuccessful] so it seem[ed] that about half [the applicants did not pass].” (2019). In this moment, a participant’s interaction with an object and the objects qualities has led to a direct consequence affecting them and the trajectory of their theatrical experience. Even if they have accepted the conditions that the object proposes, the manner in which they accept those conditions and respond to the questions posed creates different consequences both in and outside of the theatrical world Riptide have created. For example, a participant that accepts the proposition that the object

before them *is* an exam, and that the outcome of their exam results will affect whether they can take part in Riptide's experience, can have a differing consequence to another participant that accepts the same proposition *if* they grade their answers differently on the 1-5 scale. Both have accepted the actuality of the proposition, yet the consequence can still differ depending on the qualities of the proposal and the audience-participants response to it. Ignoring for a moment the participants that were chosen to be either successful or unsuccessful *randomly* – since none of the participants know that this is the case – a multitude of sub-propositions arise from the knowledge and acceptance that you are successful or unsuccessful. Palmer explains that the reason for creating successful and unsuccessful participants is because they want the audience to know what it feels like to go through those sensations. "For successful applicants what it feels like is that 'you've passed a test', so you're immediately winning. Whatever this game is, I'm winning, so I feel a sense of gratification. The 'unsuccessful applicants' go home with disappointment and then they are told they had been accepted and that was all part of the test how you deal with failure. So, you go through a bit of an emotional rollercoaster, but you feel vindicated at the end, or you have new knowledge."

In discovering one's result of the aptitude test you are forced to accept that you are either a 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' participant, which leads to *further* sub-propositions. *The Lucky Ones*, like all theatre, consists of a big / main proposition and little / sub propositions. The main proposition that *The Lucky Ones* asserts to its participants is 'that your world is now (part of) a performance'. One's mind and body are inserted inside the theatrical world of *The Lucky Ones* over the course of several weeks. The main proposition is asserted indicatively; the proposition expresses itself as a statement of fact. The main proposition of immersive (theatre) work tends to be enacted in the indicative-mood. Whether it be an escape room, smart-phone treasure hunt,

Punchdrunk show, Shunt etc. For example, Coney's *A Small Town Anywhere* (2009) indicatively claimed that the players participating in the experience lived and were a part of the history and landscape of the town. IOU's *Rear View* (2017) indicatively claimed that any individuals or objects that were visible from the mobile converted double-decker bus along the streets of Blackpool were a part of the performance. This claim is similar to that of *The Lucky Ones* (in that the anything or anyone in the centre of Leeds could be part of the experience) and *The Goldbug* (2007-8) – which emerged out of Punchdrunk's *The Masque of the Red Death* – where any location both physically and virtually (online) could be part of the six-month adventure / treasure-hunt experience if suggested by clues existing in the qualities of objects. Nimble Fish's *The Container* (2007) indicatively claimed that the location the performance took place not only represented a lorry used for human-trafficking but was a real-world-object lorry that *was* used for human-trafficking. Yet, if a participant agrees to any of these offered propositions, or any other, in immersive, site-sympathetic and/or specific, or a form of participatory installation, one accepts it in the subjunctive-mood as we do with *all* theatre. For *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* then, audience-participants accept that their world is now (part of) a performance as *if* it were true, and not *that* it is true. Immersive theatre's main proposition is enacted in the indicative and agreed in the subjunctive.

Sub-propositions on the other hand are enacted and agreed in various moods. The enactment and agreement of little / sub-propositions are what help facilitate immersive sensations and experiences. The acceptance of these sub-propositions aids the acceptance of the main proposition. For example, wilson+wilson's *House* (1998) used sub-propositions alongside the main proposition via theatrical objects. The main proposition was that the performance space (two terraced houses in Huddersfield) was connected to individuals from the nineteenth century.

wilson+wilson employed theatrical objects within the performance space creating sub-propositions which gradually revealed the story and aided the proposal of the main proposition within the plot of the narrative. Audience-participants examined the qualities of the objects which proposed elements to the story that were pieced together for meaning to be derived. These sub-propositions not only aided narrative but aided the possibility of total immersion through absorption and transportation.³³ In *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*, the questionnaire alone has a vast number of sub-propositions which arise from the qualities of its object. The offering of the questionnaire proposes to the participant that they must / ought to / should etc. complete it; it may lead to them wondering in the interrogative mood ‘what is the significance of (completing) the questionnaire?’ Likewise, a sub-proposition is enacted in *The Lucky Ones: Lailah* via the actuality of the claim that ‘*this* is an exam’ and then agreed by the completion of the exam by the participant. Considering and accepting these sub-propositions may lead to immersion through absorption. Following completion, the discovery and acceptance that you (the participant) are a ‘successful’ applicant leads to *further* sub-propositions. The knowledge that you are a ‘successful’ applicant proposes *further* things to be considered such as ‘there are stakes to this test’, ‘what / how did a participant answer which led to them being unsuccessful?’, ‘what happens now?’ etc. In this regard, sub-propositions are like the notion of infinite semiosis in semiotics since they propose *further* things to be considered, yet sub-propositions are not necessarily *signs*. As explained earlier, for Pierce, signs “must determine an interpretant in order to count as a sign, and [since] interpretants are themselves signs, infinite chains of signs seem to be conceptually necessary” (Atkin:2010). Yet the Prague School explain how theatrical signs do

³³ Machon posits that “all immersive performance events exist at some point between three criteria, [- immersion as absorption, immersion as transportation and total immersion -] total immersion being the most intense state experienced.” (2013:63).

not always have a representational function and so there is a limit to the number of signs in theatre. If everything on stage is a sign, then every object in immersive theatre creates sub-propositions.

The application processes for both *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* and *The Lucky Ones: Lailah* are vital for the facilitation of immersion since those sensual objects are the first sub-propositions offered to the audience-participants for acceptance. The acceptance of those particular sub-propositions helps “break down the barrier” to immersion (Biggin: 2017) making it easier for the audience-participants to accept the main proposition of the productions. The intricacies of the qualities pertaining to the questionnaire and the exam could be analysed to what seems an infinite degree. The number of questions and possible individual bespoke responses to those questions seems countless. Due to the almost limitless number of potential conceptual sub-propositions, analyzation of its qualities shall be curtailed, and other theatrical objects shall be analysed in finite detail. What is interesting though is that when asked if ‘unsuccessful’ applicants receive a ‘better experience’ than the ‘successful’ applicants – since they know something that the ‘successful’ applicants do not – Palmer replied that he “would probably want to get an ‘unsuccessful’ and go on the inside of something. [However,] there is also a sense of winning with the ‘successful’ ones because you think ‘oh, there’s stakes here’. You also feel exclusive because you’re in a club now” (2019). This implies that the consequence of one’s relationship to an object could mean that the quality of your experience is enhanced or diminished within *The Lucky Ones: Lailah*.

Deliveries and Packages

After the application process for *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* (2018) ended and participants were aware that they ultimately had been ‘successful’ in becoming ‘one of the lucky ones’, the experience *officially* began on March 1st, 2018. Now, as the participants know from applying to the experience, the whole premise of the production is that for the course of the next month, everything they experience could be part of the performance and theatrical world created by Riptide. The first thing that the audience-participants were presented with were flowers. The participants received an unmarked parcel in the post to their home address which had within it red carnations and a message attached stating: “Dear [participant], Hope you have a lovely day. L x.” On the back of the card were the letters ‘CE’. (Ladley, 2018) The receiver of the parcel does not *know* for certain that this parcel is an aspect within *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* yet can and would presumably assume so; the participant is being invited to lower the first barrier to their immersion in the experience by accepting that their world is now part of ‘the lucky ones’ experience. This initial object proposes the commencement of the month-long experience, it proposes locked doors and mysteries to be considered: ‘what is CE?’, ‘who is Lucy?’, ‘when will I find out more?’ ‘Will I meet her?’ etc., but along with these sub-propositions that the objects qualities force to be considered, the actuality of the propositional claim that the theatrical objects make is that *this parcel* of flowers and attached card / message, actually *is* a gift from ‘Lucy’. It not only functions as a gift and represents this and the start of your developing relationship and communication with the character, but this parcel *is* a gift from Lucy. The actuality of such a claim in this genre of theatre can have real world implications. Palmer provided me with an example from one of the audience-participants that took part – his father: “[The flowers are] kind of symbolic – you’re getting flowers from a stranger – it’s a gift from

someone. A lot of men had never received flowers full stop. [...] My dad did the experience and was questioned by my mum heavily about ‘who is Lucy?’ and he had to explain. And I like that real-world / fiction blurred line.” Receiving such an object to one’s personal home and not simply witnessing the object used as a prop on stage to signify a gift from the character Lucy, does suggest that the individual has received a gift from a woman called Lucy. So, to an outside observer like the participant’s partner in Palmer’s example, the materiality of the object is translated as reality; their partner has received a real object from an unknown woman named Lucy. It therefore requires the participant to explain the context of the object as a theatrical device to the outside observer for them to perceive it as a theatrical object. Without the perceiver being aware of this context, the proposition is not enacted nor agreed since the object only exists as a real object in the quotidian world and is not functioning as the thing it claims to be within the theatrical world of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*.

The next interaction comes the next day when the audience-participants receive a text message from ‘Lucy’. Before speaking about text messages, it is worth noting how participants *know* if / that a letter, parcel, message etc. is a part of the theatrical experience. Obviously the first parcel they receive containing the flowers is unmarked and the attached card states ‘CE”]’ on the back. At that point in the experience, the participant is unaware of what CE is and stands for within the production and so has no supporting evidence to confirm that the parcel is a part of ‘the lucky ones’ experience. However, after the first ‘package drop’ – which is how Palmer refers to the deliveries and interactions etc. – the participants should be able to pick up on the signs of the production. Riptide uses specific signs as indexes and icons which signify and represent contact from either the character Lucy or the company Capital Experience. Palmer explains:

Everything from [Capital Experience] (CE) came in a black envelope with a very distinct draw-string-closing and everything that was in an A5 black envelope was from Lucy, and that was kind of contraband. A brown envelope is CE, unmarked. That envelope was handed to you by a CE worker who was wearing a badge – so you knew that was part of the performance. Any black envelope was kind of a signifier, and we wanted that to be the case. It's [like] Harry Potter when he gets that letter through the door, you know it's a special thing. We played around with the seal too, but we thought that was maybe a bit too close [to Harry Potter]. But something that signifies it so that the next time you get it, you can spot it a mile off.

Palmer, 2019.

This example within Riptide's work demonstrates exactly what I am proposing. They created their own icon as a representative symbol for contact from the fictional company Capital Experience. They used colour to signify either formal or informal contact from the company, plus, if the envelope they received was sized A5 without the draw-string-closing then the object was sent to you illegitimately by Lucy against the will of Capital Experience. Once a participant has received a few of these objects then they can start to decode the symbolism attached to the qualities of the objects and 'unlock the doors' or 'break the barriers' to immersion. Palmer goes on to explain how they used logos and specific materials to signify and represent Capital Experience:

Everything that was obviously from CE had a [CE logo] headed letter, it was very formulated, even to the quality of paper. It was a higher quality than normal paper and even the type of font we used was the same which symbolized [CE]. Then contraband items were handwritten, black envelopes, they were a lot smaller, code was used too, you were given code but not the cipher to break it.

Palmer, 2019.

These different coloured and sized envelopes which represented contact from Capital Experience and Lucy within the fictional world were the means to enacting the proposition. The proposition was enacted through the qualities of the objects that proposed, for example, 'this is a secret

message from Lucy’, and the participants knowledge and acceptance of that was the agreement. Here, the proposition is not about truth / falsity as explained in the definition of the term earlier, it is about acceptance / unacceptance of the claim. The actuality of the proposition is that the black envelope with the ‘draw-string-closing’, for example, *is* from Capital Experience.

Messages as Objects

As previously mentioned, the next object that the audience-participants received was a text message. Emails and text messages are (still) objects despite them not being material and only existing technologically on a phone or device – unless printed onto paper. Remember, “an object is anything that cannot be entirely reduced either to the components of which it is made or to the effects that it has on other things” (Harman, 2018, p.43). The mystery of emails and text messages does not need decoding in the same way that physical objects and letters do. Once an audience-participant has received a message from an individual claiming to be ‘Lucy’ the participant has that individual’s contact number / email address saved in their phone and address book. There is no need for Riptide to allocate an element to the object which aids in signifying contact from Lucy or Capital Experience since the contact number already does this. The difference between physical correspondence and SMS messaging / email is not only one of convenience but it could be argued that text messages can be more intimate. Palmer insinuates this whilst being interviewed:

[The text messages were] very personal. The notes we gave to the [participants] is that you should respond to it as if you were responding to an old friend. Initially that’s very weird, having someone that’s so familiar with you, remember they know lot about you already from the information you volunteered up, and we also went digging

into their online profiles and things that are in public domain which gave us more to play with. You as an audience member, you are the heart of it. We went with whatever you wanted to talk about; if you didn't want to talk, we were silent. If you wanted to talk about current affairs, we spoke about current affairs. It was like having a friend that would always respond. You know, we have those friends who you message, and you won't hear from for a few days. This was a person who would respond immediately and positively and would always agree with you, and if they didn't, then challenge you. That perfect friend.

Palmer, 2019.

The immediacy of the responses by the team members playing the role of Lucy is what quickly helps to create a personal relationship between performer and audience-participant. The text messages are functioning as theatrical objects and so they constantly propose new things to be considered depending on the topic of conversation. This generates the creation of a potentially vast number of sub-propositions whilst reinforcing the main proposition that your world is a part of a performance. The proposition is enacted and agreed through the almost call and response like nature of the text messages. The images of the messages received allow for the consideration and act of thinking of things as being various ways. In responding to 'Lucy', the participant has accepted the terms of the proposal in the subjunctive-mood. They have accepted the proposal as if the individual they are corresponding with is Lucy. Text messaging offers a clear and coherent example of how this genre of theatre makes a claim in the indicative mood i.e. '*I am* Lucy, *I am* your Relationship Manager' and the audience member accepts this in the subjunctive. Since the participant accepts the proposition as if the individual is Lucy, then the production of intimacy could be accelerated through the speed and regularity of the messaging. This can lead to a shift in the dynamic of a participant's relationship with 'Lucy'. Initially, Lucy's relationship to the participant is pitched as their relationship manager – "so at that point she's only trying to make your life better". After that, she begins to invite you to "try new restaurants in your area, try different things, [become] more mindful, [watch] interesting

YouTube videos, all to make you happier. [...] Later, when she breaks away from the company she turns into that friend.” (2019). These invitations are what Biggin (2017) describes as attempts to facilitate immersive experiences and sensations in audience members and participants. Responding and accepting these invitations / offerings is what helps to lower barriers to immersion.

Premium Members

Before a participant meets ‘Lucy’ or any character and performer within *The Lucky Ones*, they are informed about a concept referred to as ‘premium membership’. A similar concept was introduced in Punchdrunk’s *The Drowned Man* (2013-14) which have audience members the option to either be Standard ticket holders or Premium ticket holders. Premium ticket holders received extra benefits which Standard ticket holders did not. For example, the audience-participants who could display a Premium ID card were allowed access to a space on the basement floor of the performance space within the old post office which was decorated as the fictional theatrical world of Temple Studios. The basement space “contained a diagram outlining where the characters were at any time, their looped actions spelled out across a grid” (Biggin, 2017, p.85). Premium ticket holders did not have to hunt and seek out intimate one-on-one experiences but were handed these experiences ‘on-a-plate’, as it were. So, paying more for a ticket means that you are rewarded by having easy access to what is deemed as ‘a better’ experience.³⁴

³⁴ This highlights an issue of large-scale immersive work where theatre companies may ‘sell out’ due to commercial interest. Adam Alston illuminates these issues, specifically Punchdrunk’s issues with commerciality, in Punchdrunk’s *The Black Diamond* and proposes that audiences should “assume partial responsibility or recognizing and responding to the control of art production at the institutional level.” (Alston, 2012, p.193).

Riptide's premium membership concept was not the same as Punchdrunk's usage in *The Drowned Man*. For Riptide, Palmer explains that "premium membership was a kind of carrot at the end of a stick [that] we gave to audience members to try and go against Lucy. They were physical cards, business cards that had a website on the back of it which was a link to a website that was a kind of credits scene. It had a bit of ending narrative, you know, welcome to the future, Capital Experience copy, and then followed by [the] Riptide program to signify the end of the experience." (2019). Premium membership was something that all participants could receive then, not by paying more of their personal money, but by their decisions within the experience. If one chose to side with Capital Experience over Lucy, you became a premium member.³⁵ Audience-participants were informed about these memberships on multiple occasions through their text conversations with Lucy and letters from Capital Experience etc. The common phrase that was repeated to 'clients' via text message was that "more privileges are given to premium members". Capital Experience told clients that premium members were selected based on behaviour. Riptide are trying to manipulate the audience-participants into thinking and acting in a particular way and use the idea of a better-quality experience to do so. Here the qualities of an object are making other objects desirable. The qualities of the text message (SQ-SO) are adding significance to the real and sensual object i.e., the premium membership card. And it is not only the text messages that make these memberships desirable to the audience-participants. Other objects are used to propose mystery and intrigue too. Riptide created a Capital Experience website for audience-participants to research the company and discover further information. The website had a 'premium members' page that asked for a login which insinuated that these cards and membership were real and existed. The website (SO) was not only claiming that *this* (the

³⁵ See pp.124-128 for the discussion regarding the decision that audience-participants had to make.

website) *is* Capital Experience's website but also that one can become a premium member and one needs to be given a login to discover more etc. Here, the qualities of the website communicate with the qualities of premium membership via a mediator – the audience participant. It is the sensual qualities of the website and the unknown real qualities of the premium membership card which proposes mystery and creates desire. This is how Riptide operate, creating these 'locked doors' for players to 'find the key' as it were, to the *inside* of the world and performance.

Digressing slightly away from propositionality, it is worth re-noting how objects interact. If an audience-participant physically receives a premium membership card, not only has the audience-participant gained access to the 'locked door', but according to OOO, *vicarious causation* has occurred. This is OOO's concept for how one entity influences another. In this scenario, objects interact with other objects via a mediator generating sub-propositions and performing theatrical claims. Harman states that "according to this theory, two real objects in the world make contact not through direct impact, but only by way of the fictional images they present to each other" (Harman, 2018, p.163). The audience-participant (RO) 'meets' the membership card (RO) through their image of the card (SO). Vicarious causation is the mechanism behind the influence of objects on-one-another. When referring to material / physical / tangible objects that are attainable and accessible by touch I do not deem it necessary to definitively state that audience-participants in immersive theatre only encounter them via vicarious causation. According to this theory then, whilst I am typing these words, I as a real object am not coming in to contact with the real object keyboard through direct impact, but by way of the images I and it present to one another. When Kenneth Branagh and David Tennant held a skull as a prop in the delivery of the famous 'to be or not be' line in productions of *Hamlet* (1988 & 2008 respectively), they did not

touch the real object skull, but made contact through the sensual object skull. Whether one believes or accepts what may seem a strange concept, (especially since philosophy's view of causality in the past has been dominated by a special entity – be it God or the human mind,) using the flat ontological lens of OOO supports the performative claim that objects propose in theatre via their qualities, particularly participatory and interactive theatre forms such as immersive theatre.

The Meet

One audience-participant who experienced *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* blogged and documented their experience online. On 6th March 2018, the audience-participant had their first physical meeting with a performer within *The Lucky Ones*. Having arranged to meet Lucy at Leeds Art Gallery at 11am on The Headrow, Leeds, they arrived at the rendezvous and a man presented them with a box and quickly walked away. Without time to discuss the contents of the box or anything with the man, objects have once again proposed and created mystery. The audience-participant retrospectively blogged their thoughts at this moment – “there could be anything in here. My mind immediately goes to the worst-case scenario. What if there's a bomb or drugs or something? It's ridiculous, but I can't help it.” (Ladley, 2018). Since the conventions of theatre are not at play, nor have the conventions been established and then broken, the man and the box *could be* anyone and anything. Conventionally, Ladley would have been waiting expectantly within an auditorium for the house lights to go down and the action to begin, but in this scenario, the man did not even introduce themselves as a character within the production. The participant had arranged to meet the character known as Lucy at this date, time and location, but the participant is not aware of whom the character is, what they look like etc. The actuality of the

proposition then is ‘this is a package’, but questions such as ‘what is in the box?’, ‘who was that man?’, ‘is this part of the experience?’ dominate one’s thoughts.

Ladley’s description of their thoughts when receiving the package directly support the notion that objects perform a theatrical claim within the indicative mood. Edward Bullough’s article “Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and Aesthetic Principle” in the *British Journal of Psychology* (1912) “emphasizes the *art-character* of Art: “artistic” is synonymous with “anti-realistic”; it explains even sometimes a very marked degree of artificiality.” (Bullough, 1912, p.99). Riptide’s use of “real objects [and] real people within actual space” blurred Ladley’s awareness of the *art-character* of the event – its artificiality. Due to the circumstances of the scenario i.e. its ‘real life’ setting on The Headrow, the man and the package as real objects, etc., the aesthetic and psychical distance between the work and the audience is reduced to an almost delusional state of “no distance”; what Ben-Chaim (1984) refers to as an unawareness of fictionality. Yet, Ladley is aware that this exchange between them and the man is a performative exchange; Ladley is aware of the “anti-realistic nature” of the art: “calming myself, I decide to retreat to the Tiled Cafe in the Art Gallery for a cup of coffee and some warmth.” (Ladley, 2018). Ladley still accepts the indicative claim that *this* is a package, and due to the particulars of the claim, accepts that this is a package *for* them personally. Yet, Ladley accepts the claim *as if* it were true, i.e., in the subjunctive-mood.

The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin stressed the importance of the *particular* utterances of signifying systems rather than synchronically analysing sign systems (1986). *How* something was used in the moment (within its “situated utterance”) was more interesting to Bakhtin than how all the linguistical signs operated together as a complementary system. Applying Bakhtin’s concept of a situated utterance to non-linguistic forms of communication, for example, to the

stage signs of theatre and art, then, Ladley's experience of receiving the package from an unknown man in the moment changes her subsequent understanding of those signs and to the realities of which they refer. A verbal and cultural exchange took place between performer and receiver via theatrical utterances and object. Analysing this exchange semiotically opens opportunities for considering the signs used and the interpretations that can be drawn out. Yet semiotics cannot effectively analyse the *difference* between this exchange in this particular scenario and theatrical form, with the same exchange (between performer and receiver) being performed on stage for a passive audience who are gazing inside the frame of the performance.³⁶ This is because semiotics can go no further than the analysis of signs and symbols and the resulting interpretants. Contrarily, analysing the exchange through the larger frame of propositionality, and the specific branch I refer to as the *actuality* of propositions, not only allows for the analysis of signs and interpretants, but also considers the *difference* in a sign between the two forms. Ladley's experience of the sign, in Riptide's situated utterance of the package exchange, denotes a propositional claim, a claim of *actuality*. The sign *actually* claims that the package is itself a package. In proscenium theatre, the exchange would propose that the sign of the prop / theatrical object only *represents* a package.

Ladley's experience of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*, and every other audience-participant that engaged with the production, did so on a one-on-one basis – that is, as an audience of one. This one-on-

³⁶ It is worth noting that the exchange is not the *same* in each theatrical form. The situated utterance of the exchange is different. Despite the performer, receiver and theatrical object being the same, *how* these real objects / actors were used differs. Even if Ladley was invited up on to the stage from the auditorium to receive the package in a proscenium arch theatre, their bodily presence is not what shifts the propositional claim from one of representation to actuality. The situated utterance of the exchange is different on account of the way in which the other objects are present. These include the theatrical objects within the particular moment of the art itself and their interaction with one another, as well as the relationship between the real human-objects which create differences in aesthetic distance between performer and audience. Here the synchronic relationship of objects meets the particularity of a theatrical situated utterance.

one method is how Riptide like to create theatre and immersive worlds for their audiences. Due to the audience-of-one-nature of *The Lucky Ones*, it could be argued that it is perhaps more appropriate to look to Audience Reception theory for determining meaning and analysing signs. This theory contends that meaning is not received and accepted passively by the reader, but that it is actively derived regardless of the intent of the author/ creator / playwright / director / producer etc. The American literary theorist Stanley Fish – though not strictly a semiotician – introduced the notion of *interpretive communities*: different groupings of readers or audiences whom assign different values to different texts.³⁷ For Fish, the value and meaning of the art is entirely dependent on the response of the receiver to it. Despite Fish speaking outside of a strictly theatrical framework, his notion forces the question of how we assign meaning to performance texts. There is a sense of this applying for each individual participant who experienced *The Lucky Ones* despite them not being faced with a performance text but with performing agents and objects. Perhaps it is possible to debate the extremes of where the meaning is coming from, the performer or the receiver, even though the exchange is theatrical. I oppose this stance since in theatre, the artists have intentions when making the work and they manipulate the audience – no matter the size – by forcing them to look at the things they want them to see. As Palmer explains in his interview, Riptide had aims and intentions for their productions of *The Lucky Ones* and one can see how they used the audiences understanding of signs and symbols to communicate meaning and propose things to be considered. Each participant from *The Lucky Ones* will have had a unique and personal experience, but Riptide created multiple layers of signification that all pointed towards the same ideas. Whether it be a large-scale performance or an intimate one-on-one, audience reception theory removes too much

³⁷ *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980).

agency from the artists. Analysing how the proposition is enacted and agreed via this lens does not work since it places both the enactment and agreement inside the spectator through interpretation. Theatre, and not specifically immersive or proscenium theatre but *all* theatre, makes a claim within a specific mood (usually the subjunctive-mood) and audiences understand and accept these claims because the artists have limited the possible meanings.

The Package

The package that Ladley and other participants received included a multitude of theatrical objects whose qualities proposed different things to be considered. I shall momentarily concede to the demeaning spoiler culture of today - that in my opinion hides the beauty of art - by not listing and describing *every* object and detail that arose from the first package drop and other moments within *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*.³⁸ Nevertheless, focus shall be paid to one particular item within that package which was a sealed and stamped envelope addressed to a 'Max Westbrook' which was to be interpreted as a letter. The letter had a *real* address inscribed on it for a street within Leeds city centre. On the back of the letter was a message that stated 'DO NOT OPEN. SEND THIS NOW.' Palmer explains that the envelope "was a bit of a challenge [to the receiver.] In the letter there was a message addressed to them [personally] which said, 'Well done, we know you're not a sheep' and it gave them additional information based on being a leader." (2019). Objects have the capability of becoming fused to, or associated with, something other than the thing itself. There are many examples in theatre where objects have become fused

³⁸ This is not because Riptide have asked me to avoid spoiling the plot for future participants either, but that describing and analysing every element within a month-long experience would require more attention than one analysed production in a thesis of five analysed productions.

to texts, characters, history, events, locations, people, performances and so on. For example, The Immersive Ensemble's *Gatsby* (2019) use a business card to fuse their production with the real-world; this shall be explored in greater detail later in the thesis. Another example is charmingly demonstrated by Benjamin Gillespie as he describes how Margolin of the lesbian-feminist theatre collective *Split Britches*, reflected on her characterization of the character Emma in the group's first production *The True Story* (1980). "[Margolin] told us how the action of smoking the pipe was a vital kinetic gesture that had inspired her characterization of Emma" (Gillespie, 2014, p.157). When Margolin then discovers the pipe in the jacket pocket of her character's original costume, the pipe fuses to her characterization of the long-forgotten character. Gillespie states that in this moment, "physical objects were able to mediate the collision of the historical and theatrical pasts, opening up the possibility of actually touching history." (2014:158).

The properties of Riptide's theatrical and real-life object, the letter, are interestingly blurred and fused together in a similar fashion. Firstly, considering the qualities of the object as a theatrical object, the letter represents, functions as, and actually is a letter for the fictional character Max Westbrook. Yet, the letter within the envelope is really intended for the particular participant who receives the envelope in the package drop with the mystery character at either The Headrow, Leeds train station, or Leeds Art Gallery. So, the statement 'send this now' goes against the message inside and the artist's intention since the situated utterance of the object and its qualities invite the receiver to respond by posting the envelope to the suggested recipient.

Ladley depicts their decision *not* to post the letter within their blog:

...the addressed envelope? I posted it...Nearly. I was literally stood next to the post-box, with it in my hand, and not a doubt that I would post it. I guessed that it might be intended for another participant in the game, and that I'd receive my own in a few days' time. Images flashed in my head of the Black Mirror Episode "Shut Up and Dance", and I half wondered what terrible thing I was sending on... As I reached

towards the post-box, I glanced towards Sainsburys. It would be so easy to open the envelope, nip in, buy some pritt stick, glue it back down... no one would ever have to know. So I opened it. And I was so relieved I hadn't sent it. It contained a note addressed to me, and complimented me on being "a leader, not a follower". It was also from Lucy.

Ladley, 2018.

Ladley's blog entry displays that they understood and accepted what the signs pointed towards, that is, they understood and interpreted the meaning of the signs and what those signs propose they do, but they didn't follow them. Ladley chose to act against the request of the signs, yet in doing so, discovered that they followed the intention of the artist. Riptide wanted their participants to break into the character Max's mail to receive a reward and personal message from 'Lucy'. Here, the signs are operating against the hidden proposal. Furthermore, this proposes things to be considered about *The Lucky Ones* experience, how Riptide operate, and aspects of the form. The contents of the envelope i.e. the personal message for the audience-participant, suggests that by trying to seek out further information or hidden clues and delving deeper beyond what the signs simply present on the surface, you discover more. It is almost as if Riptide have created rules of engagement that they want you to break to have a more enjoyable experience and derive further meaning. Riptide use the qualities of objects to express and propose to the receivers *how* they like work as a company.

Secondly, the qualities of the object can be analysed as a real-life object too. If a participant decides to post the stamped envelope via a postbox then the letter would be delivered to the address stated on the front. The correct 'real-world' postage had been paid for and so Royal Mail delivery service would, and did in some instances, post the real-world letter to the real-world address inscribed. This is because in a quotidian world context, viewing the object as a sensual object through the lens of a Royal Mail worker, the object represents, function as, and actually is

a letter for an individual named Max Westbrook who resides at the address stated. The quotidian and fictional worlds conceptually blend together when this occurs meaning that the phrase should read: Royal Mail delivery service post the letter as a real-world object *and* as a theatrical object to the real-world location *and* to the theatrical set. Royal Mail will not be aware of the theatrical properties associated with the object, but that does not mean the object loses its performing quality, nor its theatrical function and meaning. The objects perform multiple *roles* at the same time.³⁹

The Recording

If a participant did open the letter, as Ladley did, then they are informed by ‘Lucy’ that she will be in touch soon. When they receive an email later that day from her, the narrative is extended and a sense of trust or faith in Lucy may start to develop in the participant through her communications and one’s own decoding of her hidden clues and ciphers. The artists intention behind this email though is to provide the audience-participant with an mp3 file which was symbolic of the story’s narrative. So, Riptide do not only use material and real-world objects to create propositional content but recorded sounds as sensual objects. In fact, Riptide’s next project *Sonder* which is to be released in 2020 is a binaural sound walk through the city of Leeds. Audio-instruction as a means of immersion is very common in immersive work and has been used to engage and interact with audience’s way before Riptide’s era. There is Artangel’s work, such as *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)* (1999) and even more prominently in the works

³⁹ See pp.124-128 for a discussion and examples on the philosophically distinct yet simultaneous roles that objects perform.

of Lundhal & Seidl: *New Originals* (2017); *Rotating in a Room of Moving Images* (2011); *Symphony of a Missing Room* (2011) etc.

During our interview, Palmer introduced the notion of *bespoke objects*. That is, depending on the environment that the participant listens to the recording in, the material objects surrounding them become part of their experience of processing the information. Palmer discloses that Riptide:

...gave [participants] mp3 files to listen to which were mindful exercises to go through. I guess in that scenario, any object in their room, in their house, that they kept going back to was part of the experience, whether they've decided to take a bath and listen to it, listen to it on [their] sofa or in bed, that becomes part of the experience. I don't know how you'd describe that, sort of bespoke objects. [...] That mp3 was linked to the narrative, it was symbolic of the narrative. It was about being a leader and trusting people; planting all those seeds for later on.

Palmer, 2019.

In a similar way that when one considers a theatrical event that you experienced in the past, you recall the story, the set, the performers, the costume, the dialogue, the lighting etc., when recalling one's experience of a recording you remember where you were when you heard it, what time it was, what you were doing, what you were surrounded by and looking at, and so on. Therefore, if a participant does listen to the recording in their own home, as Palmer implies, then one's personal possessions and objects become intrinsically united with the theatrical event, just as a prop mediated the collision in history and theatre at the *33 x 3 Festival: A Split Britches Reunion* (2012) that Gillespie attended. The mp3 recording includes propositional utterances which force the listener to introspectively consider specific things.⁴⁰ These utterances interact

⁴⁰ The mp3 recording stated: "You are here because there is something about life which doesn't sit quite right for you. Something you can't quite put your finger on. Something... wrong. You want to dive beneath the surface level of life, and really experience it to its fullest. [...] You have been chosen. You are one of the Lucky Ones.... [...] Right now, your life is about to change. You are the hero in your own story. Whatever happened before this moment does not define who you are. You have learnt lessons from your past, but you are not your past. You are the person in this moment listening to this. Your story begins right now. [...] What would the hero of your story do if this was

with the listeners surroundings – so if they do listen at home, perhaps a sense of comfortability coalesces with the speaker – and are used by Riptide as a means of conditioning the listener. They are manipulating the participant into thinking a certain way. Palmer says that this conditions the participant since they are “already thinking of trusting someone before they ask for your trust.” (2019). One can see this process working in Ladley’s blog. After listening to the mp3 recording of the man from Capital Experience, Ladley states “honestly. I’m moved.” (2018) and you can understand how her trust and comfort with Capital Experience and the production grows.

What is interesting about the recording is that the art form within which it is used can still make a quasi-indicative claim about it despite it not being a physical object, but a technological and sensual one. This concept was raised earlier when discussing email and text correspondence and now OOO’s flat ontology comes ever present again. The recording can be both a real or sensual object despite it not being tangible.⁴¹ When the email is sent to participants with the mp3 file attached, it is claiming that ‘*this is* an email from Lucy’ and ‘*this is* a recording from Capital Experience’ – which of course they are in the theatrical world and *almost* are in the quotidian world. That is, that they are emails and recordings in both worlds, but the sender differs from character to performer. The participants agreeing to the proposition still accept it as if it were true i.e. in the subjunctive-mood.

the opening chapter? [...] Do that. Go on from this moment and live your life how your hero would. We will be with you every step of the way. We will be in touch again soon.” (Ladley, 2018).

⁴¹ The recording is accessible through other material objects such as a computer, CD, USB stick etc, but the recording as an object can only be heard through the aid of technology. The technological object still as an executant “I” and an inwardness of which cannot be perceived or touched, and also an exterior image which can be perceived and touched sensually.

Lucy's Flat

Skipping ahead in the plotline by a week the participants are confronted with 'Lucy's flat'. In this scenario, participants have to 'break-in' to a flat in Leeds city centre. Palmer explains that:

In the story Lucy went into hiding [and up] until that point, she'd contacted [the participant] everyday so there had been a three-day absence. At the end of which her friend [(Max)] gets in contact saying 'I'm a friend of Lucy's, you might be aware she has disappeared, you're one of the last people she contacted', so [the participant] kind of get[s] an 'in' from another person who explains that there's a thing she's left behind and we need to go to her flat and see whether it's still there. So that's the proposition 'we need to go this flat'. [...] This friend says that they'll keep watch while you go into the flat and then [the participant] then get[s] instructions from him, he kind of says 'I forgot to say, this is what Lucy told me' and texts [the clues through].

Palmer, 2019.

Riptide constructs this theatrical world where the fictional character Lucy has a home within the quotidian world, in the centre of Leeds. The inside of the flat confronts the participant with many interacting agents and objects, but before analysis of this begins the scene before entering the flat builds a thrilling proposition. Ladley lays out their arrival at the flat step-by-step:

I made it to the address at three minutes to five. Cue nervous waiting on the street, scanning the faces of everyone around me. My phone buzzes, and it's Max telling me the code to the door. I hesitate a moment – going into a flat with a strange man seems a dangerous choice. But my curiosity overpowers me, and I punch in the code.

The lobby is empty, but all of a sudden Max appears. He ushers me into the lift. He's frantic – no wait, he's scared. His hands shake as he keys in the code for the lift. It doesn't work. He tries again, and again it fails. Cursing, he heads to the stairs, with me in close pursuit.

One floor up, he hands me the key and tells me the flat number. Then he disappears back downstairs to "keep watch". I head for the room, not knowing what to expect really.

Ladley, 2018.

Ladley was confronted by a frightened individual that they had never met before, claiming to be the friend of Lucy whom they had had correspondence with. The individual gave Ladley a key to Lucy's flat and instructed them to go in. The actuality of this proposition is three-fold - a) the performer is Max, b) the flat belongs to Lucy, c) the key is a key to Lucy's flat. If one accepts these sub-propositions, trusts the individual, and believes that this part of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* theatrical experience, then letting yourself into an unknown flat may not be that much of an issue – as was the case for Ladley. Yet this proposition requires more faith on the participant's part than others. They must believe or take the risk that there will not be any repercussions. If the participant is deluded, may they think it possible to be arrested for breaking and entering? They might believe this because one's "aesthetic consciousness" towards the experience was overtly personal.⁴² The perceiver may not be able to separate the flat from its relation to themselves. For Bullough, distance "is obtained by separating the object and its appeal from one's own self, by putting it out of gear with practical needs and ends. Thereby the 'contemplation' of the object becomes alone possible." (1912:91). If the perceiver does not sever the object from its relation to themselves meaning that no distance is created and experienced, then an unawareness of fictionality could come ever present.

Palmer explains in our interview that one participant initially refused to enter the flat and therefore could not and did not accept the proposition. The audience-participant threatened to call the police because the individual (actor performing Max) wanted them to 'break-in' to a property. The implicit realism of the theatrical form along with the real-world setting outside of a conventional theatre blinded all elements of artificiality for the participant. Not wanting to

⁴² Bullough describes the aesthetic consciousness as "that special mental attitude towards, and outlook upon, experience" (Bullough, 1912, p.90).

‘break-world’, Riptide were faced with a dilemma and so had to find another way to restore the participant’s faith in Lucy and Max’s characters. The performer convinced the participant that they were not committing a crime because ‘they were sent here by Lucy’. This statement enlarges the distance between the participant and the production again reinforcing the artificiality of the experience. The propositional claim is still quasi-indicative, but the performer cleverly improvised a dialogue which reminded the participant of the theatricality of the interaction that they were engrossed in and enabled them to accept the proposition *as if* it were true. The problem arose because the participant accepted the enacted proposition in the indicative mood; as fact. How much the participant bought in to the scenes theatricality and artificiality is debatable because they still refused to enter the flat. Nevertheless, it was enough to convince the participant that calling the police was not necessary.

Riptide’s mission of creating theatre where the audience are the heart of the experience; where *they* ‘are the location’ became so successful in this instance that consequences to the narrative were inflicted unknowingly by the participant. If the participant is the location of the experience – “wherever you are the performance comes to you” (2019) – then arguably *all* agency lays with the audience member. Riptide attempt to manipulate where participants go through the signifying functions of objects. But if a sign fails to communicate the artists intention, or the participant rejects a sign, or even that they refuse to follow where the artist is leading them, then they can in theory guide the performance in a different direction. This is what occurred during the experience of the participant who refused to enter the flat.

The purpose of guiding audience members to Lucy’s flat within the narrative was so that participants found a specific coin – a shilling. Riptide created an escape room within Lucy’s flat in which participants had to complete around five challenges to locate the shilling. Once this was

located, they could leave the flat before they were spotted by the dangerous company Capital Experience. The coin was essential to the narrative because it was used as “a symbol for those on Lucy’s side” (2019), which proved to a later character in the story that one was trustworthy. One then exchanges the coin for a USB stick which leads to the key decision that players must make. This decision affects the outcome and narrative of their experience.⁴³

Since the participant who refused to enter the flat did not complete these challenges and therefore did not locate the shilling, this caused a knock-on effect to their experience and to the production’s narrative. When the actuality of propositions is rejected, consequences occur. In this instance, there were consequences for both performer and audience. The participant had not experienced key aspects of the storyline, nor had they witnessed specific signs which were intentionally used to make participants doubt Lucy’s character. Unknowingly, they also affected their journey to the ending of the experience. Riptide were forced to make an improvised theatrically-in-world reason why the shilling appeared in the participant’s life. The company had to find another way and reason that the participant could arrive at the key decision within the experience. Instead of the participant locating the shilling through their own detective skills, an anonymous person dropped the shilling off to the participant’s desk at work.

Unfortunately, neither semiotic analysis nor propositionality can be used to analyse the consequences of this scenario since the repercussions are not purely down to the failure of a sign, but to unseen signs and proposals. The objects of the sign failed to wholly *theatrically* signify that the real-world flat was a set within the performance of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*. The objects of the sign partially succeeded in their signifying function since the participant did not

⁴³ Consideration and analysis of the USB stick and key decision occurs on pp.124-128.

call the police, but there was still uncertainty since they refused to enter the flat. The meaning derived by the participant in this scene – whatever that was – ends *outside* of the flats setting. They are of course still inside the performance space, since the entirety of Leeds could be considered part of this space, but not *inside* the artists intended setting. The performative propositions that Riptide created with specific theatrical objects on the other side of the flat's door were not witnessed and so the participant was unable to interpret them. Be that as it may, the conclusion that propositionality uncovered which semiotics could not quite reach was *why*. Within the frame of semiotics, the flat simply did not signify a theatrical flat, but a real-world one. Within the larger frame of propositionality, the proposal made regarding the flat could not be accepted because the qualities of the objects and the claim they made were indicative of the quotidian world when perceived by this participant, and not indicative of the theatrical world.

Re-focusing the attention to the inside of the flat opens a wide range of opportunities for analysis of how objects facilitate with the enactment and agreement of propositions. Lucy's city centre flat was "mocked up so that it looked like it had been ransacked". Palmer depicts the flat below:

There were clothes everywhere, broken boxes, but it also looked like it was someone's home that had been lived in. There were takeout boxes, washing up that hadn't been done. It was obviously a female space, it smelt of perfume, it had contraceptive pills on the side, a diary open, those kinds of things. It also had – [and] we changed it every time – the audience members photo on the notice board. [...] It was of them doing the package drop the week before. [So, we had taken] a hidden photo that they didn't know was taken. A surveillance thing that reappeared in their journey. And there were some squiggled notes of them which had come out of their personality tests, kind of a summary of their personality etc. So, it was like you had been watched by this person and [we made that evident for the participant] to make [them] doubt this person, doubt Lucy.

Palmer, 2019.

The real-world flat becomes a theatrical set and the props / objects within it – along with the performer-as-object (playing the character of Max) – propose things to be considered.

The specific details of the set gives / suggests / proposes / signifies to the audience-participant – who have placed themselves inside of the theatrical location and world – information regarding the character and narrative. One could make a semiotic analysis of the key elements within the flat analysing the different ways in which the theatrical elements could be interpreted. The semiotic approach and the Prague School of thought insists that *everything* on stage has a signifying function and affects our reading / understanding of the performance. Signs can thus be viewed as working systematically to create meaning within ‘Lucy’s flat’ *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*. Yet, semiotics cannot go far enough to analyse the actively *reciprocal* relationship between the elements and audience *in this form of theatre*. This does not mean that semiotics is not reciprocal. After all, a semiotic analysis can only be achieved if the signs and symbols of the work have been experienced; something must be given up for consideration and then returned. Semiotic analyses are vicarious and aid analysing from the perspective of the passive. However, the actively involved receiver of signs and symbols can go further than a semiotic analysis because they have an implicit extra layer of reciprocity on top, or as well as, the traditional contract of participation in theatre. A participant who is *inside* of the theatrical world / set / performance not only vicariously, but corporeally processes this information due to the branch of propositionality known as semiotics. Furthermore though, the proposals are enacted between *active* interacting objects (both non-human and human) making them *actual* propositions within the theatrical world and not simply signifying functions. The enactments of proposals in the forms of proscenium and participatory theatre differ from the subjunctive to the (quasi-)indicative respectively. These differences gauge different

limits to the receiver's acceptance in the subjunctive-mood. This is a point that will be iterated again and again so that the limits to the denoted propositions are clearly framed.

Getting back on track, it is the qualities of the objects within the flat that signify information regarding the character of Lucy and the narrative; *everything* in theatre is a sign. When inside the flat, the participants were asked to describe its appearance to Max over the phone who was waiting outside 'keeping watch', and he stated that "it seems Capital Experience have been here before" (2019). This theatrical utterance along with the qualities of the set, proposed that Lucy's flat had been "ransacked". Palmer explains that there is a "bin that's been turned over, old bills and receipts, a smashed plate, there has been some sort of violence, someone hasn't just gone through [the stuff] they've turned the place upside down; unmade bed, drawers out of the wardrobe, very untidy." (2019). Combined with this was the suggestion that "life had been there" but not for a few days to align with Lucy's absence in the narrative; there was half-drunk milk in the fridge, used tea bags on the side etc.

The main propositional claims that are denoted by the objects here are a) 'this flat has been ransacked', and b) 'this is Lucy's flat'. Interwoven into these claims are an abundance of sub-propositions performatively acting via the sharable objects. Ladley's description of the appearance of that flat depicts their thoughts and interpreted ideas. "The radio spits out static. The bin is overturned. Salt is spilled across the counter. A half-packed bag is on the bed, full of clothes and towels. Did Lucy really get away? Has someone else been here?" (Ladley, 2018). One can picture from Ladley's description what it would look like and be like to walk over the threshold into the flat. How one would swiftly but gradually scan the scenery analysing the different objects and qualities laid before you to arrive at thoughts such as theirs. An audience-

participant would not be immediately immersed in this environment, it would take them time to perceive and assess the propositions before them. Once the actuality of the propositions had been accepted, then immersion and possibly belief could occur. A reminder of Biggin's key notion that immersion is not binary (2017) is ever relevant. Ladley continues:

As I search the room, I quickly come across a letter addressed to me. I open it to find part of a puzzle. I spot more pieces on the noticeboard, and quickly deduce that it's a map of Lucy's flat. Finding all the pieces will lead to the "buried treasure", or whatever I'm in here for. [...] There are clues scattered all over the place. A calendar with "Dinner with Max" and "Send Flowers" on circled dates. A stack of photographs, seemingly taken without the subjects' knowledge. I leaf through them anxiously, but I don't find one of me. There's a woman, standing up, giving a speech. I wonder if it may be Lucy. [...] The next clue leads to a bottle of apple juice in the fridge. I find a key, and quickly a keyhole. Two more pieces of the puzzle. [...] As I search further, I spot some photos on the door of the wardrobe. Still none of me, but I see notes about the people in the photographs. One is the woman I thought might be Lucy, but from the note it's clear it's not. [...] I turn, knowing that sooner or later I'll find the photo of me. [...] And I do. I'm stunned I didn't notice it earlier – I must have been blinded by my adrenaline. An entire wall is covered in a montage of photos. My post-it-note has lots of comments on. [...] I don't understand. I knew that part of Lucy's work at Capital Experience involved watching me, working out how to make me happy. But why would this be at her flat. Was she taking her work a little too personally? Could I really trust her? [...] The remainder of the puzzle pieces – one in her pillow and one in the [cut-out] pages of a book – lead me to realise [the] shilling was the object of my search. I've barely scratched the surface on Lucy's flat, but Max bangs at the door and tells me we have to leave.

Ladley, 2018.

Ladley is quoted in length here to demonstrate the gradual reading of the signs and proposals being offered for consideration and interpretation. Ladley wavers over the sharable objects of their cognitive acts / attitudes, oscillating different sub-propositions. The proposals force the player into oscillating different targets of intention such as - finding pieces to the puzzle will lead to a form of 'buried treasure', is that a picture of Lucy? Why would Lucy have intimate information about 'me' in her flat? Can Lucy be trusted? Etc. The denoted propositions generated by the qualities of the objects within the flat do not only lead to the shilling but extend

into the players personal relationship with the character of Lucy. Is Lucy really the ‘perfect friend’ that Palmer describes her as and as she may first appear in correspondence? The actuality of the sub-proposition that ‘a photo of *me* – which *I* did not know was taken – is on *Lucy*’s wall’ affects one’s perception and relationship with Lucy.⁴⁴ The main proposition of the escape-room-style flat is to find *the thing* that will help Max and Lucy, but the sub-proposition has the potential to overwhelm that main proposition due to a subject’s aesthetic consciousness. The object that you have been set the task of finding is not known. It is a ‘locked door’ and remains a ‘locked door’ even when discovered; the participant does not know the meaning / purpose / symbolism / relevance of the *thing* which turns out to be a shilling until later in the narrative. Encountering the shilling only proposes more mystery and wonder to the participant. Whereas the sub-proposition involves *you*. One may still not know the meaning of the *thing* when found, which in this instance is an image of you, but you are intimately connected with the referent of the sign in a way that you are not with the tangible shilling. Whatever the meaning behind Lucy’s use of one’s image is, one knows that it directly affects them personally, but one does not know if the meaning behind the shilling will directly affect them at all. There is a difference of vivacity in the audience-participant’s aesthetic consciousness between the main / sub propositions. The qualities or conditions of the object affect the variability of distance. Bullough states that “there exist[s] two different sets of conditions affecting the degree of Distance in any given case: those offered by the object and those realised by the subject. [...] In short, Distance may be said *to be variable both according to the distancing-power of the individual, and according to the character of the object.*” (1912:94) (emphasis in original).

⁴⁴ It certainly did for Ladley. This was the turning point in altering their perception of Lucy. Ladley admits that they do not entirely trust Lucy and that they really wanted to become a premium member and so ended up siding with Capital Experience (Ladley, 2018).

It is also worth noting that the enactment of what I am calling an *actual* proposition can still fail to be understood and accepted in the same way that a signifier fails to signify the intended signified and referent in semiotics, because the way we process information and derive meaning remains the same, through the propositional branch of semiotics. For example, Palmer says that for some audience-participants “the flat wasn’t an intuitive puzzle; it wasn’t obvious why something would be there.” (2019). Analysing theatre practices through propositionality then does not offer a *better* way to derive meaning but unveils the differences in the enactment and agreement of a sign and proposal. These differences subsist in the *roles* that objects take-on, perform and claim. For example, dreamthinkspeak’s production *Before I Sleep* (2010) made use of a disused Co-operative building in Brighton to reconstruct Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* house. Tristan Sharps (dreamthinkspeak’s artistic director) in an interview with Josephine Machon (2013) explains that the basement of the building was created to be the world of *The Cherry Orchard* house, but the ground floor was set as a department store in which you could “buy anything you want”. The items of furniture here are both props within the theatrical world of *Before I Sleep* (2010), and real items of furniture. An audience-participant immersed in this theatrical world can purchase an in-world theatrical object e.g. a sofa, as a real-world sofa which they can take home and possess as their own. Theatrical objects perform both theatrical and quotidian roles in site-responsive and immersive works such as this, through the enactment and acceptance of a proposition. It is agreed by the spectator that the object is both signifying a sofa and is representative of that referent within the production, but it also accepted as being a sofa in the larger shared reality outside of the theatrical world created.

The Exchange

After audience-participants located the shilling during the escape-room styled experience in Lucy's flat, other interactions, messages, emails, deliveries and so on go back and forth between the audience members and their new relationship manager called Adam. Adam was presented as Lucy's replacement in the storyline since Capital Experience suggested that Lucy could not be trusted. About a week after participants located the shilling, Max texted the participants with instructions. Participants were told to go to the Everyman Cinema in Leeds city centre bringing the shilling along with them. They then had to ask the front of house representative for two tickets to the classic film *Brief Encounter*. Ladley states that the representative replied to them saying "that will be one shilling please" (Ladley, 2018). Participants hand over the shilling and in exchange are given a USB stick.

It is not until this moment that the meaning of the shilling – which was used as a "locked door", proposing mystery to audience-participants – comes to fruition and is derived. As mentioned earlier, Riptide used the coin as a symbol of trust for those individuals on Lucy's side rather than Capital Experience's. This is because 'Lucy' fed the participants signs via theatrical objects which led to the shilling, to Max, to the cinema, to the front of house representative etc., so that eventually, 'Lucy' trusted the player enough to give them the USB stick. The main proposition when individuals located the shilling was that *this* is a shilling, but the sub-propositions that shilling denoted were not yet known. The signification of the object had not been made; the only referent at that point was mystery.

When the exchange takes place, a proposition is enacted and agreed within both parties of the exchange. It is not only the performer enacting a proposal which in turn is agreed by the

audience member, but the audience member becomes an active performer by enacting a proposal back to the character for consideration. For example, when the front of house character informed Ladley that two tickets to *Brief Encounter* would be “one shilling please”, the actor/character enacted a proposal and Ladley agreed to the terms of the proposition by presenting the character with the shilling they located at Lucy’s flat. Ladley’s agreement and handing over the shilling to the character, enacted a proposal to the character that they were to be trusted, and the real object shilling denoted the actuality of the propositional claim that *this is the* shilling within that agreement. The character then responded to Ladley’s indicative proposal by taking the shilling from them, and in exchange giving them a USB stick. The actuality of this exchange was that *this is a* USB stick for you. The USB stick, like the shilling, is at first presented as another locked door. Only by accessing the contents of the USB would the audience-participant discover more...and how much more is yet to be known. The chain of sub-propositions that make up the greater main proposition continue to develop and multiply as the narrative unfolds. The ongoing introduction of new objects and new interactions between the qualities of these many objects to the theatrical world create and denote further cognitive acts to be considered.

There are numerous other sub-propositions that become active during this theatrical and real-world exchange. The most interesting of which demonstrates another example of the roles that theatrical objects perform: the front of house representative at the Everyman cinema in Leeds becomes both character within the theatrical world of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*, and employee in the quotidian world. This is not the same as occupying the role of an actor and a character simultaneously when performing for an audience. This actor works at the Everyman cinema in their quotidian life. The real-object (human) is an actor performing a specific character within *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* production whilst simultaneously is executing the demands of their job-

role as a staff member at the Everyman cinema. That is to say, the employee becomes active in the theatrical world once asked for two tickets to *Brief Encounter*. If no one poses this question to the individual, then they remain in their quotidian environment and serve customers who are going about their day-to-day lives. As an audience-participant to this experience then, the front of house representative denotes many more sub-propositions for consideration. When attending to one's aesthetic consciousness, the proposition that the front of house representative a) is a performer, b) knows Lucy, c) knows Max, d) is against Capital Experience etc., are all denoted by the qualities of the actor-as-object. As an audience-participant, one accepts the actuality of the proposal that the front of house representative *is* a front of house representative, both *in* and *out* of the theatrical experience. This, however, does not affect *how* the claim is accepted within the theatrical world. The proposition is still accepted *as if* it were true (in the subjunctive-mood) within *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* production, yet the proposition can be accepted *as being* true (indicatively) within the real-world.

The USB

The final analysis of an object within *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* is to be the USB stick. The USB was at the heart of the key decision that audience-participants had to make in the experience. This key decision was about trust. Does one trust Lucy? A stranger that you've never met. Or, does one trust the authoritarian company Capital Experience? Palmer attests that this key decision was loosely based around the controversial figure Edward Snowden: imagine that "you had a USB stick with information on that you'd been trusted with – from this Edward Snowden figure – from Lucy, do you give it back to her? And by consequence threaten to leak the issues

of this company, or do you give it back to [Capital Experience] who are offering you premium membership, a reward of some sort, trying to buy you out.” (2019).

During the exchange, the USB stick (as a theatrical object) was proposed as not only representing but being a USB stick for the individual audience-participant. On accessing the contents of the USB stick via the mediator of another object i.e. a computer, laptop, tablet etc. the actuality of the proposition is aided and extended via sub-propositions such as this is a USB stick ‘with personal data and information on it pertaining to other people’, ‘do these people work for Capital Experience?’ ‘Are the individuals other audience-participants that are also experiencing *The Lucky Ones: Lucy?*’ and so on. In the theatrical world, the USB stick functions, represents and *is* a USB stick with information on it relevant to the narrative. In the real-world, the USB also functions as, represents and *is* a USB stick with documents on it. When these documents are accessed on a participant’s personal computer, the audience-participant *could* choose to use the USB stick for its real-world purpose and upload their own information on to the stick, or wipe the contents of the USB etc. These actions would have both real-world implications and theatrical consequences to the narrative of *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*.

What the contents of the USB stick are offering for consideration, are whether the fictional company Capital Experience can be trusted. This forces the audience-participant into a decision, whether to return the USB to Lucy or to Capital Experience. The proposed in-world consequences and outcomes to this decision are either that if one gives the USB to Lucy, you have this “kind of authoritarian company, who are a little bit dangerous, [and whom you know have] made people ‘disappear’” (2019), or if one gives the USB to Capital Experience you are (probably) putting Lucy in danger. However, since Riptide have arguably handed-over all agency to the audience members – by making *them* the location of the experience and – allowing

them to decide whom to give the USB stick to generating one of two planned endings by Riptide, what happens if a participant refuses to make this decision? Or they take the narrative in a different direction by changing the conditions of the decision?

Palmer states that he did witness audience members who tried to play both sides of the decision: “they tried to copy whatever was on the USB stick and give two USB sticks. We [also] had audience members say [they were] going to do the Lucy ending and say ‘yes, I’ll be there’ but then turn up at Capital Experience headquarters and vice versa.” (2019). Participants are actively attempting to take charge of the situation and narrative by using real-world objects and proposing them to the performers as theatrical objects in the theatrical world created which was created by the performers and company. The audience members develop their own gameplay in these moments. If a participant hands in two USB sticks, they are creating a performative proposition themselves using a real object and the real and sensuous qualities it possesses to do so. They are making a quasi-indicative claim that *this* USB stick *is the* USB stick that you have requested, and *this is the* USB stick I received during the theatrical experience. Now, the shoe is on the other foot as it were; the roles that performer and audience play have briefly been reversed. The participant is forcing the performer to accept their proposition. In this instance, the participant in question initially was permitted entry to the Pinnacle building in Leeds which was propositioned as Capital Experience’s headquarters in the theatrical world. However, Palmer clarifies that the participant initially got in and then “it was revealed that [the USB] was a fake so [the participant received] an improvised ending that we didn’t even anticipate happening. It was a completely improvised scene from that actor and turned more into an interrogation room scenario...which only they got.” (2019). The performer accepted the audience-participant’s proposal that the USB they handed over was *the* USB stick required to gain access to the next

part in the narrative. Accepting the proposition indicatively in this manner meant that the performer, once realisation of being duped had kicked in, had to improvise their own enactment of a proposal.

The participants that text Lucy telling her they would go to the rendezvous point to meet her, but then turn up at the Pinnacle building to see out the different ending of the narrative also used objects to propose things for consideration and denote propositions to the performers. The degree of the claim expressed through the text messages is perhaps not as explicitly animated as bringing a new object into the fold of the theatrical world, but its assertiveness is the same. The participants are expressing through the mediation of a text message that they *will* meet Lucy; the proposition is quasi-indicative once again. If the performer goes to rendezvous point at the agreed location, time and date to meet the participant, then it is because they accepted the players proposition which was expressed through the sensual object of text. What becomes evident here, and through all the examples discussed within *The Lucky Ones: Lucy*, is that objects denote propositions in theatre.

Through the interview process with Riptide's Alexander Palmer, I was provided an insight into his intentions as an artist, and how Riptide manipulated their audiences of *The Lucky Ones* through signifying theatrical objects. Our discussion illuminates Palmer's thirst of being sympathetic to real-world spaces and objects. This sympathy to specific sites and spaces, be it Leeds, Miami etc., can be seen in all the work Riptide creates whether it be *The Lucky Ones* (2018), *You Are Here* (2015), *Estate* (2017) and so on. There is an emphasis on real-world spaces and places in Riptide's work: "it always had to be in the real-world for us. It is hard enough for us to know whether the chair is just a real-world chair or if it's a *Lucky Ones* chair. So, for us it was a signifier between performance and real-world rather than changing it to

something else. Is the café that you're invited into just a café or is it a set?" (2019). This very question is why analysing their use of real-world objects for theatrical purposes is so intriguing. What this interview, research into the production, Ladley's blog, and consideration of aesthetic distance analysed through the lens of object-oriented ontology opens up, are the opportunities of analysing how a proposition is enacted and agreed through – to use the title of Schweitzer and Zerdy's book – *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things*.⁴⁵ The roles that the objects perform are interwoven but can be philosophically distinguished between the separate worlds and shared realities in-play. The dynamism of these roles exists in the claims performed and expressed by the qualities of the object(s). Since the receivers of these claims have a presence and being in the world and can physically and mentally interact and encounter these objects, those claims become ones of *actuality* for the audience.

⁴⁵ Schweitzer, M. & J Zerdy. (2014). *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

2.3 *The Great Gatsby*

Introduction

On Thursday 18th April 2019, I experienced *The Great Gatsby* performed by The Immersive Ensemble. This immersive theatre adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel was originally produced by The Guild of Misrule, which was performed in York 2016, and created by Holly Beasley-Garrigan, Amie Burns Walker, Hannah Davies, Phil Grainger, Michael Lambourne, Thomas Maller and Oliver Tilney. Still, the show is running in London, housed by the Colab Factory at 'Gatsby's Drugstore' on Long Lane. The Immersive Ensemble creatives Alexander Wright and Brian Hook are directing and producing this current run respectively.

What is the Immersive Ensemble?

The Immersive Ensemble describe themselves as a “leading immersive theatre company” who boast “creating some of the most popular immersive shows in recent years” (The Immersive Ensemble, 2016). Whilst The Immersive Ensemble did not create the immersive *Gatsby* experience, it is hard to refute their statement. They have indeed created and delivered a multitude of commercially popular shows in recent years. Shows such as the immersive musical *Fagin* (2018), which invites its audience to participate in a theatrical world which is set before the events of Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist*. The company's first show in 2016 – *The Drop Off* – tasked its participants with ninety minutes to find the location of a man somewhere within the city of London. Similarly, their show *Who Done It* follows the popular, and continuously growing trend of mystery and detection in immersive work such as Les Enfants Terribles' *The*

Game's Afoot (2020) and Swamp Motel's online detective thriller *Plymouth Point* (2020) and requires its participants to solve a murder mystery. Whether their immersive work be a mystery, a musical, an adaptation on a novel etc., it always places a focus on the audience and their entertainment. A night experiencing an Immersive Ensemble production, usually means you are invited to eat and drink during the performance itself. For example, *The Club* (2017) is a theatre performance which immerses its audience into a 'secret' club with a very particular guestlist in which the appeal for its audience-participants is to eat, drink and "party into the early hours" (The Immersive Ensemble, 2016).

The Immersive Ensemble's performance of *The Great Gatsby* incorporates many specific moments from the novel and stays true to the narrative, yet takes its own direction with Fitzgerald's text creating an immersive theatrical experience which invites its audience to be guests at an extravagant Jay Gatsby party. The Colab Factory (who house the event) describe the production on their website:

It's the roaring twenties – an era of bootleg liquor, red hot jazz and hedonistic pleasures. Jay Gatsby has invited you to one of his infamous parties and that's not an invite you want to turn down.

Step into a heart-racing immersive adaptation of F Scott Fitzgerald's seminal jazz-age novel which puts you in the heart of the action. Slip on your dancing shoes and watch the story unfold around you in this unique theatrical performance. The cocktails are flowing, the music is playing, the party is in full swing and there's the chance of more than a little scandal.

Immerse yourself in one of the greatest stories of the 20th Century.

Colab Factory, 2019. Emphasis in original.

This description does not exaggerate nor under-play the experience but does concisely prepare you for aspects of what is in-store. The production takes place across a myriad of spaces

including balconies, drugstores, jazz bars, and small intimate spaces with lavish furniture etc., and the audience are enveloped by the world of Fitzgerald's characters and the 1920s era. This section will not be reviewing the specific production viewed in April 2019 but using it to analyse how the *actuality* of propositions occurs in immersive theatre. Additionally – as was the case with *The Lucky Ones* case study – OOO will be sustained throughout the analysis of *The Great Gatsby* to show *how* they occur.

The production's aim is to immerse its participants in the story and world of *The Great Gatsby*: The Colab Factory instruct the reader / participant to "immerse yourself" in the plot of the novel. The types of immersion that exist within a theatrical performance such as this, are immersion as absorption and immersion as transportation.⁴⁶ Immersion as absorption occurs when the theatrical event fully engages the participant's concentration and imagination, i.e., total engagement. Immersion as transportation occurs when an audience-participant is "imaginatively and scenographically reoriented in another place" (Machon, 2013, p.63). To immerse oneself into this story then, the artist is suggesting that one must allow oneself to be imaginatively engaged and transported by their offerings. So, what was being offered in the Immersive Ensemble's *The Great Gatsby*?

The performance presented a plethora of theatrical objects to be considered and interacted with. In this next section I shall discuss and analyse the interactivity of the site's scenography, props, performers, participants and so on, which I shall generalise as *objects*. Analysing what these objects denoted and/or connoted to me – the propositional lure – enables me to decipher what is being actuated within the specific and overarching propositional claims. There are two

⁴⁶ Machon (2013) pp.62-63. A combination of these two modes of immersion can result in the third and final mode: total immersion.

interwoven intentions existing within the modes of immersion as transportation and absorption which permeate the topic of the actuality of propositions here: locations and scenes. The locations to be explored here are the venue of the theatrical event, as well as the scenographically created fictive worlds of Gatsby's drugstore and mansion which are rooms within the venue itself. I shall offer a descriptive walk-through of these performance spaces as I recall experiencing them to show how The Immersive Ensemble used theatrical objects to blur the lines between the quotidian and the theatrical. Then, I will explore individual scenes from within the performance which were adapted and/or inspired from the storyline of the original novel, such as Gatsby's business meeting, the tea scene at Nick Carraway's between Daisy and Gatsby, and Myrtle's death, to show what was being actuated within specific fragments and lures. The locale and scene discussions will be interested in how the theatrical objects transported, lured and immersed me into accepting the actuality of the propositional claim(s). These discussions will also illuminate what the 'goal' of immersive theatre is and how blurring of boundaries between worlds can be achieved.

Before the discussion of location and scene can begin, it is worth mentioning an aspect of the relationship between myself and the work which came prior to my arrival at the theatrical event, on the 18th April 2019, since this was a key fragment which lured me into a different way of feeling. As is the case with most immersive theatre productions, how I heard about the production and purchased a ticket, was not through the box office of a theatre in advance or on the door. I had heard about the production a couple of years ago through word of mouth and had since seen reviews and recommendations via several online sources. I decided to purchase a ticket through the booking procedure online and I received an email confirmation with the

‘tickets’ attached. The tickets were not only proof of purchase for me and the venue but served as a written invitation to me as *guest*. The invitation stated:

My Dear Friend,

The honor would be entirely mine, if you could attend my little party.

You shall find all the details you require below.

Yours Sincerely,

J. Gatsby⁴⁷

In attempting to achieve their aim of immersing their participants in the story and world of the novel, the production’s main proposition is declared before the live event commences; that ‘we (the audience) are invited guests to Gatsby’s party at his mansion.’ The propositional content in the email statement is two-fold. Firstly, the statement consists of representational content which imposes that the tickets, or proof of purchase, also represent an invitation to a party hosted by Jay Gatsby. Secondly, the invitation imposes conditions on our mind that need to be entertained. Despite me having heard and read about *The Great Gatsby* as a theatrical event – as well as having read the original novel by Fitzgerald – and then spending my own money to attend the show in April, the phrasing of the ‘invitation’ proposes to me that Jay Gatsby has personally invited me to “attend [his] little party”. This proposes that I am not (only) a spectator to a piece of theatre, but a guest, and friend, of Mr. Gatsby at his party. Before I have attended the performance, I am already aware of how I shall be viewed by the characters during the performance. My role and relationship to the characters is as a guest. This is the overarching main proposition which The Immersive Ensemble and The Colab Factory assert from the moment one receives one’s invitation, to the termination of the theatrical event.

⁴⁷ Please see Appendix 5 for an image of the documented ticket invitation and details.

In this instance, it was language that operates as a lure for feeling. Studies of pragmatics and linguistics have shown how propositional language imposes truth conditions i.e., Sperber & Wilson (1986); Wilson & Sperber (2002); Carston (2010); Nuchelmans (1973); Golding (2016). The language within the invitation imposes the condition that I am to be treated as a guest of Mr. Gatsby at this event. This condition is a fragment; a lure for feeling. Immersive theatre and immersive-styled performances tend to assign a character or role to the participants who experience their work. This may not be as crucial to the main-proposition as IE's *The Great Gatsby* is, and it need not always be as explicit as a guest or visitor etc., it could simply be what Sophie Nield calls the 'character named Spectator' – a 'limited role' where the audience either becomes "the black hole into which theatre pours itself anxiously, or [they become *theatre*] in the guise of Spectator. [... They] are either in it, or absent" (Nield, 2008, p.534). For example, in *The Murdér Express* one is a passenger on a train, in a Gingerline production one is a diner, in *Forget Me Not* one is a visitor to a nursing home, and so on. Yet, the "pioneers" of immersive theatre, Punchdrunk, like to offer a role of anonymity in their work via the use of masks. White and Machon see their use of masks as "emancipatory innovation", whereas Gordon and Maples believe the masks "to make the strict, non-negotiable rules of engagement with the performers more obvious" (Biggin, 2017, pp. 24-25).

Correspondingly, Fruit for the Apocalypse, who are not an immersive theatre company, but do create experimental work that is site-responsive, assign the role of passenger to their participants within *The Surrealist Taxi*. In *The Surrealist Taxi*, a 'customer' simply calls the telephone number, and the driver answers the phone and accepts your fare – like all taxi services. The journey is determined by drawing playing cards and determining direction of travel and distance by suit and card value. In *The Surrealist Taxi*, the assigned role of passenger goes beyond the

representational content proposed by an invitation to a party, or one's bodily presence at a party. In *The Great Gatsby* for example, the audience are physically present and may have dressed up for the occasion to fit in with the in-its-own-worldliness of the 1920s jazz bar era, but you are both guest / co-conspirator in the frivolities of the party, and spectator of the event. Whereas, *The Surrealist Taxi* has a further layer. Here, the spectator is assigned both the role of passenger and participant / spectator of the performance / journey. Yet, the role that has been assigned to the participant by the conditions of the production is *already* the role of the participant. The participant is a passenger in a moving vehicle during both the fictional world of the narrative and in the literal world of reality.

Earlier, I mentioned that Jarvis' "core hypothesis [within] *Immersive Embodiment* (2019) [was] that immersion involves myriad strategies that seek to realize the promise of a position beyond the confines of one's body, its immediate locale or its finite set of lived experiences" (2019:10). From this, one could interpret that the 'goal of immersive experience' (from a perceptual embodiment stance) for its creators, – if there is indeed a goal – is to deliver on the implied promise of fulfilment in immersion. But is this the only 'goal of immersive experiences'? Considering immersion as a form of theatre, and not purely as an experience or sensation, the fundamental goal or aim for the creators of the art is surely to immerse one's audience. Now, in a truly immersive theatre piece – like the location of the flat in *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* – in order to immerse one's audience, the place / location / set has to approach reality in as much detail as possible to adhere to the main proposition that the participant's quotidian world has become part of a performance.⁴⁸ This does not mean that the goal of Riptide's immersive theatre is the

⁴⁸ By truly immersive theatre, I am referring to theatre which presents its theatrical world as being the quotidian world.

closure of all gaps between the quotidian and theatrical worlds, but that Riptide's goal for their immersive theatre is to actuate the *illusion of the reduction* of the gaps between the quotidian world and the theatrical world. The objects Riptide used simultaneously performed theatrically and (could perform) their normal and usual purpose(s); they had both theatrical and quotidian functions. The qualities of the theatrical objects were working together to present a sensual object containing the illusion of reality. Nevertheless, it is not the aim of immersion for every sign and object to become one and the same as *all* the gaps do not have to be filled for immersive experiences to occur. For Riptide, the reduction of those gaps is important as that is what they are trying to achieve: theatrical immersion in one's daily life. Yet, for *Forget Me Not*, The Guild of Misrule and The Immersive Ensemble, and *The Murder Express* (which will be discussed in the following chapter), the line between the quotidian and the theatrical is not as rigid, since they are dealing with a much narrower geographical radius and shorter temporality.

The Immersive Ensemble's *The Great Gatsby* (2019) is not a truly immersive theatre piece. The main proposition is that the audience are guests inside the fictional world of Fitzgerald's novel, rather than the fictional world *is* the quotidian world. However, there is an implicit realism that is presented and reinforced by the production's theatrical objects and network of sub-propositions – as is the case with all immersive theatre work. There is therefore still a blurring of lines that must take place for immersion as transportation to take place. For *The Great Gatsby*, this blurring of lines is between the physical venue and the created theatrical world.

Location

Immersive theatre companies and productions have become renowned for transforming the space and place of their performances so that the story aligns with the locations natural and

manmade environments. In this sense, some immersive work identifies itself as site-specific or site-sympathetic as the theatre companies Riptide, Grid Iron, Burn the Curtains and Talking Birds – to name a few – do. These companies all share commonalities and encourage active audience participation with theatre and the theatrical environment, yet do not necessarily define themselves as ‘immersive theatre’ companies. Without getting too distracted from the issue at hand, site-specific and sympathetic work does not always have to be immersive in nature. The reason some companies may not define themselves solely as working within the form of immersive theatre is because it limits what they can make. Site-specific performance can work in most forms of theatre if it remains specific or sympathetic to its environment. For example, in BoxedIn Theatre’s *The Greenhouse* (2019), the audience are passively spectating the action whilst sat on cushioned chairs in-the-round, but this takes place inside of a greenhouse.

Punchdrunk's Barrett admits that he's not a fan of the term "immersive theatre".

"We would never use it ourselves, although I'm delighted if our audiences are totally immersed," he says. "We used to call it 'site sympathetic' - because it's all about the building."

Masters, 2013, n.p.

If immersive work is ‘all about the building’ per Barrett, it is worth discussing the location and building of *The Great Gatsby* (2019). The building used was The Colab Factory’s residency at 74 Long Lane in London. The Colab Factory transformed an old rug company’s factory floor into a venue where audiences can experience live theatre. Audiences are invited to this specific location for many different types and styles of events and under varying pretenses. In my case, the invitation to the venue dropped into my email inbox as an invitation as previously mentioned. Now, the material being of a building has what Gillespie refers to as its own ‘life-form’, in that it has a being or ‘life’ outside of its relation to a human or conscious thinker

(2014). The building itself does not have a conscious mind i.e., it is not *living*, but the internal and external environment of it – in this case of 74 Long Lane – exists and communicates with other objects and humans (which OOO refers to as objects too).

Upon my arrival to ‘Gatsby’s Drugstore’ on 74 Long Lane, I saw that the outside of the building was covered in a banner which read “The Colab Factory”. Due to this, I knew that I was in the right place, but the external appearance of the building did not look like a drugstore, nor Gatsby’s mansion. The sensual object I perceived did not align with the main proposition, nor did it suggest to me that the interior of this building would be grandeur in nature. Now, I did not expect this immersive performance of *The Great Gatsby* to take place inside a multi-million-pound mansion – The Immersive Ensemble’s budget for rent may not stretch that far! – but the location’s exterior appearance did not suggest to me that this is where the fictional character Jay Gatsby would host one of his parties. The geographical location and the exterior architecture of the building did not act as a fragment or sub-proposition which assisted the main proposition. It was not until I entered the building that I started to gradually lower my barriers to immersion. As the performance began and developed, I accepted a multitude of propositional lures that the in-its-own worldliness of the theatrical world became apparent to me; the appearance of the building’s exterior was simply a hurdle I had overcome, and now a distant ignored memory. The storyworld and space-world began once one had crossed the threshold from the quotidian world to the specific space-world of the performance and the performers’ narrative commenced. Arguably, this was not the case here, nor in other immersive works. Did the process of immersion begin once the live event commenced, or was it when audience-participants were first propositioned by real and sensual objects? I.e., was it once one crossed the threshold or once one received that liminal ticket?

Entrance and The Eyes of Dr T.J Eckleburg

The first aspects to be discussed and analysed are entering the building and perceiving the initial proposals. This discussion explains how detailed fragments / sub-propositions which one immediately perceives on entering a space are offered to lower barriers to immersion and transport us into the theatrical world; the world of *The Great Gatsby*.

There is a liminality when entering a performance space i.e., “a betwixt-and-between-condition” (Turner, 1988, 101). I have experienced that transitional feeling from the perspective of performer and audience. As a spectator / perceiver / audience-participant, something changes within us when one crosses a threshold to a new realm. This feeling is not exclusive to spectators of immersive theatre but is potentially heightened depending on what it is one is entering. I have experienced a transitional feeling when entering both a theatre auditorium and a warehouse where theatre is being performed. Due to the possibilities that are created when one perceives the objects presented on the inside of these environments, that liminal feeling could last longer, be more immediate, be more jarring etc., in an auditorium than a warehouse, and vice versa. Also, the vastness of the possibilities is always shifting dependent on one’s relation to the space itself. In this sense, the relation of theatrical objects still contains a human-oriented dimension. In Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (2014), he states that:

outside and inside are both intimate – they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a border-line surface between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides [...] The center of “being-there” wavers and trembles. Intimate space loses its clarity, while exterior space loses its void, void being the raw material of possibility of being. We are banished from the realm of possibility.

Bachelard, 2014, p.233.

This *change* that one experiences on crossing a threshold was evident in the responses to my post-show questionnaire to *Forget Me Not*. When asked if they experienced any kind of change as they crossed the threshold between the foyer and the performance space of *Forget Me Not*, ninety percent of participants said they did. And Bachelard's philosophical poetics of space here can help explain how one could experience no noticeable changes when crossing a physical threshold between two separate worlds. There was a physical boundary between the performance space and the foyer in *Forget Me Not*. This boundary separated the theatrical world from the outside world. If in the conscious mind/brain of the audience-participants, outside the performance space and inside the space conceptually contained possibility and the potential for further existence, then it is reasonable to assume that one may not notice a shift in the vivacity of one's immersion and beliefs.

The crossing of the threshold between outside and inside the performance space of *The Great Gatsby* (2019) was through a street side door of the warehouse. A doorman / bouncer opened the door of the warehouse and conversed with you as you were queuing to enter the building and present your ticket / invitation. The bouncer stamped all our hands in ink. It read 'JG'. This was a sign to say that you had paid for the event and were freely allowed to enter in and out of the show. Once I had climbed the stairs to the first floor, I entered a small room which led to 'Gatsby's Drugstore'. The performer playing the role of Rosie Rosenthal welcomed me and walked myself and a few others through all the 'guidelines' of what we could and could not do. This was the contract of participation we explicitly assented to; she even said "you can't use phones as they haven't been invented yet. We will allow you to use your phone and card to pay for drinks at the bar and we'll turn a blind eye to that, but if we see you use them at any other point, we will crush them. You can take photos once the show is over." Once Rosie finished

explaining the rules of play, we could enter ‘Gatsby’s Drugstore’. As you left the small foyer room to enter the drugstore setting, above the doorway hung the large blue eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg.

The Eyes

But above the gray land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic – their irises are one yard high. [...] But his eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days under the sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground.

Fitzgerald, 1925, p.20.

This excerpt from Fitzgerald’s novel is the first description the reader receives of the advertising board over ‘the valley of ashes.’ These eyes can be viewed as a symbol to represent the abstract concept that Doctor T.J Eckleburg is God judging American society.

The Great Gatsby (2019) makes use of Eckleburg’s eyes in their scenery as one enters the second room of the performance space – Gatsby’s Drugstore. The gigantic blue eyes are displayed on a plasterboard set over the doorway as you enter the room. There are also two large, round metal rings which are suspended from the ceiling in front of the eyes to serve as the frames of a pair of glasses. The rings are joint together by a silver taped bar which serves as the bridge connecting the frames together. The image of the eyes displayed on the plasterboard (Real Object) and the suspended metal rings (Real Object) create the three-dimensional image of Doctor T.J Eckleburg’s eyes on the advertising board (Sensual Object) from the original novel.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ See Appendix 6 for an image of the eyes.

The interaction of these objects created the overall sensual object that I perceived – Eckleburg’s eyes. This was a network of sub-propositions; a sign of a sign of a sign of a sign.

Propositionally, the object connotes a lure. It lures us into the world of Fitzgerald’s novel. The actualization of the lure modifies the proposal that *in this space* that I have entered, exists the fictional world and narrative of an adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* novel.

It is worth emphasising that what makes this created theatrical object of Eckleburg’s eyes different from the scenography of a set depicting Eckleburg’s eyes on a proscenium arch stage, is my bodily presence. I did not interpret this image as a symbol whilst sitting passively in an auditorium. I interpreted this image as a symbol whilst moving through the performance space. So, the theatrical object does not only function as the set to inform the spectator that, a), this object represents Eckleburg’s eyes, and b), this object informs us the onstage representation takes place in location *x*, but it goes beyond both a) and b) by actuating those claims. My presence *inside* the performance space meant that *that* object was the advertising board of Dr T.J Eckleburg’s eyes. The space *was* situated at the ‘valley of ashes’; I had placed myself between West Egg and New York. Therefore, the theatrical object of the eyes was a sub-proposition; a fragment which aided the main proposition that we (as audience) are inside the fictional world of *Gatsby*.

Networks of sub-propositions, such as this one, lead to further sub-propositions and things to be considered.⁵⁰ This sub-proposition made me consider things such as ‘where is *Gatsby*’s house from here?’, ‘is *Gatsby*’s house not a mansion in this narrative?’, ‘is his home a drugstore?’ and so on. The inclusion of the eyes above the doorway informed me *where* I was. I was not entering

⁵⁰ As discussed in *The Lucky Ones* chapter pp.88-93.

a fancy party as I presumed from the invite I received. Instead, I was entering the ‘solemn dumping ground’ and ‘valley of ashes’; the place where George Wilson’s garage is located within the original novel.

Prior to witnessing the interacting objects which make up Eckleburg’s eyes, I witnessed the invite, the bouncer, the stamp and Rosie Rosenthal, all of which operated as invitations / offerings / proposals for engagement with the work. Biggin (2017) incorporates into her work Salen and Zimmerman’s multivalent model for interactivity in computer gaming.⁵¹ The four-mode system includes cognitive interactivity (the psychological participation between things), functional interactivity (structural interactions with material things / objects), explicit interactivity (overt participation), and beyond-the-object interactivity (social and cultural participation). Biggin uses the model to show how each mode can lower barriers to immersion through performances and moments from Punchdrunk shows. For example, the “invitations for imaginative engagement (cognitive interactivity [MODE 1]) can be seen as lowering barriers to immersion, by gradually taking the audience members away from the real world in which they put the masks on and bringing them into (the world of) Temple Studios” within *The Drowned Man* (Biggin, 2017, p.83). In *The Great Gatsby* (2019), the invitations offered (the invite, bouncer etc.) are attempting to do the same thing. Lower those barriers and lure and transport us into the world of Gatsby. I mention this because those offerings were gradually allowing me time to become accustomed to my new environment away from reality, and once I saw and walked under Dr T.J. Eckleburg’s eyes, I remember accepting and assenting to the idea that ‘I am now entering a Gatsby narrative’. This was the first theatrical object to start the process of

⁵¹ Salen, K. & E. Zimmerman. (2004). *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. MIT, London; Cambridge, Mass.

transporting me into that mindset and world. I would not state that this network of sub-propositions alone achieved what Machon (2013) calls the state of immersion as transportation, but it started the process of wavering through those graded states.

The Drugstore

As one passes through the doorway underneath the eyes of Eckleburg, one enters a room which has a chalk board hung on the wall directly before one's eyes which reads 'Drugstore'. On the left, there is a small bar right-angled off in the corner where one can purchase refreshments such as whiskeys, gins, wines etc. Along the wall connected to the bar on the left side of the room, there is a boundary one cannot seemingly cross as a red curtain is drawn segregating the room(s?). On the right, the space is confined by a shutter which is lowered and closed. There is a raised platform right-angled off in the corner opposite the bar which serves as a seating area. In this area, there are old and worn items of furniture and decor: wooden chairs, wingback chairs, old and dusty lamps, whiskey bottles and so on. There is also a piano on the platform which is being played by the character whom we are soon told is George Wilson. He is playing nineteen-twenties-style background jazz whilst the audience / participants / guests enter.

Entering this room was perhaps the most puzzling experience of the night as what I perceived did not align with my expectations of what Gatsby's mansion and party would look like, and the only mention of a drugstore within the original novel I could recall was the one Nick purchases some cigarettes from in chapter two. I was still entertaining propositions such as 'where is Gatsby's mansion?', 'does George Wilson run a drugstore in this narrative rather than a garage?', 'is this even a drugstore?' and so on. I had only just started to perceive and experience

the inside of the performance space and the theatrical objects and props that were being proposed. As I continued, I gradually relaxed into my new environment after taking the time to perceive all the immediate areas that were accessible to me. I was still assenting to the idea that I was entering a Gatsby narrative, and that that narrative had already begun, but I was not too sure what was occurring and being actuated. The chalk board sign on the wall informed me that I was in a drugstore, but the objects, location, atmosphere and people who were in the ‘drugstore’ did not align with my notion and understanding of a drugstore in the quotidian world. The space felt more like a speakeasy; an illicit establishment (illicit within the performance’s narrative) that was being fictionally portrayed as Gatsby’s drugstore business.

Once the door we had all entered through, walking underneath the eye of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, had been closed, and the performer playing the role of Myrtle stood on top of the piano and began singing along with the music that George Wilson’s performer was playing, the audience filled the space. We stood in the middle of the space, crammed next to one another like a busy London tube. Some sat on chairs on the raised platform next to the piano, some sat on bar stools, suitcases etc., others leaning against walls, bars, and whichever spaces we could squeeze in to. The performer playing the role of Nick Carraway unbeknownst to me was stood within the audience watching Myrtle sing too. When she finished singing, he began his opening monologue and worked his way through the crowd of guests onto the raised platform. The story had begun.

This preamble within the space declared as a ‘Drugstore’ also served as a means of gradually taking audience members away from the real world. Similarly, to how Shunt in *Tropicana* led small groups of audiences down long corridors and into a fake lift to create the illusion of descending beneath the station and city, and how Punchdrunk use masks, removing their audience from the real world and bringing them in to their created theatrical one. Once Nick

Carraway had finished his opening monologue, the performer playing the role of Jordan Baker swung open the shutter and doors from the drugstore to Gatsby's grand house on the other side.

Gatsby's Mansion

We as an audience all flooded into the room exploring its objects and grandeur. There was a dance floor in the middle of the space with two seated areas either side. On the right as you entered the space, the seating was flamboyantly decorated with golden sparkly tablecloths, and there was a bar full of champagne. On the left-hand side there were a few tables to relax on. There was a piano and microphone on the left as you entered too. Gatsby's bar was directly opposite the entrance to the space. There were balconies above the seated areas wrapped in fairy-lights which contained more seating for the guests; there were steps for performers and audience to climb up to the balconies if they desired. There were other rooms hidden from view, and as the narrative developed, groups of audience members were invited into them by the performers to witness subplots and intimate one-to-one scenes. We were not however invited to wander aimlessly to our own devices like in Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man*. Instead, we were led to specific rooms and scenes at certain moments.

The real and sensual qualities of the objects mentioned above – as well as other unmentioned objects and qualities – were working together to propose that the audience had entered Gatsby's mansion. The individual fragments, such as the piano, the bar, the fairy lights and so on, once entertained, hooked me in further to the theatrical world and narrative. Yet, there were other objects that did not align with the main proposition or the conditions of the fictional world. Objects such as CCTV cameras, audience-participants' bank cards, fire alarms, exposed brick,

digital speakers producing contemporary music from the post-Gatsby eras, and so on. Other than the speakers, these objects had no theatrical functions, only real-world ones. This is where mode two of Salen and Zimmermann's model (2004) – functional interactivity or utilitarian participation – becomes applicable to this analysis. These objects created physical barriers to my immersion. For example, how can one be imaginatively and physically transported to a nineteen-twenties era which makes use of twenty-first century technologies? I had to become accustomed to the objects that did not coincide with the conditions of the theatrical world before I could suspend my disbelief, and imaginative engagement with the world could take place. I ignored everything that was not part of the proposal 'you're in a Gatsby narrative'. This meant ignoring the exposed bricks of the warehouse building, to assent to the proposition that the building and space was Gatsby's mansion, not a warehouse.

As I mentioned earlier regarding Riptide's *The Lucky Ones*, the illusion of the reduction of the gaps between reality and fiction were important for immersion to occur, but this was not as important here. The Immersive Ensemble were not trying to have its building and set approach reality in as much detail as possible. They were simply creating fictive storyworlds encompassing aspects from *The Great Gatsby* novel. I could (and did) choose to ignore those objects which did not align with the storyworld.

Like Riptide's work, Punchdrunk's *The Masque of the Red Death* (2007) and *The Drowned Man* (2013), also aimed at achieving and sustaining an intense level of engagement with the fictional world of the show. In Biggin's work (2017) she says that Felix Barrett stated *The Masque of the Red Death* "failed" if a participant "suddenly remember[ed] they [were] in London 2007" (in Gardner 2007, n.p.). To try and facilitate "total immersion at all times" (2017:84), Punchdrunk 'opened up [Battersea Arts Centre's] 16 chimneys, tore down partitions and created new

connections' (Wainwright, 2018, n.p.) so that they could reduce the gaps between the quotidian and theatrical worlds. Having total cognitive interactivity with the fictional world of *The Great Gatsby* (2019) was not attainable for me due to the previously mentioned objects with solely real-world functions. Yet, this did not hinder my immersive experience, only interrupt it. Biggin (2017) refers to Jennett, Cox and Cairn's Real World Dissociation concept (RWD) (2008) which surrounds the experience of immersion in video games. Biggin states:

In the context of immersive performance and narrative, RWD explains how an audience member might retain awareness of real-world events and continue to experience a sense of immersion in a fictional landscape, atmosphere or story. An audience member may negotiate with their immediate surroundings to retain engagement in the storyworld (narrative immersion) and the atmosphere (sensory immersion), or move between both.

Biggin, 2017, p.145.

I negotiated with the non-theatrical objects and chose to ignore them so that I could retain my engagement in the storyworld of *The Great Gatsby*. Like Biggin does in relation to *The Masque of the Red Death* and *The Drowned Man*, one could go a step further by suggesting that by becoming aware or remembering aspects of the quotidian world, but then choosing to be attentive to the fictional world that I was experiencing, that "might demonstrate a more thorough experience of immersion than if this thought never occur[ed]" (2017:84).

Conversely, there was a point where an interruption was prolonged so much that the sensation of immersion was broken, and so the gradual layering process of my immersion in the narrative and world had to commence again. The warehouse building's fire alarm went off whilst we were inside *Gatsby's* mansion during a later scene; this was not part of the performance. A business that The Colab Factory share the warehouse space with on a higher floor had accidentally set off the fire alarm mid-performance meaning that the show had to be paused and all audience members evacuated. The performers had to break character and open aspects of the building that

were not part of the performance. The red curtain that served as a boundary along the side of the bar in Gatsby's drugstore was drawn open to lead to the building's nearest fire exit. It was a side door leading on to a small back street along the side of Long Lane. We as an audience all had to stand on the other side of the pavement and wait until it was declared safe for us to go back inside. After around ten minutes we were led back through the side-door into the performance space by a few performers, and they then had to shift from their quotidian self, back to their character within the theatrical world.

Finally, the most direct means by which The Immersive Ensemble blurred the lines between the quotidian warehouse building, and the theatrical storyworld of Gatsby's mansion was via explicit interactivity / participation with designed choices and procedures i.e., mode three of Salen and Zimmerman's model (2004). As I entered the space declared to be Gatsby's mansion, the performer playing the role of Gatsby was stood overlooking us all as an audience / his guests on a balcony above the bar. Whilst my friend and I, along with other guests bought drinks and were talking, individual audience-participants were invited to dance the Charleston. Nick Carraway headed over to my friend and I and started speaking to me. He complemented me on my suit and enquired whom my tailor was. He asked me if I had met Tom Buchanan. He introduced me to Tom. George Wilson came over and taught me the steps for the Charleston. These explicit interactions with the characters – or objects as OOO would say since a democracy of objects “does not entail the *exclusion* of the human” per Bryant (2011:20) (emphasis in original) – helped blur the boundaries between the two worlds.

Obviously, my agency is still limited in these interactions. The performers are in control and are guiding me down their narrative path. The performer playing Nick Carraway will start up a conversation with some of the guests in each of his performances of *The Great Gatsby*. He may

even use the same line from time-to-time complementing the individual on their suit or attire. Likewise, the performer playing the role of George Wilson will show guests the steps for the Charleston in each of his performances. And whilst there is cause for me, or any audience-participant to respond to their interactions, our “input does not determine the outcome and the performer remains in control at all times” (2017:90).

immersive experience can exist in that movement between passive and active engagement: between freedom and following the rules; making choices within given pre-designed constraints. When considering immersion and interactivity within the walls of an immersive theatre production, what matters is less how interactive a production actually *is* at any given moment, and more the question of how it manipulates various modes of interactivity to allow for the experience(s) of its audience.

Biggin, 2017, 94.

Elaborating on Biggin’s quotation – within that question of ‘how [x] manipulates’ is what *is* actuated i.e. the actuality of the proposition. So, whilst boundaries are in fact only blurring between the real and the theatrical, the interactivity of objects creates a realm where those boundaries merge; a realm where it is claimed that an object *is* the thing it stands for. This realm indicatively claims that ‘the bar I am standing at *is* Gatsby’s bar’, ‘the human object before me *is* George Wilson’, and so on.

This discussion of location shows how the performance venue’s building, and the objects which made up each room’s scenography and set invited a lure for feeling. How they blurred the lines between the quotidian and the theatrical. One could argue that the scenography of a proscenium arch performance requires the same level of imaginative engagement and cognitive immersion as immersive theatre sets do. For example, West End productions such as *Wicked* and *The Lion King* have such elaborate sets, puppetry and costumes to imaginatively engage and become immersed. Yet, there is a definite boundary between the everyday and the theatrical. Between

performer and audience. Between on stage and off stage. To take this analysis a step further so that one can see the distinct difference between propositionality and semiotics, I shall turn to individual scenes within *The Great Gatsby* (2019) and discuss how specific objects were actuated. How these objects not only served as a successful sign for what they were, but what affect they had. And how that effect influences immersive experience.

Scenes

I will now discuss and analyse three scenes from *The Great Gatsby* (2019) which used theatrical objects to lure me further into the theatrical world of the production. The three scenes that will be considered are Gatsby's business meeting, the tea scene, and Myrtle's death. The latter two are adaptations of specific moments from the novel itself, and the former is a created adaptation from aspects of the novel and Gatsby's character. I have chosen these three scenes as they each made use of specific objects aimed at luring the audience into entertaining them to try and facilitate an immersive experience through absorption and/or transportation.

The technique of using objects to immerse participants is not wholly distinct from previous examples I have described in *The Lucky Ones* productions and *Forget Me Not* and so it may appear repetitive, but it is necessary to look to different examples of how propositions are enacted and agreed. For example, in *Forget Me Not*, a participant is drinking their tea *as if* they are in a nursing home. But they are not really drinking their tea *as if* they are in a nursing home, because, they would (presumably) not act like that in the quotidian world / reality. The drinking of one's tea is a fragment of a possibility that compliments / supplements / facilitates their engagement in the theatrical world. They *have* a fragment of the fictional world. They are

immersed in the object / the stuff / the sub-proposition. It is a detail of the performance that immerses them. And by expressing what it was that immersed me – as a participant – in separate immersive performances, it opens the endless possibilities for considering what *is happening* within experiences of theatrical performance. By examining these objects, I am offering further proposals to the questions within the processes of experiencing and making theatre which continually need to be asked.

Gatsby's business meeting

Shortly after Nick Carraway met Jay Gatsby for the first time at Gatsby's party, the performer playing the role of George Wilson asked a group of audience-participants, including my friend and I, "if we wanted to be involved in some of Gatsby's business?", and sneak away from the frivolities of the party. Intrigued, my friend and I, as well as roughly a dozen other participants, were all guided into a hidden room out of sight from the rest of the performers and participants. It was dimly lit, lavish, and filled with alcohol and chesterfield sofas. I could still hear the party going on in the main room. Rosie and Gatsby gave all of his new 'business associates' a glass of gin on entry. Rosie came over to each participant one-by-one and gave us a business card. On the front, it read 'Jay Gatsby', on the back, 'for the attention of Rosie Rosenthal'. We were told by Rosie that we must place a bet on for them using their money which they "knew would win". We were then informed that, once the meeting was over and we had returned to the main room, we must individually approach Rosie when we "had a chance" and ask her for the betting tip. If we were to approach her with lots of other people, then we were not to be trusted.

Side-tracking from the description of the business meeting for a moment, later in the evening I managed to catch Rosie on her own whilst she was carrying some drinks. I asked her for the betting tip, and my business card was exchanged for a different card which had a mobile number on it. Rosie told me to call the number the next morning and “place fifteen-hundred on the Cincinnati Red Socks”. After participating in mode three of Salen and Zimmermann’s model – explicit interactivity – with the performance and Rosie earlier on, I was presented with a business card which lured me into a different way of feeling. I felt my role as an audience participant, and as a guest within the fictional narrative, had just been broadened to ‘business associate of Jay Gatsby’. By entertaining that possibility, and assenting to that proposition, I became more imaginatively engaged and immersed in the performance’s narrative. Later, this was further enhanced when I sought out a one-to-one interaction with Rosie so that I could find out more about my role as a business associate, and what this bet entailed. The real and sensual object (business card) that I had been given / witnessed had hooked me in. As Riptide’s Palmer would say, I had been presented a ‘locked door’ and I had the hunger to find out where it led. The initial business card was not the only real and sensual object affecting my immersion here, there was also Rosie and the new business card that I would soon be given in an exchange. Each detailed fragment was threading me along to the next, deepening my engagement and interaction with the world. When I sought out that one-to-one moment with Rosie and received *my* new card and betting tip, I felt a sense of accomplishment. That card was mine. I was not simply an audience member who had been offered a possibility. I had entertained the propositional lure and been rewarded. I had been rewarded in two-ways. Primarily and less importantly, I discovered another layer of the narrative which other participants perhaps missed. This type of ‘reward’ is discussed in detail within Biggin (2017) and can be seen in pretty much every immersive theatre

companies work regularly i.e. Punchdrunk, Shunt, You Me Bum Bum Train, Riptide, dreamthinkspeak etc. But secondly and more relevantly, *my* reward was that specific fragment. Interacting with those objects and being given *my own* card hooked me into the theatrical world further. That object lured me into a “different way of feeling [my] world” (2014:6). The exchange of the business card exemplifies how a sub-proposition can be enacted and agreed.

Similarly, to Riptide’s premium membership cards, this exchanged business card led to real-world implications which was otherwise not a trait of *The Great Gatsby*. The next day, once the scheduled theatrical event had finished, I called the mobile number on my business card via my personal phone. The call went straight to an answering machine where I heard a voice state “hello, this is Meyer Wolfsheim. I am not currently taking any bets as I am still mourning Mr. Gatsby’s death. The funeral has yet to be arranged.” This type of interactivity is both explicit and beyond-the-object, and therefore toys with both mode three and four of Salen and Zimmermann’s four-mode taxonomy. Whilst the business card (RO) is ‘the object’ that immersed me and part of the wider theatrical event itself, it has a further theatrical function and narrative beyond-the-object of the theatrical event itself. I was offered another propositional lure via the utterance-type within the recorded message (SO). This lure, like drinking the tea in *Forget Me Not*, is a detailed fragment which personally immerses the receiver in that detail. The connection between the business card’s sensual qualities, and the qualities of the utterance-type I heard via my phone, fused the theatrical event with my personal real-world possessions. It allowed me to imaginatively connect with the performance via my memory. And now, I can decide to listen to that voicemail to take my mind back to that place. In this regard, by fusing objects with one’s quotidian world, one can see how an immersive experience “lingers as the

memory of a dream” (2017:111) and can generate further beyond-the-object empowerment with its audiences as can be seen in Gillespie (2014), Nield (2008) and Freshwater (2009).

Reverting to the scene of the business meeting; roughly a dozen of us were sat on different chesterfield sofas. I was sat in between a stranger and my friend that accompanied me to the event. Gatsby asked who in the room had experience with finance. My friend then entered a direct conversation with the performer by stating that he was good with numbers. Gatsby asked him what he did, the participant said that “he’d rather not say”. Gatsby asked him what he’d do if he were rich, and he replied that “he would buy his parents a house and go on holiday”.

Gatsby then challenged all the participants in the room to work out a math question: “how many glasses of two-ounce gin can one pour out of an eighteen-ounce bottle?” We had three seconds to guess and the fastest would win a prize. My friend answered the fastest and won. According to Gatsby he “talked the talk and walked the walk”. He was given a full glass of Gatsby’s “strongest gin”. As we were leaving the room, I asked him if it was nice and he said, “it was very strong!”

I mention this interaction because I knew the ‘spect-actor’ in the exchange. I knew that the participant was not a performer posing as a spectator. He was a spectator. So, when I saw him drink the liquid in the glass that Gatsby gave him – who made the claim that this was his “strongest gin” – and asked him if it was nice; his response that “it was very strong” validated Gatsby’s claim. My friend provided confirmation to me that this was not simply a case of a performer making an indicative claim about a theatrical object and the receiver accepting it in the subjunctive mood *as if* it were true. Rather, once he drank the gin, he accepted the proposition in the indicative mood *as* true. Unlike the usual format of immersive performance where boundaries are only blurring (and not *actually* merging) between the real and the

theatrical, and the interactivity of objects creates a realm where those boundaries can merge, – in this instance the real and sensual qualities of the performer being Gatsby (RO) interact with the qualities of the glass of gin (RO) creating the claim that this glass of gin *is* not only a glass of gin, but it *is* his “strongest gin” to the participant (RO) – here, the proposition that was enacted and agreed by the performer and my friend was proposed indicatively and accepted indicatively. For me, and perhaps all other participants, it was proposed indicatively and accepted in the subjunctive. My agreement of the proposition shifted from the subjunctive to the indicative *once* I received extra information from the receiver of the interaction who validated the indicative claim. In experiences such as this where only one participant’s senses are manipulated, be it via drinking a liquid, smelling smoke, tasting food etc., unless we are the one that is experiencing the interaction or change, how do we as spectators know what *is* being actuated? To an outsider we can accept the claim that the object *is* the thing it stands for, but only in the subjunctive mood. This is no different from when one sits passively watching a performance as you can only read if the sign was affective, and not what the quality of the sign was.

Tea Scene

The famous tea scene in which Gatsby’s long-awaited dream of meeting Daisy face-to-face for the first time in years, now as a successful and wealthy man is adapted within The Immersive Ensemble’s *The Great Gatsby* too. In the original novel, Gatsby asks Jordan Baker to ask Nick to invite Daisy over to his house for tea and he dresses up Nick’s home with extravagant and beautiful flowers: “He wants to know,” continued Jordan, “if you’ll invite Daisy to your house some afternoon and then let him come over.” (Fitzgerald, 1925, p.61). In *The Great Gatsby*

(2019), The Immersive Ensemble demonstrated how Gatsby prepared Nick's home for Daisy's visit by building, creating and setting the scene before the audience's eyes. Inanimate objects were of course used to set the scene such as chairs, tables, teacups, teapot, flowers etc., but the main topic of this scene will be how the performers invited audience-participants to assist in this pre-scripted scene. Following the thread from Gatsby's business meeting, this discussion focuses on humans as performing objects and how inanimate objects such as an item of costume or prop can turn a spectator into a 'spect-actor' and actuating them as the thing they are standing for.

To construct this tea scene, Gatsby chose three audience-participants – whom were clearly not affiliated with another outside this production – and named them 'the Johnson' family.⁵² 'The Johnsons' were invited into the centre of the performance space within the main room whilst all other audience members not involved in the scene stood or sat around them observing. George Wilson then placed an apron over the head of each of the three participants formulating the proposition that 'the Johnson' family worked for Gatsby and signifying that the participants had been allocated additional roles to rest of the audience. They were now characters as well as playing the role of Gatsby's guests and participants. There are many examples in theatre history as well as popular culture, literature, films and so forth, where objects, props, costume etc., have called "attention to themselves as actors" by shifting the dynamics of a character or allowing a performer to become a new character.⁵³ What was interesting about this apron, was that it paved the way for audience-participants to be viewed as part of the performance. Gillespie states that:

While it may seem odd to imagine that "inanimate" objects might feel or (re)act in the affective capacities outside our human investment or symbolic attachment, it is precisely through the sensuous qualities of the object – such as its ability to make physical and

⁵² I knew that at least one of the three participants were not familiar with the other two participants because I knew them personally. The other two participants may have been friendly with one another prior to the theatrical event, but they did not appear to attend the event together or know one another.

⁵³ For example, *The 39 Steps*, *Superman*, *Twelfth Night* to name but a few of an almost endless list.

emotional contact, its causal interactions, and its participation in relational networks – that objects become oddly present, often uncannily calling attention to themselves as actors.

Gillespie, 2014, p.152.

By placing the aprons over each participant, the sensuous qualities of the apron created a relational network which linked together the participant, their role as a ‘Johnson’ within the scene, the narrative, the performance, the event, the production and so on. This supplemented the idea that they – the participants – *were* the thing they stood for. Gatsby had already claimed that the participants were ‘the Johnsons’ prior to the aprons, and perhaps some audience members had already accepted that claim as if it were true which may have actuated the proposition. Yet the labour of the apron here enhances the claim and allows the spectators to separate themselves from the spect-actors. That distinction between performer / audience or in this case involved / not involved, although it appears to contradict the principle of immersive theatre by not having the whole performance fully interactive for all its participants and aligning more with traditional and passive audience arrangements, in this instance it helped to actuate the spect-actors *as being* the thing they stood for. One of the participants moved chairs and tables, the other brought crockery, and another swept, but they all became ‘the Johnsons’.

Myrtle’s death scene

In the original novel, Myrtle was run over by Daisy who was driving Gatsby’s car. In *The Great Gatsby* (2019), they kept this same plotline. Unlike on a proscenium arch stage where anything can be used to represent any and/or everything, the production had established an implicit sense of realism regarding its objects. The objects used were always used to represent themselves, i.e.,

they always served their principal function. For this scene, they had to make the sensual object that I and the audience perceived not only represent but *become* a car in order to align with the goal of immersive theatre – the illusion of the reduction of the gaps between the quotidian and the theatrical – and support the indicative claim that ‘this car killed Myrtle’.

Everyone was aware that this was a theatre performance, and that the performer playing the role of Myrtle was acting / pretending to be killed. But that was not the challenge here. The challenge was being able to convincingly make the claim that ‘this theatrical object killed that theatrical object’ and for that claim to be supported and actuated by the interactivity of the qualities of the involved objects.

In the scene, Nick Carraway, Tom Buchanan, Gatsby and Daisy were playing cards around a table in the main room. All the audience-participants were stood or sat spectating the scene. This was a pre-scripted scene where it was implicitly suggested that we as an audience were not supposed to attempt to interact with the performers. At that moment we were passive audience members – the kind which immersive theatre “work claims to dismantle” (2017:94). Whilst the audience surrounded and observed the table scene, George Wilson and Myrtle were arguing loudly in the drugstore space next door. The shutter and the large wooden doors – which Jordan Baker swung open for us to originally enter the main room from the drugstore – were closed, and one could hear banging coming from the space where the pair were arguing. Nick Carraway began narrating how Gatsby and Daisy were driving in the night towards “the valley of ashes”, towards “death”. The other three characters around the table froze, and the performers presented a neutral being. A being that was neither the character they had been portraying, nor themselves, but purely objects of the performance. As Nick was telling the story of how Gatsby’s car approached the valley of ashes and Myrtle ran into the road, pre-recorded sound effects of a

car's horn being held down whilst screeching noises similar to the sound of a car braking and skidding at a high speed played through the multiple surround-sound speakers which were scattered in the corners of the room and along various exposed beams in the warehouse. Myrtle screamed loudly and despairingly. A loud crash played through the speakers in time with the opening of the large wooden doors and there were two bright lights shining in our faces which began to repetitively flash in a strobe like manner. Smoke filled the space around the lights to represent fog and caused my visibility of the object(s) creating the beams of light to be compromised. The beams of light were side-by-side and spaced a cars width apart. As the doors to the room had swung open, the beams of lights jolted swiftly forwards and stopped just before the entrance to the main room which to me represented that a car's headlights were flashing on a full beam.

The brake noise, the screeching, the banging, the scream, the lights, the smoke and so on, all supplemented the idea that a car crash had just occurred and that the overall sensual object I could perceive through those doors was 'a car', more specifically 'Gatsby's car'. Due to the bright lights and the volume of smoke, I was prevented from witnessing the qualities of whatever the object(s) before me were. This along with sound effects, banging, screaming etc., manipulated my senses and so my imaginative engagement with the story helped create an overall picture in my mind which was 'that *is* a car'. I can even recall thinking 'how have they managed to get a car inside the warehouse and drugstore whilst the show was going on with no one noticing?', and 'how did it fit inside the building?', 'maybe behind the red curtain are loading bay or garage doors'. I oscillated those real-world modes of attention for a moment then through the thoughts away to remain attentive to the narrative that was unfolding before me. So as that display occurred, I was adamant that the real object was indeed a car, and that a car was

being used to represent itself as a car. I *indicatively* agreed to the sub-proposition that the sensual object I perceived before me *was* a car and agreed to the proposition that ‘that particular car killed Myrtle’ in the subjunctive mood *as if* it were true.

Unfortunately, it was at this moment that the fire alarm sounded within the warehouse and everyone had to be evacuated mid-performance. The house lights were raised, the red curtain within the drugstore was drawn, and the audience-participants and I had to walk past the objects that had created the visual effect of Gatsby’s car, and continue out the fire exit – which did turn out to be a large ground floor side door for loading and unloading items. I could now clearly see that the real objects that had constructed the sensual object I had witnessed were two stage lights surrounded and raised by wooden beams on wheels to create the illusion of a moving car.

Discovering this changed the conditions of the proposition I agreed to. I no longer believed that the sensual object I had perceived was *a* car, instead I accepted the sensual object I had perceived was a car *as if* it were true. This did not affect my immersion in the storyworld and narrative of the theatrical world, only the conditions of how that sub-proposition was enacted and agreed. My immersion in the theatrical world was however affected by the fire alarm sounding and having to evacuate the inside of that world for around ten minutes or so.

Whilst my immersion in the theatrical world was not affected at the time, my beyond-the-object memory of my personal immersive experience has changed. I can recall my initial experience of the network of sub-propositions which created my overall perception of the sensual object, assenting to the proposition that it was a car, and accepting the proposition it was a car. But now, I can also think that there were a multitude of theatrical objects working together whose qualities were interacting with one another to plant an image in my mind. An image which I could not definitively state what the real objects and real qualities of those objects were, since I was not

indicatively certain of what the object(s) before me were. I still assented to and accepted the proposition that the object *was* a car *as if* it were true, but the memory of my vivacity of my belief and immersion within that specific detailed fragment of the production has been downgraded from an actual occurrence to a believable occurrence. What remains to be the case though, is that the actuation of an agreed proposition within a theatrical event, cannot change retroactively. The conditions of the propositions enactment and agreement can shift as just shown, but the actuality of the proposition remains intact. The rolling, car-width stage lights on wooden beams (RO) *was* the thing it stood for in that moment. The sensual object I perceived was a car.

Conclusion

In discussing how theatrical objects within *The Great Gatsby* (2019) offered possibilities to be considered it has shown how the conditions of a proposition can change. It is possible that the illusion of the reduction of the gaps between the quotidian and the theatrical can cause one to accept a sub-proposition indicatively. This does not necessarily mean that the audience member forgets or believes that the *whole* theatrical experience has become or is reality, but that the detailed fragment they are immersed in is fact.

By analysing the actuality of the proposition(s) relating to the objects within these locations and scenes, it has shown the possibilities that become available to the experiencer in specific moments such as choosing to discard real-world thoughts to be (or remain) imaginatively engaged in the theatrical world (RWD). Also, the discussion revealed the roles that objects can take on, both in the theatrical and quotidian worlds, and the functions that those objects can

have, as well as how performing objects can blur the boundaries between worlds and by doing so can fulfil the ‘goal’ of immersive theatre work.

2.4 The Murdér Express

On Wednesday 17th April 2019, I experienced *The Murdér Express* performed by Funicular Productions. *The Murdér Express* is a murder mystery immersive dining experience set in early 20th Century.⁵⁴ The production was created by Funicular Productions co-founder, Craig Wilkinson, and production director Ed Borgnis, and the show is currently running at the fictional Pedley Street station – Arch 63, Pedley Street, London, E1 5BW.

Set onboard a glamorous train with lavish furnishings, the brand’s [(Funicular Productions)] debut show, ‘The Murdér Express’ transports guests back in time to the grandeur of the 19th century. Travelling by train for pleasure is in its infancy and with it comes a special kind of thrill. Departing from Funicular’s ‘Pedley Street Station’, passengers are invited to experience ‘The Murdér Express’ as it makes its first historic journey from London to the fictional town of Murdér in France.

Entering via the Pedley Street Station ‘Seven Sins’ Bar, passengers of ‘The Murdér Express’ will wet their whistles whilst luggage is packed onboard. Joined by characters such as Frank, an East End Costermonger, Tilley, a music hall star, Vera, a widow in search of adventure, and Cliff, a local antique dealer as they embark on the trip of a lifetime. Guests will board via the elegant dining car, which features plush booth seating and is lit by atmospheric period table lamps. The menu, designed by BBC One’s MasterChef 2017 finalist, Louisa Ellis, will be served throughout the experience, as the story of the ‘The Murdér Express’ unfolds.

⁵⁴ Gingerline theatre company describe immersive dining as “a catch all term which simply means experiencing a meal within an immersive environment. [...] Whatever techniques of immersion used, the essential thing is there is no divide between you as a dining guest and the performance space. [...] It is important to note that not all immersive dining experiences contain a narrative and a plot. However, most immersive environments contain actors and characters who bring the dining world to life, telling a story or interacting with guests while they dine. In these environments the food itself is not just something nice to eat, it is a prop to reinforce the fantasy world that has been created. Some immersive dining experiences out there focus more on the ‘dining’ part, some more on ‘immersive’ part. [Gingerline claim to] place equal emphasis on ‘immersive’ and ‘dining’.” (Gingerline, 2018, n.p.).

Audience-participants act as, and are treated as, passengers aboard *The Murdér Express* train. Participants observe, partake and experience the performance at booths with other participants. It is at these booths that the participants are also served a four-course meal and dine with other audience participants they may, or may not, know personally. Whilst travelling to Murdér, Frank Fletcher, an East End spiv, is found dead by the conductor. All the characters aboard the train must attempt to prove their innocence during the journey. Ultimately, each booth within the train-carriage must discuss amongst themselves who they think committed the murder. Each booth then casts their vote by announcing who they think the murderer is. Whichever character has the most votes across all the booths is declared the murderer, and they are thrown off the moving train to their death.

What is Funicular Productions?

Funicular Productions is an immersive collective that is made up of talented event, brand, and theatre professionals. The company was formed at the start of 2018 with *The Murdér Express* being their debut show. Funicular Productions's work is always performed at their site at Pedley Street, London. This follows the pattern of most immersive performances and/or theatre that are created by theatre companies in that Funicular's works are performed at a specific site that was not originally intended for theatrical performance.⁵⁵ Like Riptide's *The Lucky Ones*, Funicular's works are always created in response to the layout of their set, space and architecture, and so in

⁵⁵ Companies such as Punchdrunk, WildWorks, Nimble Fish, Back to Back Theatre, to name a very small few, perform their theatres at specific sites and/or respond sympathetically to a specific site / landscape / location. For example, Punchdrunk's *The Drowned Man* at the disused postal sorting office warehouse in Paddington, London.

that way their works are site-sympathetic. Whilst they do not define themselves as a site-sympathetic theatre company, their works are all about place. For Funicular, the place or location of a performance – their set – is always a life-sized train carriage. Wilkinson, in an interview with Sophie Farrah for *Toast.Life* explains that the company was formed in 2018 due to the opportunity of saving the train-carriage from being binned after its tour of Europe was completed: “We couldn’t let it go to recycling! So we gathered all our friends and family and set about our business plan. [...] We want to transport our guests in to our world for the time they are with us and offer them a completely unique experience they would not get anywhere else” (Wilkinson, 2018). Their business plan evidently is to use the train-carriage as their device on which to create immersive-dining experiences. Whilst *The Murdér Express* was their debut show, they have also performed *The Greatest Snowman* (2018), *The Jewell of the Empire* (2019) and *Journey to the Underworld* (2019) all at Pedley Street Station, and all following the same format: audience members / passengers board the train-carriage and are wined and dined whilst experiencing theatrical entertainment. *The Jewell of the Empire* is most like *The Murdér Express* as it too is a murder mystery come dining experience, but it is set in 1937. The audience must help the characters find the missing diamond and decipher who the killer is. *The Greatest Snowman* and *Journey to the Underworld*, like *The Murdér Express* and *The Jewell of the Empire*, are immersive dining-experiences too, but are different in genre to murder mystery. For example, *Journey to the Underworld* is a dark fairy-tale and love story where audience members / passengers board the train-carriage to the underworld. *The Greatest Snowman*’s narrative proposes that audience members board the train-carriage to the Birmingham Christmas markets and they must help the character Ed Snow believe in Santa Claus once again. The food served

for audience members was different to that of the other shows as it was a seasonal feast for Christmas, plus, ‘The Murdér Express’ carriage became ‘The Arctic Express’ carriage.

As with the analysis of *The Great Gatsby* (2019), I shall analyse the interactivity of the theatrical objects I experienced in *The Murdér Express* production via the two interwoven intentions of location and scene. These intentions shall not be structured in the same format as in ‘The Great Gatsby’ chapter: discrete and separate. Instead, these intentions will flow in and out of one another via a thorough descriptive walk-through of what / how I experienced the theatrical objects and propositional lures before me chronologically. This allows for a different way of analysing propositionality which explores how the enactment and agreement of accepted propositions can develop and change over time. The case study will still be supported by the application of OOO as *The Lucky Ones* and *The Great Gatsby* were, but this case study shall also analyse the production’s dining experience and food as a theatrical proposition. As the performance was an immersive-dining experience, the consumption of food and drink whilst the narrative was unfolding was not only encouraged but integral to the experience itself.

Additionally, we audience members remained seated for the entirety of the show and were waited on by waiter/actors. Audience members only moved around the carriage if invited to by the characters, or to go to the toilet. That passivity is wholly different from the interaction and engagement of audience-participants in Riptide’s *The Lucky Ones* and The Immersive Ensemble’s *The Great Gatsby*. In these performances, audience-participants are actively moving around, dancing, seeking out secret rooms, clues and information etc. Whilst the descriptive walk-through discussion is interested in how theatrical objects within *The Murdér Express* transported, immersed and lured me into accepting the actuality of the propositional claim(s), as the Gatsby discussion was, this analysis also shows how sub-propositions do not *always* aid and

support one's acceptance of the main proposition. In 'The Lucky Ones' chapter of this thesis, I stated that *the enactment and agreement of little / sub-propositions are what help facilitate immersive sensations and experiences*. The analysis and investigation of the sub-propositions I experienced pertaining to the food in *The Murdér Express* do not contradict my previous statement, but in fact show that when sub-propositions help facilitate immersive sensations and experiences, these do not *always* have to be related to the main proposition, but instead, the immersive sensation and/or experience can be in a small, detailed fragment, scene, object, and so on. Before the descriptive walk-through of how I remember experiencing *The Murdér Express* commences, consideration of the event's venue in affecting my immersion through transportation and absorption is to be briefly discussed as it was with *The Great Gatsby*.

Site-location

As previously mentioned, the production's site was performed at a venue which was not originally intended for theatrical performance. As I explained earlier, this was also the case with *The Great Gatsby*. There was nothing about the building (RO) itself, or its qualities (both RQ and SQ), which suggested that grandeur existed inside it, or, that theatre productions were staged and performed at the location. The only tell-tale sign was the 'The Colab Factory' sign attached to a fence out front.⁵⁶ Contrarily, the performance site of *The Murdér Express* did suggest or propose something that, when combined with the name of the venue, aligned with the main proposition of the performance itself. The main proposition of the performance was that 'you are a passenger aboard The Murdér Express train that is travelling to the fictional town of Murdér in

⁵⁶ That being said, if one did know what / who The Colab Factory did / are then one may never have presumed that theatrical performances took place inside 74 Long Lane.

France'. When I booked the tickets to the show and received the address of the venue, the ticket read "Venue: Pedley Street Station". As someone from the north of England that is not local to London, I was unaware whether Pedley Street Station was a functional and actual train station in East London. When I read that the address of Pedley Street Station was Arch 63, Pedley Street, London, E1 5BW, I presumed that the performance site was at an active or disused train station. When I arrived to the venue and saw that I was entering a warehouse space that was built into the arch of a railway bridge and so would not be experiencing the performance on a train-carriage that was physically attached to an active railway line, my initial thought was 'this is not as real' and 'this is not as believable'. A few interesting things to consider stem out of these thoughts. Firstly, the thoughts are incorrect / irrelevant. The production itself is framed as a performance, and as we know from Goffman (1974), that means that there is a physical and/or conceptual line created which separates the quotidian from fiction. So, no matter where the performance is performed, whether it be on a live railway track or not, it is still a performance; it is theatrical fiction. Not only this, but my concept of the extent of immersivity – *how* immersive an event is – seemed to be connected with how closely the performance, and the objects within it, and the artefact itself, represented reality. Allow me to restate that I deem the goal of immersive theatre to be the illusion of the reduction of the gaps between the quotidian and theatrical worlds. Therefore, it does not matter how much *The Murder Express* aligns with reality, but how much it *appears* to align with it. Performing the show on a moving train may have facilitated the illusion of the closure of the gaps between quotidian and theatrical quicker and with more vivacity than a stationary train-carriage, but both would still have gaps between worlds. And as I shall soon explore, the fact that the performance site was underneath a railway line and inside the arch of an actual bridge did not take anything away from how the production

used theatrical objects to transport and lure me into a different way of feeling their world. It only affected the preconception I had arrived at the event with. Performing a theatrical event on a train-carriage, in a railway bridge arch, at a venue that has been named Pedley Street Station, is a very coy way of having objects interact and using semantics to propose a specific thing to be considered and did facilitate in transporting and luring me into a willingness to immerse.

The Walk-through

As with *The Great Gatsby*, and most immersive theatre productions I have experienced, on arrival to the venue of *The Murder Express* at Pedley Street Station, the audience-participants and I had to wait outside the building until the performance began. There was no foyer with a box office and a bar or shop for audience members to wait, meet, drink and chat like there usually are at proscenium arch theatres such as The Old Vic, The Lyric, Wyndhams, The Lawrence Batley Theatre, The Alhambra etc. My friend and I stood on the pavement outside the warehouse with other audience-participants chatting and wondering if we somehow had all got the location wrong. When the warehouse doors flung open, there was a man sat at a desk and audience-participants began to form a line in front of him. When my friend and I got to the front of the queue, the man greeted us and asked for our names. We gave them, and in exchange he provided us with individual train tickets. My friend and I both had the same number on our ticket; number one. The man provided us with some ‘guidelines’ about what we could and could not do; this was Funicular’s way of explicitly and implicitly informing participants of the ‘contract for participation’ (Machon, 2013, pp.99-100). Some of these guidelines were in keeping with the time-period of the setting, and some were not. For example, the man informed us that flash photography and videos were not allowed, but we could take photographs via our

phones even though camera phones were not invented until 1999. We could also purchase drinks from the bar using our bank cards and phones too. Once the man had finished informing of us of the health and safety measures and specific details in the contract for participation with the production, he permitted us beyond the desk and inside the warehouse.

As my friend and I wandered in slightly we were confronted by a large stone wall which forced us to walk around it to the right and head down a sort of corridor. Along the stone wall was a cloakroom with an attendant who offered to take our coats. We gave our coats over and she told us to continue walking straight towards the '7Sins' bar. At the end of the stone wall / corridor as I entered the space, the toilets were the first thing I saw. They were directly in front of us when we entered the space. The toilets had saloon western style swing doors which I thought was odd. My understanding of the production was that it was set in 1937 in Europe, not in latter half of the 19th century in Mississippi or West America. Along the same wall and attached to the toilets was the 7sins bar which was open for audience-participants to purchase drinks at. As my attention shifted from the bar and I began to observe the rest of the performance space before me, the space opened into one large warehouse space. When witnessing the entirety of the performance space, my eyes could not help but jump straight to the train-carriage itself on the left side of the space. It was a dark, life-size, replica of an early 20th century style train-carriage, except, the windows were opaque and could not be opened, and there were no wheels on the carriage since it was not on a track. There was a metal sign fixed to the carriage that read 'Murdér Express' which of course signified and proposed that the train-carriage not only represented, but was, the Murdér Express train. And one door to the carriage, led up to by a few wooden steps, which we audience-participants would eventually enter the carriage through. As I stared at the train-carriage (SO) examining all its sensual qualities, steam was abruptly emitted from the side of the

undercarriage along with the loud, sudden noise that trains make when the pressure of steam is released. The interacting qualities of the carriage, sound, steam and haze etc., proposed to me that the Murdér Express was a functioning steam train. Steam continued to be sparsely expelled from the carriage in the lead up to the audience-participants boarding the carriage.

The wall at the back of the performance space that the carriage led up to was made of red brick. There was a about a three-metre gap between the carriage and the '7Sins' platform bar which was on the right side of the space. That three-metre gap between carriage and bar, in which you could see the red brick which separated and joint the spaces, signified the platform at Pedley Street Station. I interpreted the space as representing a train platform because of the interaction of the qualities of the objects before me and the signs they signified. As well as the name of the platform bar, there was also a large number seven attached to red brick wall in between the bar and the carriage which signified the specific platform we were all at, was platform seven. There was also a large analogue clock which had a sign integrated into it which read 'Pedley Street Station', and an early 20th century lamppost.

Whilst my friend and I, and several audience-participants that were already inside the space assessed our new environment and waited for the remainder of audience-participants to be admitted entry and be given their train tickets, individuals began to chat with one another and purchase drinks from the bar. The platform space served as a sort of liminal zone between worlds. This was Funicular's way of lowering barriers to immersion and gradually removing participants from the real world. Funicular created a foyer like atmosphere like one typically expects to find at traditional theatre venues, except, the performance had (sort of) already begun. The audience was already on, and in, the set, interacting and coming into contact with theatrical objects and one another. Characters would walk around the platform and strike up a conversation

with individual audience members whilst waiting for the conductor to declare that the train was to depart. For example, the character of Frank Fletcher, subtly walked over to my friend and I and asked us if we “wanted to buy some coupons”? “What are the coupons for?”, I responded. “Beer or wine, or something.” We both declined as the character’s demeanour, attire and aloofness proposed to us that he was not to be trusted. In that moment, I entertained the propositional lure and possibility and chose the action of not purchasing the coupons. This does not mean that I was unwilling to (be) immerse(d), but rather that that particular fragment hooked me into the character’s narrative and further into the theatrical world causing me to accept the proposition that ‘Fletcher was not trustworthy’ as if it were true.

After striking out with my friend and I, Fletcher wandered over to another cluster of audience-participants and asked them the same question. A couple of the participants paid him two pounds for a coupon, and he said, “much obliged” and wandered off to talk with other participants that were entering the space. The character playing the role of the train conductor approached the same participants that had purchased the coupons and said “you should be more careful” when dealing with Frank Fletcher. As I observed the participants’ interactions, I contemplated a number of sub-propositions such as ‘can those coupons (actually) be used for drinks?’, ‘have those individuals (actually) been duped?’, ‘will they be given their money back?’, ‘will the bartender play out a scripted conversation with the participant where they give them a ‘free drink’ for their troubles?’, and so on. Both my friend and I, and the participants that exchanged the coupons for money, entertained the propositional lure of Fletcher’s coupons, but in differing ways. However, this does not necessarily mean that our willingness to immerse, or our state of immersion, was different in degree. I do not know what thoughts were going through the other participants’ minds once the conductor had insinuated that they had been duped by Fletcher, but

I imagine they were weighing up whether to confront him, or test the coupons out at the bar, or complain to another participant or character etc. Ultimately, the two participants did go and raise their concern / complain to the waiter/actors at the bar. I overheard and witnessed the waiter/actors give the participants two pounds off the price of a drink of their choice to counteract the purchase of the coupons so that they were not out of pocket. In complaining to the bar staff, perhaps, however improbable it may be, the participants took the coupon exchange with Fletcher personally i.e., were offended or negatively affected by the exchange on a personal level as the participant in *The Lucky Ones*: Lucy was that refused to break in to the flat and threatened to call the police. A state of delusion may have taken hold where an unawareness of fictionality left the individual feeling disgruntled and frustrated that they had been conned. Alternatively, it could have had a negative effect on their willingness to immerse in the theatrical world. Maybe they became more aware of the fictionality and theatricality of the character's interaction by considering asking the actor for their money back once the narrative was over. Either way, or any other possible action they considered and/or emotion were left feeling, one can see how entertaining / not entertaining a propositional lure, and the *different ways* of entertaining a propositional lure can leave one feeling wholly different. The sub-proposition that I and the other participants initially considered when engaged in overt participation with Fletcher was whether to respond, and how to respond / act. I chose to act by not purchasing the coupons and the other participant chose to act by purchasing them. Those decisions could then have had a direct impact on our immersion in the theatrical world.⁵⁷ I could have had a less intense state of immersion than the other participant by not coming into contact with a fragment of the theatrical

⁵⁷ I use 'could' here, since I do not know if / how that particular audience-participant's state of immersion was altered. For me though, my decision did have a direct impact on my state of immersion in the theatrical world. In actively deciding not to purchase a coupon, I lowered a barrier to my immersion within the gradual process of becoming immersed.

world that they accepted access to. By denying myself tangible access to the object itself, I was unable to become absorbed in that particular fragment.⁵⁸ Contrariwise, the other participant could have had a less intense state of immersion than I did at that moment because tangible access to the coupon (RO) forced the participant to remember the artificiality of the theatrical world and therefore not be absorbed and/or transported into its realm. From the same example one can also see that when a participant is *observing* an interaction rather than *participating* in an interaction, the sub-propositions one considers become more passive. When I observed the participant purchase the coupons, the sub-propositions I then considered were all related to a sense of wonder around how the narrative before me will unfold. Whereas the participants that were actively engaging in explicit interactions with the characters and theatrical world presumably were considering what specific action to take.

Inside the Train-Carriage

When all the audience-participants had finished purchasing refreshments, the conductor rang a bell and blew her whistle which signified that the train to the fictional town of Murdér was almost ready to depart. The audience-participants and I began to enter the train-carriage little by little. My friend and I climbed the few wooden steps up to the train-carriage door and the conductor asked for our tickets. We handed over the individual rail tickets with the number one on that we were given by the man at the desk when we entered the venue, and the conductor informed us that we were sat at ‘booth one’ and pointed towards the table on our immediate left.

⁵⁸ Here, I do not mean that I denied myself access to the real-object itself as OOO claims this unattainable, but rather that I denied myself access to coming into contact with the object. Per OOO, objects come into contact with one another through vicarious causation – the images that the objects present to one another.

The interior of the train-carriage was very glamorous. There were two rows of four plush booths with an aisle through the middle displaying an elegant and chic blue patterned carpet. There were six audience-participants per booth. The booths appeared ostentatiously lavish and opulent with blue chesterfield style leather seats to match the carpet and dark wooden tables dressed in thick white tablecloths. The tables were lit by small period lamps, but LED lights ran along the ceiling of the aisle which illuminated the performance space. The windows of the train-carriage were LCD TVs which upon entry displayed images of the platform we all had just come from. I remember thinking that that explained why the windows were opaque. Sophie Farrah describes the televisions in her interview with Wilkinson:

To ensure that the experience is truly immersive, the Funicular set is equipped with eight large format LCD displays in the interior 'windows' of the carriage, which display original 4k footage shot on a heritage steam railway in the Welsh Highlands, so guests can well and truly sit back, relax and enjoy the beautiful scenery along the way.

The train carriage sound system also consists of an impressive eight discrete audio channels which when combined with the video, gives the train a very convincing sense of movement.

Farrah, 2018, n.p.

The inclusion of these objects and their qualities along with the steam proposed the idea that The Murdér Express was a functioning steam train. Equipping the set with these objects did not create a 'truly immersive' experience as Farrah suggests since the train was not actually moving. It did provide 'a very convincing sense of movement' for me, but I was always aware the carriage was stationary, and if I needed to use the toilet during the performance, I would have to

step off the ‘moving’ train to use the platform toilets. Furthermore, as Farrah states, the footage that was displayed on the screens during the performance was of the Welsh Highlands. And even if one ignores / puts to one side / suspends belief / that the Welsh Highlands are different in appearance to France – Murdér is a fictional town, and its appearance could be identical to the Welsh Highlands if that is what the narrative claims – one cannot ignore that the starting location of the train was from Pedley Street Station in East London. When the footage began, I expected to see buildings from the surrounding areas of East London, but we immediately found ourselves looking out on to a rural and barren landscape, and the footage on the screens only ever displayed rural landscapes. Funicular failed to close *all* the gaps between the quotidian and theatrical worlds for me here, but I was still able to accept the proposition that the train-carriage was moving *as if it were true* through the interacting qualities of the images on the LCD screen, the audio sounds, the steam and haze, and so on. In using propositionality here it allows for a discussion of *how* the proposition is enacted and agreed. The proposition that ‘the train-carriage is moving’ is enacted by the claim that the theatrical object – the train-carriage set – *is* the thing it stands for, and I as an audience-participant accept that proposition due to the interacting qualities of the objects within the train-carriage set; the LCD screens as windows being one of them.

Another barrier to my immersion that I had to put aside was the durational element of the performance. As per Machon’s *scale of immersivity*, one knows that “time is treated as an organic and important experiential element of the event” in immersive theatre and performance (Machon, 2013, p.96). The narrative claimed that the journey from Pedley Street Station, London, to Murdér, France took one hour by steam train. In reality, I am aware that the Eurostar from London to Paris takes over two hours, so how can I believe and accept that I can travel

from London to a fictional town in France within an hour? Nik Wakefield in his PhD thesis *Performing Temporalities* (2016) discusses three core principles that underpin time-specific performance making.⁵⁹ Wakefield states that “the platform of time-specific performance making establishes an approach to work that is enmeshed with temporality and entails a sense of how performance makes time and is not only made by it” (Wakefield, 2016, p.347). The narrative of *The Murdér Express* makes its own durational time that is discrete from quotidian clock time. The theatrical event does indeed last two hours, but Funicular’s framing of the performance allows for a world that creates its own durational quality that has rules for time that is separate from the quotidian rule for time i.e., the performance creates a world where travelling from Pedley Street Station to Murdér takes one hour in quotidian clock time, and we as audience-participants accept that proposition due to the parameters and otherworldliness of the event.

As the train ‘departed’ the murder-mystery plot began. The character Frank Fletcher was found dead in a different car by the conductor. Neither the audience-participants or I saw Frank’s body nor how he died, but we all accepted the proposition that ‘Frank is dead’ via the enactment of the conductor’s propositional utterance. As the investigation began into his death and the narrative developed, the first course was brought to each audience-participant at their booth. The theatrical narrative and individual scenes were performed intermittently with gaps for audience-participants to eat, chat, drink, and waiters to bring / collect dishes. The first two courses – an amuse bouche and a starter – were both vegan and so most dietary requirements were covered.⁶⁰

There was also no multiple choice with these courses. For the main course and the dessert, on

⁵⁹ The three core principles are: “1. Using clock time as a container for performance encourages the emergence of duration [...] 2. Memories and documents perform the past in the present [...] 3. Use the temporality that is always future and always changing as a focus for performance” (Wakefield, 2016, pp.345-346).

⁶⁰ Funicular Productions asked audience-participants to inform them of any specific dietary requirements e.g., coeliac disease, via email prior to the performance so they could cater for that.

the other hand, we could choose between a meat or vegan dish for the main, and a dairy or vegan dish for the dessert. There was a menu and checklist on each table, and we participants had to tick how many of our booth's six wanted which dish. A simple and convenient fragment for taking one's order without the waiter/actors going around to each participant asking for orders whilst the performance was running. Funicular Productions could have asked for our orders when we purchased our ticket, offering a proposition to be considered at the time of booking before the theatrical event itself took place. Instead, they opted for the checklist to be completed during the event and so it became a theatrical object and propositional lure to be entertained. Whilst this may sound like an untheatrical act – since meal orders are placed in a variety of methods every day in restaurants, fast-food chains, via phone, online, via an app, on an aeroplane etc. – the dining experience of *The Mordér Express* was a theatrical act and immersive-style performance. The menu and checklist were offerings to be considered and lowered a barrier to my immersion. For table one (the booth that my friend and I were situated on), the checklist facilitated audience-participant interaction with one another. Our table discussed which food choices we were going for and which meal sounded nicer, and in turn this led to general social discussions about what to expect from the performance, what other performances we'd seen, whether we were local, what theatre performances we would recommend, and so on. Although I was conversing with these four audience-participants about quotidian things that were exterior to the theatrical event itself, rather than always / only discussing the plot and aspects of the performance, these conversations gradually led me to feeling more relaxed and immersed in the overall experience. I was interacting with participants as 'myself' i.e. I was not playing the role of a character, or the "character named spectator" (Nield, 2008). I was coming into contact with theatrical objects on my table that were part of the

performance, *I* touched the menu, the tablecloths, the cutlery, the lamps; *I* smelt and tasted the food and drink; *I* heard the audio sounds of a rumbling train and the conversational utterances of the participants; *I* witnessed the interacting qualities of a host of objects. I, the real-object I / the executant I of I and the sensual object that is I were interacting with quotidian objects that when framed within a performance facilitated my immersion in the performance's theatrical world through detailed fragments.

Characters from the plot would come and sit at individual booths and strike up conversational utterances with audience-participants too. These were not entirely scripted scenes that were universally spectated by all participants – although they were rather contrived – but rather intimate one-on-ones, or one-on-five's depending how many participants were at one's booth. For example, whilst the participants and I that were sat at 'booth one' were eating our starters, Tilley Tulip "a music hall star" (2020) sat down and conversed with us. Prior to Frank's death, Tilley and Frank had an argument where we, the audience-participants, were all informed that the two characters used to date. When Tilley sat down at our booth and began conversing with us, she informed us that she was scared that we would think *she* was the murderer. Tilley stated that Frank was horrible to her during their relationship, and she despised him for it, but she was "not a killer". In this moment, and other moments like it that were occurring with different characters at different booths, the interactions were part of the 'immersive' and theatrical part of the performance. These moments fused the dining aspect of the performance with the theatrical narrative and allowed them to run alongside one another. Yet, these moments, particularly the Tilley interaction that I was overtly involved in, were also quite contrived. It was clear that these moments were scripted, artificial, and a little forced, rather than allowing them to develop naturally. The performers wanted to propose specific things to be considered to / by participants

to affect their vote at the end of the narrative. This was similar to how interactions and intimate scenes were constructed in *The Great Gatsby* i.e., Gatsby's business meeting and the discussion about the gin. Incorporating real objects into the artificial and theatrical interactions such as the gin in *The Great Gatsby*, and the food in *The Murdér Express*, and allowing participants tangible access to the sensual theatrical object(s) within these moments facilitates immersion in scenes that consist of a greater aesthetic distance; where audience-participants are aware of their fictionality.

Whilst courses were consumed, audience-participants were mostly left to their own devices, but as the plates were taken away, one knew a scene would emerge gradually or suddenly from out of the blue. This usually happened whilst a character, most commonly Vera, "a widow in search of adventure" (Howard, 2020) aboard the Murdér Express, was stood in the aisle conversing with participants. Then another character would enter the carriage from the door at the back of the aisle – which proposed the idea that they came from another car – and began speaking with Vera, or whichever character it happened to be, loudly enough for all audience-participants to hear. This signified the commencement of a new scene to be witnessed by all so that one could follow the plot. We were guided back into the narrative by these segues and signs. Whilst we were continuously inside the theatrical world and event, the gaps in clock time between scenes meant that *what* one was immersed in may have shifted. For me, I was more immersed in the food and the conversation than the storyline of the performance itself, but I would flit from one to the other following the format of the production. As I discussed at the start of this thesis, during my initial research into immersive style performances in 2016, I created a hypothetical template for audience-participants that became immersed in the *Forget Me Not* (2016) performances. Whilst this template cannot be applied to other immersive-style performances

without being tested, the ideas can be transferred over to help analyse my experience in *The Murdér Express*. When I was flitting from observing a scene, to participating in a discussion, to eating, and so forth, I had to begin perceiving and assessing the particular qualities of the objects that were relevant to that fragment again. The propositions and the lure for feeling that one feels pertaining to a particular proposition, had been framed, then dismissed so that a different proposition could be proposed, then reframed again. I remember having to perceive the qualities of the proposition all over again to remind myself that ‘that was proposing x’ and later on that same thing ‘was proposing y’. This is what I called *Layer 1 – Proposition Assessment*. This is a mediating layer and what I posit that I underwent as I was perceiving and assessing the qualities of the objects and the sub-proposition(s) before me. Continuously flitting from narrative to dining, and dining to narrative, forced me to reassess the conditions of the sub-propositions before me, and ultimately, this affected my immersion in the piece. You are reminded of the quotidian world and the gaps between worlds when you converse with participants. These moments both aid and hinder one’s immersion in the world as they are simultaneously enhancing and decreasing aesthetic distance rendering it “in a constant state of flux” (Naverson, 2001, p.3).

Refocusing attention to the food and dining experience within the performance allows for the exploration of how the theatrical narrative ran alongside the dining experience. This provides another aspect of propositions that has yet to be discussed in the two previous case studies. In the two previous case studies, audience-participants paid to be entertained, to be immersed, to solve a mystery, to play a game etc., but not to dine; not to be fed. In *The Murdér Express*, audience-participants were paying for both theatrical entertainment and a dining experience simultaneously. If Funicular Productions wants their participants to be immersed in both activities at the same time, or one and then the other, then the two activities need to be

intertwined and supported by one another so that the participants' role, and the proposition(s) related to that, posits a claim that aligns with the conditions of the theatrical world and can be accepted as if it were true. So, how did the theatrical narrative and dining experience run alongside each other? How was the proposition that I was / became a combination thrice of passenger, diner, and audience-participant enacted and agreed?

The main proposition *The Murdér Express* asserts to its participants is that 'you are a passenger on the 20th century Murder Express train when a passenger dies'. This is asserted and claimed indicatively as being true. Within the performance, there was a network of sub-propositions which when I entertained and accepted them, helped to facilitate immersive sensations and experiences for / within myself. As stated in 'The Lucky Ones' chapter of this thesis, sub-propositions are enacted and agreed in various moods and the sub-propositions related to the audience-participants collective and individual dining experiences were no different. As I shall soon discuss, these sub-propositions were claimed and accepted indicatively e.g., the existence of the food in both worlds. Other times, sub-propositions were claimed and accepted in the subjunctive-mood e.g., Vera's dog was claimed and accepted to be a dog as if it were true when in actuality it was a puppet. And sometimes, sub-propositions were claimed indicatively and accepted in the subjunctive-mood, like the main proposition of an immersive performance *always* is. What was different about the sub-propositions that I experienced in *The Murdér Express* though, was that when I entertained and accepted them, they did not *always* support my acceptance of the main and overarching propositional claim 'that I was a passenger on the 20th century Murder Express train when a passenger died'.

This may seem improbable since Funicular and the director have purposely made decisions to help facilitate immersive experiences which support the main proposition of the performance,

but I theorise that this is because *The Murder Express* focused more on the ‘dining’ element of the experience than on the ‘immersive’ or ‘theatrical’ element of it. The performance was still theatre, and was theatrical too, but the performance’s narrative did not discuss the food. It was almost as if the characters and the theatrical objects were part of a different realm than the food. The audience-participants, food, theatrical objects, characters etc., were all simultaneously both apart of multiple worlds – the theatrical and the quotidian – yet the treatment of the food by the performers and performance was discrete and separate from their treatment of the narrative.

There were times when the performance continued whilst I and other audience-participants were dining, plus, there were a couple of individuals that were interacted and engaged with by characters *whilst* participating in the activity of dining, as my booth was with Tilley, but these were few and far between. The result of this left me more engaged and immersed in the dining experience and in discussing quotidian related things with the participants at my booth, rather than in the narrative itself. So, whilst I was portraying the role of a passenger on the 20th century Murder Express train as a passenger had died, the sub-propositions of ‘this is my dinner’, ‘this lamb is lovely’, ‘these people are nice’, ‘I wonder where they are from’, ‘that show they recommended sounds interesting’ etc., were not supporting my engagement and acceptance of the theatrical narrative and main proposition of the performance, but instead, facilitating my engagement and immersion in the dining experience / section of the performance.

This does not mean that the dining aspect of the performance always removed my attention, engagement and interaction with the narrative and immersive aspects of the performance. On the contrary, the tangibility of both the food and the theatrical combined hooked me further into specific stories. Throughout this thesis I have posited that immersive theatre and performance makes a claim in the indicative mode and is accepted by audience-participants in the

subjunctive-mood; accepted as if it were true. The food (both RO and SO) in *The Murder Express* is not an exception to the rule, but an example of how sub-propositions can be enacted and agreed in various moods. Here, Funicular Productions' treatment of the object(s) food, and the audience-participants acceptance of the claims pertaining to the food are accepted indicatively, not in the subjunctive, i.e., as if it were food. I do not simply mean that because the production incorporated real and edible food into its performance that that is why I accepted the food as food indicatively. If this were the case, then no matter the performance style, venue and arrangement, real food would always be treated and accepted as *being* or actuating food indicatively. Rather, I mean that the placement and function of the real-object 'food' in the theatrical world, on a dining table, performed its quotidian use in serving as food for consumption by the audience participants, by *me*, in *both* worlds. This combined with my tangible access to the sensual object food within the theatrical world, along with my role as 'the diner' being true in both worlds, led me to accepting that the food *was* food in both the subjunctive-mood and indicative. It represents and actually *is* food for consumption, and its consumption is to be performed by *me*. And so, as the food *is* food, and the dining experience that one experiences *is* an actual dining experience, the interactions with characters and the narratives one hears and experiences during these moments appear to be that much more real and believable. In having tangible access to a fragment of the performance, in this case the food, I was in a way granted access to the inside of the performance. As Gingerline state "in these environments the food itself is not just something nice to eat, it's a prop to reinforce the fantasy world that has been created" (2018).

Paradoxically, the theatrical elements of the interactions with characters and the theatrical world appear all the more theatrical and artificial because of the food's actuality. Whilst I was eating

my main course, the conductor lined up the characters Vera Vanderdale and her dog Fluffy Vanderdale, Tilley Tulip, the Murder Express waiter, and Cliff the antique dealer, in darkness throughout the aisle as suspects in the murder of Frank Fletcher. The period lamps at each booth remained on so that participants could see and eat their food, but the LED lights down the aisle were switched off. The conductor then proceeded to individually go through each character in the line-up and ask the passengers / audience-participants if they thought it could be them that killed Frank. The conductor suggested possible motives that each character may have had which proposed a number of sub-propositions to be considered and contemplated by myself and the other audience-participants regarding who we thought was the murderer. As the conductor said the next character's name, a spotlight individually shone on each character from above their heads. This scene was extremely melodramatic and histrionic. For example, when it shone on Vera Vanderdale's head, Vera began exaggeratingly trembling and presented herself as overemotional. Once the spotlight moved on to the next person in the line-up, Vera sharply stopped whimpering and trembling. Moments like this which occurred simultaneously alongside my interactions with real and tangible objects (my meal) increased the aesthetic distance between me and the performance. I became more aware of the fictionality and theatricality of the scene that I was observing before me. This was partly because of the theatrical elements and devices used to signify the melodramatic i.e., the stage lighting changes, the characterisation, the references to other genres of theatre and performance etc., and partly because of my tangibility to the actualised quotidian objects inside the theatrical world.

As the performance was drawing to an end and the desserts were being served and eaten, each booth was asked by the conductor to vote on who they thought had committed the murder. Being set a direct task by the show's narrative and theatrical object conductor which we, the audience-

participants, had to discuss amongst ourselves at our individual booths and relay our verdict back to the conductor and theatrical narrative / world was one of the few times where an interaction between the dining and theatrical elements of the performance aided and supported one another in facilitating engagement and immersion in both worlds. The dining and narrative elements of the performance still had clear boundaries and distinctions though. The conductor via a propositional utterance offered a lure to be entertained within the confines of the dining element of the performance: ‘discuss amongst your booth who you think the murderer and come to a verdict’. The discussion at my table was now solely focused on the sub-propositions that each participant had assessed and considered, rather than discussing quotidian things outside of the narrative. Throughout the performance, we were offered a network of sub-propositions that all proposed further things to be considered such as ‘where was Vera at the time of the murder?’, ‘was the murder Tilley’s revenge on her ex-partner?’, ‘are there any clues or hints that I have not picked up on?’ and so on. These sub-propositions all had to be considered so that when we were set the task of entertaining the proposition ‘who killed Frank?’, our decision, as a group, was made on probable and demonstrative reasoning. We were all immersed and engaged in contemplation of what we had witnessed and experienced over the past hour within the confines of the theatrical world. The booth at which I was sat came to the group decision that we thought Vera was the murderer. The conductor went over to each booth individually whilst these discussions were ongoing and asked for each of their votes. The conductor wrote down each vote and tallied the results. The entertainment of that fragment – the conductor’s utterance – and the interaction with her as a theatrical object drew us further into the narrative and “into a different way of feeling [our] world” (2014:6). Imparting our verdict and information from the dining aspect of the performance to the theatrical narrative in turn affected the outcome of that

narrative. In ‘The Great Gatsby’ chapter of this thesis, I posited that *the interactivity of objects creates a realm where the boundaries between the real and theatrical merge*. Here, the interactivity of objects (the conductor and participants) linked the realms of dining and narrative which in turn created a realm where the boundaries between the real and theatrical merged. The outcome of the votes was announced by the conductor and the overall consensus was that the Murdér Express waiter was deemed to be the murderer by the audience-participants. All the remaining characters proceeded to grab the waiter, open the door to the train-carriage whilst the train was still ‘moving’ – the audio sounds and TV footage were still playing – and throw him overboard to his death.

Subsequently, a ghost appeared in a white sheet with the voice of the performer that played the role of Frank Fletcher. The conductor removed the sheet from the individual’s body and revealed that Frank Fletcher was alive and well. Frank informed everyone that he had been sleeping the whole time and was never actually dead. Here, one can see how the enactment and agreement of propositions can develop, shift and change over time. Wakefield states that “experiences of time-specificity are the actual temporal shifts that emerge through the shared time of living performance” (Wakefield, 2016, p.95). The temporal shifts that emerged throughout the performance led to myself needing to dissent from my original agreement to the proposition that ‘Frank is dead’ and assent to and accept the proposition that ‘Frank is alive’. There are many sub-propositions throughout the performance, and all theatrical performances, which when considered alter one’s perception, understanding, and acceptance of (an) agreed proposition(s). This is different to liminality. In the next chapter I shall discuss how Tom Piper’s cube design in *Romeo & Juliet* can signify *x* in one scene, and *y* in another due to liminality and accepting a new proposal. In this instance though, as actual temporal shifts occur and develop through

shared experience the conditions of the agreed proposition that ‘Frank is dead’ changes to ‘Frank is alive’ due to the newly proposed arrangement and interactivity of theatrical objects and their qualities.

Both my, and the rest of the audience-participants’, acceptance of the newly proposed proposition that ‘Frank is alive’ had further consequences on the theatrical narrative too. The largest consequence, which led to the outcome of the theatrical narrative, was that in actively participating in the narrative by voting for who we deemed the murderer to be, we, the passengers / audience, became the murderers aboard the Murdér Express. We all then had to accept the further sub-proposition that ‘we were the murderers’.

Conclusion

The immersive case studies I have discussed and analysed propositionality through up to this point have progressively become more theatrical. *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* and *The Lucky Ones: Lailah* were both closely aligned to ‘reality’ i.e., the quotidian world. They did not create their own theatrical world that was discrete from quotidian activities, but rather created a pervasive theatrical game within the geographical radius of Leeds, West Yorkshire, and attempted to create an illusion of the reduction of the gaps between the quotidian and theatrical. The immersive theatre experience of *The Great Gatsby* attempted to immerse their participants inside the plot of Fitzgerald’s novel by recreating and adapting iconic scenes and placing participants inside those scenes so they could, or at least felt they could, play out, change and affect the outcome of those scenes and moments in a very real way. For example, the immediacy and authenticity I thought I witnessed when the car lights shone in my eyes was so powerful due to the indicative claim that

the theatrical object proposed, but the deconstruction of that moment illuminates how extremely theatrical and artificial that theatrical object and propositional claim and lure actually was; it shows how abundant my willingness to immerse and be immersed was in that moment. Thirdly, this discussion of *The Murdér Express*, which is more closely related to the format and style of proscenium and/or ‘traditional’ theatre than the other two case studies because (a), audience-participants mostly remain sat down observing scenes rather than actively participating within them, and (b), the production’s performance style is more exaggerated and melodramatic than the performance styles of *The Lucky Ones* and *The Great Gatsby*.⁶¹ This journey of immersive theatre and immersive-styled performance which has edged closer in style towards artificiality shows that propositionality works as a means of analysis in understanding what is being actuated in both realistic and theatrical performances where interaction and engagement with the theatrical world is possible and accessible for audience-participants. It shows how the interactivity of the qualities of theatrical objects help facilitate immersion through transportation and absorption in said objects and world. Plus, it has shown how the emergence of shifts in temporality and the reassessment and acceptance of propositions can change the conditions of a previously agreed upon proposition. This occurs through the entertainment of further propositional lures that are offered to audience-participants throughout the duration of the performance and within their direct experience. Propositionality also caters for the discussion of an audience-participants willingness to (be) immerse(d) in the theatrical world. But what happens in theatrical environments that do not cater for audience participation? Does

⁶¹ Whilst *The Murdér Express* is more closely aligned with proscenium theatre than *The Lucky Ones* productions and *The Great Gatsby*, it certainly is not ‘traditional’ in its theatrical arrangement nor is it performed on a proscenium stage. Also, *The Lucky Ones* and *The Great Gatsby* do not conform to the theatrical forms of naturalism and realism. I am merely suggesting that they attempt to create the illusion of aligning with reality much more so than *The Murdér Express* which is happy for the distinction between the genuine and artificial to be acknowledged, seen and understood for the audience-participants’ entertainment.

propositionality still work as a means of an analysis, or does it reach its limits? The next chapter addresses this very concern and explores any differences by drawing on the theatrical performances of *Romeo & Juliet* (2019) and *Dorian* (2019). The theatrical objects, and the qualities of those objects, that are discussed and analysed within these performances are still to be viewed via the ontological placement of OOO.

2.5 *Romeo & Juliet* and *Dorian*

Introduction

There has been a common format throughout this thesis so far. I have offered a brief walk-through and/or synopsis of immersive and pervasive styled performances and analysed how the theatrical objects within these performances have proposed a possibility; a lure for feeling. Throughout the analysis of *The Great Gatsby* (2019), I discussed two interwoven concepts that were manipulated to facilitate immersion as absorption and transportation for the participants of the experience. I will follow a similar format going forwards. In the RSC's *Romeo & Juliet* (2019) and Proper Job's *Dorian* (2019), I shall explore the two interwoven intentions of location and scene, except, the categories of immersion as absorption and transportation shall not be discussed since these groups, as Machon (2013) defines them, do not apply to traditional theatrical forms. One can still become immersed in the drama and narrative during proscenium arch theatre, cognitively and emotionally, but this does not mean the requirements for immersion as absorption are met since the audience member is not a participant, only a spectator. There is no physical interaction with the performance and so 'total engagement' in the activity is not possible.

Specific theatrical objects and props shall also be discussed alongside and within the location and scene discussions during the analysis of each production. This again repeats the same structure and thread running through the previous aspects of the thesis. However, this conversation will not necessarily endorse propositionality's pertinency to semiotics, but rather display where propositionality reaches its limits. This does not mean that propositionality entirely breaks down in different environments and audience arrangements, but it will demonstrate how, in proscenium arch theatre, audiences are still lured into a different way of feeling the theatrical world, yet they do not have the possibility of touching / encountering the world as one does in immersive theatre. A transaction still occurs between production and spectator in these performances, but perhaps one that is not as deep. One that does not have as many, or perhaps any, sub-propositions. When sub-propositions do exist for audience members within a performance, I will show that / how they operate differently than those discovered in interactive theatrical events such as immersive and pervasive performances.

It may be presumed, since I was simply a witness / observer / spectator to *Romeo & Juliet* (2019) and *Dorian* (2019), that the most appropriate method for analysis here would be semiotic analysis. Obviously, a semiotic analysis of a show does not offer a new contribution to knowledge since applying this method of analysis to theatre experienced its initial breadth of study in the nineteen-thirties and forties with the work of the Czech formalists and has continued ever since.⁶² I am therefore using these shows as tools for displaying how propositionality goes beyond semiotics in immersive theatre but does not in proscenium – this is where my contribution lies.

⁶² What started the Prague School of thought and its period of intense investigation in structuralism was "Zich's *Aesthetics of the Art of Drama* and Jan Mukařovský's 'An Attempted Structural Analysis of the Phenomenon of the Actor'" (Elam, 1980, p.5) which were both released in 1931.

Another feature which differs from the story and structure of the thesis so far is that in this chapter, *Romeo & Juliet* (2019) and *Dorian* (2019) shall be analysed together. This is because sub-propositions operate differently in proscenium, and so the depth of analysis and the volume of questions that can be discussed are smaller than in the chapters on Riptide and *The Great Gatsby*. Also, further proposals that derive from the analyses of these performances are similar or cross-over with one another i.e., location and scene.

Before commencing the analysis of propositionality within a traditional audience arrangement, it is vital to remind oneself that when propositions are discussed in these forms e.g., proscenium theatre, they are to be viewed in the same way as with participatory forms of theatre: as the sharable objects of cognitive acts and attitudes operating as lures. However, this discussion will show how the enactment of a proposition differs from that within immersive theatre. The claim that is made as a result of a proposition in proscenium theatre is not indicative as it is in immersive theatre. Instead, a claim is made in the subjunctive mood and accepted in this mode too.

When referring to a production I attended such as *Romeo & Juliet* (2019) and *Dorian* (2019), I shall use the word ‘witnessed’ as opposed to ‘experienced’ to help describe my role. I witnessed the performance in the traditional or conventional sense of attending the theatre: sitting and observing in the auditorium whilst the action occurred on stage. The rest of the audience and I were spectators, observing the performance through a one-way mirror. Both the Alhambra theatre’s main stage and the Lawrence Batley Theatre’s (LBT) main stage are proscenium arch stages, and so the audience and I looked through those arches.⁶³ We were provided an

⁶³ I witnessed *Romeo & Juliet* (2019) at the Alhambra, and *Dorian* (2019) at the LBT.

architectural frame of reference through which to peer and *witness* the action. We of course did *experience* the action too, but due to the various forms of theatre that attempt to blur the boundaries between performer / spectator and stage / auditorium in postmodern and contemporary theatre practice, I reserve the word experience for events in which the audience's role is not only to watch, but to participate.

This distinction may seem a mundane one, but if one meticulously analyses theatrical discourse, this distinction identifies whether it may be more appropriate to analyse theatre from a semiotic perspective or a propositional one. As this discussion will reveal, there comes a point where propositionality meets its limit in traditional audience arrangements. It still works in these arrangements, but it does not go as far or deep as it does in participatory practices. It is the role of the audience member that is paramount for propositionality. As previously stated, propositionality differs from semiotics through its sensory dimension. Contemporary practices, such as immersive theatre, can affect an audience-participants experiences via all five human senses (Di Benedetto, 2011) whereas the traditional theatre – as I'm defining it – only tends to make use of two to three: sight, hearing and occasionally smell.⁶⁴ The sensation of touch allows audiences to interact with objects / art / theatre on a heightened level of intimacy; it can be perceived as being more personal. Immersive and pervasive experiences have often been described as bespoke due to this reason as Riptide's *The Lucky Ones* was. Yet, these levels of intimacy cannot be measured through semiotics alone. Semiotics becomes obsolete in these moments as it cannot identify the difference in quality between an object that represents something in proscenium theatre and an object that represents something in immersive theatre.

⁶⁴ This does not mean that traditional theatre is not capable of manipulating the human senses of touch and taste, only that it happens less frequently. The theatre genres of music hall and pantomime have regularly provoked these senses through participatory means yet are still presented via the traditional convention of the performer / audience relationship.

For example, with the *Forget Me Not* cups discussed earlier: semiotics could not tell if they were cardboard cups or porcelain cups since they were both signs of a cup, i.e., an object is always a sign of an object on stage. Propositionality on the other hand claims that an object *is* the thing it stands for; it does not merely represent it. This propositional claim allows possibilities for suggesting why an object created such an effect in the receiver. It cannot necessarily answer that question, but it can ask further questions which offer further proposals and possibilities for new ways of bridging the gap between the question and the unknown answer. Put in its simplest form then, if one was a witness to a performance, semiotics can ask *what did that represent?* If one experienced a performance, or better yet participated *in* a performance, propositionality can ask *what (actually) was that?*

The question that needs investigating in this chapter then, is, what can propositionality ask when one witnessed a performance? Does propositionality also ask – *what did that represent?* – in traditional arrangements in the same way that semiotics does, or does it go further, or even not as far as semiotics? My argument is that the role of the audience member and their potentiality to physically interact with objects – along with the parameters of the thing being investigated / researched etc. – decides whether a semiotic or propositional analysis would be more appropriate.

Proscenium Arch Analysis

Before examining how objects propose in immersive theatre, I initially described its form, along with the characteristics of immersive works and performances. The same must be done for the proscenium arch theater so that one understands what it is that separates works which are

associated with the term ‘immersive’, and art which is performed on a proscenium stage. To begin describing this ‘traditional’ arrangement of experiencing theatre, it is worth explaining how one comes to understand the traits of an activity such as theatrical activity. Gregory Bateson’s *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972) and Erving Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* (1974) define activities as having *frames* which are placed around an event by an individual to organize their understanding. Goffman calls this the “frame of activity” (1974:247). Elam describes frames as “conceptual or cognitive structures to the extent that they are applied by participants and observers to make sense of a given ‘strip’ of behaviour, but derive from the conventional principles through which behaviour itself is organized” (Elam, 1980, p. 87).

Elam goes on to describe the *theatrical frame* as:

the product of a set of transactional conventions governing the participants’ expectations and their understanding of the kinds of reality involved in the performance. The theatregoer will accept that, at least in dramatic representations, an alternative and fictional reality is to be presented by individuals designated as the performers, and that his own role with respect to that represented reality is to be that of a privileged ‘onlooker’.

Elam, 1980, p.88.

This description of the theatrical frame aligns with all forms of theatre. The only aspect which one could argue is different is that in some forms of theatre, such as immersive theatre, the role of the ‘theatregoer’ is more than, or goes beyond, that of an ‘onlooker’. The role is of an audience-participant / participant / spect-actor and so on. Elam (1980) references Bateson and Goffman in his work, but specifically Goffman when discussing the theatrical frame, since Goffman’s chapter named ‘The Theatrical Frame’ (1974, pp.124-155) discusses it in detail. Although, Goffman describes the frame of a theatrical performance as limited to that which has a staging area and an audience region – like the proscenium theater. This narrow definition does

not leave room for certain participatory practices which include the spectator as part of the performance e.g., immersive theatre and most site-specific and sympathetic works. This is understandable since Goffman (1974) and Elam (1980) were both writing at a time prior to the creation of such theatres which were visceral and physically inhabited by an audience. This type of theatre arose from the visual and physical theatre of the nineteen-eighties and, according to Machon (2013), was when the term ‘immersive’ was starting to be associated with these types of work.

A performance, in the restricted sense in which I shall now use the term, is that arrangement which transforms an individual into a stage-performer, the latter, in turn, being an object that can be looked at in the round and at length without offense, and looked to for engaging behaviour, by persons in an “audience” role. [...] A line is ordinarily maintained between a staging area where the performance proper occurs and an audience region where the watched are located. The central understanding is that the audience has neither the right nor the obligation to participate directly in the dramatic action occurring on the stage.

Goffman, 1974, pp.124-125.

Goffman’s narrow frame of performance is restrictive since it does not accommodate all forms of theatre. Performance is such a broad concept which incorporates a wealth of styles, forms, practices, activities, sports, games, interactions etc. After all, theatre is only one type (which falls under the umbrella category) of performance that exists as a separate entity from all other types of performance e.g., dance, magic, comedy, improvisation and so on. Yet, I have quoted Goffman’s narrow definition of the term because it outlines the fundamental differences between theatrical forms and components. In proscenium arch performances where that “line” is maintained between performance / auditorium and performer / audience, exists what Elam calls the “crucial axiom in the theatrical frame” (1980:88), i.e., “the understanding that the audience has neither the right nor obligation to participate directly in the dramatic action occurring on stage”. In immersive theatre whilst there are pre-scripted scenes, which when performed for a

live audience implicitly suggest that the audience are not supposed to interact with the performers, the “frame of the activity” is that the audience are “*actually there*, physically inhabiting the fantasy world created”; and that “the audience-participant-performer-player is anchored and involved in the creative world via her or his own imagination” (Machon, 2013, pp.61-62) (emphasis in original). The corporeality of the audience is present in immersive theatre and that is wholly opposite to proscenium arch performances. During a proscenium arch performance “it is only fellow performers who respond to each other as inhabitants of the same realm; the audience responds indirectly, glancingly, following alongside, as it were, cheering on but not intercepting” (1974:125).

There are anomalies to Goffman’s statement. For example, when actors hold the action for laughs. This is clear communication between performer / audience; the audience’s response of laughter *does* intercept the actor’s realm, though not explicitly. Plus, it is the actors that are holding for laughs, not the characters. Also, there are proscenium arch shows which include direct address. In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Hamlet addresses the audience which acknowledges their presence in the theatre. The audience are momentarily invited into the performer’s realm meaning that performer / audience inhabit that realm together. Similarly, with the musical *Cats*, performers would often enter the audience dancing and grinding with / on audience-members. In the late nineteen-nineties, one audience member sued the production after David Hibbard, who performed the role of Rum Tug Tugger, thrust his pelvis in their face. Do moments, like this, of performer-audience interaction change or affect the propositionality? Pantomimes are all about breaking the proscenium arch barrier and including the audience in the theatrical realm of the performance. Arguably, at the point of “it’s behind you!”, the show becomes immersive to an extent. The audience’s presence has been acknowledged and their actions / utterances affect the

actions / utterances of the performers on stage. This moment of audience interception in pantomime is renowned; it is a choreographed transaction that all that attend pantomimes pay for and expect when attending the show. There is not only explicit interaction via utterances and the sensation of touch, but pantomimes commonly hand out sweets to child audience members. In accepting and digesting these sweets, they are placing a part / object of the performance inside themselves which “deeply involves” them in the theatrical activity. In this regard, the pantomime is more ‘immersive’ than immersive theatre shows that only manipulate (some of) the senses of sight, hearing, touch and smell.

Romeo & Juliet

On Friday 15th February 2019, I witnessed the Royal Shakespeare Company’s (RSC) *Romeo & Juliet* (2019) at the Alhambra theatre in Bradford, England. The main proposition asserted by *Romeo & Juliet* (2019) was that the elements and objects on / within the stage / performance space (re)presented the theatrical world of Shakespeare’s *Romeo & Juliet*. The aim of this proposition was to make the classic text appear like “a world as close to our own as possible”, thus creatively modernising it so it appeals to a younger audience “who could recognise themselves” in it and specifically the characters of Romeo and Juliet (Whyman, 2019). Despite the aim of Whyman’s production, the stage elements did not aid this proposition. The set consisted of a rusted-stone-framed proscenium arch with matching backdrop which was dark and grey. It was grey in the multitude of tones which Mark Rothko’s famous *Untitled Black on Gray* is grey. There was only one object on stage at the beginning of the performance – this

predominantly remained the case throughout – which was a cube centre stage.⁶⁵ The cube remained centre stage for the performance’s entirety. This was the focal point; a liminal object which represented a multitude of varying locations as the narrative transpired. It represented and functioned as the performance’s set, and it is this object and its scenic metonymies, that will be the focus of the analysis here and in the location and scene discussion combined with performing objects from *Dorian*. Michael Billington describes Tom Piper’s design of the rotating cube as “oddly nondescript” (Billington, 2019, n.p.). Of the six sides to the cube, only five were visible. The bottom face was solid and acted as the ground for whichever location the performance signified the characters were in. The top face was solid, and characters would often climb onto it, stand on it, sit on it, converse on it etc. Two sides of the cube were therefore solid, opaque, and suggested ‘the back’ of whichever location the object and narrative denoted in a scene, i.e. a wall, backdrop etc. The remaining two sides were open spaces and so were not sides at all. Characters could step onto the bottom face of the cube and appear to the audience as if they were inside (of) it. There was a hatch in the top face of the cube and a ladder which led from the surface of the bottom face, through the hatch out onto the above surface of the top face, allowing the performers to move from inside the cube to above it. This set did not make the classic text appear like “a world as close to our own as possible” in terms of its physical appearance. When other stage elements were introduced such as costume and props, these mainly did replicate the appearance of our shared world in 2019, albeit not always. For example, the fashion of both the Montagues and the Capulets was like that of the different generations and classes one sees in UK society today. The young lovers Romeo and Juliet both wore tight skinny jeans in black and light blue, respectively. Romeo wore black Nike trainers whilst his father – performed by Paul Dodds

⁶⁵ The cube represented and functioned as the performance’s set. Other theatrical objects that appeared on stage were the actors, costumes, and props which were brought on and off when needed.

– epitomised my interpretation of the smart-casual look of a modern day, middle-aged, middle-class, white male by wearing a formal shirt tucked into dark, regular fit jeans with a blue blazer and dark brown brogues. Whereas Raphael Sowole whom performed Tybalt wore a leather knife holster around his chest which is not a fashion accessory adopted by many in modern society, certainly not in the UK or Verona. For me then, it was not Whyman’s use of stage elements that were attempting to achieve her artistic intent, but the casting.

For Whyman it was important that the “cast was in every sense diverse, and representative of the UK’s complex differences” (2019). Whyman wanted to tease out some of the text’s covert “references to sex and sexuality and [match] them to our more (but not entirely) liberated world” (2019). She goes further and states that since the character roles within Shakespeare’s original play text were conceived to be performed by men, she wanted to have a wider range of women performing on stage so that “women as well as men could truly see themselves” (2019).

Whyman, along with casting directors Hannah Miller and Matthew Dewsbury, cast Bally Gill and Sakuntala Ramanee as Romeo and Lady Montague respectively, and so some members of the Montague family were British Asian. Karen Fishwick was cast as Juliet and performed with her Scottish accent even though no other character within the Capulet family had a Scottish accent in the performance. Mercutio was performed by Charlotte Josephine, and not only can you see the director’s attempt to make the world of the classic text like our own here, but you can also see her attempt to pose questions about equality and violence today.

Having identified Whyman’s aims and means for achieving the performance’s main proposition, the enactment of the proposal had been stipulated. But how was the proposition agreed? Was it agreed? Well, one cannot speak for other audience members, but I accepted the proposition that the performance space existed as and represented the narrative of Shakespeare’s *Romeo & Juliet*.

I did not think that the performance achieved its aims in relating to a present-day young audience, but I am not here to review the quality or success of the production. What is important for the purposes of this thesis is that fundamentally, the performance succeeded in representing the play *Romeo & Juliet*.

Location & Scene

The cube

The cube that was used to represent varying locations and scenarios within the play's narrative suggested things to be considered. Both semiotic and propositional analysis cater for signs / suggestions / proposals. But where do each of them fail and/or bump up against its limits? As previously touched on, the cube's appearance was 'nondescript'. Nondescript in the way that the likes of Meyerhold and Popova's theatre of Russian constructivism "excluded the use of picture or colour signs". Yet, like constructivism, "the arrangement of the construction [often] failed to create an unambiguous theatrical sign" (Honzl, 1940, pp.77-78). Honzl explains how Meyerhold's construction in *The Death of Tarelkin* made use of a cylindrical object which "could have suggested any number of things, but none of them without ambiguity" (1940:78).⁶⁶ In comparing the RSC's cube with Meyerhold's cylindrical object one can see the similarities in how nondescript theatrical objects can suggest a multitude of things to be considered. In order to suggest / propose a specific thing, the collaboration of various stage properties and objects are required. Honzl suggests that:

⁶⁶ Honzl suggests that the cylindrical object could have represented a meat grinder, a circular window, a round cage, or a huge mirror.

The sign (representative) function of the scenery and props is determined solely by the movements of the actor and by the manner in which he uses them, but even their representative function is not entirely ambiguous.

Honzl, 1940, p.78.

Prior to this statement in the “Dynamics of the Sign in the Theater”, Honzl, similarly to how OOO separates objects from the conception that they are *only* inanimate and nonhuman, frees the concept of ‘actor’ from solely being a human representing a character: “not only can a person be an actor but so can a wooden puppet or a machine or anything at all” (1940:75).⁶⁷ Honzl presumably is referring to ‘actor’, in this sense, as a human representing a character, since he genders the actor – “...by the manner in which *he* uses them” – but, since Honzl himself frees ‘actor’ from the confines of ‘human representing character’ to “anything at all”, it allows one to view actors as objects in theatre as OOO does.

Returning then to the RSC’s cube and its relation to Meyerhold’s staging of *The Death of Tarelkin* one can see that when actors / objects interact they work as parts; parts that represent a whole. In *The Death of Tarelkin*, Honzl explains that:

it is only when we see the actor pacing back and forth in the cylindrical structure like a prisoner and clutching its slats like bars that we realize the function of this stage prop: it is a cell. Simultaneously, however, there remain in our minds all the associations of form that originated during our first glance at the said prop. The idea of a “meat grinder” in combination with the idea of a “prison cell” acquires mutual polarization of new meanings.

Honzl, 1940, p.78.

Honzl uses the study of signs to show what is actualized by the combination of the signifying objects in this specific moment of *The Death of Tarelkin* i.e., the fact that ‘it is a cell’. However,

⁶⁷ Honzl “frees the concept of actor” in this context by defining ‘acting’ as that which “merely consists in representation of the dramatic character by something else” (1940:75).

that which is actualized is subjunctive. ‘It is a cell’ actualizes the object as standing for that object, not actually being that object. It actualizes as if it were true; as if it were that object. Whilst this actualization succeeds at representing, it fails at *being*. The quality of a subjunctive claim of actualization is therefore different from the quality of an indicative claim. To reiterate, this is where semiotics misses the mark. As Honzl goes on to stipulate:

It is true, that our theaters have not deviated from this method of indicating dramatic place, since it is all the same (precisely with regard to action as an element of drama) whether a change of scene is indicated by an inscription or by a costly stage set of a terrace, throne room, cemetery, battlefield, and so on.

Honzl, 1940, p.92.

For semiotics, it is “*all the same*” whether a sign be simple or lavish, witnessed or experienced, intangible or tangible. This is not the case for propositionality. Propositionality identifies the quality of the sign in a way that semiotics leaves out and provides a method for exploring one’s willingness to immerse. Similarly, though, both semiotics and propositionality allow for the “mutual polarization of new meanings”. One can be aware of both Meyerhold’s “meat grinder” and “prison cell” despite their sharp division of meaning from the perspective of either semiotics or propositionality. An object can represent different things in all forms of theatre. It can represent different things because of *liminality*. Liminality, as previously mentioned, describes the transitional stage within a rite of passage e.g., nuptial rites, funeral rites etc. Therefore, when an object is framed within / as performance, it is open to interpretation, meaning that liminality is always possible. Like semiotics, propositionality can handle liminality, yet there is a slight difference in the enactment of a proposition in an immersive environment, to a proscenium one. When a claim is (quasi)indicatively made e.g., in the cases of immersive and pervasive experiences, and one accepts the claim as if it were true, the object becomes the thing, and the

only thing, that it is claiming to be. So, whilst one can polarize different meanings and oscillate different modes of attention, in the exact moment of agreement to an indicatively claimed proposition, the object is no longer what it previously *was*, only what it presently *is*. That is not to say that it cannot revert to what it was claiming to be, or even become something else entirely, but that an object usually does not get used in a different way as it might ‘spoil the illusion’ of the implicit realism fundamental to the form of immersive theatre. Although, this is not the case for claims made in the subjunctive-mood i.e., the mode in which claims made in traditional arrangements exist, such as Proper Job’s *Dorian* (2019) and the RSC’s *Romeo & Juliet* (2019). In this regard, it is not that propositionality breaks down in traditional audience arrangements then, but that, *how* an object is labelled differs between the two environments. By looking at an example from the RSC’s cube, one can see the difference between how an object is intended to be seen, and how it is ultimately labelled.

In *Romeo & Juliet* (2019), Karen Fishwick’s Juliet was sat on top of the cube whilst conversing with Bally Gill’s Romeo who was stood in front of it looking up to her. This was the RSC’s dramatic portrayal of the famous balcony scene. This signified that Juliet was in her bedroom looking out of her window, and Romeo was in the courtyard *outside* of Juliet’s bedroom window declaring his love for her. Then, in a later scene, a dress was hung from the top of the cube whilst a chair was placed in front of it, which Juliet’s nurse (played by Ishia Bennison) sat on. The placement of these objects and costume signified that that scene took place *inside* Juliet’s bedroom. The interaction of the onstage theatrical objects alongside the utterances of the play text represented these things as if they were true. It was the addition and interaction of the performing objects / ‘actors’, per Honzl, which actualized the relocation of the scene. Upon perceiving, assessing and accepting the signs displayed before me, I in turn accepted the

proposition that the first scene took place at the courtyard outside of Juliet's bedroom as if it were true. Likewise, I accepted the second scene inside her bedroom as if it were true. These are two separate propositions that I need to accept to follow, and become immersed in, the narrative. I, as audience, accept the shifts in meaning of the cube (there are new propositions being made with each shift) because I was shown each time what those meanings were – what it came to represent. Once the locale had been relocated though, I was still conscious of the previous location and idea. The possible interactions between the qualities of the cube and the qualities of the objects interacting with the cube, allowed for the consideration of both the courtyard and the bedroom simultaneously, as well as any other locational suggestion which was subsequently proposed. There was no ultimate point of arrival where the cube *was* Juliet's bedroom, and *only* Juliet's bedroom, since the claim was made in the subjunctive-mood. Obviously, all objects are representative since they are framed as (part of a) performance, but if the propositional claim was (quasi)indicative, then it would affect the propositions enactment. This may seem like a case of splitting hairs regarding how an object is labelled, but it is an objects' label that differs between immersive and proscenium environments, not propositionality's ability to explore an audience's willingness to immerse. That does not break down. When one accepts each proposition and shift in meaning, it lures one into a different way of feeling regardless of environment. It is the degree of one's immersion that differs.

***Dorian* (2019)**

Bedroom and Recording Studio

Similarly, to the RSC's use of the cube, the set and performing objects within *Dorian* (2019) also constructed and suggested to the audience that certain scenes took place within a character's bedroom. Proper Job Theatre's production of *Dorian* (2019) was a contemporary performance inspired by the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde. As well as highlighting the pressure of toxic masculinity and gym culture, different media devices (such as webcams and smartphones) recorded particular moments of the onstage live action and screencast them on to large screens within the backdrop of the set to explore the impact of social media on the characters. Music was performed live throughout the play, predominantly instrumental music via keyboard, but there were also vocals from the characters too. This was especially the case with the characters of Sam and Sarah as they were pursuing a career in music within the narrative. The focus, however, was on the character of Dorian who was constantly aspiring to look like a fitter, more muscular photoshopped version of himself, and the extremes he went to, to achieve that.

The set design for *Dorian* (2019) was quite complex. The flats along the back of the stage were segregated into numerous squares and rectangles of varying sizes. There was one much larger rectangle in the upper-central position of the backdrop which was a monitor used for projecting close-ups of the on-stage action, videos, imagery, and so on. At the beginning of the performance, the smaller sections of the backdrop initially appeared to be mirrored, as I could see the reflection of some of the onstage objects in a few of the individual quadrilateral sections.

But, as the performance developed, every square and rectangular section within the backdrop displayed media which was either projected or screencast.

The layout of the set created three separate zones. These zones depicted various settings / locations / places / rooms. Stage right's zone depicted the character Sam's bedroom, and in other scenes it depicted his recording studio. The performer playing the role of Sam very rarely departed his position upstage right where he sat at a keyboard located on top of a raised platform. The keyboard had a webcam / recording device attached above it that was facing Sam whilst he was sat at the keyboard. In front of the platform was a wooden structure on wheels which could be moved around, and a block on which rested a collection of dumbbells and gym weights. Tucked in the corners, both downstage right and left, were mannequins elevated on blocks. These mannequins were initially covered in blankets, and so it was not until later in the show's narrative that the audience witnessed them since they were concealed from their view. Similarly, stage left's zone depicted a bedroom and recording studio, but these belonged to Sarah's character instead. Stage left also contained a keyboard with webcam / recording devices attached to it, but this keyboard was not elevated on a platform as Sam's was. It simply lay on top of a keyboard stand which was on the stage's ground level like the rest of the set, props and performers. Moving slightly inwards towards centre-stage (on the right of the Sarah's keyboard) was another wooden structure on wheels which again could be moved around the stage by the performers. The final zone was centre stage which depicted a number of different settings, such as Harry's gym, a restaurant, Dorian's house, the landing outside of Sam's bedroom, and so on. I will not describe every aspect of the set because I am not investigating all the production's performing objects, and this would require too much attention which is best spent elsewhere. Nonetheless, the details pertaining to the projector screen wall, upstage right, the wooden-frame

structures on wheels, and the mannequins, shall be paid greater attention to. Upstage right was on a platform – a raised-level – about a metre above the stage floor. There was a keyboard set up on a table with a chair tucked under it which faced offstage right. The performer playing the role of Sam, was sat on this chair, at the keyboard, for much of the performance. There was a laptop/tablet set up directly in front of the chair which lay on top of the keyboard, and another laptop that was raised on a shelf to the left of, and above, the keyboard. There was also a wireless webcam attached to the keyboard too. Occasionally the webcam projected the performer that played the role of Sam onto the screens within the backdrop whilst he was playing the piano, or, within the context of the play's narrative, whilst Sam was speaking directly to his fans online via a vlog. This set-up ran along the back of the platform touching the screened backdrop flats.

This detailed set-up of upstage right was used to represent a recording studio. Any dramatic action that took place on and was confined to the limits of this raised platform, depicted the location of the characters' Sam and Sarah's recording studio. However, when other theatrical objects were added / interacted with the overall sensual object already created upstage right, the dynamics of the sign altered, which meant that the setting of the scene could be relocated. Earlier, I discussed how a courtyard metamorphosed into a bedroom through the interacting qualities of objects related to the onstage cube in *Romeo & Juliet* (2019), and here, a similar transformation process occurred from a recording studio to a bedroom with the addition of a wooden-frame structure.

Amongst the set and design of the performance space were two large wooden structures on wheels which were slightly off-centre stage. These, like the cube in *Romeo & Juliet* (2019), appeared to have more of a utilitarian purpose and function than a decorative one, by clearly

indicating different locations within the play. The wooden structures were rectangularly shaped, with wooden beams formulating each side of the rectangular shape. The rectangle's longest sides were vertical and the area inside the shape was empty meaning that objects / any-thing could pass through the structure. The wooden frame had a latch which meant part of the frame could be turned and rotated by the performers to give the impression of being opened and closed. The wooden structure was moved around by the performers on multiple occasions to denote various locations and scenes.

Focusing on a later scene within the performance, the wooden structure was moved from stage-left and positioned in front of the raised platform upstage right. Up until this point, the raised platform area had signified the location of a recording studio. With the addition of the wooden structure, we as an audience now had to perceive the dramatic action that occurred on the raised platform through the area between the wooden beams. Due to this, the wooden structure suggested and served as a window-frame like the picture-frame of the proscenium arch serves as itself. Through the frame, we saw the performer that played the role of Sam sat on a chair playing a keyboard. The theatrical objects on the raised platform had not altered or changed position, but the addition of the wooden frame in front of the platform now suggested a new sensual object. One that represented Sam's bedroom, rather than a recording studio.

This description is not ground-breaking. The dynamics and changeability of the theatrical sign and its ability to transform and represent varying places, objects, things, is the beauty, fun and essence of theatre make-believe. The Prague School has already taught us that what something represents can change, since signs are polyfunctional. But analysing this relocation of scene can make clear how propositionality reaches its limits in this form. It reaches its limits here due to the lack of sub-propositions that are created. In the scene, the performing object (wooden

structure) does not become the window-frame to his bedroom, it only represents / imitates / symbolises it. The only suggestion that is offered here is the subjunctive suggestion that ‘this represents Sam’s bedroom’. It does not offer any additional proposals to consider. Proposals such as ‘can I enter Sam’s bedroom?’, ‘am I allowed in Sam’s bedroom?’, ‘must I accept that Sam is in his bedroom’ etc., are not necessary to entertain as these possibilities have already been determined and ruled out by the format of the theatrical device and the contract assented to by the purchasing of a ticket. There are no *further* sub-propositions created in the mind of the spectator either, due to the initial proposals i.e., propositions such as ‘what happens if I enter / leave his bedroom?’, ‘should I move the window-frame?’, ‘would the characters recognise that, in moving the window-frame, I have changed the location of the scene?’, and so on. Analysing these types of questions and proposals is not possible in these types of audience arrangements since the performance does not facilitate or allow access and opportunity for them. Propositionality reaches its limits as a method of exploring further possibilities and one’s willingness to immerse here, and it recedes to the same level as semiotic analysis.

Again, this can be proven by the same object being used in a different way. It was not only the qualities of the wooden-framed structure’s appearance and its placement in front of the raised platform which suggested that the sensual object represented Sam’s bedroom window, but Sam’s interaction with it too. As the narrative of the play developed, the character Sam developed an eating disorder. The performer playing the role of Sam turned the latch on the wooden structure and hence rotated the frame. This signified the opening of his bedroom window. He then proceeded to lean his body through the framed space – whilst his feet remained planted on the ‘inside’ of the boundary – as he held, and placed his head inside, an opaque plastic waste-bin and made retching noises as if he were vomiting into it. He would then lean back so that all his

body was on the inside of the framed boundary, closing the latch to signify that his bedroom window was closed with him inside the room. The performer acted this on multiple occasions as the story unfolded to signify that the character's condition was worsening. In a later scene, Sam was on the raised platform having not been seen by, or interacted with, any other characters for several scenes. This suggested that, within the story, he had confined himself to his bedroom for a few days. The performer playing the role of Dorian entered stage left whilst calling Sam's name. Sam quickly moved the wooden-framed structure from facing horizontally in front of the platform, to facing vertically upstage centre along the side of the platform so that it was between both him and Dorian. Sam then sat down on the edge of the platform facing inwards towards his bedroom whilst pretending to lean against the wooden frame. Dorian went up to the frame, knocked on the wooden beams, and continued to call out Sam's name. The performers' actions, utterances and inter-actions with the theatrical objects combined to propose that Sam had locked himself in his bedroom and that the wooden frame now represented his bedroom door, rather than window. Sam was on one side of the door, leaning against it to prevent Dorian from entering the room, and Dorian was on the other side of the door, banging on it to try and make Sam let him in. A new boundary was created that divided the space between Sam's bedroom and the landing of his house, with the wooden frame serving as the doorway between the two spaces. Here, the re-positioning of the theatrical object on stage once again affected the narrative's setting. Though, rather than relocating the scene from one location to another, the placement of the wooden frame shifted the audience's conceptual position of viewing from spectating through a character's bedroom window, to spectating either side of a character's bedroom door. Whilst I understood and accepted the proposition and transformability of the sign from window to door, the proposal offered was limited. I could only interpret the signs on display for meaning and

understanding and there was no possibility for further sub-propositions that acknowledge the presence of other entities to be considered. Regarding propositional analysis then, one can see if and how the proposition was agreed, but not what I accepted or thought. One cannot identify the effect my agreement had on my engagement with the theatrical world, nor the quality of the agreement. The actuality of the proposition is not attainable due to the limit of the subjunctive-mood. Propositionality does not entirely collapse as a means of an analysis here, and in this form, but it is halted. It ceases to fulfil its purpose at identifying the quality of the sign, only if it was successful / unsuccessful.

Technology in *Dorian*

As I mentioned in my synopsis of *Dorian* (2019), the performance used different media devices to record and screencast specific moments of the dramatic action on to the screens that were built into the set's backdrop. Every performer has their own smartphone or webcam which they use (at least once) to screencast their face, screencast their delivery of a line, project an image and so on. For example, the performer playing the role of Sam uses a webcam to screencast his keyboard performances, and the performer playing the role of Sarah uses a smartphone to screencast the character's vlogs to her online fanbase. These technological objects used in *Dorian* (2019) have both a 'real-world' function in performing technological tasks for their uses, as well as a fictional function in representing the execution of the portrayed technological tasks. This is the same as when non-technological objects perform both a 'real' and 'fictional' function simultaneously i.e., a fork used by a performer on stage to eat food performs its real-world function – to pick up food – and its fictional function – to represent a fork. Yet, when technological objects in *Dorian* perform their real-world function, they affect the audience's

relationship with the performance, and the theatrical artefact itself, in a way that is not the case when a performer uses a fork on stage to perform its quotidian function. This is because the use of these technological objects in *Dorian* changed the proximity between performer and audience and so the degree of aesthetic distance was able to shift.

An example of this during the performance was when Sam had a breakdown during his ‘livestream’. The context of the screencast, within the narrative, was that Sam was streaming his keyboard performance live online for his followers to see. People then left comments on the stream about his ‘awful’ appearance which Sam read out, displayed a fit of rage, and broke down into tears whilst the stream was still live. The webcam (RO) screencast the performer’s onstage actions onto the screens that were built into the backdrop of the set. As an audience member, I could view the performance on stage in front of me, and I could see the performer’s actions displayed on the large screen. The video on screen displayed the performer’s actions from his shoulders upwards, and so I had a zoomed in view of the character’s expressions. This screencast allowed us, as audience, a more intimate view of Sam and the effects caused by social media pressure and toxic masculinity.⁶⁸ The proximity between myself and the performer (RO) had not shifted but displaying his performance via a stream meant that I had closer access to an image of the real object (Sam), via a different real object (screen). The proxemics of the performer / audience relationship were therefore reduced via the qualities of the sensual object I perceived on screen.

Early on in this thesis, I referenced Ronald Naverson’s *Scenographic Distance* (2001) which suggests that “a true theater must exist between the two extremes of no distance and too little

⁶⁸ Toxic masculinity was the theme that was being explored by Proper Job’s production.

distance. It must suspend the audience between a perception of fictionality and non-fictionality of the unreal and real” (Naverson, 2001, p.8). I suggested that immersive experiences were suspended closer towards non-fictionality / the real due to their arrangements and manipulation of space, place, game, story etc. This suggestion simultaneously implied that in works of proscenium theatre, these aspects of the performance tend to be unmoving. Whether that be accurate or not, it was not the case for *Dorian*. The distance and relationship between myself and the performing objects did shift, as evident from the screencast, and constantly so, too.

Whilst the proxemics of the performer / audience relationship were both reduced and increased, constantly shifting throughout the performance – in part due to the technological objects used – the organisation and shaping of the theatrical objects still enforced a greater aesthetic distance. The use of a flat-screened media device to portray the onstage action reminded me of the fictionality of the performance and event. The two-dimensional quality of the real object was like a pictorial-sign. Signs manifest in paintings and picture frames like the proscenium arch itself: “for some the ornate proscenium frame with its origins in two-dimensional scenic representation helps to reinforce the fictionality of theatre” (Naverson, 2001, p.9).

I have discussed proxemics and aesthetic distance here, because a closer proximity to an object does not always necessitate propositionality. This thesis posits that the tangibility of objects by audience members / participants is required for propositional analysis and the investigation of the various sub-propositions proposed. It also posits that even when an individual’s proximity to an object is reduced so much that the object is physically tangible, that does not necessarily mean that the possibility of touching / grasping / interacting with the object is accessible within the theatrical world. In the case of the technological objects in *Dorian*, the sensual object I

perceived of Sam on screen brought me closer to an image of him, and that sensual object / image actually *was* an image of the character Sam, yet the claim being made by the interaction of the onstage theatrical objects was still a subjunctive claim. The claim being made was that the screen represented Sam livestreaming to his followers, not that Sam *was* livestreaming to his followers. I was not able to entertain the possible sub-proposition that there were, and are, fans of Sam's music that watch(ed) his videos online. By not being able to entertain possibilities such as this, I am reminded of the fictionality of the event which affects my engagement with the work. I was still engaged and immersed in the storyline unfolding before me, but one cannot retrospectively analyse how I approached the non-existent further proposals before me. Once again, this is where propositionality fails. It fails when there are no sub-propositions to be considered; no possibilities for the experiencing subject to entertain.

Are there any moments in proscenium arch performances such as, *Dorian* (2019) and *Romeo & Juliet* (2019), where there are possibilities for the audience to entertain? Where propositionality as a means of analysis does not fail? I shall explore this via the props / theatrical objects of the mannequins within *Dorian*.

Mannequins

In both corners of downstage left and right, lay a brown box. The brown boxes had little discernible features except that they were dark, opaque, appeared sturdy, and were possibly made from wood, though it was hard to tell. They looked like podiums and were in fact raising unknown objects off the stage floor. The objects being raised were unknown to myself, and the audience, since they were covered by black sheets. When Harry was describing and depicting an

image of ‘the perfect body’ to Dorian, the performer playing the role of Harry removed the sheets from the covered objects and revealed mannequins which expressed the chiselled appearances of the male body.

Whilst the mannequins were covered by the black sheets, one could argue that they were, to use Palmer’s phrase, ‘locked doors’. I, as an audience member, knew there was something beneath the sheet, I just did not know what it was yet. Yet, unlike in Riptide’s *The Lucky Ones: Lucy* and *The Lucky Ones: Lailah*, I had no method of finding out what was under the sheets other than waiting for the reveal. There was no game to play, no clues to decipher, no hoops to jump through, no puzzles to solve. Only sitting patiently through the temporality of the fictional world presented on stage would (potentially) reveal what was under the covers. Unlike Palmer’s ‘locked door’ concept, we as an audience never knew if we would find out what was under the sheets or not. One may have had an urge or desire to know, to see, to discover etc., what was under the sheet, but one did not know if that desire was to be fulfilled. I myself was intrigued and wondered what the object could be, and assumed I would find out, but did not know for sure that I would. In this scenario, I could only entertain the possibility that I might find out what was under the cover – if the performers eventually remove it – in my mind. I could postulate what I may have witnessed, but I could not actively or physically entertain the possibility. I did not have access to the real object itself. That detailed fragment was not accessible for me and so I could not reveal the possibility.

Is propositionality limited in this scenario, once again? Is wondering what is / was under the sheets a sub-proposition? *To an extent*, yes, it is. However, the proposition relies solely on the onstage performing objects to construct the considered proposal(s), and not *you* as a participating

object in that world. For example, one can think ‘what is under the sheets?’, yet one does not have the possibility of thinking ‘what happens if *I* look under the sheets?’, nor entertaining / performing / acting out the removal of the sheet or touching the sheet. In this instance, the entirety of propositionality does not collapse since it still caters for the consideration of *what*, i.e., ‘what happens if...?’ But the added quality and intense sensation one can feel when one is included in the lure is not obtainable. My initial presumption that propositionality *always* breaks down to the same level of semiotics is therefore premature. Propositionality can be used to analyse proposed things that an audience member has no impact or agency towards. Though, the extent to which the proposed thing can be analysed will still not go as far as could be possible for a sub-proposition within an interactive theatrical production. Sub-propositions exist within proscenium arch theatre then yet operate differently. Sub-propositions exist as detailed signs rather than means to ‘close the gaps’.

Conclusion

One can see through exploration into the proscenium arch performances of *Romeo & Juliet* (2019), and *Dorian* (2019), that when a claim is both made and accepted in the subjunctive mood by performer and audience, the result of this is that nothing actuates in these claims. The answer to the question I posed at the start of this chapter – what can propositionality ask when one witnessed a performance? - is that it can only ask what semiotics can ask, i.e., *what did that represent?* The claims made in the examples shown only represented something as if they were true. Therefore, using propositionality as a means of analysis only goes as far as semiotics does in these types of performances. That is a possible reason why semiotic analysis has been used to analyse proscenium arch theatre for almost a century. However, one could still use aspects of

propositionality to discuss further proposals made in these styles of performances. It can still be used as a tool to explore an audience members willingness to immerse themselves in a narrative. Sub-propositions can exist for audience members, as they did for me in *Dorian*, as detailed signs, yet they can only rely on external performing objects and not oneself as a performing object in their construction / proposal and entertainment. Predominantly though, propositionality has more limitations as a means of analysis in proscenium work compared to interactive theatrical experiences. In proscenium arch theatre, both semiotic and propositional analysis only access the interpretations of signs and/or propositions. They both hold that “*all the same*” quality when propositionality bumps up against its limits due to the lack of possible physical interaction with the performance and objects. Where propositionality thrives then is in audience arrangements which include audiences as participants in the performance. Contrariwise, since the development of contemporary theatre audiences and audience arrangements and interactions from the nineteen-eighties onwards, semiotics has been missing the mark at identifying the possibilities, qualities and effects of agreeing to a propositional lure in immersive performances. For me, propositionality works well in both environments, and is an effective method for exploring one’s willingness to immerse. That being said, my argument is that: the role of the audience member and their potentiality to physically interact with objects decides whether semiotic or propositional analysis is more appropriate.

Conclusion

In this conclusion I will answer the research questions that I proposed at the start and throughout the thesis and show how I have addressed my specified aims and objectives. In doing so, I will explain the significance and implications that theatre propositionality has as a means of analysis and the contribution to knowledge that I have made. Finally, I shall lay out questions for further research that this project provides.

Research Question

The research question that I proposed throughout this thesis asked how ‘propositions’ are enacted and agreed in immersive and proscenium theatrical environments; how are things proposed to audiences in these forms? This thesis has shown that they are proposed by the interacting qualities of objects. The sharable objects of cognitive acts and attitudes that one experiences are *propositions* themselves. These propositions operate in theatre as *lures* which create (a) *possibility(-ies)*. In examining how I, and others, entertained specific possibilities in both immersive and proscenium environments, I have achieved my aim for this project: to decipher what *is* being actuated within the interplay of objects and/or things in theatre and performance. I did this by choosing five specific theatrical performances within the performance styles and environments of immersive and proscenium and unpacking what is / was actualised in particular moments. Achieving my aim answering my research question has proven the following principles:

- a) in immersive theatre and/or performance propositions are enacted / claimed (quasi)indicatively i.e., as being *actual*.
- b) in proscenium arch performances propositions are enacted / claimed in the subjunctive-mood i.e., *as if it were true*.
- c) audiences and participants accept a performance's main-propositions in the subjunctive-mood.
- d) sub-propositions can be enacted and agreed in various moods.

And by expressing what it was that immersed me – as a participant – in separate immersive performances, it opens the endless possibilities for considering what is happening within experiences of theatrical performance. By examining these objects, I am offering further proposals to the questions within the processes of experiencing and making theatre which continually need to be asked.

Significance and Implications

The significance and implications that have derived from this project which postulates propositionality as a means for theatrical analysis can be seen via a review of the work's two main chapters.

Chapter one offers a definition of propositionality and its (non-)relation to semiotics. This chapter implies that the theatre semiotics that was pioneered by the Prague Structuralists is a branch of theatre propositionality. Not the other way around. It explains how propositional claims and what is actuated within the agreement of these claims between performer and audience differs within immersive and proscenium environments. The implications of this are

that semiotics cannot effectively analyse the difference in *quality* between a sign in immersive theatre and a sign in proscenium theatre, but propositionality can. Propositionality can do this because it explores the conditions of the sign and proposal. Conditions such as how the audience was arranged; whether the individual directly engaged in overt participation; what sub-propositions they considered, and so on. This is what makes propositionality significant as it supplements a materialist-semiotic analysis of theatre.

Chapter two adds to this significance in greater detail by suggesting that the role of the audience member and their potentiality to physically interact with objects – along with the parameters of the thing being investigated / researched etc. – decides whether a semiotic or propositional analysis would be more appropriate. The performances discussed start closer to the left side of Ben Chaim's (1984) continuum and gradually move further to the right i.e., from a realism to a stylised realism. There is almost a delusional state of no aesthetic distance where participants may have an unawareness of fictionality, which performance-by-performance moves towards a greater aesthetic distance and an awareness of fictionality. The consequences and implications which emerge from this are that propositionality's limits are reached. In interactive environments, the number of sub-propositions and possibilities that could be entertained may be infinite depending on the interacting qualities of the situational-utterance. Whereas this number is most likely to be much lower in proscenium arch performances which do not offer propositional lures in the same accessible and graspable format. This does not mean that propositionality does not work well in both environments though. What is perhaps most significant of all, is that the explorations discussed have shown that propositionality works as a method to explore one's willingness to (be) immerse(d) in a theatrical world.

Contribution

The objective for this project was for others to understand the concept of propositionality within theatre and performance as a means of analysis. My contribution to knowledge is an offering of an alternative perspective for analysing theatre and the quality of audience engagement and immersion. This contribution is potentially most important when one considers the wider concerns and further research questions that are now possible due to this research project. I have solely investigated performances that are immersive, site-sympathetic, pervasive, environmental etc., as well as performances which are performed within the frame of the proscenium arch, but further studies now have the possibility for expanding those parameters to other performance styles and arrangements in theatre. Hybridised practices which incorporate theatre with other external theories and praxes could also be explored. Every theatrical performance entails a different arrangement of theatrical objects, and the interacting qualities of those objects now have a means of being explored and discussed so that audiences, artists, academics, practitioners etc., can pinpoint what *is* / *was* actually happening in the interactions they experienced; what *was* actuated.

Conclusion

I promote theatre propositionality as a means of analysis in theatre for those who are interested, like myself, in understanding how theatre and the arts communicate. Not so that one learns ‘art’s truth’, but so that one can recognise what, how, and why a performance or artefact has interested, engaged, immersed, and led one into a “different way of feeling” one’s world. In an interview with Jon Cogburn, Graham Harman states that:

Science is supposed to provide knowledge [...] but this has never been the case in the arts. We do not understand a painting by Picasso by discovering an ever-lengthening list of true facts about it. The goal of art is not to create paraphraseable imagery, but to create something to which no paraphrase ever does justice.

Campbell, 2015, n.p.

Appendices

1. Layer 0 – *Pre-Perception*
 Layer 1 – *Proposition Assessment* (A Mediating Layer)
 Layer 2 – *Acceptance*
Immersion and Belief
 Layer 3 – *Dissension*
 Layer 4 – *Reflection*

Figure 1: My initial proposed template of the layers of performance that can be accessed by audience members throughout their journey within a performance of *Forget Me Not*.

2. Weblinks to a visual depiction of the *Forget Me Not* (2016) performances and set:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG_MlfIXgcc and
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flhLTYJM_zg

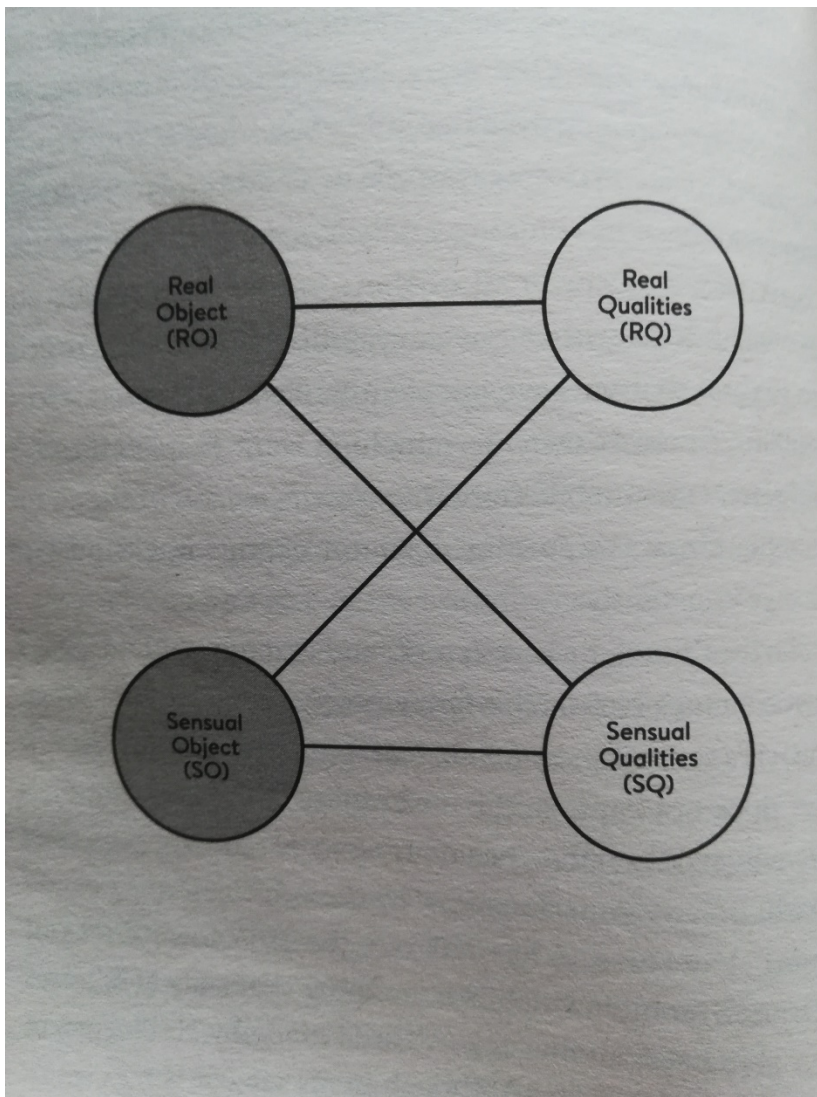
Questionnaire Feedback Statistics and questions for *Forget Me Not* (2016) performances in November 2016.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
1	0	X	23	0	X	0	X	X	X
2	5	X	19	2	X	5	X	X	X
3	11	X	17	9	X	6	X	X	X
4	23	X	18	24	X	25	X	X	X
5	27	X	30	31	X	29	X	X	X
6	X	X	4	X	X	X	X	X	X
NO	X	6	X	X	29	X	12	18	X
YES	X	60	X	X	34	X	53	48	X
YES&NO	X	X	X	X	3	X	1	X	X
UNANSWERED	X	X	X	X	X	1	X	X	23
ACTOR	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	5
INDIVIDUAL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	35
ACTOR&INDIVIDUAL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	3

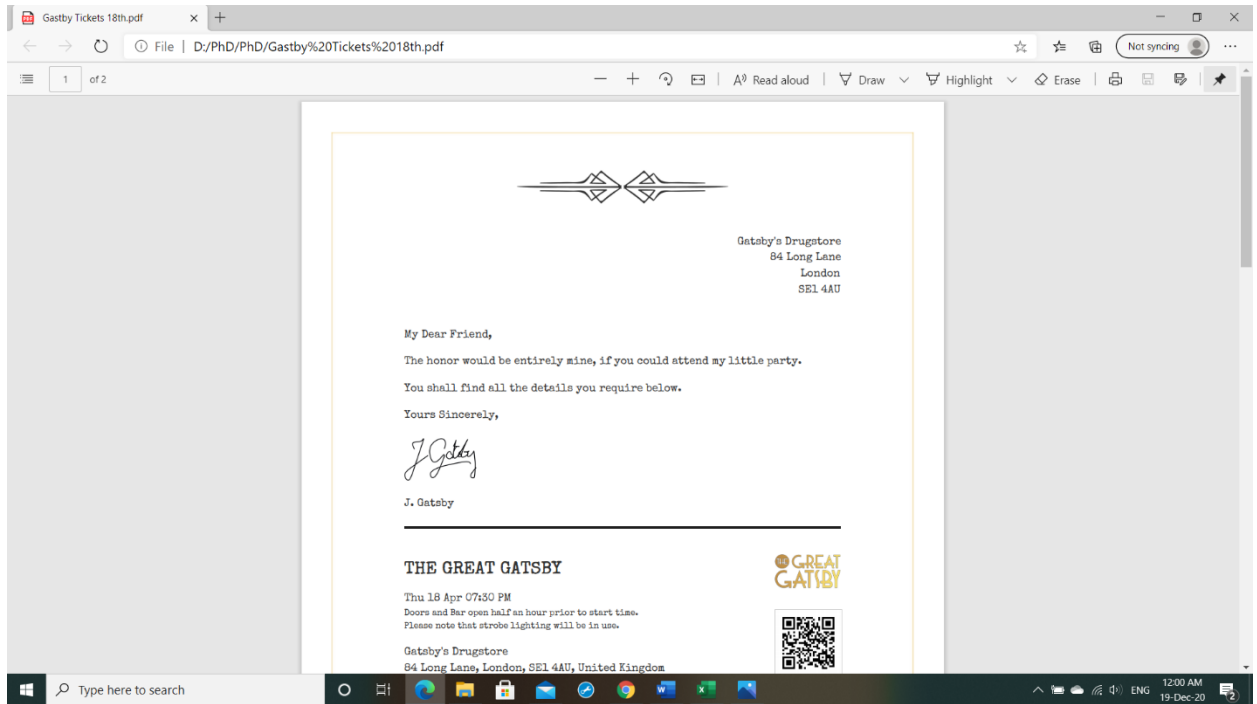
1. Did you at any point in the performance believe in what was happening? (1-5)
2. Did you experience any kind of change as you crossed the threshold between the foyer and the performance space? (Yes or No)

3. Did you experience any kind of change when..? (different moments 1-6)
4. How did it affect your viewing when characters were speaking with audience members? (1-5)
5. When the characters were telling stories (performatively) did these moments take you out of the immersion and alter your perception? (Yes or No)
6. At any point, were you immersed in the reality of the performance? (1-5)
7. Did you experience any kind of change as you left the space and crossed the threshold back into the foyer? (yes or No)
8. Did you have direct interaction with a character? (yes or No)
9. If yes to Q8, did you feel you were speaking to an actor or individual?

3. Image of 'Figure 1 - The Quadruple Object' (Harman, 2018, p.80).



4. Image of *The Great Gatsby* (2019) ticket.



5. Image of an aspect of *The Great Gatsby*'s (2019) set.



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