NOSTROVIA: METHODS IN CREATING IMMERSIVE THEATRE FOR AUDIENCES

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Abstract

In Nostrovia*: Methods in Creating Immersive Theatre for Audiences*, I explore the process and politics of creating an immersive dance theatre experience. *Nostrovia* was performed January 16th -18th 2020 at The Peacock Public House and reimagines the historical narrative of the Romanov family. This thesis begins with an overview of participatory movements and presentations that inspired immersive and site specific performances, and then proceeds to summarize the theoretical framework that was used to create this production. Through the use of adaptive narrative, consensual practices and movement shaped for non-dance spaces, I outline the practices and developments that occurred throughout and subsequently following the performances. This thesis is aimed at understanding and analyzing methodologies for guiding and engaging viewers/participants through contemporary dance presentations.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my fearless and talented sister, Ginger Kearns, whom without I would not be anything that I am. Thank you for loving me, raising me and always believing in me, paper flowers that last forever for everything you do. You are my sunshine.

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Introduction

Immersive theatre has arguably become one of the biggest theatre movements over the past decade. With the emergence of London based companies such as Punchdrunk or The Guild of Misrule, and New York based company Third Rail Productions, the immersive work being produced promotes unique experiences and opportunities for theatre goers. Combining dance with immersive theatre has begun to challenge typical dance practices by deconstructing the roles of performers and audiences.

In *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*, Josephine Machon describes immersive theater when she articulates the relationship between the words "immersive" and "submerge." According to Machon, immersing or submerging the audience in an unfamiliar environment creates a new set of rules and politics that audiences are not accustomed to attending (21). In a conventional theatre setting audiences watch the performances in the dark, seated in a theatre without having the opportunity to participate or be incorporated into the stage. The word "immersive" has become interchangeable and used in theatre marketing to promote "experience(s)" for audiences, overriding the usual set of guidelines enforced in "conventional theatre". Using terminology that is in vogue such as "immersive," "site specific," "interactive," or "interdisciplinary," seems to be directed primarily at the consumer with less concern about clarification for the modes being presented.

Though it could be said immersive theatre is a subset of site-specific performance, I believe it is the focus of the work that changes the essence. It has been a challenge to find clear definitions identifying the differences between site-specific and immersive theatre. However, Adam Alston (128-138), Rose Biggin (177-200), and Josephine Machon (85-89; 123-142) have touched on the subject and provide insight into understanding the differences between the two forms. Following Alston, Biggin, and Machon I suggest that artists who

create site-specific work are often focused on the relationship between the environment and the performers, while immersive performances tend to focus primarily on the audience's experience. Although immersive work is informed by the space it is situated in, the relationship with the audience is often the priority. Nevertheless, it could be said both types of performances would fall under the category of participatory performance art, which aims to bring art closer to everyday life by physically engaging the viewer.

In *Participation*, art historian and critic Claire Bishop defines the challenging relationship between performer and viewers/participants in participatory art by "striving to collapse the distinction between the performer, audience, professional and amateur" (10). Participatory performances such as *The Drowned Man* (2013), *Then She Fell* (2012), *The Great Gatsby* (2016), and arguably the most popular, profitable, and long-running dance work, *Sleep No More* (2011), seem focused on experiences, and are being advertised as one-of-a-kind theatre spectaculars. These performances often result in a heightened engagement level and become an accessible way for non-contemporary theatre and dance artists to interact with contemporary work.

Linda Hutcheon, a Canadian academic specializing in literary theory, suggests there are many modes of immersive: the act of reading a print text immerses audiences through imagination in another world, seeing a play or film immerses us visually and aurally, and interacting with a story in a videogame or theme park adds physical, enacted dimension (133). Each provides us with a sense of being transported in psychological and emotional terms (Hutcheon 133). I contend that immersive theatre, specifically immersive dance theatre, challenges the receptiveness of audiences in contemporary dance through immersing us in another world—in a visually, aurally, and enacted dimension. The mobility, atmosphere, and unconventional environment that immersive dance theatre offers can engage

viewers/participants in renewed methods that the twenty century audience may crave. Attending to recent methodologies of audience engagement I ask: What are the elements that make up an immersive dance theatre performance? How do you engage viewers/participants in unique experiences while implementing consent culture? And how do you re-interpret history and adapt a narrative for a specific space?

To explore these questions I created an immersive dance theatre performance titled *Nostrovia*. "*Nostrovia*" is the mispronunciation of the Russian word *Na Zdorovie* which is a toast commonly used at parties, meaning "to good health" or "cheers." My completed thesis presentation was an hour-long performance comprised of a live musical score, theatrical scenes, and choreographed movement. It took place at 582 College Street, in a pub called The Peacock Public House. It was performed in front of a test-audience of 14 people on January 6th, 2020, premiered on January 16th, 2020 and ran five times between the opening and closing—on January 18th, 2020. It was performed by six performers: Sarah Mclennan, William Hamilton, Robyn Noftall, Nicolas Masse, Paige Sayles, and Kendra Epik, and two musicians: Daniel Katsoras and Christin Spencer—all of whom were collaborators throughout the entire process.

Through the creation of an immersive dance work in a venue that is typically used as a bar, I brought together performers and viewers for the re-interpretation of 20th Century Fox's animated film titled *Anastasia,* and the historic narrative of the Romanov family and the corresponding events that transpired in that time. Based on my findings, this performance would be classified as immersive dance theatre. In the development of this work, I attempted to create an approachable atmosphere for both non theatre goers and avid contemporary theatre goers. In doing so, I challenged the parameters of the viewers'/participants'

relationship with the performers while complying with the 1950s themes that the space provided.

The motivation to pursue this topic of research emerged upon reflecting on various discussions and critiques that contemporary dance often receives from the general public; specifically, those framing contemporary dance as inaccessible and unapproachable (Maltais-Bayda 1).[1] From personal experience, and parallel with many Canadian artists living in Toronto, I noticed an overwhelming tension that arises when inviting peers that do not participate in contemporary art forms, such as theatre, dance, and visual arts, to attend live performances. In order to better understand this tension and resistance that exists, I began brainstorming and researching how dance creators might contest this negative aura that contemporary dance has begun to receive.

These observations and concerns led me to the work of the Creative Trust Research Fellowship (CTRF), an organization formed in 2002 that aims to "strengthen the organizational health and sustainability of creative music, theatre and dance companies in Toronto" (Creative Trust "About"). In 2008 the CTRF created initiatives to build a sustainable arts community by improving the financial stability of theatre and dance companies in Ontario (Creative Trust "About"). With assistance from the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA), one of CTRF's initiatives endeavored to engage companies in a comprehensive audience development program (Creative Trust "About"). To determine engagement levels, the CTRF hired consultant Alan Brown and research associate Kelly Hill,

[1] In this case, accessibility refers to topics of approachability and relatable content in contemporary dance forms rather than the politics, the capitalization of dance and its artists, and importance of providing/adjusting entertainment for differently abled persons. These concerns are all relevant and should be carefully considered by our funding bodies and creators; however, this research is focused on exploring new approaches to audience engagement through immersive work. In future projects I would consider adapting and creating work to reach a broader public through greater consideration of accessibility.

who created and administered the "Audience Engagement Survey" to approximately 30,000 audience members of music, dance, opera, and theatre in 2010 (Brown 2).

After reviewing the results of this survey, there are two outcomes that influenced my research. The first is that in Ontario nearly half of dance audiences are comprised of fellow artists, the highest artist-compromised audience being from the fields of dance, music, theatre, and opera (Brown 6-16). I consider this problematic, recognizing the immense population in the city of Toronto and audience members attending performance arts events. Many participants involved in the CTRF's survey responded that seeing live entertainment was a vital activity for them (Brown 10). The second influential discovery is that Toronto dance and theatre audiences believe that members should be able to participate, react and interact in live performances (Brown 25-26).

The survey results suggest that audiences are looking to be stimulated in different ways in live performances, which led me to ask: If contemporary artists develop individual and/or personalized relationships with participants through immersive performances (including central narrative), does this enhance audience engagement in the performance? When asking this question, I had never considered the problematic definition of the word "engagement" when speaking about artists and audiences. Thus, to clarify, when discussing "engagement" the concept refers to the act of engaging, an emotional involvement or commitment or the act of being in gear. When discussing audience engagement, we talk about audiences that are engaged in both experiencing and remembering; audiences go to the theatre to be engaged in the experience of the moment and in the subsequent recollections of it (Radbourne et al. xiv). For me, it was never a matter of subjective opinion corresponding with the "success" of the performance I created; I was never challenging that by creating an immersive work that would sell more tickets, turn a bigger profit, or receive raving critical

reviews. Rather, my aim was to experiment with viewer/participant engagement in the sense of whether audience members could ask themselves: "do I believe the movement?" or "do I follow the narrative?"

While engaging in articles, books and journals I came across *The Audience Experience: A critical analysis of audiences in the performing arts* edited by Jennifer Radbourne, Hilary Glow, and Katya Johnson. This book also features analyses and quotations from the same consultant who created the CTRF's survey, Alan Brown, who reconsiders measuring the success or failure of arts production through demand metrics (5). Brown states: "When discussing audience engagement it is becoming increasingly clear within the arts sector that measuring ticket buying or attendance is not sufficient to provide knowledge of audience engagement" (5). This understanding of engagement leads me to wonder, are there practices or performance forms that contemporary artists can use to help with engagement of audience members new to contemporary performances?

In measuring audience engagement against audience experience Radbourne et al. came across four key attributes in audience experience: authenticity, knowledge, risk and collective engagement (8-9). These four attributes consider the knowledge audiences seek in live arts performances; the economic, and/or social, and/or psychological risk that the audience experiences (Radbourne et al. 8-9). The authenticity captures the emotional engagement in valuing live performance and the "collective engagement," a term used as a way of describing the audience's sense that there were communal meanings (Radbourne et al. 8-9). Translating these attributes into contemporary art practices, I believe the ideas of narrative, relationship (performer/performer, performer/audience, audience/audience), and immersive or unconventional dance spaces, come into play. Using contemporary dance practices as a source of creation, immersive work can create one-of-a-kind experiences and

active spectatorship through the use of performer and participant proximity, adaptive genre narrative, and movement shaped for unconventional spaces.

This thesis presents the pre-production and developments that occurred during the creation of *Nostrovia*, an immersive dance theatre event. Chapter 1, titled "Narratology and Adaptation," discusses how I adapted an existing historical narrative of the Romanov family and their relationship with Rasputin from 1906 until their deaths in 1918. The motivation to adapt a historical narrative, rather than approaching this project as a remount of an existing Anastasia or Romanov story was derived from Hutcheon's argument for adaptation, in *Theory of Adaptation*. While discussing her reasons for adaptation, Hutcheon states:

> There is a wide range of reasons why adapters might choose a particular story and then transcode it into a particular medium or genre. As noted earlier, their aim might well be to economically and artistically supplant the prior works. They are just as likely to want to contest the aesthetic or political values of the adapted text as to pay homage. Whatever the motive, from the adapter's perspective, adaptation is an act of appropriating or salvaging, and this is always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new" (20).

This quote inspired me to explore my own interpretations of the characters, their stories and their personal stakes. As well as pay homage while also contesting common expressions of the Romanovs. Using Aristotle and Gustav Freytag's five act structure, postmodern narratology and Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, I provide the narrative infrastructure for this performance (Aristotle 15; Freytag and MacEwan 114-140; Hutcheon 6-28).

In chapter 2, "Intimacy and Recognizing Consent Culture in *Nostrovia*," I address the question of accessibility in contemporary performance with recognition of the complicated relationship between performer and viewer/participant in immersive theatre. Placing

performers in proximity with guests brings up a series of complications and questions that would not typically arise in a conventional setting; questions surrounding consent, safety, touch, and agency—all which were addressed to empower our performers and viewers/participants during the creation of *Nostrovia*.

In chapter 3, "Choreographic Process in *Nostrovia*," I outline my methodology for shaping movement for the specific space of The Peacock Public House. Generating and creating movement material in conjunction with distinct architecture and surrounding materials, provided in the environment, became important to the framing and visibility of the work. Because the audience would be moving in and out of plotlines while following characters, I questioned how engagement would vary and how sight lines may be interrupted. I wondered: Would viewers/participants become disengaged with a character if they had not seen what had come before, or would they be disengaged by entering part way through a movement phrase or scene? And how could I pre-emptively address these potential problems using choreography and the architecture of the space?

Ultimately, I produced *Nostrovia* with intent to create accessible contemporary performance art that empowered non-contemporary artists through an experience. By selecting and adapting an environment outside of the black box, I customized an intimate atmosphere that was not typically used for dance performance or live theatre. I worked closely with musician and performer Kendra Epik, to create a musical score that supported the narrative of the Romanov family as well as highlighted the 1950s era as a theme. Laura Phillips was the lighting designer, who worked closely with me in order to create the look and feel of the space with her use of light. Our goal was to use light to set and change the mood of a character or scene, and to help viewers/participants focus on specific moments throughout the performance. With the support of music, light, and the performers and crew, I

guided viewers to transcend into a new world that offered a variety of unexpected themes and forms. In this way, the audience entered the story, participated as surrounding characters, and created their own adventure as they experienced the movement, music, and unknown environment around them.

Literature Review | Immersive Theatre

The work of four scholars, Josephine Machon, Rose Biggin, Julia Ritter, and James Frieze, influenced my research into concepts of immersive theatre which are largely drawn from theories of immersive gameplay (Machon 59-63; Biggin 79-93; Frieze 93-103). Immersive gaming has been used to refer to games which invest players in a detailed, pervasive fiction (Frieze 94). Scholarly debates between narratologists and ludologists argue about whether immersive gaming narrative should be included in theatre and literary theory, or whether it should be its own medium (Biggin 158-159). Nevertheless, I will not be discussing the elements of interactivity and exploration at length; instead, I focus on viewer/participant engagement.

Moreover, *Nostrovia* was not created in the hope that viewers/participants would develop a complete understanding of a finished narrative; but rather, the intention was to engage audiences emotionally and sensorially with the characters, environment, and narrative. Although not the main focus, in the performance of *Nostrovia* I referenced gaming influences in immersive theatre with the character of Alexei. In the scene "Alexei Plays a Game," the character places a jewel inside one of three identical Russian dolls. Alexei then maneuvers the dolls around, confusing the viewer regarding the location of the jewel. If the viewers/participants can guess which Russian doll the jewel is under, they win; if they do not, Alexei wins. This is a scene that was created through improvisation and inspired by concepts of interactive and immersive gameplay.

Throughout my research each of these scholars, Machon, Biggin, and Frieze, provided insight into the behavior guidelines, social dynamics, gameplay, and experiences that are fundamental to immersive work. Specifically, Biggin's work titled *Immersive Theatre and Audience Experience: Space, Game and Story in the Work of Punchdrunk* influenced my

understanding of interactivity and my use of "multistories," a term used by Biggin when discussing the layers of narrative (135-157). Machon's work *Immersive Theatre: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*, was informative of what immersive theatre is and how intimacy among viewers/participants is gauged. And finally, Frieze was influential for my understanding of the different types of immersive theatre and participatory performances, with his work *Reframing Immersive Theatre*. While the first three authors listed focus primarily on Punchdrunk's production *Sleep No More* as an example, each of these discussions provided broader insight into immersive theatre and aided in the progression and expansion of my research into specific areas such as the concept of proximity in performance and narrative theory.

My exploration of narratology and adaptation for unconventional performance environments, discussed in chapter one, is primarily influenced by four particular scholars: Aristotle, Gustav Freytag and Elias J. MacEwan, and Linda Hutcheon. Aristotle and Freytag and MacEwan provide early theories of dramatic works and techniques. Their knowledge of structure provided a road map for adapting and creating scenes and action sequences (Aristotle 15; Freytag and MacEwan 114-140). Hutcheon, author of *A Theory of Adaptation*, informed my decisions while creating the story of *Nostrovia.* Adding support to this, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* by Mark Currie, enlightens my knowledge of narrative and the use of the narrator (Currie 1-5). Together these works provide guidance when adapting the historical narrative of the Romanovs.

In an effort to engage, respect, and empower spectators, I drew from publications that address proximity, audience engagement, and participation—which I discuss in chapter two. *Performing Proximity* by Leslie Hill and Helen Paris considers the impact of space and proximity in live performance. This text contributed to the creative process of *Nostrovia*,

particularly the exercises that are explained and examined in the book (Hill and Paris 162-178). The most influential reading material throughout this process was *The Audience Experience* edited by Jennifer Radbourne, Hilary Glow, and Katya Jonson. This work examines different audiences and presents case studies of audience engagement and methodology, which is of central interest in chapter three. These essays supported my creation and distribution of a survey shared with viewers/participants (elucidated in chapter 3), as well as deepened my understanding of how engagement can be measured. *Participation* by Claire Bishop was informative of different types of participatory performances and presented a lineage of participatory works since the 1950s.

Finally, in discussing the history of participatory forms it is integral to my research and understanding of immersive theatre to explore the history of the artists who pioneered this form of contemporary art. In what follows, I will outline key players and/or performances that influenced immersive theatre, making it what it is today.

Historical Referencing in Participatory Forms

It is difficult to determine exactly where participatory art began; it could be argued that site-specific practices have been utilized throughout history in early religious and sacred traditions. Many plays presented in the middle ages could be defined according to current uses of the term immersive theatre. In more recent history, much of what is considered immersive and site-specific work became regular artistic practices in the 1950s. *The Happenings*, made popular by Allan Kaprow, are considered a symbolic precursor in how spectators related to contemporary performance art (Kaprow and Kelley n.p.). *The Happenings* were a series of actions and events that occurred outside of conventional spaces

and venues; locations such as a loft, garage, backyard, or anywhere in an accommodating space where people could be assembled (Sontag 1). The performers were often not studied actors or dancers, and the works did not rely on plot or narrative (Sontag 1). These performances informed ways of presenting art that would challenge the distinct roles of the performers and audiences throughout the twentieth century.

Another example of ground-breaking performance forms is the Judson Dance Theatre, which was a significant movement collective that was influenced by an experimental composition workshop led by Robert Dunn in the 1960s. Many cutting-edge choreographers, performers, composers, and visual artists participated in the events—such as Yvonne Rainer, Deborah Hay, Trisha Brown, Fred Herko, Steve Paxton, James Waring, Carolee Schneemann, David Gordon, Judith Dunn, and Lucinda Childs (Jackson 2). Together they formed a collective of choreographic researchers participating in and creating events at Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich, New York (Jackson 1).

The events that were hosted consisted of classes and concerts that initiated a surge of dance practices in unconventional performance settings (Banes 167-212). These events were often sporadic, rarely repeated, and often not deemed a "dance performance" due to the unconventional nature; rather, "they would be performances or exercises, tasks, or games" (Jackson 1). Because of this, dance critic George Jackson suggests, "it wasn't always possible to distinguish between choreographer and performer" (1). The lack of distinction between performer and choreographer was informative for the creation of *Nostrovia*. The development of set choreographic material and play between viewers/participants and performers was created in collaboration with the performers. This worked to accentuate the difference between characters, through the performers' diverse talents, experiences, and styles.

The events at Judson Church, and by Kaprow in general, are historic and influential movements in participatory art forms, succeeding two major activist-oriented movements that occurred in the 1920s that could also be labeled as participatory art. As a response to World War I, artists began protesting the art of previous generations by resisting the capitalist ideologies (Trachtman n.p.). The Dada movement, which began in Switzerland in the early twentieth century, involved a group of artists who published books and manifestos as well as created paintings and sculptures (Elger et al. 25-27). Their creative work, which included cabaret performances, demonstrations, confrontations, and declarations, questioned society, the purpose of art, and the role of artists themselves.

Dadaism inspired Hugo Ball's night-club performances at the Cabaret Voltaire, which was originally described as "a center for artist entertainment with daily gatherings of musical performances presented by artists" (Segel 325-326). Preceding the opening of the Cabaret, the night-club setting would host performances in the theme of dadaism by artists who did not reduce their work to one primary discipline (Edwards and Wood 340-350). Rather, the artists created and performed in multiple forms in an effort to reconstruct the boundaries that were established through capitalism that aimed to keep the disciplines distinct from one another. The methods used to create *Nostrovia* were similar in the sense that the performers could not concentrate solely on the movement formation of contemporary dance, because the choreography required them to engage elements of theatre and improvisation, as well as engage some singing and playing of musical instruments.

The second social movement that influenced my work was the Soviet and Bolshevik protests that occurred in Petrograd in October 1917. This October revolution influenced my use of narrative and the formation of the storyline by including events that led up to and caused said revolution. The final scene in *Nostrovia* corresponds and hints towards the

aftermath of the following February revolution that caused Tsar Nicholas Romanov the second to surrender his government and step down as the leader of Russia (Harris 2017 n.p.). The Romanov family was then forced into hiding before they were shot and killed during the October revolution. Three years later, theatre practitioner Nikolai Evreinov directed and created *The Storming of the Winter Palace* (1920), a mass spectacle re-enacting the 1917 events. Scholars, such as Clair Bishop, consider this work the creation of a new medium, or the preliminary presentation of participatory theatre (Bishop 10).

Before creating *Nostrovia,* my interest in the Romanov family was merely inspiration stemming from childhood memories. It was throughout the process of understanding participatory art forms that I came across the correlation between the *The Storming of the Winter Palace (1920)*, classified by Bishop as preliminary participatory theatre, and the Romanov family, who were part of the cause of the original revolution (10-11). This relationship between the beginning of participatory performance art and the Romanov family was a serendipitous discovery that influenced my development of the narrative and provided depth and texture to the reasons for my choice of story—one of which was to expand my knowledge of participatory forms, specifically immersive theatre. The events, experiences, and performances of *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, Cabaret Voltaire, *The Happenings,* and the Judson Church movement are formations of site-specific and immersive artworks that only begin to identify and label participatory art forms that came before. These movements inspire and reflect the immersive theatre we know today, and it is my hope to understand the construction of how such works are created.

Chapter 1 | Narratology and Adaptation in *Nostrovia*

Anastasia (1997) was the first movie I had ever seen in a theatre, and the character of Anastasia was one of the only female characters or "princesses" I felt I could relate with in that moment of my life. As a child, I connected with her ferocious independence, unapologetic attitude, and appearance, which I recognized was similar to mine. As an adult, I found myself relating to her more, specifically to her desperate attempts to discover what "home" means. In my adaptation, this 1997 animated narrative slowly transformed as I brought in performers to play the surrounding characters in *Nostrovia*. Through this process of character development, I became more interested in the non-fictional Romanov family and their interweaving stories that piqued the interest of the Russian nation, rather than the independent tale of one family member. The heightened stakes of Tsar Nicholas' sovereignty and the overwhelming responsibility Tsarina Alexandra would take on as the mother of a sick child and the ruler of Russia are examples of complicated situations each real person had in their lives.

The depth of the narrative throughout *Nostrovia* became primarily focused on the fall of the Romanov family, their dynamics, and the many rumors that occurred throughout and after their dynasty. I adapted an existing narrative that I discovered while exploring scholarly works such as Mark D. Steinberg and Vladimir Hrustalëv's historical novel *The Fall of the Romanovs*, outside sources including Edvard Radzinsky's novel *The Last Tsar* among various non-authoritative documents such as websites and magazines articles (see William DeLong; Bernadette Deron; Carolyn Harris; and Simon Seabag Montefiore). These sources substantiate the continuing infatuation with the Romanov family, as well as the view that claims about the family seem more a result of whispers and rumors than factual information.

Furthermore, these texts provided my project with information surrounding the Romanovs' capture, the war, a linear trajectory of the timeline, and actual diaries or letters of the family.

Despite the death of Tsar Nicholas and his family in 1917, their murders still resonate throughout Russian history. This event has inspired conspiracy theorists, government cover-ups, and public speculation, even after the discovery of five of the bodies in 1994 and the remaining bodies in 2007 (Coble 20). As a result of the ongoing infatuation, and since the release of the animated movie, the Romanovs' story has developed into *Anastasia* the Broadway Musical (2016), *the Romanoffs* (2018) an Amazon Prime episodic series, and a newly released Netflix docu-drama called *The Last Czars* (2019).

Building from these sources, this chapter will discuss how the theory of adaptation, postmodern narratology, and Gustav Freytag's five act structure affected my approaches to the project (Freytag and MacEwan 114-140). Specifically, I re-imagined the historic narrative for immersive dance theatre, the character development that occurred as a result of the performers' interpretation, and character arcs, as well as how I collaborated with a musical director and band to evoke an aural narrative. This adapted historical narrative of the Romanov family was developed to entice and engage viewers/participants with pre-existing knowledge of the Romanovs through the form of contemporary dance theatre.

Structure and Theme

I determined that the best way to generate experiences for Toronto audiences was to create what felt like a party, rather than a "dance performance." The site known as The Peacock Public House provided inspiration upon choosing a general theme for the performance, and fortuitously, it was built with the essential technical elements conventional live performances often require. The venue is reminiscent of an old cigar lounge with

furniture such as tables, chairs, barstools, mirrors, and couches all within the 1950s, Mad Men era theme. This time period motivated my adaptation to be developed in relation to the surrounding environment and architecture. A modern manual for adaptors explains that themes are, in fact, of prime importance in novels and plays; similarly, in TV and films themes must always serve the story action and "reinforce or dimensionalize" it, for in these forms storyline is supreme (Hutcheon 11). Expanding this argument, I suggest themes are also significant in immersive dance theatre; therefore, the development of *Nostrovia's* themes and storyline were of focus.

Consistent themes in *Nostrovia* include: the love between family and the power and corruption that come to fruition at a party set in the 1950s. Using these themes I retold and adapted the Romanov story following Freytag's five-act structure, which is based on Aristotle's three-act paradigm utilized in Greek tragedy and comedy (Aristotle 15; Freytag and MacEwan 114-140). This three-act paradigm outlines the procedure for plot construction, organized by a beginning, middle, and end (Aristotle 15). Building from Aristotle, Freytag developed his five-act structure by expanding the organizational breakdown to consist of five parts: the introduction, development, climax, denouement, and resolution (Ray n.p).

In Act One of *Nostrovia*, we were introduced the central motifs and themes of the story; what I believed the audience needed to know before the story began, such as the time period, place, characters, and hints towards an initial conflict—the time period was the 1950s, the place was the Imperial Palace or party space hosted by the Romanovs, and the characters were Tsar Nicholas, Tsarina Alexandra, Alexei, Anya, Duke, and Rasputin. In Act Two, the development or rising action consisted of movement throughout this section that leads the audience to the climax. This act is specific to cause and effect events, and illustrates the dynamic of everything that has been introduced thus far—the stakes begin to magnify and the

dynamic increases. In my adaptation of the story, the rising action progresses with the relationship and trust that begins to develop between Rasputin and the family. This is evident when Rasputin heals Alexei in the "Alexei Falls Sick" scene, which occurred during the "I Put a Spell on You" track (Simone; see table 1 in the Appendix A for an outline of the action sequence).

The climax, or the turning point in the story, occurs at the top of Act Three when the "War" scene happens. As a result of the First World War, Tsar Nicholas decided to vacate the palace and command the Russian forces, leaving Tsarina Alexandra and Rasputin in charge of governing the nation (DeLong n.p.). This historical event initiated the development of particular scenes in *Nostrovia*, such as "Negotiation," which highlights the duet between Duke and Tsar Nicholas, and "Manipulation," which focuses on the dynamic between Tsarina and Rasputin. When Tsar Nicholas left, Russia began suffering heavy losses at war, food shortages, and inflation (DeLong n.p.). The story we were focused on telling with *Nostrovia* was how the family reacted to these events and what went on within the walls of the palace.

In Act Four, during the denouement or the unraveling the characters react and learn from what occurred during the climax, thus things begin to happen in response. Moreover, the story begins to unravel and many of the performers' solos signify the change in character that happens as a result. As things change, Alexandra takes the throne, Alexei struggles with becoming the future heir, Anya hides the relationship between Rasputin and Alexandra, and Duke begins to plot the death of Rasputin. Following these shifts, the characters begin to turn on Rasputin, which results in the "Poisoning" scene, leading us into Act five: the resolution. This final Act is the initiation of something new; following the performers we are entering a new world and the tone of the subject matter is revealed. The death of Rasputin happens, and soon after the Tsar is forced to abdicate (Harris 2017 n.p.; "Nicholas II (1868-1918)" n.p.). A

new government is brought in and the families' lives are taken, demonstrated through a blackout and spotlight on Anya. We end with the song "Dream A Little Dream of Me," and this final image is intended to reference the animated movies song, "Once upon a December," and hint towards the theories of Anastasia surviving (Fitzgerald; Callaway).

This five-act framework, that Freytag offers, provided motivation and purpose for the characters' movements in and out of different environments and the choreography within the space, in order to prioritize and unfold the adapted narrative of *Nostrovia* (Freytag and MacEwan 114-140)—as Hutcheon suggests (11). I called this aspect of choreography, the characters moving from one space to another or from a solo to a duet, pathways. There were many narrative layers and overlapping choreographies in different areas, or "multistories" as Biggins refers to them, therefore the characters/performers utilized different pathways (135). An example of this is when Tsarina moves from the Vanity with Alexei to her "War" scene movements at the table in the Ballroom (see fig. B.1 in Appendix B for the Tsarina's pathway notes). Because each character is distinct and motivated differently throughout the adapted narrative, their pathways remained unique to them. These pathways acted as a road map for each of the characters, and no character followed the same pathway as another. Each character/performer was moving from one action to another, in a different environment depending on their individual narrative and the larger plot.

Characters

The basis of this creation was to use forms that would aid the audience in understanding, relating to, and engaging with contemporary dance forms. In adapting a historical narrative, the understanding of plot and connection to story relies heavily on the characters, as Hutcheon confirms (11). Drawing from Murray Smiths' argument, Hutcheon

suggests "[c]haracters are crucial to the rhetorical and aesthetic effects of both narrative and performance texts because they engage receivers' imaginations through what [Smith] calls recognition, alignment, and allegiance" (11). Furthermore, Hutcheon continues, "[t]he theatre and the novel are usually considered the forms in which the human subject is central, and characters are the focus of adaptations" (11). This information justified and encouraged my intuition surrounding authentic and personal character growth within the performer's creation process. The characters were adapted and developed through my research; from scholarly works, popular sources, and the use of "autobiology"—a method in the creative process, described by Leslie Hill and Helen Paris (162), which will be discussed in chapter 3.

The parameters of The Peacock Public House's spatial arrangement presented limited possibilities of where performers could dance freely, move through the space, or rest. Unlike other participatory performance locales, there was no variation in levels or rooms available where scenes could take place without viewers/participants being distracted or viewing numerous scenes at once. Part of the value in this work is participating intimately with, or investing in, a character to witness a moment of vulnerability or strength. Considering the limitations of the environment, I wanted no more than six performers.

When deciding which characters were necessary to tell the narrative I had adapted, I relied on the amount of significance and depth the real people offered to the climax of the five-act structure (Freytag and MacEwan 114-140). The character of Anya, our narrator, stood out as an obvious choice of character because the primary inspiration for the performance was from the movie *Anastasia* (in which she is the main character). Adding significance to this choice, Anastasia is a central figure who is well known; her death has been a topic of much discussion—especially in light of the controversy surrounding her imposter, Anna Anderson, who claimed she was Anastasia (Haukeness 355). The choice to

have her act as a narrator was also inspired by the performer's additional role as the singer at the party. As the singer, she would have access to the stage and microphone all night and would be a guide for viewers/participants.

Secondly I chose Rasputin, being a notable and mystical Russian target, featured in the 1997 animated film and 2019 Netflix series, as well he is discussed at length in multiple texts for having an effect on the royal family—there was even a popular song written about him in 1978 by the vocal group known as Boney M. Moreover, popular perceptions of Rasputin as treacherous created a perfect "villain" for the adapted narrative.

The next roles assumed were that of Tsar Nichols and Tsarina Alexandra. Reading their letters to each other and historical backgrounds inspired me to develop scenes for the two lovers (Steinberg and Hrustalëv 108-112). Alexei, the only son and heir to the throne, inspired character development due to his hemophilia being the reason for Rasputin's involvement with the family (Harris 2016 n.p.). And the final character to be added was the Duke, who was created through an amalgamation of real people including Prince Felix Yusupov, Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, and right-wing politician Vladimir Purishkevich, who were the close friends of the Romanov family and rumored assassins of Rasputin (Harris 2016 n.p.). The Duke's character went through numerous changes, partially due to recasting and partially due to my uncertainty of whether this figure had a deep enough connection to the family members. His character trajectory and embodiment was the most dependant on the performer, specifically because of this blending of historical figures in conjunction with the source material—being made up solely of non-scholarly documents (see DeLong n.p.; Deron n.p.; Harris 2016 n.p. and 2017 n.p.; and Montefiore n.p.).

While casting the characters, Kendra Epik would always assume the role of Anya because she was the musical director and main vocalist throughout the performance. The rest

of the dancers were cast based on how they embodied the qualities of a character in their natural movement and presence in the first workshop that took place. Following Hutcheon's suggestion that "[c]onflicts and ideological differences between characters must be made visual and audible[,]" I was encouraged to cast performers that could provide context and knowledge to the viewers/participants through their movement style and facial expression (40).

The characters were adapted over the course of the creation process, as the performers and I collaborated on newfound information or natural theories of adaptation. For example, some characters were modified to help viewers/participants relate more in-depth. As mentioned earlier, the historical figure of Alexei suffered from hemophilia (Rogaev et al. 817); however, in an effort to be consistent with the themes of the show (set at a party in the 1950s), we modified the character's illness to alcoholism. A number of adaptations were made depending on the characters' arcs throughout the evening and where each performer needed to be in the space. Music often provided the performers with motivation or movement texture for their character, and these audible changes elevated the narrative and aided the performers in connecting emotionally and physically within their personal and character arcs.

Music Score and Tracks

The musical score and track selection was chosen and made in collaboration with Kendra Epik and musicians Daniel Katsoras and Christin Spencer. Our primary focus was for the music to help set the mood of each scene and to familiarize viewers/participants in the 1950s era. The majority of the musical tracks used to create the score of the performance were originally released between the years 1950 to 1969, and some tracks (released more recently) were adapted to have a doo-wop sound that was popular at that time. Because the

narrative leads up to the death of Rasputin and the Romanov family, we wanted the tracks to follow a trajectory that reflected the narratology. Thus the music progressed from light-hearted/whimsical scores to dark/ominous tones.

In Act One, we focused on giving viewers/participants essential, locational information, such as when and where the experience was set. The opening tracks, “West End Blues,” “Suspicious Minds,” and “Let's Twist Again” (Armstrong; Presley; Checker), provided this information about the era. Hearing those three tracks sequentially set up the performance and notified the viewers/participants that they were entering a story from the past. The tracks are upbeat enough to encourage dancing and participation, and inform viewers of the fun that was being had prior to the conflicts that arise in Act Two.

Conflicts that emerged when selecting the musical tracks usually surrounded the different scenes or moods that were occurring in different spaces. We knew early on it would not be possible for all the rooms to have their own track or volume level, this was due to the noise restrictions and space. The space was not big enough to isolate or filter the sound in the semi-separate areas; the sound flowed between the Ballroom at one end of the space, and the Map Room at the other end (see fig. 1.1 below, for an overview of the space). And because the lighting and music cues were connected, it would have been challenging to have separate tracks in different areas while providing consistent timing for the performers and musicians.

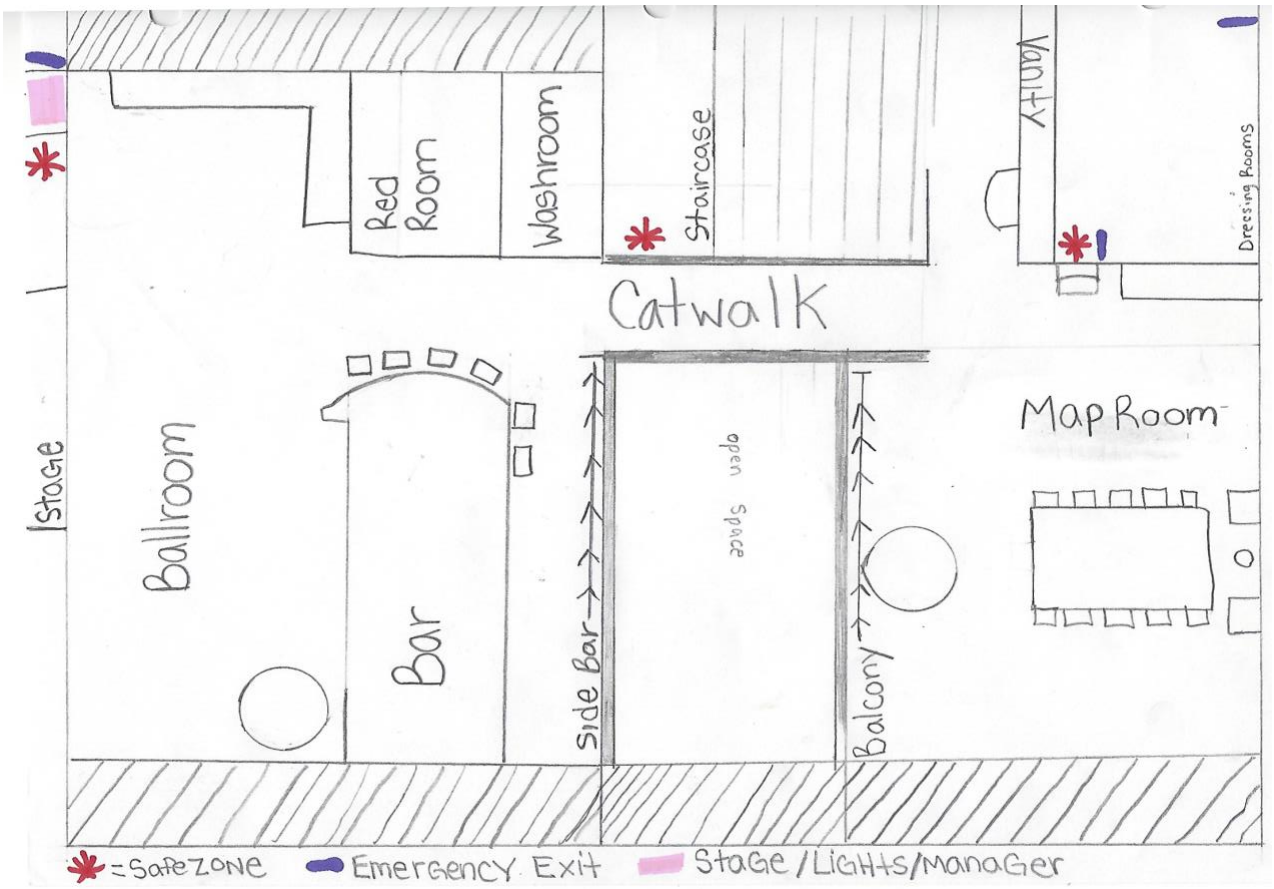

Figure 1.1: Spatial Diagram
This spatial diagram illustrates the area of The Peacock Public House in which *Nostrovia* was presented Jan 16-18, 2020.

Working with live music was a challenging task, especially in the space offered by The Peacock Public House, where the performers and musicians could not always see each other. This performance was heavily reliant on the consistent timing and accuracy that developed, leading up to the performance. It was not always the musicians cueing the performers or the performers cueing the musicians; but rather, it was a joint effort in collaboration (between who cues what and when). The musicians often had to rely on the performers' urgency to make their cue and the performers often relied on the band's timing or sound to initiate movement. This was prominent in the "War" scene; the person initiating the cue often alternated, and the cue depended on Rasputin's arrival to begin the duet with Duke.

In some instances, the timing of the duet and the number of viewers/participants that the performers had to negotiate the movement around caused variations in timing. When we noticed this happening we decided to incorporate a window of silence until the performers swiftly moved into place, at which point Kendra could cue the drums when she saw the performers hitting the wall. The timing for scenes often changed, depending on how the audience moved in the space and on how much negotiating and security the performers would need before they could begin their movement. In the interest of the performance, the characters often had to take their time getting to a scene by interacting with a guest through improvisation or picking up their timing to avoid missing their cue.

The tracks were selected based on what was happening in the scene. For example, if the goal of a scene was to inform the audience of the love and connection between family, such as in Act One, Kendra and I would search for tracks that reminded us of those things—in this particular example, the scene called "Family Ties" resulted in the song "Love is Here to Stay" (Cole). In another example, when Rasputin is dying in Act Five, we chose the song "when the party's over" in order to allude to the end of the performance/party and generate remorse and sentiment for our villain (Eilish). One of my particular favorite tracks is "Lonesome Town" which is heard in the middle of Act Three (Nelson). I engaged with the action that occurs throughout this song for two reasons: first, because it is the first time we begin to see the characters unraveling alone due to the climax of the narrative; and second, because it changed the entire mood of what we thought the performance would be.

When creating the pathways for the performers throughout the space, we often adapted the tracks to inform of the end of a scene or shift in mood. In doing this, the band would extend or shorten tracks to coincide with the movement happening at the time. It involved the band members rearranging lyrics or phrases that I felt were important to inform

the narrative or action that was occurring. For example, in the scene called "Alexei Unravels," in Act Four during the song "Sunday Bloody Sunday," we made sure the line "I can't believe the news today" happened when Alexei catches Rasputin and Tsarina Alexandra (U2). This song was modified to correspond to the initial stage of playfulness between siblings and then the anger and betrayal that motivates Alexeis' solo. Another moment this rearrangement of lyrics happens was in the scene "Poisoning," set to the track "War Pigs" (Black Sabbath). In the moment Rasputin drinks the poison that would later kill her we made sure the lyrics declared: "death and hatred to mankind, poisoning their brainwashed minds." While these details may seem unproductive or irrelevant, they were a focus in the collaboration between the musicians and me, to continue to help engage and inform our audience with knowledge surrounding the plot.

Nostrovia*: A Postmodern Narrative*

Based on the historical background, and the figures and development that occurred in my adaptation of the historical events that took place in Russia in 1906-1918, I interpret *Nostrovia* as a postmodern narrative according to Mark Currie's postmodern narrative theory (1). As Currie explains:

> Postmodern novels are intertextual novels. They are highly aware of their condition in a world pervaded by representation, and of their place in a tradition, or a history of representation, both real and fictional. They belong to a more general cultural condition in which cultural forms recycle, repeat, reshape and rewrite past forms. They use fiction intertexts as ways of incorporating the boundary between fiction and reality within a fiction, and therefore of dramatizing their own relationship with the outside world. They celebrate intermediality, or the representation of relations

> between novels and other media, such as films, television programmes, images or works of history. They particularly favour the identification of a particular, usually well-known intertext, in the form of a novel, often for the purpose of rewriting it, especially from a point of view that was marginalized in, or not represented by, the original (2-3).

Because the historical characters and narrative were referenced throughout the entire performance of *Nostrovia,* and actually the performance itself was created as an amalgamation of fictional rumors and historical facts, my adaptation approaches what Currie identifies as postmodern narrative. The representation of the characters and storyline were inspired and generated from documentation of the Romanovs' lives, as well as from personal inquiries surrounding events that I related to personally or felt inspired by. Further, I was interested in rewriting and recreating this story from the point of view of the characters, not the point of view many speculated. This is not a hero's journey and it is not a happy ending; it is a narrative adapted and fictionalized to relate to the themes/era that The Peacock Public House offered in order to help an audience create their own empowered journey through immersive dance theatre.

Hutcheon's work guided many of my narrative impulses, specifically through her theories of adaptation. The following quote impelled and inspired my adaptation of the Romanovs' historical narrative by using participatory performances: "Being shown a story is not the same as being told it—and neither is it the same as participating in it or interacting with it, that is, experiencing a story directly and kinesthetically. With each mode, things get adapted and indifferent" (Hutcheon 12).

Chapter 2 | Intimacy and Consent Culture in *Nostrovia*

When Bishop discusses *The Happenings* she summarizes them by focusing on the relationship of the audience in these participatory forms and claims that the creator, Alan Kaprow, "sought a heightened experience of the everyday, in which viewers were formally fused with the space-time of the performance and lost their identity as an audience" (102). Conducting performances outside of the traditional theatre setting and collapsing the division between performer and audience bears a series of behavioral and safety politics.

Guidelines put in place to benefit and establish safe spaces throughout *Nostrovia* included two security guards, a stage manager, and three allotted safe spaces for performers if at any point they felt uncomfortable. The security guards were dressed in all black to differentiate from viewers/participants and performers, they were identified at the beginning of the performance to allow them authority from viewers/participants. They offered services to anyone feeling overwhelmed, to help guide people into safe viewing spaces, and to halt access to specific locations. The stage manager was there to set up the top of show, manage any logistical issues, and provide special attention to situations that could be dangerous. This included clearing glassware before scenes took place, stopping the use of cellphones, managing any lights that were not supported through our lighting system, and/or assisting in viewing needs of viewers/participants whose view might be limited by the additional effects of smoke and/or strobe lights. The safe spaces were located behind the exit door in the Map Room (the backstage area), and behind the lighting/sound booth and inside the Red Room.

To support my original inquiry of how to engage audiences throughout immersive work, our viewers/participants were offered a level of agency in co-creating their own interactions through mobile decision making. In other words, during *Nostrovia* the audience was able to walk around the space, grab a drink at their leisure, sit down on any allotted chairs or couches, and interact directly with the performers.

Challenging Barriers and Creating Connections with Audiences

Immersive work breaks an invisible barrier that is often created through the separation of audience and performers in traditional theatres, as theatre scholar Sara Freeman suggests, "the human body displaced on the distant and distinct stage has a very different power than a human body sharing the space of the viewer/participant" (166). This dismantled barrier between viewer and participant has raised a number of key questions and concerns surrounding consent in participatory art. While workshopping the event we attempted to inform, protect, and empower participants and performers using two strategies.

The primary strategy involved offering explicit instruction to participants about what they could and could not do in an initial monologue performed to an intimate group of six to eight people. I wrote this monologue in order to include important statements surrounding the event and answer questions some viewers/participants may have about this specific immersive experience (see fig. B.2 in Appendix B). These statements were later reiterated in a speech that was highlighted and spoken to the entire group. When guests arrived they were directed to check-in and grab a drink until a "host" would come down and ask them to join the party upstairs. The host would vary between three characters, Alexei, Duke, and Rasputin. These characters were chosen to bring guests upstairs through each performer's acting skills, and with a strong incline to have the characters of Tsar Nicholas and Tsarina Alexandra welcome guests to what would later be introduced as their party.

The idea was that while escorting guests upstairs the performers would recite a monologue highlighting important guidelines to follow throughout the course of the evening. This monologue was imperative to my understanding of immersive theatre for two main reasons: One, because it developed immediate personal connections with guests by breaking the fourth wall, and second, it gave guests crucial information about the plot, experience, and

consent without revealing non-essential plot-points that could be answered over the course of the event through personal discovery. The instructions highlighted in the monologue centered on my initial questions around consent in participatory performance.

Subsequent discussion with the performers and a guest audience determined what we as collaborators felt necessary to share. Informing guests that "[t]he adventure is your own to create," aspired to give viewers/participants empowerment and encouragement in choosing what to see and where to go; the words, "many things happen amongst the shadows when people are distracted by the glitz and glamour," attempted to entice guests to explore smaller moments within the performance that might not be as attention grabbing (such as taking time to watch the band or following a character who would abandon the scene to move into a new space on their own); asking guests to "follow us into the night and have a laugh while you sip your poison," encouraged bar sales throughout the night while solidifying the theme of a party; and perhaps the most significant statement made in the entirety of the monologue directed guests to "listen with your gaze and touch only what you must." Though each performer was given the choice to rearrange and re-configure these statements, depending on their character's narrative, each performer made a choice to speak this last line clearly and menacingly as a means to emphasize that participants should not be touching the performers or fellow guests.

These points above would then be reiterated by the character of Tsar Nicholas after the first scene. When they were spoken by this character there was authority established, through the additional directives of the staging, lighting, and use of a microphone. By hearing similar statements by two different characters we believed it would give the viewers enough information to encourage safe participation and encourage discovery throughout the course of the evening.

The secondary strategy for informing, protecting, and empowering participants and performers, made use of a gesture or physical touch that was often used to relocate participants from unsafe areas in the space or to encourage participants to join the performers in different areas or rooms. In immersive work, creators and performers are often putting viewers/participants in intense and unknown situations. As the creator, I became infatuated with providing an opportunity for participants to choose the level of intimacy they shared with a performer. After consulting with intimacy coaches and performers from *Sleep No More,* I discovered exercises and methods that performers can employ to honor the personal space and the choices of participants.[2]

For example, one method that each performer utilized in the event was a gesture we call "the offering." The offering is an arm gesture where the performer would enter the viewers/participants social space and then stick out their hand towards the participant they wished to interact with. This gesture was to be performed slowly and with direct eye contact, while also offering viewers agency to accept or decline the invitation of the performer. If a participant declined, the performer could clarify their offer with their voice by saying "would you like to follow me?"—which also opened up space for a number of participants to join them. If the participant continued to decline, the performer would move on to a different participant. If the participant joined hands with the performer, the performer would then move closer and enter the participant's intimate space. They would then place a hand on the small of the participant's back to test their resilience of touch and pressure before guiding the participant to a new location. This method is used in *Sleep No More* and analyzed by theatre and performance scholar James Frieze as a means of creating a non-verbal contract of consent, to form some level of intimacy between participant and performer (50-54).

[2] In order to ensure anonymity, I will not disclose the names of my interlocutors from *Sleep No More.*

In the initial stages of workshopping *Nostrovia*, I worked with seven dancers at The Peacock Public House. The primary function of these workshops was to discover movement influences from the space, prepare the performers to move in physical manners that differ from within a studio setting, and to understand how touch can be perceived. Upon participating in intimacy workshops and speaking to performers who had experience in immersive works, I utilized two common practices. First, I directed the dancers to find a partner and to label themselves as numbers one and two. Then I instructed "dancer one" to close their eyes and for "dancer two" to place their hands on "dancer one." For ten minutes "dancer one" was asked to close their eyes and to limit their contact with "dancer two" to the hands only. In this formation, we played with various movements: moving slowly, moving quickly, leading the partner with their eyes closed and having said partner lead the way. The partners would then switch positions and the exercises would be repeated.

After both partners experienced the space with their eyes closed we discussed the sense of touch, determining that there was a soft touch and a hard touch. The soft touch was described as a gentle hand, there for protection and guidance. The hard touch identified moments when the leading partner was trying to move drastically or stop the following partner from colliding with someone or something, or moving into an unsafe area. We discussed hand placement and where on the body felt the most comfortable and stable for the partner to place their hand. Most of these answers included the shoulders, mid-back, and bicep areas. We decided as a group that key approaches to safe and appropriate physical touches were to use clear eye contact, hands always needed to be in view, and hands were always placed on the side or mid to upper back of the participant. This exercise helped us establish safe, consenting areas of the body to arrange the viewers/participants throughout the event if needed, while recognizing that all viewers/participants are different and that,

potentially, not all would have an understanding of immersive theatres' broken barrier between audience and performer.

In *Theatre Audiences: a Theory of Production and Reception*, Susan Bennett theorizes participation and audience, suggesting that the business of buying a ticket, agreeing to watch the action, and so on constitutes a "social contract" between spectator and production (204). With the use of video and photography *Nostrovia* was marketed as being an immersive theatre event, and when consumers purchased a ticket they were informed of the space and nature of the production through an email. This was an attempt to manage expectations for viewers/participants who might not have experienced immersive dance theatre. It provided essential information that informed consumers that they would be stimulated in varying ways, different from that of a live performance in a theatre setting.

Throughout the event, there was a series of "precious moments" that were inspired by Punchdrunk's concept of one-on-one or one-to-one interaction; an intimate moment between performer and a single viewer/participant (Jupp n.p.). With the recent uprising of immersive experiences, creators are continually attempting to create more intimacy or one-of-a-kind experiences for audiences. Punchdrunk's concept of one-on-one, or one-to-one explores direct connection between performer and audience member, space and individual interaction, and the intensity of these scenes, which is highly conductive to facilitating immersive experience (Biggin 90). Furthermore, Machon elaborates that this concept "defines work where the piece is designed for one audience member. This may involve one artist performing for/with you within the piece or could involve any number of performers in the work to facilitate, the individual experience" (22).

Exploring my own methods, and in understanding the spatial limitations, the dancers and I created moments that were not always specific to one guest; but rather, specific to a

small groups of guests. I recognized that there may be discomfort in abandoning friends and other participants that could cause guests to remove themselves from the experience. Attempting to determine the level of willingness of the participants to engage is nearly impossible and an endeavour that could result in unsafe consequences for either the performer or the viewer. The challenge we came across, upon presenting *Nostrovia*, was that we found Toronto audiences that attended were not as experienced with immersive performances and intimate one-on-one performances. Instead of creating numerous one-on-ones or insisting that guests jump into unknown situations alone, we decided to offer experiences to small groups of one, two, and three people.

As mentioned earlier, these experiences were called precious moments, a term I came upon when thinking about these special and intimate experiences viewers/participants have to take with them when they leave. We considered a precious moment anything from a quick look directly from a performer to a participant in the exposed space, or at the extreme, a few minutes alone with a performer in an enclosed, separated space. These moments included, but were not specific to, a performer mentioning a participant by name, a performer offering their hand, a performer guiding a participant into a safer position, or a performer toasting with the participant. In a more secluded precious moment, the character of Duke is enclosed in a tight space with one or two individuals who witness him poison the drink that is later given to Rasputin. The Duke performer was given one goal in that particular precious moment, he was to attempt to have the participant(s) poison the drink without giving them any verbal direction but strictly gestural movement and eye contact. If he was successful, the participant would be responsible for the poisoning of Rasputin; if he was not successful the Duke would have the participant exit the enclosed space and open up the door for the audience to see him place the

poison in the glass. In the end, the performer was successful five out of six times in having the participant poison the drink. This is a defining moment of interactivity in *Nostrovia*.

Chapter 3 | Choreographic Process in *Nostrovia*

When creating *Nostrovia*, my primary goal was to choreograph and generate short solos or vignettes on each individual performer in a specific location in the space. I intended for the viewers/participants to be within an arm's reach of the performers, and that they would have moments of direct eye contact. The performers would never be backstage or have the ability to turn around and face away from the viewers/participants. The performers were all primarily dancers and although they have studied acting it was not their immediate discipline. I wanted the material to feel authentic, a term used to capture the way audiences seek truth and believability and one of the four attributes discussed by Radbourne et al. (9). I wondered how we could develop movement material that the audience could relate to and the performers could execute safely. The choreography was created in collaboration with the performers; through improvisation, "autobiology" (a movement generating technique used by Leslie Hill and Helen Paris), and Rudolph Laban's eight efforts (162). It was then established for the five performances.

Rudolph Laban was a dancer, choreographer, and theorist known for his work in movement analysis and notation (Davies 45). Through his work with space and effort, he identified eight of the most common effort movements (Davies 45). These effort movements were pressing, slicing, flicking, dabbing, wringing, floating, gliding, and punching (Davies 45- 6). Warren Lamb explains that "[t]hese can be considered basically like eight notes of music, which may be composed in an ultimate number of ways. It is the composition of efforts which is expressive; everyone is normally capable of using them all" (qtd. in Lovell 19-34). Prior to the creation of *Nostrovia* I was familiar with using Laban movement analysis as an improvisational technique, but I was also curious about using it to develop an exercise I created to generate material between partners. The exercise was called Battle Royal, and it

began with two dancers facing each other. From there I named two body parts, saying for example “left elbow to right shoulder.” This guided one partner to use their left elbow to make contact with the other partner’s right shoulder. The receiving partner reacted to the movement directed at them, and often this included isolating, contracting, or dodging the primary action. I would typically continue the exercise until it began to develop a short phrase of movements that would be focused on attacking and reacting with atypical body parts. When the movements were established, I played with the speed, force, and focus of each attacking or reacting motion.

Using the Laban technique, I adapted the exercise to use the eight efforts that Laban identified. Instead of saying “left elbow to right shoulder,” I directed the left elbow to right shoulder” in a punching effort. This allowed me to produce more informed movement choices that were relevant to the scene or narrative I was attempting to translate. I later adapted this exercise for a soloist, in which the same direction was given and the dancer was asked to use both of their own body parts to attack and react. This caused an interesting fluid effect in a soloist body, different to the feel created with a duet or trio. This method was used in two duets, scenes called: “Manipulation” and “Siblings”, a trio scene called “Catwalk”, and Rasputin’s first solo (see table 1 in Appendix A for an outline of the action sequence).

Working in the contemporary dance field for the past eight years, I have practiced numerous ways of generating material. From my experiences, one of the most common forms new choreographers are using is movement creation and development from a personalized journal writing exercise. In 2016 I participated in a workshop titled the *Emotional Body* with Bonnie Kim, who had been a dancer at Winnipeg Contemporary Dancers and worked under Artistic Director Tom Stroud. In this workshop she used a journal exercise to access our memories and then create a solo work using the phrases or words we highlighted. This is an

exercise from Tom Stroud, a Professor at University of Winnipeg, who is known for his work in integrating theatre and dance. Stroud is a certified instructor in the *Emotional Body* and CL4 in ALBA Emotion, which is a psycho-physiological technique to help actors create and control real emotions. Having participated in three of Bonnie Kims' *Emotional Body* workshops, I saw how certain exercises used to develop movement allowed dancers to move in and out, and change emotional states safely and with ease. This led me to question the use of these exercises, and their effect in immersive theatre.

In *Nostrovia,* the performers were to be portraying characters that would move in and out of different emotional states throughout the course of the evening while viewers/participants would be within arms-reach. Therefore, I investigated where these journal exercises had originated and if there had been a term used to describe them. I was curious about whether there were any theatre or dance companies who had experience in using it in other participatory practices. This led me to *Performing Proximity* by Leslie Hill and Helen Paris who are co-directors of Curious, a London based theatre company, and who have described this performance-making method as "autobiology" (162). Hill and Paris describe this, and many other journal exercises that are used to explore connections, as a method of being "between the body and the mind, biology and biography," that draws "on participants' 'gut feelings'" in order to create "autobiographical material 'straight from the heart'" (Hill and Paris 162). I became curious about these exercises as a main source of creation for the performers to reflect on the experiences of the characters. Below is an example of an exercise that Hill and Paris present:

Automatic writing - fight , flight, freeze

> *Write for five minutes on each of these words fight/flight/freeze. In automatic writing mode, try not to take your pen off the paper. Write with your whole body engaged. If you "freeze" keep your pen moving across the paper, whatever comes out.*
>
> *Take a moment to read each of your automatic writing responses. Underline words, fragments, sentences that you are interested in. Perhaps they surprise you, or you are curious to take them further or you are particularly pleased or shocked by them…..Find a gesture from the words. Create a small performance moment* (170-171).

To choreograph the character solos I used this exercise and adapted it, slightly, to fit within the parameters of the narrative. I began by talking to each performer about their character, and their character's story. The performers knew which character they were playing, and thus came to rehearsal with a few facts about their character that interested them. We discussed these facts for a short period, and then I asked them a series of questions: What does the character feel the most challenged with? What does the character have to lose? What does the character have to gain? When they answered I then asked the performers to explain their answers and thought processes, and this often led us to a discussion or personal story about the performer. From there, I dug deeper, choosing an adjective, personality trait, or emotion that was expressed, as a basis for the exercise by Hill and Paris (see below example of words or phrases the performers used to write about).

Primers for journal exploration, arranged by character and their chosen phrase:

Alexei - A time you felt like you lost control.

Anya - What home means to you.

Duke - A time you tried to impress someone.

Rasputin - What the word Mystical means to you.

Tsarina Alexandra - A time you felt like an imposter.

Tsar Nicholas - A time you felt you were losing your power

Following this activity, I guided performers to highlight words or phrases that enticed them to generate a small movement, and together we combined these movements and placed them in a spot in the space that we felt embodied what they had written about. As a result of this process, Alexei's solo took place on the stairs and on the bench, Anya's solo took place near the stage, Duke's solo took place at the vanity, Rasputin's took place in the Map Room, Tsarina Alexandra's solo took place across from the window in the curtains, and Tsar Nicholas' took place, originally on the negotiation table, but was then moved to a similar table in the Ballroom to accommodate his choreographic pathways. The solos would then be transposed for group sections, specifically the ending scene.

Using Hill and Paris' "autobiology" technique allowed the performers to move in and out of emotional states and generate choreography that was personal to them (162). The solos and phrases that I believe this approach was especially effective for, and caused me to have an emotional response, was Tsarina Alexandra's solo at the curtains and Alexei's solo at the stairs. "[A]utobiology" is a method of creating that I intend to understand further, specifically the science and use of the breath and response within the "autobiology" form (Hill and Paris 162). I believe utilizing this choreographic method was successful in creating dance for interpersonal relationships between performers and viewers/participants. The technique was, in my opinion, conducive to creating choreography for immersive dance theatre because of its perceptive focus on the relationship between the audience, performer, and experience, which, as discussed in chapter 1, separates site-specific from immersive dance work.

Dancers and architecture can disrupt established logics and views of audiences by blurring the boundaries between bodies (insides and outsides), buildings, and space; and thus creating and working in the in-between spaces can be useful. This is doubly evident in those dances set in and around buildings (Briginshaw 184). In *Nostrovia*, we use the tables, chairs and even the bar as secondary dance partner. In everyday life these common objects are often not used outside their primary purpose, a chair to sit on, a table to eat on, a bar to sit at. To continue my investigation into immersive space and shaping movement for unconventional settings, I question whether the disruption of space is always occurring due to the physicalized movement that is not common to pedestrians or non-dancers. Approaching pedestrian space in unfamiliar ways and deconstructing the original value and/or use of a given space or object will disrupt common logics or visualization that recognize space and objects in taken-for-granted ways. Still, I wonder: Are there approaches in which we can produce choreographed physical movement while working with the existing themes and aesthetics of the unconventional, possibly pedestrian environment and its objects, or even relating to the object and/or space itself?

Using improvisation in the creative process of *Nostrovia* began to heighten environmental awareness in dancers and evolved into a movement that was aimed to compliment the structure, texture, and architecture. Improvisational structures permitted the dancer elements of freedom and creativity in making moves and sequences of movement. Indeed, dancers can employ any number of compositional strategies and creative responses to pursue an outcome where the result is not fully known (Ribeiro and Fonseca 71-85). Upon engaging in an improvisational score that asked dancers to examine a small portion of the

space and emulate it in their body, they would emulate its shape, line, texture, and dynamics. For instance, the performers were able to choose a small item, such as a scratch on the wall, or a bigger item, such as the bar or stool. Through a process of physicalizing the object, they would develop a greater understanding for its relationship in space, and thus provoked personal interpretation of the space and its objects. This would result in the performer generating movement that was architecturally and texturally in theme of the object or environment surrounding them.

After interpreting the object in their body I would ask them to use that object as a scene partner by sharing its weight or physicalizing its shape. The result of this exercise developed three sections of the work: the opening solo performed by the characters Alexei, Duke, and Rasputin, during the track "West End Blues;" the opening movements at the beginning of the song "War Pigs;" and a select part of Anya's solo, during the song "Angel Eyes" (Armstrong; Black Sabbath; Fitzgerald). The movements of these scenes acted as a dialogue between body and space, and were effective in continuing to convey the overall theme of the work. Utilizing improvisation as a form of generating choreography was effective in creating a symbiotic relationship between space and performer. Through this method I formed much of the movement that was presented in *Nostrovia*; however, the intent behind creating the movement lacked the narrative depth I was attempting to draw out to aid the audience. This led me to reconsider the procedure in which I used improvisation to create choreographic material, and its effects in immersive dance theatre. In an effort to improve material in later iterations, the improvisation method I used may need to be reformed to include the narrative, such as, the tone or theme the improvised work should have.

Nonetheless, improvisation was helpful in creating and shaping movement for the specific space or object.

Shaping Movement for Non-Dance Spaces

In shaping movement for unconventional spaces I realized that there are challenges that arise in the absence of traditional theatre formatting; various complications came to the fore such as visibility, spatial constructs, and viewer/participant interference. Navigating these obstacles was challenging, I often did not know where viewers/participants might position themselves. In an effort to create for viewers/participants I used methods of selective visibility and proxemics to help choreograph movement in the unconventional space.

In the world of stage lighting it is of prime importance for lighting designers to achieve visibility through a technique known as selective visibility—which refers to using light strategically to ensure the subject/object of focus is visible (Pilbrow 7). Moreover, each member of the audience must be able to see clearly and correctly those things that they are intended to see (Pilbrow 7). This methodology was used for black box theatres and is pertinent to lighting for theatre in general; the concept of selective visibility became fundamental in creating pathways for the audience and directing the audience's attention in unconventional performance spaces (see fig. B.1 in Appendix B for an example of the pathways).

In addition to the significance of visibility, I also considered how the use of, and movement through, space affects the relationship between performers and viewers/participants. I wondered: How can I engage viewers/participants in unique, one-of-a-

kind experiences while implementing consent culture in choreography? In an effort to account for the different areas of the venue that viewers/participants might occupy, I considered how the performance could be viewed from the four different places.

In addition to the method of "autobiology," Hill and Paris discuss "audience-performer encounters" to explore the relationship between proximity and intimacy in live performances (5). To do this, Hill and Paris build from the "landmark work" of 1960s anthropologist Edward T. Hall and his "science of proxemics" which, they acknowledge, is still significant today (6). As Hill and Paris explain, Hall's concept of proxemics examines the "distances between people in terms of public, social, personal and intimate space" (5) (see image 2.1, on page 47). Hall's investigation, Hill and Paris conclude, led to the recognition that kinesthesia shapes experiences of space; therefore, Hill and Paris argue, performers play a significant role in creating intimacy with audiences through the relationship with proximity (5-10). Hall's proxemics model offers me a framework to explore and describe the complications that arouse while shaping movement.

During the performance of *Nostrovia*, the action moved through the different areas of the larger space, multiple times (see fig. 1.1 on page 25 for reference to the spatial diagram throughout this chapter). Our lighting designer, Laura Phillips, was able to use selective visibility to guide the viewers/participants through the space at specific moments, in order to help them follow the narrative. One of the moments we were able to choreograph the audience in this way occurred in the transitions between the scenes "Alexei Falls Sick," "War," and "Negotiation" (see table 1 in Appendix A for an outline of the action sequence).

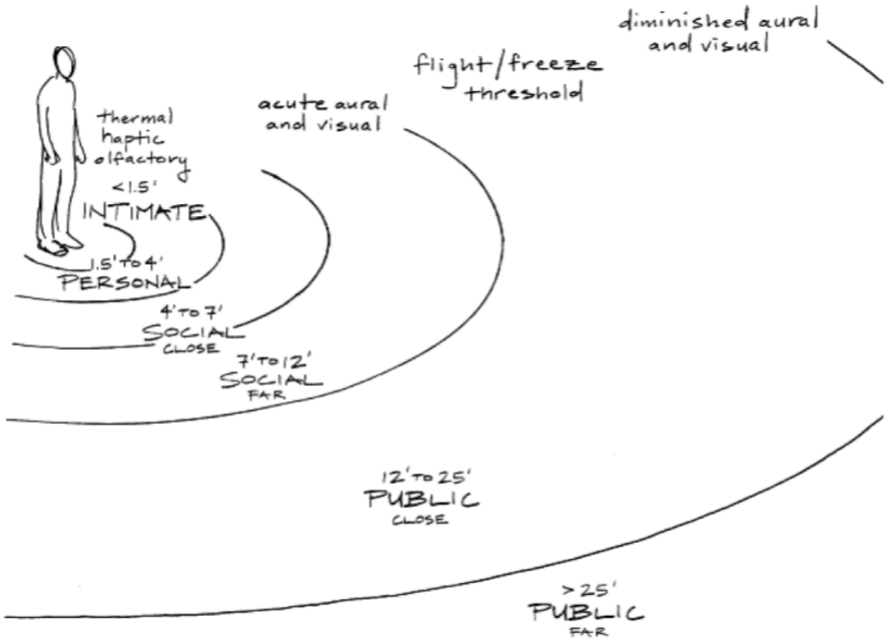

Illustration 1.1 Proxemic zones
[Sketch by Angrette McCloskey]

Figure 2.1: Proxemic Zones
Edward T. Hall's diagram of proxemic zones (Hill and Paris 7).

Further, these moments demonstrate different relationships with proximity that developed between the performers and the viewers/participants. With this transition (mentioned above) the audience was directed to view the "Alexei Falls Sick" scene during the track "I Put a Spell on You" from various locations (Simone): such as the "personal" space, sitting at the table where the action was happening; the "social" space, standing at a distance around the table; or the "public" space, across the two windows near the bar (Hall qtd. in Hill and Paris 5). Using light, this scene could be enjoyed from any of these areas; from various vantage points viewers/participants could see the facial expression of the performers ("personal" space), the shape of the bodies and some facial expression ("social" space), and the shape and of the body as well as fellow viewers'/participants' reactions and movement

("public" space) (Hall cited in Hill and Paris 5). We placed two lights in the corners of the Map Room and one light hung from a ledge in the ceiling that faced the table where the action was about to occur.

There were two moments during the Saturday shows specifically, where two viewers/participants were located within the intimate space, or "personal" space, of the performer (Hall qtd. in Hill and Paris 5). The character of Rasputin turned around to lean on the side ledge in the Map Room but a viewer/participant was located where they were meant to lean. Without hesitating, the performer leaned in and placed their hands on either side of the viewer/participant and adapted the movement phrase to complete the choreography. Without touching the viewer/participant the performer was able to create an intimate and unique moment that only this viewer/participant was able to experience.

In another example, when transitioning from this scene to "War," we cleared the space slightly to allow for the characters to move swiftly to other rooms from their "War" actions. After the "War" actions occurred, the character of Alexei climbed on to the table and tilted the light that was hanging from the ceiling and faced it towards the "Negotiation" scene that was about to begin. This slight movement was a clear transition for the audience to shift their focus from one scene to another. The "Negotiation" scene was visible through two of Hall's proximities: on the catwalk looking through one window or sitting at the dining table located in the Map Room, both of which related to the "personal" space; or through two open windows close to the bar, the "public" space (Hall qtd. in Hill and Paris 5). These examples illustrate how we choreographed the audience to move through the space, achieved visibility

of important scenes that were influential for the narrative, and created different levels of connection and engagement through the use of proximity.

A method I used to empower the audience in their decision making and demonstrate other modes of viewing scenes, when confined to the spatial constructs of the space, was directing the focus and attention of performers. During the "Angel Eyes" track, the character of Tsarina Alexandra performed a solo at the ledge of one of the windows—the solo took place in and around the window area (Fitzgerald). Depending on where the viewer/participant was situated, Tsarina would be hidden by the frame, wall, table, or curtains. To ensure viewers/participants would be able to see certain parts of the performers' solo from all angles, I choreographed the performers to indicate the different viewpoints that were available through movements. Tsarina began the solo by looking at the viewers/participants that were located in the "public" space (Hall cited in Hill and Paris 5), across the two windows, focusing her gaze at the mirror to indicate to the audience that they could view the solo through the mirror as well as directly in front of them. When she transitioned her focus to the ledge she prompted the viewers/participants in her "social" space (Hall qtd. in Hill and Paris 5), signaling that she would be moving into their space and that they could transition to the catwalk for a different view where they could also watch through the mirror or head on.

In short, through the use of direct focus we indicated to the viewers/participants the multiple viewpoints they could use to their advantage. This method was used for many of the scenes that had restrictions to the visibility, including: "Rasputin's Lair," which was located in the Map Room; "Preface to Alexei Falling Sick," in the Map Room; "Duke Watches in the Shadow," located on the ledge; "Alexei's Downward Spiral," located in the stairwell;

"Anya's Dream," located in the Ballroom; and the beginning of "Poisoning," located at the bar.

In researching ways to create and maneuver immersive theatre in the confines of an unconventional theatre setting, I noticed a gap in scholarly discourse regarding the question of how companies create safe spaces for audiences and performers. Specifically, I was looking for details about how creators choreograph the performers in setting a scene, or preparing the viewers/participants to watch a large choreographic section. I wondered how I could safely indicate to viewers/participants that they needed to move if, for example, they were standing in the Ballroom and watching a scene take place at the bar. The various ways that I was able to provide insight to the viewers/participants (discussed earlier in this chapter), helped me to address this gap in the literature—techniques such as offering guidance through selective visibility, as well as eye contact and touch.

I consider these methods to be small gestures or procedures to manage expectations and empower viewers/participants in consenting rituals. In other words, these methods choreographed how the performers transformed and maneuvered viewers/participants in particular locations prior to dancing large movement phrases that required the viewers/participants to be in, what Hall might consider their "public" space (qtd. in Hill and Paris 5). Recognizing this, we developed a four step approach to direct viewers/participants when a scene or action sequence required them to be outside of a performers "intimate," "personal," or "social" space—as Hall describes them (qtd. in Hill and Paris 5). Step one included a nonverbal cue from a security guard, suggesting viewers/participants move to a safer location. Step two involved a performer entering the space and slowly preparing for the

scene—they may have interacted with a prop or become curious with an aspect of the space. At this point, the performer could use a verbal cue to transition viewers/participants to a safer location, such as "Why don't we go grab a drink at the bar?" or "Why don't you join me on the couch?" The third step included the performer creating what I call the Invisible Bubble; a technique for opening up the space prior to performing, so that the performer would not lose momentum or beginning the movement material awkwardly. To create the Invisible Bubble, the performer would walk or run around the space they needed in a circular fashion until viewers/participants backed up. Once the space cleared somewhat the performer could then begin the movement phrase. This created an invisible wall or line that viewers/participants subconsciously knew not to enter and avoided.

These approaches were often enough indication to inform the audience to remain in, or return to, the "public" space (Hall qtd. in Hill and Paris 5). Because the performance was live and there was access to alcohol, there were moments when these approaches fell short. This is when step four would be used: a security person or performer, depending on the situation, would walk towards the viewers/participants and swiftly guide them to a safe location using a hand behind their back and a soft touch. Determining these consenting rituals revealed the importance of guiding the audience with respect and the insight that I could spend more time choreographing viewers'/participants' movement, than that of the performers.

While producing and creating *Nostrovia,* I felt enamoured with creating physical movement that was informative of the atmosphere, narrative, and space. Choreographing movement for unconventional spaces and creating six different pathways and vocabulary for

performers was an element of immersive work I had prepared for. After reflecting on the performances, I recognized scenes and transitions that functioned well and moments that fell short. The consistent factor in each of the successful moments was a clear use of focus utilized with the performers, light, and sound. When a light transition would happen, it implied to viewers/participants that the focus was shifting or the mood was changing; and when a performer consistently gestured or focused attention, it provided information to the viewers/participants regarding where to move or where to look. These moments were scattered throughout *Nostrovia* and helped in guiding the viewers/participants through the narrative that was unfolding.

I believe these moments could have been more consistent, and the use of sound could have been adjusted to intrigue viewers/participants in different opportunities. More control and manipulation over the volume of the music might have proved useful for guiding the audience; if the sound could have been increased in volume, it may have helped in shifting viewer/participant attention—possibly enticing some viewers/participants to move into a different room. Alternatively, if the sound was decreased it might have provided different understandings, such as the ending of a scene. I now understand that when creating an immersive dance theatre performance it is fundamental to provide viewers/participants with visual, choreographic, lighting, and audio cues to inform and guide their experience through space.

Reflections on Surveying

In the initial stages of this research I intended on surveying viewers/participants who attended *Nostrovia*, between January 16-18, 2020, in order to support my research and provide insight to what audiences saw and how they engaged. I was inspired by consultants, scholars, and organizations who were focused on understanding the participation and engagements of the audience in the performing arts—scholars such as Radbourne et al.; consultants Alan Brown and Jennifer Novak; and organizations like The Creative Trust that are invested in encouraging and building opportunities for their arts communities.

I initially created a survey to be distributed and filled out by viewers/participants at the end of each performance of *Nostrovia.* Towards the opening night of the performance I questioned the negative effects of asking people to submit to their responses directly after stepping out of the experience. I wondered: What qualifies the end of the experience? With respect to experiences that I was focused on creating for audiences, from my perspective, these begin from the moment you decide to purchase a ticket and continue through: the exchange, the information you are provided prior to the performance, when you walk through the doors, and until you leave the space. Atmosphere and environment is reflective of the people that are performing, viewing, working or participating. As Radbourne et al. inform, discourse amongst viewers/participants is one of the four indicators called collective engagement that comprises an index of the audience experience (9).

In an effort to engage audiences in the experience of *Nostrovia* I felt it was disingenuous to have them fill out a survey about the performance immediately after they left the performance space. Buying alcohol was at the liberty of the viewers/participants throughout the entire evening, and I was concerned this could sway the authenticity of the comments or responses in the survey. I questioned: How would being prompted to reflect and

write about what you just saw or experienced hinder your overall experience? After considering this question, I chose not to take a risk compromising the experience and to respect the boundaries of the viewers/participants; allowing them to converse amongst themselves and leave the location when they were ready.

To accommodate this decision while still inquiring about audience experiences, I emailed a survey to all ticket buyers the following week. The survey was inspired by the original survey used by the Creative Trust and in *The Audience Experience* (Radbourne et al.). Receiving these back brought to my attention the subjectivity and diplomacy of the survey. The surveys were submitted through email and then a third party would access and combine the data to be submitted to me anonymously. When reading the surveyed data and comments, they felt biased. I knew a large amount of the people that purchased tickets, or the performers did; some were friends and family, and some were strangers. Pre-existing knowledge of *Nostrovia*, obtained through personal connection (being a friend or family member of me or one of the performers), sways the opinions of the survey and does not allow for clarity in the answers that I hoped these surveys would provide me. Therefore, I decided not to include the survey responses in my research as I believe it is problematic to include potentially biased data from viewers/participants. Nonetheless, I have included this blank survey as means for understanding the data I was attempting to receive (see fig. B.3 in Appendix B).

Concluding Thoughts

Nostrovia is a versed production of methods used to create and understand immersive dance theatre. Originating from questions about adapting historical narratives, use of space, audience engagement and consent, this thesis demonstrates how narrative, proximity among performers and participants, and movement shaped for non-dance spaces can be used as tools to engage, protect, and empower audiences. I used ideologies from performance and dance scholars and creators who have come before me, such as creator Hugo Ball, and scholars Rose Biggin, and Linda Hutcheon, and from these insights I have combined what I believe to be three key components of creating an immersive dance theatre experience: Narrative development, creating consensual intimacy, and shaping movement (of both performers and viewers/participants) in unconventional spaces.

In chapter 1 I explained how I adapted the historical narrative using theories of adaptation from Linda Hutcheon and understandings of drama from Aristotle and Gustav Freytag. Chapter 2 discussed the politics of consent and guidelines for intimacy in immersive theatre, and how I pre-emptively attempted to create safe spaces for audiences and performers. Throughout Chapter 3 I outlined my creative process and how I used methodologies, such as improvisation and Hill and Paris' "autobiology" to develop authentic movement qualities and shape movement for unconventional spaces (162).

In this first iteration of *Nostrovia* and the adaptation of the historical Romanov narrative, I recognize three areas in which I would modify, develop, and elaborate in later presentations. In remounting *Nostrovia* I would rework the story, utilize the entire space of The Peacock Public House, and push the dynamics between performers and viewers/participants. In developing my adaptation of the narrative I did not want to commit to telling a long, extended story; but rather, I aimed to showcase action that I believed was

relevant to understanding the Romanov family, in a way that had not been told in other productions. Moreover, feeling sorrow for Rasputin and Tsar Nicolas is often not acknowledged in the telling of the Romanov narrative. Extending this story into a more lengthy work could give viewers/participants more time to connect with the characters, and could result in a more elaborative ending that offers deeper insight into the family and their deaths.

Using the entire space would allow for the viewers/participants to get lost throughout the performance, by obscuring the view of the "multistories" happening simultaneously (Biggin 135), and thus focusing attention on particular portions of the larger story; moments and/or characters. I believe this would add mystery to the narrative and characters; audiences could engage solely on the scene in front of them (or the scene they are following) and not be tempted by other action sequences.

Each character was created in collaboration, between me and the performers. Towards the end of the show run, the performers were engaging more confidently with viewers/participants in ways that provided one-of-a-kind experiences and unique moments of individuality. These moments were the most interesting for me to see develop over the course of the process. In future iterations, I am interested in solidifying some of these moments and continuing to push the change in dynamic between performer and viewers/participants. Seeing audiences and performers gain confidence throughout the course of the hour long performance is a beautiful quality of immersive theatre.

In reflecting on the experience there is one choreographic area I wish I had focused on more. It is challenging to predict the whereabouts of audiences with immersive work, but there are methods to guide viewers'/participants' movements, and to encourage engagement from particular vantage points that are productive to their experience. Sound, light, and the

performers are instrumental for providing information to audience members throughout the performance. In creating immersive theatre, I needed to choreograph the audience, as well as choreograph the performers.

This research has been enlightening and informative of how immersive dance theatre is created. *Nostrovia* fostered an in depth analysis of creative and safety procedures that go into the production of participatory art. Although there is no one way to create, and because subjectivity is a key ingredient in audience engagement, the modes I used to create this work were always in the interest of the viewer/participant; I wanted to inform the audience and guide them through contemporary dance. Though this may not be the practice of other contemporary artists, it is nevertheless my goal as a creator and a storyteller to not only engage in work that I am interested in, but attempt to empower the audiences who chose to attend.

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Appendix A: Tables

Table 1: Five-Act Structure
This table details *Nostrovia's* Action Sequence for reference: the Acts, Scenes, Placements, and associated Tracks.

***Nostrovia's* Action Sequence**			
Act	**Scene**	**Placement**	**Track**
1	Opening Monologues	Bar	"West End Blues"
	Tsar/Tsarina Love	Ballroom	"Suspicious Minds"
	Tsar Speech	Stage	BREAK: No track
	A Party at the Palace	Ballroom	"Twist Again"
2	Family Ties	Ballroom	
	Rasputin's Lair / Solo 1	Map Room	
	Preface to Alexei Falling Sick	Ballroom / Bar	"Love is Here to Stay"
	Alexei Falls Sick	Bar / Map Room	"I Put a Spell on You"
	Duke Watches in the Shadow/ Solo	Side Bar	
	Duke / Rasputin Duet	Side Bar	
3	War	All Locations	
	Negotiation	Balcony	
	Tsarina Solo 1	Ballroom Table	"Turn the Noise"
	The Battle of Being Tsar / Solo	Ballroom	
	Alexeis Downward Spiral	Staircase	
	Off to War	Catwalk	"Lonesome Town"
	Anya's Dream / Solo	Ballroom	
	Tsarina Takes the Throne / Solo 2	Balcony	"Angel Eyes"
4	Manipulation	Map Room	
	Brother / Sister	Ballroom	
	Alexei Unravels	Ballroom	"Sunday Bloody Sunday"
	Return from War	Bar	BREAK: no track
	Rasputin Takes Over	Balcony	"all the good girls go to

	A Disagreement Amongst Friends	Catwalk	hell”
	Strangers on a Train Duke / Tsarina	Ballroom	
	Alexei Plays a Game	Map Room	
	Precious Moment	Red Room	“bury a friend”
5	Poisoning	Bar / Ballroom	“War Pigs”
	Rasputin’s Death Solo 2	Ballroom	
	Walking the Red Aisle	Catwalk	“when the party's over”
	Say Goodbye to the Romanovs	Ballroom	“Turn the Noise (Reprise)”
	Final Goodbye	Ballroom	“Dream A Little Dream of Me”

Table 2: **Final Track List**
This table details the Final Track List for *Nostrovia*

***Nostrovia’s* Final Track Selection**			
Track	**Original Artist or Version**	**Year Released**	**Musicians involved**
“Improvised Vamping”	Christin Spencer & Daniel Katsoras	N/A	Christin Spencer & Daniel Katsoras
“West End Blues”	Louis Armstrong	1928	Kendra Epik & Daniel Katsoras & Christin Spencer
“Suspicious Minds”	Elvis Presley	1969	Kendra Epik & Daniel Katsoras & Christin Spencer
“Let's Twist Again”	Chubby Checker	1961	Kendra Epik & Daniel Katsoras & Christin Spencer
“Love is Here to Stay”	Nat King Cole	1955	Christin Spencer & Daniel Katsoras
“I Put a Spell on You”	Nina Simone	1965	Kendra Epik & Daniel Katsoras & Christin Spencer
“Turn the Noise”	Patrick Watson	2015	Kendra Epik & Daniel Katsoras & Christin Spencer
“Lonesome Town”	Ricky Nelson	1958	Kendra Epik

“Angel Eyes”	Ella Fitzgerald	1958	Christin Spencer
“Sunday Bloody Sunday”	U2	1983	Christin Spencer & Daniel Katsoras
“all the good girls go to hell”	Billie Eilish	2019	Kendra Epik & Daniel Katsoras & Christin Spencer
“Bury a Friend”	Billie Eilish	2019	Kendra Epik / Daniel Katsoras / Robyn Noftall / Christin Spencer
“War Pigs”	Black Sabbath	1970	Christin Spencer & Daniel Katsoras
“when the party's over”	Billie Eilish	2018	Christin Spencer & Kendra Epik
“Dream A Little Dream of Me”	Ella Fitzgerald	1963	Kendra Epik
Back up tracks for vamping			
“Beyond the Sea”	Bobby Darin	1958	Kendra Epik & Daniel Katsoras & Christin Spencer
“I'll be seeing you”	Frank Sinatra	1944	Kendra Epik & Daniel Katsoras & Christin Spencer
“Ain't that a kick in the Head”	Dean Martin	1960	Kendra Epik & Daniel Katsoras & Christin Spencer

Appendix B: Prose

Figure B.1: Tsarina Alexandra's Pathway
Notes taken, by the performer playing Tsarina Alexandra, of the pathways they follow throughout *Nostrovia*.

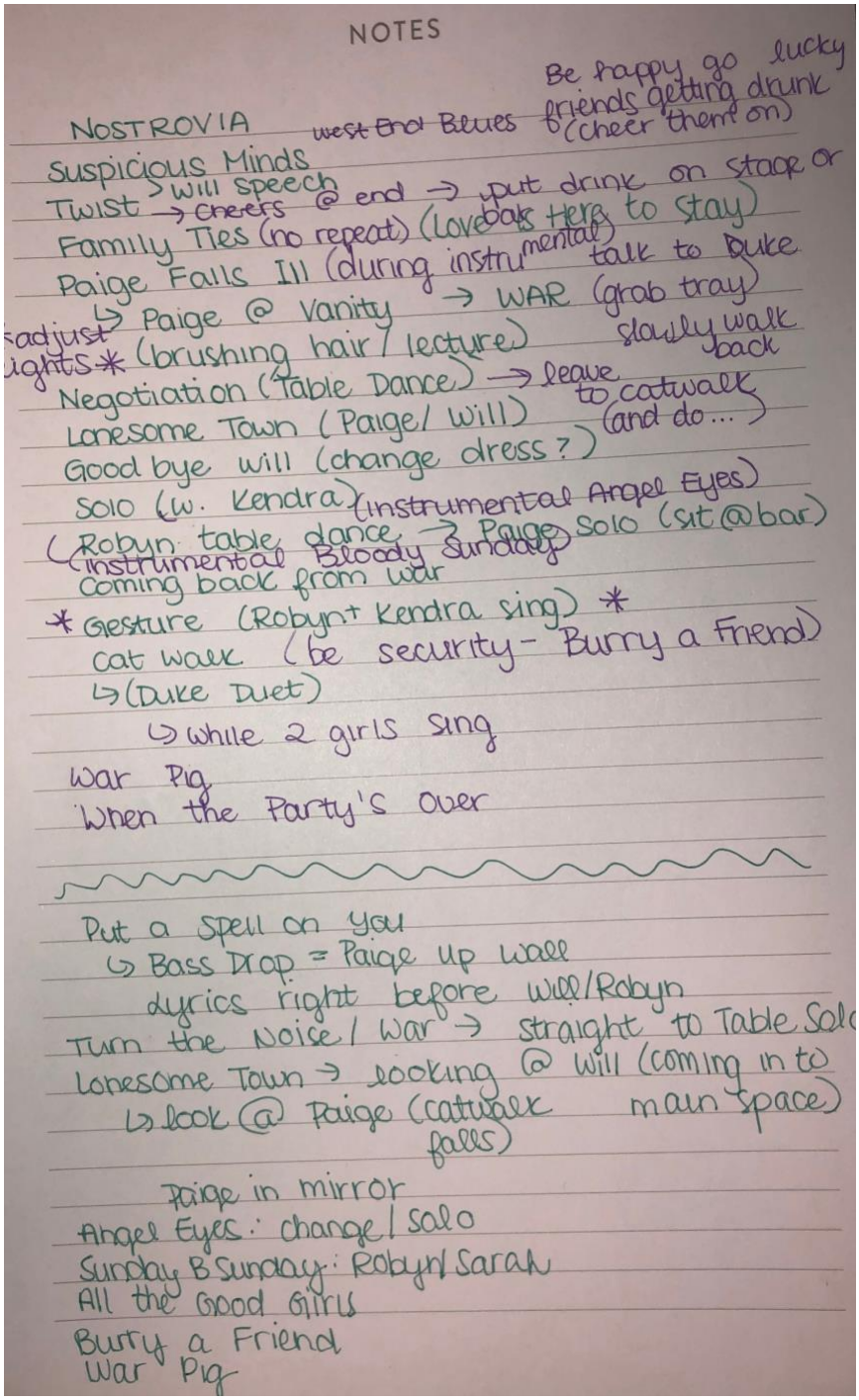

Figure B.2: Prologue
Original copy of the Prologue/Welcome Script.

Alexei / Duke / Rasputin

**Character glides down stairs to notice large group*,*

Welcome, Comrades/Friends/Darlings/
Who do we have with us tonight, invited guests of the family? Friends of loved ones? stragglers from the streets? Either way you're all invited. I'm just so excited to get acquainted with each and every one of you. Up the stairs you go, meet me at the top for a minute to catch up… (to be worked with and improvised)

Do you see the eyes… they watch you all around. They find you in the dark, and if you think they won't they will.. they prey on your misfortune and your sorrow, your passion. They whisper words in tongues and pray you don't understand. My sweet souls don't believe what they tell you but remember what they say. Follow us into the night and have a laugh while you sip your poison. Pasha (or bartenders name) at the bar can be exceptionally helpful if the that of what you need is warm cheeks and loose lips. Loose lips used for many things…Many things happen amongst the shadows when people are distracted by the glitz and glamour, so don't get caught up in the songs of sweet Anya without exploring the whereabouts of her roots. Mysteries lie in this dynasty on this ground where we stand or stood. Not many people know what but you may find out. Your journey is your own to create though may I suggest you don't always follow what you think is right. Join us in the parade, but don't march when they tell you you've been had. Listen with your gaze and touch only what you must. Don't go…. russssssshhhhhing through. If at any point you feel like it could all over throw you, come find me or her or him or they. Either one will help you find your way, or maybe ease your pain just for a second. Until then, raise your glass with me and repeat the words that trickle from my mouth. Nostrovia my friends, I hope to share with you again.

Figure B.3: Survey
Survey sent out to viewers/participants after *Nostrovia* closed.

***Nostrovia* audience engagement survey**

Nostrovia premiered on January 16th - 18th, 2020 In Toronto, Ontario at the Peacock Public House.

Please highlight your answers using

Please highlight your age below,

14 - 20
21 - 30
31 - 45
46 - 65
65 +

Do you earn a portion of your income from performing or creating art?

Yes
No

Please tell us which of the following art disciplines make up that portion of your income,

Dance
Music
Theatre
Visual
Administrative
I don't participate

How many contemporary dance shows have you attended in your life?

0 - 5
6 - 20
21- 50
50 +

Do you seek out contemporary performances in Toronto?

Yes
No

How do you view dance most often?

TV/ FIlm

Internet / You tube
Live Performances

People go to dance / music/ theatre performances for many reasons. From the list that follows, please choose the three most important reasons why you attend dance / music / theatre.

To be inspired or uplifted
To engage intellectually with the art
To discover new plays and playwrights / choreographers and companies / composers / bands and pieces that you've never heard or seen before
To relax and have fun
To have an intense emotional experience
To spend quality time with family or friends
To become a better appreciator of dance / music / theatre
To expose others to the arts
To learn about cultures other than my own
To celebrate or observe my own cultural heritage
To feel calmed, at peace, serene

Prior to *Nostrovia* have you ever attended an immersive, site specific or participatory performance?

Yes
No

How much do you agree with each of the following statements?

Audience members should not do anything but sit quietly and watch or listen attentively during performances

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
No Opinion

Audience members should be allowed to participate, react and interact during performances

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
No Opinion

As a result of being able to move around did that change your sense of engagement throughout the entirety of *Nostrovia*?

Yes
No

Did you feel like your experience at a contemporary dance performance was enhanced due to the immersive nature of the performance?

Yes
No

Chose any of the following following reasons (you may check more then one),

The ability to stand and move around
The space
Your proximity to the performers
The live music
The combination of dance, music and theatre

Were you able to follow a narrative throughout the entirety of *Nostrovia*?

Yes
No
Sometimes

If you answered No to above please skip this question,

Did you find the narrative kept you engaged in the performance?

Yes
No

Did you have any direct engagement with performers?

Yes
No

If answered Yes what was that experience like for you?

How would you describe *Nostrovia* to a friend?

Would you like to see a more immersive, site specific or participatory dance performance in Toronto?