From Clowns to Computers
Performing Theatrical Interactivity and Pervasive Transmedia Fictions

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Abstract

The Collins English Dictionary defines "Interaction" as "a mutual or reciprocal action or influence", and "Interactivity" as "allowing or relating to continuous two-way transfer of information between a user and the central point of a communication system".

This study will analyze the range of pre-existing interactive theatre types, using the model of interaction theorized by Gary Izzo in *The Art of Play*. This model will be used to categorize and problematize the various strategies developed and deployed through seven years of practical interactive research in the theatre. The sites of this research include five productions I worked on as a director, from 2008-2012, with Toronto-based U.N.I.T. Productions, featuring clown duo Morro and Jasp, and an eight-month long, massive, trans-media fiction project called *ZED.TO*, created by The Mission Business, a local event design company where I worked in 2012 as both writer and narrative designer.

The central research question steering this dissertation is twofold. First, what strategies of interactivity already exist and how has the pre-existing theory of audience interaction behind these strategies evolved through the production and performance of these two projects? Second, in what ways have these strategies been proven effective, in real-time or during online encounters, to encourage an audience to believe, trust, share, play and ultimately participate inside an interactive theatre production? To prove the efficacy of these strategies, observations and opinions of both the public and the press are examined.

The answers to these research questions trace the sources, evolution and distribution of these strategies from within the established theatre practice (including improvisation and clown) as well as interactive approaches sourced from game design and social media. This multidisciplinary research helps to define what strategies work towards achieving interactivity in the theatre and how, or when, it is appropriate to utilize it during a theatrical production.

In essence, this study examines, through a survey of the history of immersive and interactive theatre, the strategies realized by the Morro and Jasp clown series and *ZED.TO* and how these projects have contributed to the evolving theory and practice of interactivity in the theatre. Analyzing such strategies will create a sourcebook for those seeking to bring theatre into the digital world as well as understand (and perhaps even undertake) the performance of pervasive interactive narratives in the future.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to everyone who has ever played inside the worlds I have helped to create and alongside the characters I have helped to shape. Without you, there could have never been a clown kitchen party or a biotech pandemic adventure. Without you, I would only have been playing alone.

Acknowledgments

There are many, many people I want to thank here – for believing in me, for allowing me the time I needed to make the work I have, and for helping me see this study to its conclusion.

First, I need to thank my parents, Jim and Linda, who allowed a young, 13 year-old boy to make a tough choice between 6 a.m. hockey practice and 9 a.m. theatre rehearsal. Their willingness to let me follow my own path has steered my entire life's work. Thank you both for letting me play my game, my way.

Next, I have to acknowledge U.N.I.T. Productions' clown teacher, Pete Jarvis, for showing me how to always search for what is "remarkable" in everything I do. Also, of course, Heather Marie Annis (Morro) and Amy Lee (Jasp), whose almost decade-long dedication to their craft, whose ability to put up with my crazy ideas, and whose willingness to risk, every show, every moment, so that the audience might realize it's safe to trust and share, is beyond admirable. Without you, I never would have understood the true power of interactivity. Thank you for letting me be a part of the best team I've ever known.

Speaking of teamwork, I need to thank the other four members of The Mission Business for their trust in me when shaping the stories and story worlds we have made together. To Elenna Mosoff, David Fono, Martha and Trevor Haldenby, you four have allowed me to imagine things far beyond what I ever even considered possible. The experience I have gained, and the cross-discipline learning we have all engaged in, will shape the way I see story telling for the rest of my life. Thank you for letting me help build the future with you. Also, I have to thank the *ZED.TO* army, the over 100 artists, actors,

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Introduction

The Academy, The Arts, And The Arcade

"The theater is the only institution in the world which has
been dying for four thousand years and has never succumbed.
It requires tough and devoted people to keep it alive."

—John Steinbeck, *Once There Was a War*

When I finally decided upon interactive theatre as the subject of my dissertation, the three spheres in which I work finally, and for the first time, aligned.

First, I am scholar. I believe in the critical deconstruction of the creative process in order to understand what systems are at "play" behind it. The survey of the historical and cross-cultural examples of theatrical interaction included in chapter one inspired me, and made me realize that my work was a part of a lineage of theatre that I am proud of and at home in.

Chapter one breaks down the broad spectrum of interaction so that the reader might better understand how interactivity in the theatre has thus far been theorized. Unlike many aspects of the traditional theatre, there exists a surprisingly small amount of scholarship on the subject outside of the guidebooks of practitioners or the writings of the popular press. This study seeks to bring together what *does* exist so that one can understand what *might* exist in the future.

As a scholar, I also believe that new knowledge means that new ways must be tried, new forms must be shaped, and new pressures on tradition must occur. This study is not a criticism of traditional theatre, however it does illuminate that there exists a divide between how theatre has been traditionally experienced and how it might be experienced in the future.

Second, I am a storyteller. And in this study, the focus rests on the methodology of telling rather than the particular stories told. Through the opportunities afforded to me over the past nine years while working as the director of the Morro and Jasp clown troupe, I have gained insight into how to engage with both the actors and the action, and how to help performers reach across the space to include participants in ways that create connection and communion.

As a site for interactive experimentation, the work of Morro and Jasp contain several qualities that help to explore interaction. In no particular order, these are: Clown, Charm, Character and Comedy. The clown form already has built into it the desire to break conventions and reveal the truths behind customs and thus make it ideal for easing people out of their expectations. Charm also

helps with this, as it disarms the fear that prevents people from risking, and therefore playing – both the reason for and the fuel of interaction.

Character, or in this case characters, means individuals who always exist, even outside of the theatrical space and appear in people's lives daily through various social media channels. This, in the end, allows people to feel familiar with them and to trust them. Finally, the work of Morro and Jasp is comedy, the greatest of social lubricants. And, as Oscar Wilde knew, "if you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh."

In chapters two and three, this study breaks down interactivity in five Morro and Jasp productions, and offers examples of both the patterns of deployment and how, when varying levels of pressure are applied to the audience, a creator can shape an experience in which the participant feels safe enough to trust, share, believe and ultimately play.

Finally, I am a designer. I have, since 2010, worked as the narrative designer on two projects with The Mission Business, a design collective that constructs connected live and online pervasive interactive experiences for both the public and private sectors. I have come to understand how game design can shape notions of interaction utilizing players and player agency, and how such agency allows play to be evolved into choice, and how gaming is often socially rooted, encouraging play and choice between players inside of an interactive fiction. In the traditional theatre, such elements are reserved for the "actors" only.

Chapters four and five focus on *ZED.TO*, an eight-month experiment in interactivity that occurred across a wide span of both places and platforms.

Following a fictional biotech company's fall from grace, *ZED.TO* was experienced through videos, corporate websites, and tweets, and four major events that allowed interaction beyond what the traditional theatre had to offer.

ZED.TO led me to explore game design and the tools behind transmedia. The experience provided opportunities for players to connect, day or night, to digital sites of engagement that informed the actions taking place in the physical world. In this case study, I offer a breakdown of the methods used in designing some of the interactive instances that kept players playing across a large period of both space and time.

This cross-pollination of the academy, the arts and the arcade has led me to explore theory through practice and has informed practice through theory. It has given me as well an understanding of a methodology of working, one that pulls from forms and theories both very old and very new. Clearly, interaction has to be experienced to be understood. This understanding is the core of chapter six, my reflections and conclusions of the study as a whole.

What I hope is taken away from this study then is this: a better understanding of the techniques behind the creation of play in interactive theatre; an appreciation of the opportunities that tools such as social media and the internet can offer to someone interested in creating interaction that lasts longer than the run of a show; and finally an acceptance that the world is changing, and that theatre, as it always has, is changing with it.

<u>Preface</u>

Some Things Must Be
Experienced To Be Understood

"I cannot conceive any work of art as having
a separate existence from life itself"

—Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*

This study is about the evolution of the art of live and digital storytelling and the activation of an audience towards play inside interactive theatre. At the same time, however, it is also about my personal evolution as a director and designer in relation to these fields. This study's structure then reflects that evolution, with the survey of the theory, terms and types of interactive theatre being presented first, and followed by the records of my earliest experiments with interaction – experiments that occurred during the production of the Morro and Jasp clown series.

The Morro and Jasp chapters therefore serve as a pathway through those primary tests and trials in interactivity. The tools and techniques learned during those first projects, especially *Morro and Jasp do Puberty* and *Morro and Jasp Gone Wild*, provided me with the necessary appreciation of key concepts such as site-specific and environmental work, an understanding that proved essential to the extended story-world building of ByoLogyc in *ZED.TO*.

The lessons learned during *Morro and Jasp Go Bake Yourself* and *Of Mice and Morro and Jasp* – community building and shifting the status of audience members from passive viewers to active co-creators – were indispensable when engaging the wide diversity of players who participated in *ZED.TO*. In all, the experience gained during the Morro and Jasp experiments illuminated the component parts of audience interaction on a small scale. These lessons proved essential when I later attempted to activate a crowd of such size and breadth as was present during *ZED.TO*.

The various influences steering these projects, including clowning and digital game design, suggest a variety of new evolutions in interactive possibilities for the theatre. That said, in the chapters that follow, the primary focus is always on the nature of the instances of interaction and the methodologies and theories behind them, not on clown or game design per se. When discussion of clown or game design does occur, it is in order contextualize approaches to interactivity that are not found inside the traditional theatre's conceptualization of the actor/audience relationship. That is to say, this is not a study about clown or games, but rather what interaction in the theatre does and can mean for both creators and participants.

Methodologically, the main form of research in this study is practice-based. As

Bruce Archer, author of *The Nature of Research,* has argued

> There are circumstances where the best or only way to shed light on a proposition, a principle, a material, a process or a function is to attempt to construct something, or to enact something, calculated to explore, embody or test it. (Archer 11)

Defined by the *Canadian Journal of Practice Research in Theatre,* this type of

research is "experiential, reflective and communicative…the practice-based

researcher participates in the production not only of art but also of new

knowledge on procedures and creation/devising processes that may be of

benefit to other theatre artists, scholars and pedagogues" ("Home").   This

contribution to new knowledge in the area *of* participation therefore arises

from actually participating.

Lastly, this study suggests ways in which interaction in modern theatre

practice may represent an evolution of the construction and consumption of

theatre itself. This is certainly true in the terms of the range of technologies

available to today's theatre maker, but may also be true in terms of how

audiences are provided with instances of choice and agency within the

theatrical experiences.

It must also be noted though that the traditional theatre is not without its own

sense of agency – audience belief. In this study, I examine how the traditional

notion of suspending disbelief may actually be displaced by investing *in* belief.

This is only possible, however, given the traditional theatre's ability to create

an agency of the imagination.

The theatre's ability to create conditions for make-believe is what enables

participants to play at all. This recognition is important for all of us to realize,

for it is through the traditional theatre that one enters into these new possibilities of live performance, audience communion, and the power of stories.

<u>Chapter I</u>

Setting the Stage:
Defining Interaction and Play in the Theatre

Remember, interacting is a cooperative venture.

—Jeff Wirth, *Interactive Acting*

Terms and Definitions

In order to begin any discussion on theatrical interactivity, a handful of key terms must first be defined. These terms, and the ideas, concepts and approaches that follow from them, will frame the subsequent understanding and analysis of the strategies used during the production and presentation of two major interactive projects - the Morro and Jasp series (a clown duo conceived by U.N.I.T. Production in 2005 that explores, through comedy, a variety of everyday topics including friendship, honesty, puberty, sexuality, bullying, poverty, etc.) and *ZED.TO* (an eight month, end-of-the-world

tragedy/technologically infused pervasive adventure produced in 2012 by The
Mission Business that centered on a fictional Biotech company and its vision of
a future too good to be true).

So what is "interactive"? The Collins English Dictionary defines "interaction"
as "a mutual or reciprocal action or influence" ("Interaction") and
"interactivity" as "allowing or relating to continuous two-way transfer of
information between a user and the central point of a communication system"
("Interactivity").

As well, two additional definitions offer insight and relevance to this study.
The first, "interactive", is defined as something "that works together so the
total effect is greater than the sum" ("Interactive"). The second, a cultural
definition by The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy,
states, "if users receive real-time feedback… so that they can modify the
use…the system is said to be interactive" ("Interactive").

Therefore, to begin to theorize the notion of theatrical interactivity, we are
speaking of a mutual, reciprocal, modifiable series of linked actions in which a
two-way transfer of information works together to create an effect more than
the sum of its parts. In simpler terms perhaps, it is a performance that allows
audience and actor the opportunity to play with, rather than just the actor
playing for, the other. So what then is play?

Play and Play-making

Performance theorist Richard Schechner examines the notion of play to
problematize the theory further. "Play is very hard to pin down or define. It is a

mood, an activity, an eruption of liberty; sometimes it is rule-bound, sometimes very free. It is pervasive" (79). In *Performance Studies: An Introductions*, Schechner references French sociologist and play theorist Roger Caillois when he suggests that despite the challenges of defining play, the existence of four categories, or types, of play can be observed:

1. *Agon* or competition. Games where there are winners and losers. The outcome is determined by the skills and/or strength of the players. Examples: Races, weightlifting, chess.
2. *Alea* or chance: Games where fate, luck, or grace determines the winner. Examples: dice, roulette.
3. *Mimicry* or simulation. Playing within an imaginary make-believe or illusory world. Examples: theatre, children's make-believe play.
4. *Ilinx* or dizziness. Playing to induce a disorienting experience or state of mind. Examples: spinning, roller-coaster rides, getting "crazy drunk" (Schechner 84).

In connection with interactive theatre, the third category of play, *Mimicry*, is at first glance the most relevant. However, and as both Schechner and Caillois also realize, when looked at again, one form of play often includes some elements or aim of the others. Indeed, interactive theatre can, and often does, utilize all four types of play in its various realizations and iterations.

Additionally, Caillois separated play in general into two categories – *Ludus* and *Paidia*. "Caillois uses the Greek world 'paidia' (related to the word for 'child') to mean a spontaneous burst of play, turbulent and unconstrained. On the other hand, the Latin 'ludus' means a game governed by rule-bound behavior" (Schechner 95).

This difference will prove exceedingly important to study. When designing and deploying techniques for interaction, there must be a deep awareness of the inherent potential to blur the lines between these types of play. In the study of pervasive games, both online and live action, this is referred to as

emergent gameplay, highlighting the fact that "the combination of infinite affordances and unpredictable environment leads to surprising coincidences and occurrences" (Montola 18).

While interactive theatre does not always allow for infinite choices or offer environments of an unpredictable nature, the danger again exists whenever control of the experience is shared between audience and actor. (The collusion of interactive theatre and game design will be discussed more thoroughly during discussion of *ZED.TO* and its use of both on- and off-screen gaming techniques in chapter three.)

Returning to the subject of play, Schechner interestingly also identifies a western bias against play.

> From Plato to the Puritans, the playful has been considered frivolous, unimportant, and even sinful. Playing is a major distraction tempting people away from work, which is the 'real business' of living . . . Adults are supposed to play only during 'time off' (from work) in specially designed places and according to well defined rules (101).

Director and author Gary Izzo echoes Schechner's observation in his book, *The Art of Play,* when he states "The rise of interactive styles of entertainment reflect a need for the play element in today's culture" (Izzo 5). Indeed, Izzo attributes this rise to a lack of something important. "What we are missing is simple creative play, the first play we ever knew, the play of connection, experimentation, and discovery, the play of make-believe" (Izzo 7).

Environments and Liminal Spaces

Izzo also problematizes the theorizing of interactive theatre – the environment. Recognized in numerous fields that utilize interactivity and play, such as ritual

or game design, the location – be it physical, digital or mental – has a deep impact on the players' ability to "make-believe". Izzo traces this idea back to the ancient Greek word "Tementos", or the sacred circle.

Fig. 1 – Theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus, Athens

"Whether the rules within be of law, religion, contest or make-believe, they are by definition sacred places, temporary worlds within the ordinary world, set apart from and dedicated to the performance of an act apart" (Izzo 9).

> In interactive theatre, the stage is an *environment* – one that encloses both audience (or guest) and actor alike. Environmental theatre need not be interactive, but interactive theatre is always environmental. Each guest, singly or as part of a group, is endowed with a 'role' to play…Audience members are merely fellow characters within the illusion (Izzo 24).

This notion of Tementos also reflects the idea of the "liminal spaces" of rituals identified by anthropologist Victor Turner - and taken up by Schechner –

which transforms the idea of the limen or "a passageway between places rather than a place itself" into something more. "What is usually just a 'go between' becomes the site of the [inter]action" (Schechner 58).

John Huizinga spoke of the "magical circle", or "the boundary separating the ordinary from the ludic and real from playful" (Montola 7). Widely recognized as the forefather of game studies, Huizinga understands play as most often ludic, or rule-bound, so that one might win, defeat, or conquer an opponent. Later game play and game design scholars have come to dispute this notion, problematizing the idea that boundaries can be maintained, an idea that will be returned to in chapter four.

Arguably, the above definitions of the playing space can be collapsed into one, if the term "world" is added. The various encounters that occur between audience and actor inside interactive theatre happen in a world created for the express purpose of encouraging belief. In *Interactive Acting,* author and actor Jeff Wirth expands on the importance of this. As opposed to a traditional theatrical performance, he says

> An interactive performance does not rely on the 'suspension of disbelief.' It calls for an 'investment of belief.' The experience seems real to an audience because they are making an active investment of their minds, bodies, and spirits. When the audience becomes players, they are moved, because they are not just observing the performance; they are living it as well (Wirth 3).

Schechner also identifies a difference in that "Make-believe performances maintain a clearly marked boundary between the world of the performance and everyday reality. Make-belief performances intentionally blur that boundary" (Schechner 35).

Participation and the Participant

So what can interactive theatre be said to offer? The chance to play manifested inside a world via audience participation. What then is participation? Collins defines "participate" as "to take part, be or become actively involved, or share" ("Participate"). While the first element of the definition is easily understandable, and underlines the entire notion of interactive and interaction, the last part – to share – is perhaps one of the most important elements of an interactive performance and echoes both the dangers as well as the goal of getting people to invest in belief. In sharing, the audience is made liable and is bonded to the performance, involved somehow in its realization.

> In traditional theatre the audience assumes a *reactive* role, responding to the performance in a passive fashion. Interactive theatre expands the experience of the audience by offering them a *proactive* role, in which they are invited to join as a collaborator in the creation of the performance (Wirth 1).

This notion of the audience as participant forms the base on which all these definitions hang. In this study, the notion will be used frequently in the discussion of the role of the audience in *ZED.TO*, and to the techniques of audience participation used widely in Morro and Jasp productions. In this study, therefore, participant will be synonymous with both audience member and player.

Types of Audience-Inclusive Theatre

In order to better understand the various approaches that past theatre makers have used to included the audiences or participants into live performances, Izzo lays out a spectrum of audience-inclusive theatre. What is common to all

is that they break down or bypass the *fourth wall* or imaginary barrier that separates the world of the actor from the world of the audience. This spectrum includes: *Intimate Theatre*, *Audience Participatory Theatre*, *Variety Entertainment*, *Improvisational Comedy*, *Street Theatre,* and finally true *Interactive Theatre.*

Izzo's categorization will be used here in order to provide the reader with a basic framework for understanding not only the history of interactive theatre, (though the following survey prioritizes similar types of work over listing them by date of creation) but also will illuminate the various aims, approaches and, more importantly, limitations behind each type.

This will allow the Morro and Jasp series and *ZED.TO* to be considered as a part of this spectrum of interaction, and make clear when and how these projects have made use of, rejected, or evolved the prevailing theories behind this type of theatre.

Intimate Theatre

Izzo defines *Intimate Theatre* as what happens "when the traditional proscenium stage is altered to bring the action on the stage closer to the audience" (Izzo 21). This includes productions that use unusual stage configurations, or no stage at all. Generally, these intimate theatres manifested themselves as thrust stages, theatres-in-the-round, and various types of environmental theatre. Izzo claims that in this first subcategory, and here only, the fourth wall is maintained despite bringing the audience member physically closer to the action.

Historically, there are numerous examples of this intimate type of theatre, including theatre "in the park", various kinds of rock musical theatre that transcends the audience space, and even small venues spaces not equipped with a proscenium. Perhaps even the massive public performances of the ancient Greek world could be called intimate in this sense (despite the size of the audience), as the dancing floor of the chorus being thrust forward, brought the actor into close contact with many of the viewers.

Wirth identifies "environmental theatre" as particularly useful to an understanding of interactive theatre as a place by "which the actual physical setting is used for its "reality value" (Wirth 5). That is, the environment here encourages play by creating a space in which to "make belief", or "invest in belief". This "reality value" is essential to certain such productions seeking, particularly, realistic interaction.

There are, however, more complicated and advanced forms of *Intimate Theatre* produced today than Izzo or Wirth knew of when writing. The U.K. theatre company PunchDrunk's *Sleep No More*, for example, recreates most of the settings of *Macbeth* and Alfred Hitchcock's films, *Vertigo* and *Rebecca,* inside a fictional hotel in lower Manhattan.

There, over the space of five floors and for most of the two and a half hours, audiences wander around various locations, regardless of whether or not actors or action is occurring in them or not. They are free to touch, open, explore and at times even taste the environments on offer. In terms of interaction, however, the setting – impressive and immense as it is – represents the start and end of this communion between doer and watcher.

Fig. 2 – Punchdrunk' *Sleep No More* , New York City

Audiences are never allowed to speak (in fact, masks are issued to everyone upon their entrance), or interfere with the action or actors in any way. The "hotel" may be open, but the fourth wall is still very much closed.

In an article on the arts, culture and ideas blog, *CultureBot,* columnist Agnès Silvestre describes her experience inside *Sleep No More,* highlighting the tensions that can exist within a production designed to be interacted with, but not necessarily interactive. She writes

> *Sleep No More* is predicated upon a basic suspicion of the audience. The way the piece is designed limits my desire to act or intervene–and if I don't respond to suggestion, it will remove me from the show. It's safe and smooth, but hypocritical. There is the illusion of choice and agency, but the offer is rigidly circumscribed, and the only real role allowed to me is that of passive voyeur, consuming the actions, images and sounds of

the piece. I can open this drawer or that drawer, follow this actor or another. I have a choice, but it changes nothing. I'm a passive ghost moving through this illusion. And the only agency granted to me is the capacity to consume ("Punchdrunk").

There are, however, instances in the intimate theatre when the fourth wall is intentionally broken, and something like a direct address is offered by actor to audience. "The important difference here is that the production, if you will, is aware of the audience's existence" (Izzo 22). The most obvious instance of this is in the use of personal soliloquies in the theatre of Shakespeare in Elizabethan England. The main function is to share the character's internal struggle with the audience in a manner beyond a traditional dialogue. This creates or causes a shift in the actor/audience relationship and a new sense of trust.

Fig. 3 – The Globe Theatre, London

In fact, the theatres of Shakespeare's day themselves reflect this aim in their design, and as one can experience at the recreated Globe Theatre in London, the intimacy of the theatrical environment is highly conducive to this sort of connection to and with the actor. "The theatre of Shakespeare's day resembled the courtyards from which it evolved, with a stage thrusting out" (Bowles 64). Indeed, it was even on occasion the case that a disgruntled audience member, some mere inches away and perhaps unhappy with the production on stage, would hurl obscenities or worse from where they stood.

Interaction, however, of the type theorized at the beginning of this chapter, and the notion of an actor and audience working together in a two-way transfer of power over the outcome of the action, was foreign to this approach to theatre. Indeed, if and when done to the satisfaction of the crowd on hand, intimate theatre "continues undisturbed in its preplanned order. Its harmony is never breached by the spontaneous act on the audience's part" (Izzo 22).

Another instance of this type of theatre that blended *Sleep No More*'s intensely immersive environment (though not its ability to explore the rich detail of the material world of the experience) and the direct address of Shakespeare was Necessary Angel's *Tamara*. Created by director Richard Rose and writer John Krizanc, and premiering in 1981 as a part of the Toronto Theatre Festival "Onstage 81", *Tamara* tells the tale of ten characters, including the titular artist Tamara de Lempicka and fascist Gabriele d'Annunzio (in whose home the experience is supposedly set, during 1927, in Mussolini's Italy.)

According to *Toronto Star*'s theatre critic Richard Ouzounian

> You don't go to Tamara for the story. You go for how it's told.
> This living movie is set not in a theatre, but all over a spacious

mansion, and although every room is alive with activity for most of the evening, you have to choose which of 10 characters you're going to follow ("Tamara Reviews").

Unlike *Sleep No More,* however, the audience was positioned *within* the narrative. "The audience, as 'spies' in the house and then 'informers' become part of the conspiracy" ("Tamara"). Also, the spectators were encouraged to share their experiences with each other.

> The audience is given a series of rules at the beginning of the performance and the whole group of spectators meet up only once more before the performance ends - at an intermission feast where they are encouraged to exchange information. ("Tamara").

The concept of rules will emerge as increasingly important as this study continues; as audience participation increases, so too does their ability to distrust the performance.

In these cases, prompts such as the following are useful.

> 1. As characters leave and separate from a room, which will you follow?
> 2. Or will you wait and see who shows up in one or several rooms?
> 3. Will you follow the same character all the time, or switch characters as the play progresses?
> 4. Will you stay with a friend, or each adopt different strategies?
> 5. How will you respond when an actor gives you instructions? ("Tamara – play")

As can be seen, *Tamara* offered a non-traditional viewing method, and even some level of interaction with the character, yet the audience was never invited to shift or change the direction of the experience itself.

Bertolt Brecht, the German writer and director, who championed the notion of Epic Theatre, also made a frequent practice of direct and immediate address. As a part of his infamous *Verfremdungseffekt,* or alienation effect, Brecht used this shifting of the dynamics of the stage, not to enhance but rather to disrupt the audience's investment in the world of the play, seeking instead to make

them question the motivations behind the actions of the characters rather than allow the viewer to bond emotionally with them.

> 'Verfremdung', in fact, is not simply the breaking of illusion (though that is one means to an end); and it does not mean 'alienating' the spectator in the sense of making him hostile to the play. It is a matter of detachment, or reorientation (Willet 179).

Whether or not he succeeded in achieving this goal is beyond the scope of this study, but his work with the Berliner Ensemble and those who follow in his tradition undoubtedly sought to use direct contact to cause an effect upon the audience, one outside of the sort possible with the fourth wall fully intact.

Audience Participatory Theatre

Brecht marks an interesting transition space between *Intimate Theatre* and *Audience Participatory Theatre* for, as Izzo points out, "in participatory theatre the production is not only aware of the existence of the audience, as in intimate theatre, it is also aware of itself as a play" (22). It could be said that Brecht's work at times was both aware and unaware of the fiction of its own world. When audience participatory theatre is defined by instances where "one or more members of the audience may be brought onto the stage to perform some action integral to the scene" (22), however, Brechtian theatre falls short.

An example of modern *Audience Participatory Theatre* is the British Pantomime, a genre known for not only allowing but also actually encouraging the audience to get involved. Julian Barnes, literary critic and author, offers the following definition of Pantomimes or "Pantos":

> The panto has its historical roots in the harlequinade and was cross-fertilized by the Victorian music hall. In essence, it consists of a fairy tale--the story of Cinderella, Mother Goose,

Aladdin, Dick Whittington--that, while drawing on a traditional narrative line, is constantly updated by topical references, often of a satirical nature (Barnes 201).

Indeed, according to writer Ferne Arfin, "Pantos" allow for certain kinds of participation, such as where "villains are hissed, misfortunes are bemoaned and several key lines - "Oh yes it is!" - "Oh no it isn't!" and "He's behind you!" are shouted out by one and all at the appropriate moments." ("What is Pantomime"). All this leads to "a raucous, noisy entertainment that's fun for everyone in the family ("What is Pantomime").

The Mystery of Edwin Drood, (or, as it was later called, *Drood),* is a musical presented in the style of a British "Panto" and is based on the unfinished novel by Charles Dickens with book, music and lyrics by Rupert Holmes.

Because Dickens's book was left unfinished, the musical hinges upon a novel idea: the audience decides by vote which of the characters is the murderer." What's more, in terms of offering interactivity, the audience is also given the opportunity to decide who from the cast will become the detective and, as well, "one male and one female character are chosen to develop a romance together ("The Mystery of Edwin Drood".)

From a review of a recent production by Roundabout Theatre, *New York Times* critic Charles Isherwood highlights how the knowledge of the appropriateness of this involvement from the start helps to shape the performance. "Most of the fun is in the clue following, the red herring spotting and the seat-clutching tension as the suspects gather in the drawing room for the moment of exposure." ("Raising the Dickens").

Fig. 4 – Roundabout Theater's production of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*

What's more, in order to allow a sense of involvement and play to be possible, "Holmes wrote brief alternate endings for every possible voting outcome, even the most unlikely" ("The Mystery of Edwin Drood"). The realization that various voting outcomes would require the creation of multiple endings is very much at the core of what involving the audience requires for an interactive creator. This notion, and its complexity, will be discussed in much further detail in the chapters that deal with *ZED.TO*.

Another example is *Tony n' Tina's Wedding*, a performance where "audience members actually play the roles of Tony or Tina's family and/or friends" ("About the show").

> This universal familiarity with the union of two individuals from 2 distinct families, regardless as to where you are from, will take you back and forth between fantasy and reality throughout the entire evening. For the ultimate experience… eat, drink, dance, converse and allow yourself to be caught up

in the activities. This all-inclusive evening of entertainment will be something you and your friends will be talking about for many years to come ("About the show").

Fig. 5 – People dancing at *Tony 'n Tina's Wedding*

The show has run in over twelve cities across North America, and is unquestionably one of the most well known examples of *Intimate Theatre.* However, the franchising of this experience has not been without its drawbacks. In a recent audience review on www.ticketmaster.ca, of the show in Calgary, the desire for profit obviously hampered the experience.

> I've seen Tony and Tina's wedding before and I have to say I was a bit disappointed especially with the venue the Wedding Pavilion…The tables were so crammed in, that you couldn't enjoy anything…It was very difficult during the reception to hear or see the characters as the PA system was terrible…Was much more enjoyable last time in a small intimate venue with tables surrounding the main players so we could ALL enjoy it ("Fan Reviews").

Because, as mentioned above, environment matters so much to interactive theatre, issues like these not only make the audience feel less than able to share in the experience, but also much less likely to invest in what is happening during it.

Another key condition of *Audience Participatory Theatre*, one that also functions well with the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of clown, is that "once theatre becomes participatory, the stage itself gains an identity rather than being [or becoming after the participation is over] a forgotten convention" (Izzo 24). Or, once the audience enters the sacred space, that space is forevermore identified *as* such, not able to return once again to merely a necessary element of or division in a theatrical production.

Perhaps the most famous contemporary example is the Russian clown Slava Polunin, especially *Slava's Snowshow*. A multifaceted spectacle that arranges the audience as viewers of vaguely connected clown acts, it does allow them some measure of interaction when elements of the show break free of the limitations of the stage. The audience does not come to the stage to participate or play, rather the playing on the stage comes to them.

For example, in one sequence, the clowns are involved in distributing a large web-like sheet which, when unrolled by the audience, became a massive mat of cotton covering the entire house, much like a spider web. In another instance, the clowns send giant balls into the house, allowing the audience to bounce them back to the clowns on stage or to each other.

Fig. 6 – The "Snow Storm" in *Slava's Snow Show*

The "snow show" sequence, the pinnacle of both the action and the interaction, however, finally allows clowns and audience to experience the same moment at the same time. Set to "O Fortuna" by Carl Orff – part of the cantata *Carmina Burana* – the theatre is transformed into a raging blizzard, replete with blinding light (provided by baseball stadium caliber lighting) and countless small rectangles of paper blown at the audience at high speed (via several fans). Again, this is clown as spectacle – wonderful, fantastical, but not ultimately changeable.

Another recent example of *Audience Participatory Theatre* is *Furezabruta* – a production whose title translates from Spanish into "brute force".

> Filled with bright lights and high energy, the show combines aerial imagery, acrobatics, and dance. The high sensory performance also includes interactive staging that encourages viewers to participate in the proceedings ("Portfolio")

Fig. 7 – Ozone Prouducciones' *Fuerzabruta*

The work of Ozone Prouducciones, *Fuerzabruta* positions the audience as participants in a spectacle of physicality. From their website, they claim to be "building a common dream with viewers" and, in a statement that echoes the concept of the sacred circle, create "a space where the viewer is delivered, knowing that they are a part of an artistic event, which is inside of a parallel reality, ethereal, beautiful, and absolutely delirious" ("Portfolio").

While limited in how the audience can participate – only one or two individuals are ever included in the actual action - Ozone imagines shared experience for the audience as

> The spontaneous reaction of the public determines the other elements to be more forceful. To be real. We can choose how actors respond to stimuli, but we cannot do the same with the public, they always respond in a true, unplanned way ("Portfolio").

Another example of this type of audience participation, but one that manifests itself very differently, is Berlin-based company Rimini Protokoll, and specifically its production *Best Before.*

> *Best Before* pulls the multi-player video game out of the virtual realm and rewires it for an intimate theatre setting. With a gaming controller in hand, each of the 200 audience members begin as an anonymous avatar – so called actor – interacting with a panel of on-stage experts – an electronic artist, a game tester, a politician and a traffic flagger. Taking its inspiration from Vancouver's video gaming industry, the new world, Bestland, evolves and devolves as the population makes personal, social and political decisions. They clash, collaborate and negotiate the forces that shape their own reality ("Best Before").

Presented as a hybrid of two environments, the onscreen Bestland, and the off-screen world of the theatre in which it is performed, *Best Before* "blurs the line between fiction and reality, often using real people rather than actors and involving the audience in profound ways" ("Rimini Text").

As Marsha Lederman comments in the *Globe and Mail* review of a production of *Best Before* during Toronto's Luminato festival in 2010, the audience is *the* reason for the performance – indeed their participation is what makes the performance purposeful. "The idea is to elevate the role of the audience to create an exciting, involved and yet theatrical experience" ("Rimini Text").

In the same article, Lederman interviews one of *Best Before*'s creators, Stefan Kaeg, who questions the traditional place of the audience in the theatre.

> 'What is your role of spectator normally? You're sitting silently there and you're trying to identify with somebody who has big emotions for you and you try to sort of find moments in your life [when] you had similar ones,' Kaegi says. 'And here you are yourself deciding through roles and take a fate in the end. You become something, you regret something, you might have a catharsis moment' ("Rimini Text").
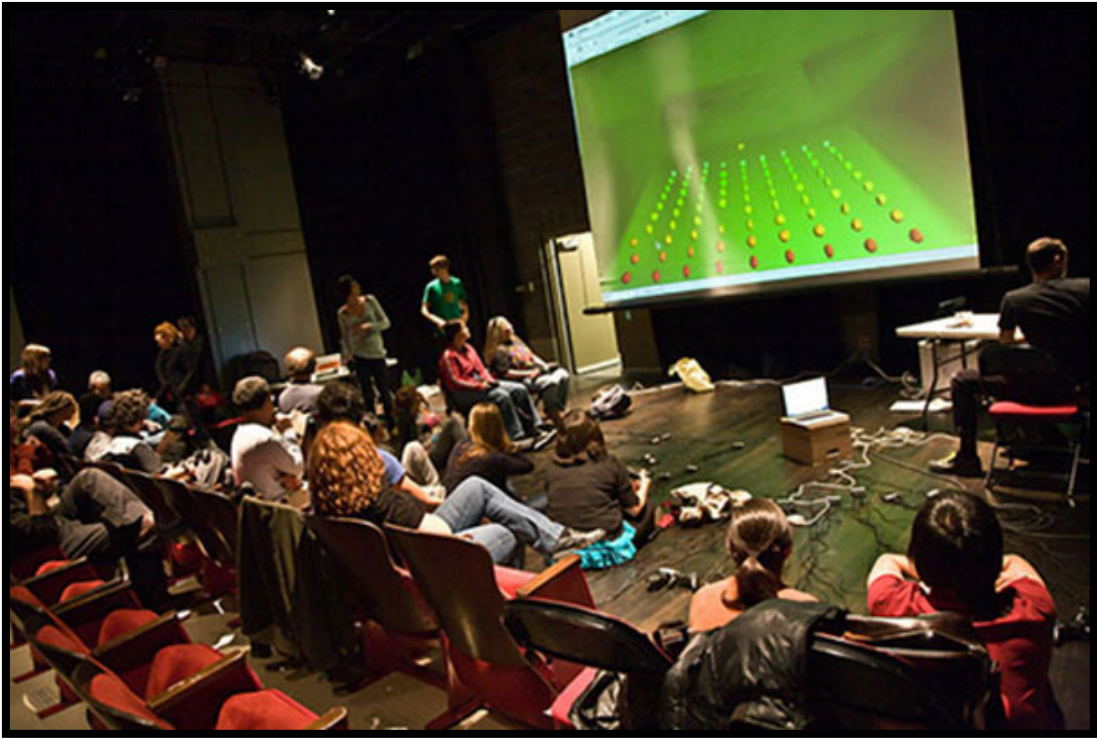
Fig. 8 – Rimini Protokoll's *Best Before*

Perhaps one of the best-known examples of *Audience Participatory Theatre* is *Dionysus in 69*, a performance piece created by the New York-based company The Performance Group, led by director Richard Schechner in 1968. Based around Euripides' *The Bacchae*, Schechner and company sought to bring the carnal, raucous nature of the original rituals described in the classical Greek play to the audiences of the twentieth century. Also made into a film in 1970 (and using footage from two performances from 1968),

> Schechner's troupe, the Performance Group, would by turns chant, or dance, make love, plot murder, whisper to the audience, or among themselves hold group therapy sessions. With its nudity (partial in the actual production I saw; total in the film), its audience-participation orgies (timid and embarrassing in the production; sensual and enthusiastic in the film) and its range of theatrical invention "Dionysus in 69" strives for a degree of sensuous presence that, paradoxically, I think it best achieves as filtered through the film ("Dionysus in 69").

Regardless of the outcome of the performance, the productions of *Dionysus in 69* helped to shape what would become Schechner's three principles of audience participation detailed in his 1973 book, *Environmental Theatre.* These principals are:

> 1. The audience is in a living space and a living situation. Things may happen to and with them as well as 'in front' of them.
> 2. When a performer invites participation, he must be prepared to accept and deal with the spectator's reactions.
> 3. Participation should not be gratuitous ("Environmental" Schechner 79).

Fig. 9 – Still from The Performance Group's film *Dioynsus in 69*

Indeed, Schechner identifies a key element to be discussed in chapter four – games and gaming – as a sister form to interactive theatre.

> In participatory situations game structure replaces aesthetics. Instead of events being worked out beforehand, there is a 'game plan,' a set of objectives, moves, and rules that are generally known or explained. The game plan is flexible, adapting to changing situations ("Environmental" 79).

As can be seen above, *Audience Participatory Theatre* is also where one finds the playground of the improviser, who is able to "ad-lib around the unavoidable variables engendered by any audience member's inclusion in the

production" (Izzo 23). This concept of improvisation, required for such performances as *Best Before,* becomes essential in both *Audience Participatory Theatre* as well as in what Izzo calls *Variety Entertainment.*

Variety Entertainment

"In truth, the variety form is ancient; its roots run as deep as theatre itself. As long as there have been balls to juggle, ropes to walk, or any trick that fascinates, there has been variety" (Izzo 23). While often considered para-theatrical, or quasi-theatrical, variety theatre is as valid a source for the basis of all theatrics as ritual. Individuals such as the magicians Penn and Teller best represent a resurgence of variety performance, known collectively as "new vaudeville". In their live shows, street performances or on their television shows, *Fool Us* or *Tell a Lie* (where they invite magicians or other illusionists to attempt to mystify them and the audience in attendance), they are rooted in nothing so much as the fascination of others.

In 1992, during the filming of *The Magic of David Copperfield XIV: Flying – Live The Dream,* illusionist David Copperfield attempted to push these boundaries by having people at home participate in the process. Based on a simple mathematical sequencing trick, Copperfield invited the audience to select a number and by touching their finger to the television screen, chart their course through a map of various locations, at the end of which he would remove all the possible destinations except the one which the player at home had their finger on.

Fig. 10 – Still from David Copperfield's television illusion

While not truly interactive in the sense being explored here, and due to the formulaic nature of the trick (there was no actual agency possible), it is worthy of mention nevertheless as an example of cross platform interaction, combining live performance and technological communication. In terms of the projects under study here, *ZED.TO* used ideas and strategies descended from these early endeavors to widen the range of interaction channels.

Continuing this taxonomy of interactivity, New Vaudeville differentiates itself from older forms of variety performance by "its inclusion of the audience. New Vaudeville artists work close to the audience and very often incorporate participation into their routines" (Izzo 23). In relevance here, the Morro and Jasp series, much more so than *ZED.TO,* frequently used the tool kit of the variety theatre. However, in contrast or subversion to Izzo's claim that "The variety performer is entirely aware of himself or herself as a performer on a

stage; there is no illusion presented and no belief to suspend" (23), Morro and Jasp performances often, for example, walk the line between illusion and reality, most comfortable in the liminal space of the clown world – inside the "real" world, yet maneuvering through it very differently.

Improvisational Comedy

Following variety theatre, *Improvisational Comedy* is what the title claims it to be - the practice of creating comedic scenes or scenarios rooted in suggestions from the audience and occurring via actions discovered at the very moment of the performance. "In this performance form, a particularly witty ensemble of comics take suggestions from the audience as variables in improvised scenes" (Izzo 24). Izzo is careful to identify here, however, that improvisational comedy (hereafter simply "improv") is not truly an example of entirely free, or *paidic* play. While the inspiration for the action is often external to the actors there is almost always a structure that allows for a measure of control over the eventual outcome.

In its connection to participation, or the two-way transfer discussed earlier, improv is:

> Participatory only insofar as the audience suggests what may happen on the stage. The professionals then take over and do the performing. Rarely are the audience members brought on the stage. There is no room for an amateur… (Izzo 24).

So what then does improv offer? As a comedic performance, one of its major goals is the creation of situations of humorous absurdity, irony, and juxtaposition. But even more is the idea of live creation, based on immediate

input from the participant. Here we also see reflected the cultural definition of interactive – "if users receive real-time feedback… so that they can modify the use…the system is said to be interactive" ("interactive"). Izzo reinforces this sense of enjoyment or desire for this real-time modification as a chance, though still mediated by division, of play between doer and watcher.

> The thrill of live improv is knowing that what you see is a spontaneous reaction. Much of the gratification comes from watching the ensemble work together in a seemingly rehearsed state of harmony and support. The audience's personal connection to the show comes from watching its suggestions played out on the stage (24).

In his book, *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*, director and teacher Keith Johnstone agrees with Izzo, stating that the audience "…admire the improviser's grasp, since he not only generates new material, but remembers and makes use of earlier events that the audience itself may have temporarily forgotten" (Johnstone 116).

Johnstone understands that "good improvisers seem telepathic; everything looks prearranged. This is because they accept all offers made – which is something no 'normal' person would do. Also they may accept offers which weren't really intended" (Johnstone 99). Clearly, he realizes that "it's possible to turn unimaginative people into imaginative people in a moment's notice" (Johnstone 75).

As a teacher of improvisation himself, Johnstone seeks ways to help future improvisers. His ideas on the importance of environment, or a play space dedicated to the act, reinforces the notions mentioned previously. "If I want people to free-associate, then I have to create an environment in which they aren't going to be punished, or in any way held responsible for the things their

imagination gives them" (Johnstone 118). This could be considered the ultimate ideal for the creation of a proper environment for playful and genuine interactivity. Only when this is created and offered to the participant is it possible for "the improviser to understand that his first skill lies in releasing his partner's imagination" (Johnstone 93).

Wirth, however, argues the point somewhat.

> Interactive theatre is not just improvising. A talented improvisor is not necessarily a great interactor. That is because many improvisors are used to performing with other improvisors, not with members of the audience (Wirth 37).

Whether one takes this point or not, it is useful to take from this that "improvisational techniques establish a common language through which cooperative story building can take place" (37). Wirth builds on this idea:

> When you can give a great performance yourself, you're an actor or an improvisor. When you can start with people who have never stood on a stage, never made a speech, never entertained a group, and free those audience members to be great performers in their own right, then you have become an interactor (Wirth 87).

Notable examples of improv in popular culture can range from the television show *Who's Line Is It Anyways* to live shows such as Second City and Theatre Sports.

An example of improvisational theatre that defies the traditions of the genre is Improv Everywhere, "a New York City-based prank collective that causes scenes of chaos and joy in public place" ("FAQ"). Improv Everywhere creates mass, public actions that invite participants to play for a short time inside events they call "organized fun".

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Fig. 11 – Improv Everywhere's "No Pants Subway", New York City

 It has created work that ranges from 20,000 people riding the New York subway with no pants on, to spontaneous musical performances in grocery stores, to public freezings in Grand Central Station Improv Everywhere uses the notion of play to transform spaces into sacred circles, if only briefly. "We hopefully bring excitement to otherwise unexciting locales and give strangers a unique experience and a great story to tell...[the experience] can simply be about making someone laugh, smile, or stop to notice the world around them" ("FAQ").

The company's creator, Charlie Todd, is very clear to set this work apart from what is traditionally considered improvisational theatre.

> We are not claiming that what we are doing is improv. While staging organized stunts in public places is obviously completely different from improv comedy in a theatre, the two

activities do share similar techniques. We stay in character at all costs and usually have no script beyond the mission's idea. We have no clue how people are going to react to us, and that is where the improvisation comes in ("FAQ").

In another non-traditional use of improvisational techniques, this time connected to clowning, Rebecca Northan's *Blind Date* makes use of both improv and audience participation to create, with a singular participant (rather than a mass public), a durational, one-on-one experience.

Chosen at the beginning of the performance, the participant interactions with Northan (an actress, improvisor, and director by trade) mirrors the awkwardness of a first date with a complete stranger. While this aspect of interactivity is in itself not rare – theatrically all participants are at least somewhat unsure of what is expected of them –*Toronto Star* theatre critic Richard Ozounian observes: "Talk about walking on the high wire without a net! Northan's concept is that she can sustain a 90-minute improvisational blind date with someone who is not a performer" ("Blind Date").

In a 2010 interview with Dave McGinn from the *Globe and Mail*, Northan discusses the necessary sensitivity and care required when dealing with the audience.

> A big part of the show's success comes from creating a sense of intimacy with her 'date', a skill she learned from her improv training at [Keith Johnstone's] Loose Moose Theatre Company in Calgary, Northan says. It would be all too easy to bring someone up on stage and make jokes at their expense, as so often happens when audience members are enlisted during a show. 'I find that really mean-spirited,' Northan says. 'We were always taught, if you bring an audience member on stage, you take care of them and you make them look good. That's your job' ("Rebecca Northan").

This need to care for the participant along the course of their journey, to ensure they are not the props of, but rather the purpose behind, interactive theatre will be discussed again in the following chapters. As Wirth reminds us:

> Most spectators are not actors. They don't know how to act, especially not in front of strangers. If they're going to take the risk of performing, they need to feel there is a friend who will help them out along the way (95).

Fig. 12 – Rebecca Northan and participant in *Blind Date*

Northan identifies what else is required, beyond sensitivity, for this type of experience to take place.

> We have this structure that we play inside of, but no script — anything can and often does happen. . . So if the guy wants to do something entirely different — for example one show a guy said, 'Let's go to a casino,' and I could hear the two props guys in the back hustling around to try to make that happen — we will go for it' ("Actor Slips").

The ability to recreate the desired outcome for the participant requires both a flexible structure and constant adjustment. In the case of *Blind Date*, it is possible to achieve this, or as Northan says "go for it" because the interaction is between *one* audience member; add only one or two more players and the physical requirements skyrocket. This was a major element of the creation of *ZED.TO*, and will be investigated further in that chapter, specifically in relation to the production of video games and how player agency is manifested and maintained.

Street Theatre

If *Improvisational Comedy* is understood as bringing the audience's ideas into the realm of the actor, the next category - *Street Theatre* - does the opposite. Izzo's description reads as overly simplistic – "It is usually participatory and can contain any or all the styles of variety, improve, storytelling, dialogue, music pantomime or scripted play" (Izzo 25).

Certainly, street theatre has had numerous iterations over the course of the history of western theatre. Today, it is most often seen in the work of buskers, or street performers who utilize some or many of the tools of improv and variety theatre to entertain crowds in the hope of eliciting payment for their efforts.

Busker festivals around the world, such as the Toronto Buskerfest, bring together acts ranging from acrobats, magicians and clowns (where the act of giving money represents the audience's appreciation of the performance), to

living statues (physical performers, usually highly made-up) who remain mostly immobile until activated by money put into their hat or bucket by a passerby.

Fig 13. – U.N.I.T.'s clown teacher Pete Jarvis busking as "Silver Elvis"

The audience relationship in this last group could be termed the "pay-to-play" model, a phase taken from video game terminology which describes, at the very least, games in which the player must pay for elements of the experience in order to progress. This could include the arcade machine where play is limited to a certain amount of lives or time per coin, or games played online where access to some areas or equipment is unlockable only after a small payment is made. In all, the play in these cases is characterized more by transaction rather than interaction.

Another element of *Street Theatre* important here is the *Happening*. Coined by American performance artist Allen Kaprow in 1966, a Happening described "art events that simply happened, without picture frames, plots, or any marks of orthodox visual arts, theatre, dance or music" ("Environmental" Schechner 138).

While more connected to Performance Art, there is one key element of Happenings that make it worthy of mention here in connection with interactivity, especially as it relates to the role of the audience. Kaprow says that "Audiences should be eliminated entirely – everyone at a Happening participates in it" ("Environmental" Schechner 140).

Fig. 14 – A "Happening"

Is there historical precedent here? Certainly the *commedia dell'arte* of the Italian Renaissance is one of the most well-known examples of *Street Theatre*.

As opposed to the *commedia erudita*, or the written comedy of the Italian Renaissance, the acts of the traveling troupes were designed for the streets, or public squares, where the well-known figures of the community – doctors, soldiers, merchants or servants – could be explored and examined outside of any kind of state control. While the troupe's scenarios were often pre-planned, and used a series of stock characters, their realization in public often resulted in unintentional interactions with the audience.

Fig. 15 – Jan Miel's *Actors from the Commedia dell'Arte on a Wagon in a Town Square,* 1640

"The essential elements in the definition of the *commedia dell'arte* are professionalism, masks and improvisations" (Molinari 160). Indeed, one is able to trace the roots of improvisation back this far, in that "improvisation' was the whole foundation of the acting techniques in *commedia dell'arte.* This explains the name 'improvised comedy', just as its origin explains the name 'clown's comedy" (Molinari 163). By this, and in connection to its interactive traits, Molinari is referring to the *commedia's* ability to reflect common human issues while being responsive to the environment in which it occurs. "It has been called impossible to think of Hamlet apart from that particular story in which his life revolves, but Harlequin is open to anything that comes along" (163).

Perhaps the most well-recognized and theorized form of street theatre in recent decades is that of Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal, and his Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal's technique for activating audiences involves transforming them into what he calls "spect-actors". "The Theatre of the Oppressed is *theatre* in this most archaic application of the word. In this usage, all human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!). They are Spect-Actors (Boal xxx).

> 'Spect-actor' is a Boal coinage to describe a member of the audience who takes part in the action in any way; the spect-actor is an active spectator as opposed to the passivity normally associated with the role of the audience member (Boal xxiv).

Accordingly, the role of the spect-actor is directly linked to the notion of interactivity in the theatre, but here the play is not play for the sake of itself, but rather a means to help bring about social action and/or social change for those involved. It is perhaps the farthest away in terms of how it places value on entertainment and education respectively, but in terms of audience

(participant, player, or spect-actor) is equal with, rather than subservient to, the performer. In this study, the spect-actor will be considered the high-water mark of the role of the audience in interactive theatre, in terms of promoting agency and choice inside an interaction. (The Morro and Jasp series and *ZED.TO* primarily operated as pieces of entertainment. While both projects discussed and at times dissected ideas from the surrounding contexts, neither actively sought to propel the attendee toward any social or political action).

Fig. 16 – Boal's Forum Theatre in Nepal

Boal's work is sometimes confused with protest theatre, which can and often does involve some sort of call and response action, but he is very quick to point out that:

> Forum Theatre is not propaganda theatre, it is not the old didactic theatre [of say Brecht]. It is pedagogical in the sense that we all learn together, actor and audience. The play –or 'model- must present a mistake, a failure, so that the spect-actors will be spurred into finding solutions and inventing new ways of confronting oppression. We pose good questions, but the audience must supply good answers (Boal 19).

Indeed, Forum theatre – "a theatrical game in which a problem is shown in an unsolved form, to which the audience, again spect-actors, is invited to suggest and enact solutions" (Boal xxi) - is key to understanding how Boal used interaction across his career, and how he taught it in his Theatre of the Oppressed centres around the world. (In Toronto, Mixed Company Theatre still uses Forum Theatre to educate inner city youth and school-aged children. This organization will be discussed in more detail in chapter three as one of the Morro and Jasp performances was developed with Mixed Company, utilizing their methodology alongside U.N.I.T. Productions. This way of approaching interaction influenced subsequent Morro and Jasp productions).

However, Forum Theatre is but one format used by Boal. Of the other two, Image Theatre and Invisible Theatre, the latter bears some examination here – especially in connection to *ZED.TO*'s pervasive elements outside of its ascribed or acknowledged play spaces. (Here again, discussion on this and its correlation of the techniques used in Alternate Reality and/or Pervasive games will be discussed later, in chapter four, during the breakdown of the influences of *ZED.TO*).

Invisible Theatre, as Boal argues, is a performance approach in which all but the actors are unaware of its existence as a work of fiction, a replica or an example of a situation that might, and often has, occurred elsewhere between oppressors and oppressed.

> Invisible Theatre is public theatre which involves the public as participants in the action without them knowing it. They are the 'spect-actors', the active spectators, of a piece of theatre, but while its happening, and usually even after the event, they do not know that this is theatre rather than 'real life'; of course it is also 'real life' because it is actually happening, the people are real, the incidents are real, the reactions are real (Boal xx).

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Boal is very quick to place it inside a theatrical setting, however, despite its overt social purposes and despite shedding traditional trappings of the theatre. "One point must be clearly understood: Invisible Theatre is theatre; it must have a text with a scripted core, which will inevitably be modified, according to the circumstances, to suit the interventions of the spect-actor" (Boal 6).

Interactive Theatre

The last type of audience participatory theatre suggested by Izzo is simply called *Interactive Theatre*, a theatre in which "the stage is an *environment* – one that encloses both audience (or guest) and actor alike", however, "environmental theater need not be interactive, but interactive theatre is always environmental" (Izzo 25).

Izzo suggests that in participatory theatre, an awareness of the act *as* play is almost always present, whereas "the interactive play is no longer aware of itself" (25). Even that audience is unaware since they are merely "fellow characters with the illusion," or "sacred circle". He recognizes, above all else, that "interactive theatre is designed not to be *observed*, but to be *experienced*" (25). "Interactive theatre, then, can be defined as theater in which the audience actively and spontaneously co-creates, with the actor, the unfolding drama" (26).

In itself, this may be an impossible end, a goal towards which one aspires but never truly reaches. As is observed time and time again in the above examples, the tensions that exist between the necessities to script a course of events, to keep the audience "at bay" as it were, and the desire to have them participate,

to play, is ever present and is perhaps ultimately unsolvable. In both the Morro and Jasp series and *ZED.TO*, the notion of shifting away from a scripted core to one that is modified (and modifiable) by the circumstances of audience participation (but which still maintains the integrity and intensity of a traditional theatrical experience) is *the* challenge that prevails over all choices of both interactive technique and intention.

That all these definitions speak of a "continuous two-way transfer", of a "working together", and a "modification of use" is fact and may release the interactive theatre maker from some of their chains, the reality is that "the guest [or participant, or player, or spect-actor] is as responsible for the outcome" (Izzo 25).

An example of this may be found in the British Production, *You Me Bum Bum Train*. Described by *Financial Times* theatre critic Sarah Hemming, in a BBC radio interview, as simply "an audience of one and a cast of hundreds perform a series of elaborately improvised scenes" (BBC), *YMBBT* is an attempt to let each participant decide how to play in environments created, crafted, and composed by performers who seek to be responsive to the individual audience member's wants and desires. These include a bank robbery, a football game, and a military drill.

In these locations, each participant would be encouraged to join in, decide, or lead the action being suggested by setting and performers. With the final down of the big game, or the tense moment of the robbery, these moments positioned the audience member *as* the reason for play, and with *You Me Bum Bum Train*'s ability to build up an entire world around them, they played

along as if in a game. This will be extremely relevant in chapter four during

the discussion of The Mission Business' *ZED.TO*.

In a year-end review of the best theatre of 2012, *Guardian* theatre critic Andrew

Dickson explained his experience inside *YMBBT*:

> As a piece of drama, it toyed with many of the things that are
> current in theatre at the moment – the boundaries between
> individual and collective experience, the fragmented nature of
> story and plot, of belief and disbelief. It required you to
> improvise your own theatrical experience, and do so in an
> environment that referenced 3D film, performance art, theme
> parks and gaming (one could interpret the locations in which
> you appeared as a series of disconnected, free-associative scenes;
> equally as a role-playing game requiring varying levels of skill)
> ("Best Theatre of 2012").

Fig. 17 – "The Big Game" from *You Me Bum Bum Train*, London

Echoing Dickson, a BBC Radio 4 program framed the success of the guided but

"disconnected, free-associative" interactivity in *YMBBT* by stating

"participation is absolutely the key. Many of these shows follow the kind of structure you might expect if you were doing a video game," and that "the permission for an audience to play is something that they find enormously attractive" ("It's Fun but is it Theatre?").

In the same interview, however, *Whatsonstage* critic Michael Coveney problemitized the notion of participant and permission, stating "what I don't like about some of the things I've seen is the element of coerciveness, of a sort of low-level fascism which casts the audience as a protagonist in the evening" ("It's Fun but is it Theatre?").

Lyn Gardner, theatre critic for *The Guardian*, took this argument further:

> Theatre as we enter the 21st century was still very much stuck in the 20th century and, in fact in many ways, in the mid 20th century. What we have seen over the last ten years are young companies looking at how they might make theatre in entirely different contexts and that means theatre that often completely smashes the fourth wall, which is interactive, which is immersive, and which has a very different relationship with its audience ("It's Fun but is it Theatre?").

Clearly, it is this relationship between actor and audience that is the key to making interactive theatre work.

Of course, there are readily identifiable elements that are required to make it work, such as an environment that encourages play, recognition that an audience is present within that space, and a sense of the game or play inherent in such performances. There is also the challenge of incorporating new information into a pre-existing narrative structure unlike "the traditional theatre going experience where you go into the theatre, you sit in rows in the dark, and somebody sort of does theatre *to* you" ("It's Fun but is it Theatre?").

Actor/Audience Relationship

But no factor is more important to the audience relationship, and thus interactive theatre, than sharing between doer and watcher. Sharing requires trust, and like any human relationship, trust is the foundation of all potential interaction. Wirth hints at this when he suggests "The art of any [interactive] work lies in the ability to reach people where they are, while helping them stretch to what they might become" (91).

In the next four chapters, I will examine some of the questions asked and the solutions found by Morro and Jasp and *ZED.TO* in order to provide an experience of belief, sharing, and trust. This record of the tools and techniques discovered, developed, and deployed in the creation of two significantly diverse interactive theatre projects can serve as both documentation and challenge, as theatre artists of the twenty first century seek ways to make choice part of the theatre-making and, by extension, the theatre-going process.

Chapter II

Clowning Around:
Interactivity, Improvisation and Involvement

We hunger for the mirror of human relationship and personal interaction.
We yearn to play.

—Gary Izzo, *The Art of Play*

In order to proceed with the investigation of the interactive techniques used by U.N.I.T. Productions to provide an experience that engendered belief sharing, trust, and ultimately play in an audience, something must first be said about clowning. This is necessary here, as every choice made during the creation of the Morro and Jasp series – a female clown duo operating out of Toronto since 2005 and performed by Heather Marie Annis (Morro) and Amy Lee (Jasp) – was, either physically or philosophically, influenced directly and deeply by the clown component.

Fig. 18 – U.N.I.T. Production's Morro and Jasp

What then, besides the donning of a red nose, constitutes clowning? At its core, and in connection to this study,

> Clown is only really different from Acting in the sense that Clown makes direct contact with the audience. This makes the performance personal. People can watch the most brilliant acting on Film and Television but only in the Theatre can we make contact with other living breathing human beings and the Clown emphasizes this contact . . . The Acting convention of the fourth wall turns us into voyeurs; clowning invites us to participate (Cashman 24).

Strictly speaking, Morro and Jasp are what are referred to as Canadian clowns in the tradition of teacher and performer Richard Pochinko.

Pochinko, a Canadian (1946-1989), was originally trained in mask, clown, and physical theatre at the Jacques Le Coq School in Paris from 1970-71. However, Pochinko's time with Le Coq was short lived. "Le Coq himself dismissed

Pochinko after only a few months. The truth is that Le Coq recognized Richard's grasp of the European mask work immediately and told him to return to Canada to create his own form of mask/trixter" ("Richard Pochinko").

In addition to this training, and perhaps more important to his eventual teaching, were the instructions Pochinko received about the nature of the "trickster/fool" tradition from JonSmith (c.q.) – a (perhaps imaginary) first nations' clown figure who reshaped Pochinko's thinking on the purpose of clown. Pochinko claims that in a dream, JonSmith told him that

> . . . his people had always had clown clans as part of the social make-up of their tribes, and that clowns were revered as powerful shamans, healers, as well as being delight-makers…they were the ones who kept people in touch with the everyday while fulfilling the need for a connection with the sacred. Functioning as social regulators, they had absolute freedom to ridicule whomever they pleased . . . They would defy accepted behavior, turn the world topsy-turvy and bring new insight into the truth about Man's place within the order of the universe ("On Meeting Richard Pochinko").

Pochinko's inspiration then - real or fictional - was founded on the desire to play. His conceptualization of clowns as "delight makers" who form a "connection to the sacred" makes them ideal vehicles for encouraging an audience to participate and interact.

> Between the panic and possibilities lies your clown. The panic and the possibilities are universal. If you can learn to laugh at your panic and together we can find a way to express it, then people will identify with it and go through their panic with you and release it. So you see what you're doing for an audience? The audience identifies with the clown. That's the difference between an actor and a clown. While an actor is playing someone else, a clown is playing himself and you. A clown doesn't act; he pretends, like a child does, but his is the innocence after experience ("On Meeting Richard Pochinko").

As the acknowledged father of Canadian clowning, Pochinko has influenced virtually every major clown in Canada since. In 1975, Pochinko (along with

teacher and clown Annie Skinner) founded the Theatre Resource Centre (TRC) in Ottawa. Through the TRC and his later work in Toronto and Montreal, Pochinko trained an entire generation of clown teachers, the most notable being Sue Morrison (The Institute of Canadian Clowning), Mike Kennard and John Turner (Mump and Smoot/The Space/The Clown Farm), Jan Henderson (Fool Moon Productions), and Cheryl Cashman (Teacher/Performer). Unfortunately, Pochinko died of AIDS in 1989 and the TRC closed down shortly after that. The loss to this unique aspect of Canadian performing was enormous.

Pochinko's work, however, has had a lasting impact on the Canadian clown community. What is most important to take away from his work is that the training it provides is rooted first and foremost in making the performer open and available. Having been trained in this tradition of clowning, Morro and Jasp allow and invite the audience to identify with them as clowns – the key first step needed in building the aforementioned sacred circle or play space that includes everyone present at the performance. This identification remains essential to this work because, as Wirth reminds us, "The art of any [interactive] work lies in the ability to reach people where they are, while helping them stretch to what they might become" (91).

A final note on Pochinko is that, despite moving away from or evolving the Le Coq techniques he encountered early in his career, he kept alive a key element of clowning that existed since Le Coq's beginnings – the so-called Joey and Auguste framework that often defines the relationship between a pair in a clown duo. "Over the years Pochinko imbued the Lecoq [*sic*] technique with his own inspirations . . . he also developed an advanced workshop – the

Joey/Auguste – which had a profound influence on many Canadian Clowns (Mump and Smoot foremost among them)" (Cashman 24).

> Joey and Auguste's relationships are dysfunctional relationships and they work. It's not going to be a good balanced relationship. You just got to accept that everybody's relationship is dysfunctional on some level. It's just finding that level of dysfunctionality (*sic*) with the appropriately dysfunctional person that makes your dysfunction work together ("Day 1").

This is important here as it defines the nature of Morro and Jasp's relationship to each other, and thus influences what type of relationship the audience will have with them, as well as what techniques are possible and appropriate - based on how the participant might react/interact with them individually.

Lastly, a brief survey of those who have specifically trained U.N.I.T. Production's core team members is required. The three figures described below in some way enhanced or evolved the notion of the function of clowning used by Morro and Jasp, as well as contributed to their understanding of how various approaches to interaction might be used to achieve specific aims in specific situations.

The first of these, Pete Jarvis, is a teacher of clown, mime, and mask, who trained with Pochinko during the final years of his life. U.N.I.T. Productions worked exclusively with Jarvis from 2005 to 2008, fully and deeply exploring Pochinko's techniques of clown creation. While an extensive list of what that training entailed is outside the scope of this study, Jarvis identifies the main value of the Pochinko method:

> 'Before I met Richard I had all the technique in the world but not the access to it,' Jarvis says. 'He helped me discover the confidence to find my own individual characters from within. All the insecurities started to fall away, and I was able to walk into any space and feel comfortable . . . like going out on the

street and performing in front of the Eaton Centre. That's what I hope to do in my own mentoring' ("Send in the Clowns").

In addition to his work as a teacher and mentor, Jarvis is also a professional busker and is an expert in exploring and exploiting the interactive possibilities of that form of *Street Theatre*. His "Silver Elvis" busker act – where he impersonates a robotic Elvis activated to dance by an audience member's patronage – has toured festivals around the world and is renowned for its ability to activate, engage, and draw payment from an audience. From this, U.N.I.T. Productions learned the value of gaining attention, of attracting an audience to the performance, in order to be able to begin sharing with them.

Helen Donnelly, another teacher trained in Pochinko's techniques, is a professional performance clown whose work experience also includes busking and street performance, as well as clowning with Cirque du Soleil. In addition to this, and most relevant here, is that Donnelly is also a therapeutic clown - a performer who seeks to use the techniques of clowning to help activate those recovering from illness or injury, as well as to engage those who might be in a convalescent home or suffering from a terminal sickness.

> With their focus on the imaginative and the creative, therapeutic clowns offer new opportunities for play and laughter, for self-expression and self-acceptance, for mastery and empowerment, and for moments of tenderness and comfort. We believe that these interactions have an impact on everyone's experiences and perceptions, and thus help to humanize the health care setting ("Statement of Principles").

Both U.N.I.T. Productions performers trained directly under Donnelly (and her partner Kathleen Le Roux) from 2009 to 2011, and have practiced this work with them in a variety of health care settings. A key to understanding how Morro and Jasp's interactive techniques have manifested themselves in this

sphere of theatre and health is directly connected to Izzo's notion of *Interactive Theatre*.

Fig. 19 – Helen Donnelly as "Flap", a therapeutic clown

That is, "interactive theatre…can be defined as theater in which the audience actively and spontaneously co-creates, with the actor, the unfolding drama" (26). At this point, Izzo says, "the interactive play is no longer aware of itself" (26). In this light, therapeutic clowning allows for spontaneous co-creation, without the pressures of narrative or authorial intent. The *only* purpose is to allow play, for sharing, for trust, to provide the patient with an opportunity to participate in their mental and emotional recovery.

It should be noted here that when Morro and Jasp first began performing in 2005, Canadian clowning was essentially defined by the work of Mump and Smoot – an award-winning Joey and Auguste clown duo created in 1988 by Mike Kennard and John Turner alongside director Karen Hines, whose "distinctive style of clowning finds its roots deep within their work with Pochinko" ("Press"), U.N.I.T. Productions' core team trained with Turner at the Clown Farm – an institution established in 2002 and devoted to the exploration of clown work – on Manitoulin Island during the summers of 2011 and 2012.

Improvisation and Interactivity in Clown Performance

Indeed, Mump and Smoot offer an interesting comparison point to Morro and Jasp, as their performances exhibit many of the tenets of *improvisation.* From the popular press, it has been identified, by *Now Magazine*, that "Turner and Kennard are such deft improvisers that technical problems - and there were a couple on opening night - only mean opportunities for bigger unexpected laughs" ("Clowns Conquer"), and, in the *Edmonton Journal,* "the fun of any Mump and Smoot show is how quick Kennard and Turner are on their feet, and how playful they are about the whole theatrical illusion" ("Press").

Turner's thoughts and approach echo those of Izzo's, Wirth, and Pochinko in that the purpose of the program he runs out of the Clown Farm is "to awaken and encourage a sense of pleasure, to heighten awareness of one's immediate environment, and to develop an honest response to internal impulses and external events" ("Welcome").

While utilizing *Improvisational Comedy* in their theatre, and while they clearly react quickly and cleverly to unexpected shifts in their world and they obviously know that an audience is present in front of them, Mump and Smoot almost never cross over into what Izzo calls *Audience Participatory Theatre*. This type of interactive theatre, one where "one or more members of the audience may be brought onto the stage to perform some action integral to the scene" (Izzo 22), however, does describe Morro and Jasp performances.

Rubric of Interaction

To that end, U.N.I.T. Productions discovered, developed, and deployed a rubric of interaction as a means of better allowing an audience member to feel safe with and eventually seek participation inside a given performance. As Wirth puts it:

> Most spectators are not actors. They don't know how to act, especially not in front of strangers. If they're going to take the risk of performing, they need to feel there is a friend who will help them out along the way (95)

What arises from this desire to help non-actors is something akin to Boal's "spect-actors", a three-tiered model of interaction known internally as "Soft", "Medium", and "Hard", depending on their form and function. While there exist no textual materials setting out how each of these modes is to be used outside of this study, they nevertheless do comprise *the* most essential element of how Morro and Jasp interact with the audience and encourage them to play along.

This rubric includes various levels of choice and intent. For instance: Are the participants expected to interact as individuals, or in a group; are they required

to come to the clowns, or will the clowns come to them; and do they need to speak, or is it a physical interaction? Again, it must be stated that no *actual* record of these factors exists outside of performances themselves. These are techniques discussed in rehearsal, in the creation of each show, and only then are they manifest live during the events themselves. Being experiments *in* interactivity, rather than a testing of pre-existing, externally sourced techniques, the lines can and often do blur.

This is the nature of play, however, and as Schechner and Caillois pointed out in the discussion of play in the first chapter, the blurring of such lines is unavoidable and a necessary element of play itself. As this system reacts to the input of the audience, its very function changes, flexes, and grows. This in itself is a key aspect to creating belief and trust between audience and actor, participant and performer – the shared nature of the game and its outcome.

The concept referred to as a "Soft" interaction by U.N.I.T. Productions is one beyond anything contained in Izzo's *Intimate Theatre*. It is more than just close watching or close proximity to the clowns, more than just direct address or a thrust stage. Where it does connect to this first type of interactive theatre, however, is "that the production, if you will, is aware of the audience's existence"(Izzo 22). At times, a "Soft" interaction is the first contact between the audience and Morro and Jasp. This has involved the clowns entering the audience's space, or as a conversation between clown and audience member. It may involve the sharing of food, from clown to audience member (and then from audience to audience afterwards), a communal song, or sound, or even a series of basic movements.

Fig. 20 – Jasp starting a "Medium" interaction in *Morro and Jasp do Puberty*

A "Medium" interaction is defined by U.N.I.T. as involvement with an individual, but with the audience member remaining in place as a viewer. In general, the clowns are in physical contact with or expressly focused on the viewer. These interactions are essential, in order to proceed towards "Hard" interactions. Much like approaching an unknown household pet, a gentle

touch is often required. Here again, Wirth's notion of active versus passive participation is important:

> In traditional theatre the audience assumes a *reactive* role, responding to the performance in a passive fashion. Interactive theatre expands the experience of the audience by offering them a *proactive* role, in which they are invited to join as a collaborator in the creation of the performance (Wirth 1).

In the case of "Medium" interactions, Izzo reinforces one of the key differences, in that "in participatory theatre the production is not only aware of the existence of the audience, as in *Intimate Theatre*, it is also aware of itself as a play" (22). The "Medium" tier, then, involves allowing the audience to understand the moment not only as being in *a* play, but also as a moment *of* play itself. These interactions mostly involve either Morro or Jasp, or both, entering "the house", in order to elicit some sort of help, or advice, or action from an individual. The specifics of how the participant responds shapes the tone of the performance and continues to maintain the sacred circle as a place within which individual agency and activity is allowed.

From here, however, conflict between audience agency and authorial desire begins. In "Medium", and especially "Hard" interactions, the power given to the participant is very real and in some cases very important to the progression of the narrative. Unlike in Izzo's *Improvisational Comedy* category, where the "audience's personal connection to the show comes from watching its suggestions played out on the stage" (24), in these two tiers the relationship between actor and audience is that of fellow players. The participant becomes a choice-maker in real time, and not in the deferred manner of traditional improvisation, thus opening up the possibility that something unanticipated might occur and would need to be dealt with.

Wirth too identifies these limits:

> Interactive theatre is not just improvising. A talented improvisor is not necessarily a great interactor. That is because many improvisors are used to performing with other improvisers, not with members of the audience (Wirth, 37).

However, Keith Johnstone, a master improviser himself, reminds us of the value of improvisation in interaction when it is done openly and honestly, qualities Canadian clowns have been shown to excel at: "it's possible to turn unimaginative people into imaginative people in a moment's notice" (Johnstone, 75).

Finally, "Hard" interactions occur when an individual or group is brought "onstage", in order for them to take a clearly active role in the performance. The selection of participants for this level of interaction is perhaps the most delicate of any action in Morro and Jasp, as the "correct individual" needs to possess the right mix of willingness and hesitation. If they are too frightened to trust or play, the interaction will be painful for them, for the clowns and for the rest of the audience.

On the other hand, if they are too eager, the interaction becomes less about experiencing a shared moment and more about someone wanting to perform against – rather than with – the clowns. This, therefore, requires both a measure of encouraging but also managing the interaction.

As Northam, creator of the clown show *Blind Date* discussed in chapter one, "we were always taught, if you bring an audience member on stage, you take care of them and you make them look good. That's your job" ("Rebecca Northan"). In Morro and Jasp, "Hard" interactions have manifested themselves as dancing onstage with the clowns, as doing make-overs on fellow females, as

contests between participants, or as role-playing inside a story being enacted *by* the clowns themselves.

These "Hard" interactions, while the most "risky" for both actor and audience member, generally only occur late in the performance, after an atmosphere of sharing and trust has developed. Again, this reflects much of Boal's notion of the "spect-actor"; "a member of the audience who takes part in the action in any way; the spect-actor is an active spectator as opposed to the passivity normally associated with the role of the audience member" (Boal xxiv).

Fig. 21 – Morro in a "Hard" interaction during *Morro and Jasp Gone Wild*

Experiencing Interactive Theatre

One final note here in relation to Izzo's final category of audience participatory theatre - what he calls simply *Interactive Theatre*. As he states, "interactive theatre is designed not to be *observed*, but to be *experienced*," and while that has remained an undeniably key component of Morro and Jasp, the notion that "the interactive play is no longer aware of itself" is not – at least not in the sense that Izzo seems to mean this.

The audience is always – at least at the start of each performance – aware of Morro and Jasp as fictional characters, and the performance as a theatrical creation. Their investment in the characters' existence, via their repeated and meaningful interactions with them, on the other hand, caused them perhaps to shift the way they understand what that actually means. While the events of the performance never become other than make-believe, the clowns, however, make possible the transition into another world. The audience may just *wish* them to be real. They most certainly treat them as real – both on- and off-stage. This notion will be explored once again at the end of the next chapter in connection to Morro and Jasp's online presence and the power of work that is serial and episodic rather than stand-alone.

Having now defined U.N.I.T Production's own rubric of interaction, a quick comment must be made about how often this quality has been talked about in the popular press. Not only does this confirm it as *an* element of the performances, but as one of *the* most recognized elements in the work.

From *Now Magazine* (Toronto):

> Expert at encouraging audience participation and playing off each other ("Morro and Jasp Gone Wild").

From the *View Weekly* (Edmonton):

> Audience participation elements are incorporated skillfully, supporting a sense of engagement with the characters ("Of Mice and Morro and Jasp").

From *Arts Vox* (Online):

> As with any 'Morro and Jasp' production, one can expect a porous fourth wall, some gentle ad-libs at the expense of audience members, and palpable chemistry that could only come from a fruitful eight year partnership ("Fringe Picks").

From the *Free Press* (Winnipeg):

> Annis [Morro] and Lee [Jasp] make the most of the outdoor venue, crawling and tramping through the grass (and spectators), and even venturing right into the river. The performers showed their improv chops in their many involved audience-participation bits ("Morro and Jasp GONE WILD").

From *Shalom Life* (Toronto):

> It's in these scenes, where Morro and Jasp break the fourth wall and pull audience members down from their seats to participate in the action, that the two actresses really shine…Annis and Lee are equally great at improvising and clowning, and they play off the audience with impeccable timing ("Toronto Fringe Festival").

Having thus established interactivity as not merely a part of but rather a core principle of U.N.I.T. Production's work, what follows is a detailed description of how these "Soft", "Medium", and "Hard" interaction techniques were actually applied to a series of clown performances. What will emerge from this is insight into how interactivity is manifest in actual practice and what effect it has in the creation of an atmosphere of belief and sharing within a space of trust and play. (It should be noted that this study will ignore the first two Morro and Jasp performances – *The Funtastical Friendship of Morro and Jasp* and *The Truth According to Morro and Jasp* – as they were early experiments in working with clown characters, and as such were not designed to include any real interactivity).

What follows then are five case studies of productions, created between 2008 and 2012. Each traces both instances of interaction (via the three-tiered rubric described above), as well as – and more important to the true understanding of interactive theatre – how they were used in sequence, inside a planned narrative, so that an atmosphere of belief, sharing, and trust existed, allowing the audience (as a group or as individual participants) to "play" inside the world of Morro and Jasp while simultaneously contributing to its construction. In no case was the audience to understand themselves as *outside* of the action, but rather as an essential and important part of it.

The shows to be examined are *Morro and Jasp do Puberty* (2008)*; Morro and Jasp Gone Wild* (2010); *Morro and Jasp Go Bake Yourself* (2011); *Of Mice and Morro and Jasp* (2012), as well as a piece created especially for younger audiences – *The Bully Show: Clowns in the Round* (2009), created with Mixed Company Theatre *as* a piece of Forum Theatre. For the sake of contextualizing the instances and flow of interactivity throughout these case studies, a brief summary of the plot will begin each analysis and will be included alongside the description of the interactions where necessary, so as to contextualize their use and the progression of interaction to interaction.

(To set the context for the staging of these performances: Most occurred in a traditional theatrical setting, with a stage area physically separated from the audience. The disruption of traditional set up became an increasingly important tool for reengineering the audience/actor relationship. As well, certain of the shows – *Morro and Jasp Gone Wild* and *Morro and Jasp Go Bake Yourself* – were also site-specific productions, and this aspect will be discussed where relevant.

In general, lighting was focused either only on the stage, or on both the stage and the house. The latter often served to announce the arrival of an interactive sequence. In works such as *Morro and Jasp Go Bake Yourself* or *Of Mice and Morro and Jasp*, the house lights remained on more consistently, except when required to achieve effect such as a black out. This use of lighting helped to mark a shift in U.N.I.T. Productions' approach to interactivity – originally understood as a series of devices to be utilized during moments of play to a holistic approach, creating a truly shared experience of "play".

Morro and Jasp do Puberty

Morro and Jasp do Puberty (henceforth "*Puberty*") "explores the trials and tribulations that we all had to go through, are going through, or are about to go through on the way to becoming a grown-up" ("morroandjasp.com"). Highlighting the challenges involved in the transition from childhood to puberty, this 60-minute performance marked the first real attempt at genuine audience participation and thus began the investigation of the tools and techniques of interactivity used by U.N.I.T. Productions.

Here, not only was the audience recognized as present, but their role was one of teenage confidante and comforter. That said, the prime motivation for production was that of storytelling, rather than story-sharing. While the sacred circle was extended to include the audience, the idea of a "two way transfer" was still relatively unexplored. This show was first produced in 2008 at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival and was subsequently performed in Montreal, Edmonton, New York City, and in several remounts in Toronto.

The first major interaction in *Puberty* occurs early on in the performance. Morro has just discovered that she has gotten her first period. She runs into the audience (away from the toilet – one of three main set pieces, the others being a bed and a telephone), in order to share her discovery. Recognizable as a "Medium" interaction, this act quickly "broke the fourth wall" and formed an immediate bond between the performer and the person chosen (usually a fellow female) to receive Morro's secret – "I'm bleeding from the crotch." However, once learned, the participant was then required to share this with the rest of the audience, forcing a public action from a supposed passive viewer.

This interaction, just minutes into the performance, established two main things. One, as mentioned above, that this experience was to be a shared one, that what happens "on stage" could and would be brought into the audience's realm; and two, that no secrets were to be kept here, that the awkwardness of puberty would be honestly and openly shared with all present. Immediately, the world of the clowns became the world of the audience.

To echo Pochinko's understanding of the function of clowns in performance, "If you can learn to laugh at your panic and together we can find a way to express it, then people will identify with it and go through their panic with you and release it" ("On Meeting Richard Pochinko"). Belief then begins with the audience's ability to identify. The sharing of private information served to strengthen it; the combination of both began a bond of trust. By being complicit so early on, the audience was invited to invest in the theatrical journey.

The second interaction, initiated by Jasp, is a "Soft" one, allowing the audience member selected to remain in their seat. In order to maintain her notion of beauty, Jasp has applied a hair removal cream to her arms and face. Prompted by the fact that the cream is beginning to burn her skin, she requires the participant to let her know when 37 seconds have passed – the prescribed amount of time remaining in her "treatment".

As an interaction, it may not seem very complicated; however, what occurred through it was the beginning of the transfer of a small amount of power and control to someone other than one of the performers. The selected individual controlled 37 seconds (or more if they wished) of the play, Jasp all the while growing more and more uncomfortable. Some chose to let that time pass quicker than it actually was; others decided that they enjoyed Jasp's suffering and dragged out the process.

That is to say, it was the audience member, not the clown, who decided the immediate course of action. While no real control over the story's overall progression changed hands during this sequence, it is true that an outsider did have some measure of influence over one of the story's characters. Even if it was only for 37 seconds, this interaction shifted the nature of the relationship between action and audience.

Guardian critic Lyn Gardner's words here are worth repeating since "the traditional theatre going experience where you go into the theatre, you sit in rows in the dark, and somebody sort of does theatre *to* you" was destabilized ("It's Fun but is it Theatre?"). The perception of who was the "doer" and who

was the "watcher" became blurred. The experience of *Puberty* was not just involved in seeing or sharing, but one that could also involve shaping as well.

The next interaction saw a return to the "Medium" type. In this case, Morro is continuing to explore her dysfunctional relationship to feminine hygiene products. While demonstrating the various uses of a sanitary napkin or "pad", she ends up re-enacting how one of the pads managed to escape her grasp and land, embarrassingly, on "this guy's head." For this interaction, an older gentleman was always selected. The immediate and intimate confrontation of something traditionally kept far away from men caused a crisis of social norms.

Fig. 22 – "The Pad"

While very brief in nature – the pad was quickly removed after a few seconds – the invasion of a "woman's issue" into the physical space of a male audience member altered, if nothing else, proximity to the "problem". While perhaps unpleasant for some, this tactile connection to both the artifacts and antagonists in Morro's world marked a shift in the nature of the theatrical sharing. If seeing is key to believing then touching must be something akin to knowing.

Following almost immediately was another interaction, again instigated by Morro, meant to heal any potentially broken bonds between actor and audience. Rummaging in her lunch box, the clown produces a bag of Cheetos – a staple of the Morro and Jasp experience since *Puberty* – and after first stuffing her face with them, offers the rest of the bag to the elderly gentleman who had been "padded". The snack is then passed around for the rest of the audience to enjoy, the act of communal eating functioning as a reparative one, meant to shift the focus from an individual back onto the group. As well, the senses of smell and taste are aroused as a means to continue the extension of a shared world. Through this, the simultaneous experience of everyone present – clown included – re-forged the bonds of trust and reinforced the inclusive nature of the action. Not only could *anyone* play, in fact *everyone* could if they chose to.

The last few examples in *Puberty* marked the shift into "Hard" interactions. It is important to remember here that, as Johnstone insists, "good improvisers seem telepathic; everything looks prearranged. This is because they accept all offers made – which is something no 'normal' person would do" (99). Izzo reminds us too, in his dissection of *Improvisational Comedy*, that "rarely are

the audience members brought on the stage. There is no room for an amateur…" (24).

In the case of Morro and Jasp, however, it is precisely the amateur quality of the participant that makes the interaction work as a means of building trust and shared experience. The fact that the participant was experiencing the moment first hand (as was the clown with this *particular* participant) made the interaction truly playful and believable.

The first "Hard" interaction invokes a familiar trope of teen life – the slumber party. In this case, a female audience member is brought up on stage, selected by Jasp, in order to help Morro celebrate her transition into womanhood (a fact Jasp has only recently learned about and is struggling with, she being the older sister and somewhat envious of Morro's head start). After being instructed on how to blow a party horn, which allows for a brief moment of sexual innuendo and thus evoking the hormonal excitement of the sleepover, the participant is invited to share *her* first menstrual experience.

While for the sake of discretion, in order to not force the female audience member on stage to divulge her own private information, this offer is interrupted before it can actually occur. What this interaction does regardless, however, is literally place the participant in Morro's shoes; for a brief moment, she becomes the "star of the show", her story about to hold equal weight to anything else said or done thus far. For the individual, the realization of the difficulty involved when private matters are publicly exposed is very present, and the once fictional nature of the performance has suddenly become very real. All eyes are upon her, waiting, wondering.

For the audience as a whole, their perspective has shifted. No longer is the world just about Morro's period or Jasp's problems, but rather these instances are seen to belong to a spectrum of women's stories. For the females in the audience, they understand themselves no longer as just audience members, but instead as members of a shared community, sympathizing with not only a clown, but with one of their own, on stage and now on the spot.

For women in attendance, their belief in the experience is no longer in doubt, as it is in some ways their story unfolding in front of them, triggering their own pubescent memories. For the men, this moment is akin to the pad scene – they are outsiders and will always be, and yet at the same time they are inside, or at least alongside something generally kept from them.

If this interaction has the potential to be shockingly honest to some, its second part exists to make amends for that honesty through humour. If the audience has become divided by what has (almost) happened, they become reunited by what is about to happen. In her deflection of Jasp's attempt to embarrass the participant – who has now been offered chocolate to calm her potential sense of unease – Morro has switched the subject to one she knows Jasp will take up – boys. After inquiring for whom the participant has affection, Jasp decides that in order to help out their new friend catch or keep her man, a make-over is required.

Fig. 23 – "The Make Over"

Involving applying make-up to the face, eyes, and cheeks of the participant –
who, unlike everyone else present, cannot see her appearance as the make-
over progresses – the final act is the application of lipstick. Morro, having been
unable to participate in the make-over, except as Jasp's assistant, wishes to
apply the final touch. Jasp immediately refuses, and after some discussion it is
decided that the participant should make the final decision – Morro or Jasp?
Here, for the first and perhaps only time during *Puberty*, real choice is offered.
(A generous interpretation of this would be a form of compensation for the

manipulation done to her emotionally and physically by Jasp; however, this was not the essential function).

Instead, this is the final "on-the-spot" moment for the participant. She is able to select Morro or Jasp, or, as sometimes happened, both. As the canvas for the clowns, she is able to decide the final touch. Each option elicits a different response from both Morro and Jasp – and by extension the rest of the audience – but the ultimate outcome was always the same. The key to this sequence, the hardest of the "Hard" interactions in *Puberty*, is that never during or after the make-over was the participant called anything but beautiful. Despite the somewhat garish look resulting from the combination of clowns and cosmetics, both Morro and Jasp (and the rest of the audience) praised the effect.

What was really being praised, however, was the participant's bravery and willingness to both play and play along. A younger adult female always, and thus close in age to the performers and not too far past the supposed age of the clowns, her willingness to be the object of Morro and Jasp's examinations of feminine beauty standards completed the circle of trust. Being given over to the play of others, the give-and-take of the audience/actor relationship finally matured. No longer was the convention of "us vs. them" an option; the group dynamic, one full of risk and sharing, came fully into being.

The next interaction involved Morro who, having decided that the monthly cycle of menstruation meant that one quarter of her life was essentially gone, traded her normally sporty attire and optimistic outlook for dark clothes, darker make-up, and a tragic view of existence. As part of this shift, she

decided that she must smoke – an act that echoes typical teenage angst and surface-level rebellion. In this "Medium" interaction, the clown calls from the stage for a cigarette, and is willing to wait for one to be offered.

Unsure of what to do, the audience – having recently bonded through the make-over experience – is now individuated and isolated again. As breakers of a social taboo, the smokers in the audience were often reluctant to reveal themselves. When Morro asks everyone to "smell their neighbors," she further forces those already feeling potentially awkward to see their choice to smoke in the all-seeing public eye. While this still elicited laughter, it was self-conscious laughter, for both those being sought and by the seekers as well.

At first, this interaction might seem contrary to the pursuit of a trusting and sharing play space. However, as Pochinko reminds us, "The audience identifies with the clown. That's the difference between an actor and a clown. While an actor is playing someone else, a clown is playing himself and you" ("On Meeting Richard Pochinko"). In connection to the creation of belief, this interaction is unquestionably real for the audience. While smoking is a personal choice, the possibility that someone might enable the clown – a figure of innocence – to do so as well is unpleasant and forces them to question why they themselves do it. This interaction also illuminated again a key element of sharing in *Puberty*: that while sharing joy and hope is easy, sharing vices and secrets is not, and being forced to identify them in front of others is even harder still.

In practice, however, most times Morro was able to acquire a cigarette from an audience member. Here, the tensions between wanting to play along and

being uncertain if they should made the interaction more unpredictable than most. As a final turn of the knife, after having forced a smoker to reveal his or her self, Morro would then say to them: "You shouldn't give cigarettes to minors." This last act of both defiance and judgment from performer to participant broke the tension by allowing everyone to see that there was no "right" response to this situation.

Morro would always end up destroying the cigarette in her hands as she realizes the ridiculousness of her actions. That she offers it back to the audience member shows her appreciation of their effort and sacrifice, and transfers the embarrassment back onto the clown. This additional interaction, while perhaps appearing as a throw away for the sake of humour, echoes some of Brecht's notions of alienation and perhaps his real purpose in using it:

> 'Verfremdung', in fact, is not simply the breaking of illusion (though that is one means to an end); and it does not mean 'alienating' the spectator in the sense of making him hostile to the play. It is a matter of detachment, or reorientation (Willet 179).

Like the taboo of the menstrual period, smoking is re-orientated by the clown so that it can be understood and approached, giving the audience a chance to encounter it differently. As they are *the* providers of the potential vice, accountability to their own self and health is questioned.

The final interaction in *Puberty* involved another individual audience member, but this time a male was required. While unquestionably a performance deeply rooted in the exploration of female puberty and its associated social and physical complications, this last "Hard" interaction sought to finally and fully position the male portion of the audience into the story and world of Morro and Jasp.

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As the story evolves, we learn that Jasp – having sought for and failed to find a date for the school dance – decided to attend regardless, an act of defiance to those who have rejected her. While Morro is busy elsewhere, Jasp fantasizes about what her grand entrance into the dance would be like.

Dressed in a flowing gown, she envisions her greatest crush – actor Leonardo DiCaprio – waiting for her to arrive. She eventually discovers him in the audience and, after having him stand up and come to meet her; he becomes subsumed into the fantasy. According to her instructions, he bows and then they begin to dance.

Eventually interrupted by Morro's calls for help (she has somehow managed to get a tampon "stuck" inside her), Jasp thanks her beau for the moments of grace. One particular occasion of this sequence bears describing here, as it illuminates perfectly the desired effect of both this particular interaction and the vulnerability of the sharing involved in *Puberty.*

On this occasion, Jasp selected an older gentleman with a cane – unknown to the performer at the time as he was seated. When he rose and moved towards her, the audience was completely silent; the participant's physical disability the only thing in focus at the moment.

Fig. 24 – Jasp dancing with a participant

The purpose of this interaction was to fulfill fantasies and provide hope – to a young girl who imagines herself unworthy of love and affection – and it is the participant who is to provide that for her. It is a gift given through a moment shared. On this occasion, however, the opposite also occurred. The clown was able to give the gift back - a moment of dignity and worth for both. Actor and audience in this sequence knew the slightest sense of rejection, the cruelty of

misperception would destroy this moment, but through giving, and trusting, a profound connection could be and was made.

What does this mean? Richard Schechner once wrote, "From Plato to the Puritans, the playful has been considered frivolous, unimportant, and even sinful. Playing is a major distraction tempting people away from work, which is the 'real business' of living…" (101). The purpose of play here, and in *Puberty* as a whole is, in fact, far from frivolous or distracting. It offers a state of being in which the audience were encouraged to realize that they had become confessors, collaborators, and colleagues on a journey to know themselves better, to see themselves reflected through the action of the clowns and their fellow audience members as they are, regardless of social or personal factors, regardless even of social taboos.

The first effort of U.N.I.T. Productions into the realm of interactivity, *Puberty* became less an example of a shift in theatrical space than a shift in approach to theatre as a whole. The community forged during the performance, the shared sense of observation and revelation about difficult-to-discuss topics, made the experience not merely play in secret, but public play through secrets, through hopes and desires and fears, and a consummation only possible through the theatrical creation of trust.

Morro and Jasp Gone Wild

Morro and Jasp Gone Wild (Henceforth "*Gone Wild*") sees Morro and Jasp (from the website description) "off to celebrate Spring Break at the beach.

Looking to shake off city life for some fun in the sun, the clown sisters expose themselves to a new kind of craziness, learning that even the best laid plans can spiral way out of control" ("morroandjasp.com"). Playing off the tropes of the *Girls Gone Wild* video series (one that focuses on Spring Break revelers engaging in overly intoxicated and overtly sexual activity), the title also houses another meaning, however – when one goes savage, and has to exist in the natural world, subsequently reawakening the less-than-civilized instincts required to survive.

Gone Wild is also the first of U.N.I.T. Productions' work to explore the interactive elements of *environmental theatre* in "which the actual physical setting is used for its reality value" (Wirth 5). What makes *Gone Wild* interesting, however, is that it is a hybrid (as opposed to *Morro and Jasp Go Bake Yourself,* which has only ever existed as a site-specific work), created first in a traditional theatrical setting and then re-imagined over a year later for an outdoor setting in a park beside the Red River in Winnipeg. The tensions this segmented creation and production process illuminated, in regards to the tools and techniques deployed and subsequently repurposed, will be explored below.

The first interaction in *Gone Wild* occurs before the show proper even begins. As the audience enters the theatre, they encounter Morro and Jasp fighting over the control of the radio in their "car" (in reality a pair of lawn chairs and a wagon). During this "Soft" interaction (considered "Soft" due to the lack of required action from the audience as opposed to their proximity to the performers), they would be spoken to by clowns, honked at by Jasp, or offered Cheetos by Morro.

Again, as in *Puberty,* this interaction serves to establish the liminal space in which the experience was to take place. As Schechner has identified, the very space on which the performance is about to occur is transformed, so that "what is usually just a 'go between' becomes the site of the [inter]action" (58). This interaction was eventually removed from the environmental production of *Gone Wild* to adhere to the "reality value'" of the site itself, but as a result, the creation of a publicly shared space – despite actually being in a public space – was delayed, and as a result so too was the ability to begin the trust-building process.

Fig. 25 – *Gone Wild* being performed beside the Red River, Winnipeg

The next interaction, a "Medium" tier one, occurred after Morro and Jasp – due to the escalation of the in-car arguing that began with the radio – have crashed their car and are now stranded in the woods in parts unknown. In order to try to salvage the situation, they decide to call a tow truck. Their phones, however,

have been damaged in the accident. They therefore require help from the audience.

In this interaction, they select someone to surrender their phone (after grilling them on the technological quality of it, their long distance plan, and if it has a speaker phone function – a key component to allow the rest of the audience to share in the experience). They then call a predetermined number and, remarkably, a seemingly real employee of a towing company answers.

The function of this interaction is connected to the notion of "make-belief" (the investment in belief in which, according to Wirth, "the experience seems real to an audience" and allows them to make "an active investment of their minds, bodies, and spirits") (3). Here, however, this investment is not in the world of the clowns' creation, but rather is an extension of belief in that the clowns are actively participating in the world of the audience who witness them make connection via something not framed as a theatrical prop.

During the site-specific run of *Gone Wild*, this sequence was transformed from a "Medium" to a "Hard" interaction by requesting that the participant who provided the phone actually dial the number given to them by the clowns. When they also encountered what appeared to be an actual tow truck company, their surprise only amplified the effect of this interaction. It must also be noted that, as the first real interaction to occur in the site-specific version of *Gone Wild*, this also caused some confusion, as up until that point there had been little to indicate that the piece was to include interactivity or participation of any kind.

What should be noted here is, by being beside an actual river, on numerous occasions boat traffic would pass by. Whenever possible, the clowns would attempt to make contact with the occupants of these vessels, and beg them for rescue and delivery to the desired destination – the beach. While none ever stopped, some slowed to chat. These unintended, but extremely potent "Soft" interactions welded environment and experience into a stronger whole than perhaps any planned interaction might have. As Izzo reminds us, "In interactive theatre, the stage is an *environment* – one that encloses both audience (or guest) and actor alike. Environmental theatre need not be interactive, but interactive theatre is always environmental" (24).

Regardless of version or variation, the next interaction extended the "Medium" type into a level of physical intimacy never undertaken in *Puberty*, yet that was very much in line with the subject matter being investigated in *Gone Wild.* After calling the tow truck and waiting for it to arrive, Jasp decides to make the best of a bad situation and get in some tanning. In order to protect her from the sun – real or imagined – sunscreen is required. She recruits a male member of the audience to help her apply it.

Unlike the dancing interaction in *Puberty*, which sought to position the role of males within the performance as equally important to, if still very much different from, the world of the female clowns, and thus create a safe space in which to deal with the awkwardness of pubescence, the sunscreen interaction was risqué and ostensibly unguided. Indeed, after rubbing lotion on Jasp's back and shoulders, the participant discovers she has applied some to her chest, made perfectly visible and accessible by her low cut bathing suit.

In Caillois' breakdown of the two major types of play – *Paidia* and *Ludus* – it is the former that is prompted here. As opposed to *Ludus* or "a game governed by rule-bound behavior," this *Paidiac* interaction very much risks "a spontaneous burst of play, turbulent and unconstrained" (Schechner 95). What this does echo from *Puberty*, however, is the placement of power in, quite literally, the audience's hands. While the clown eventually rescinded the choice, these few moments of uncertain control, coupled with the sexual tension caused by the nature of the interaction and the actor's costume, created a play space potentially full of danger (and delight).

Eventually, a water fight breaks out using a spray bottle, a small water pistol, a six nozzle water cannon, and eventually a water balloon. From this escalation came a "Soft" interaction with the audience suffering collateral damage from the water. While simple, this interaction served two functions: further bonding the world of clown and audience together through the extension of the elements of the clowns' physical world into theirs, as well as beginning the series of play experiences of what Caillois called "*Ilinx* or dizziness" play, or play "meant to "induce a disorienting experience or state of mind" (Schechner 95).

(In the first theatrical incarnation of *Gone Wild*, this water fight caused only a handful of sprinkles to fall on a few members of the audience, as it involved only the first two water toys listed above. In the second incarnation, however, a much more elaborate experience was engineered, involving the water cannon, water balloons, and a specialized area of the space termed the "Splash Zone" in which audience members, keen to participate – actually or experientially – could sit, poncho covered, to literally get as close to the action as possible.)

Building off the sexual undercurrent in *Gone Wild*, the next interaction allowed for not one but two participants to join the clowns on stage for a condom tutorial that used cucumbers as proxy phalluses. (One of these cucumbers was hidden under a random seat, allowing for a moment of what will be referred to in the chapter on *ZED.TO* as a "find/search" interaction – the main function of which is to allow the participant to actively engage in the story happening around them. The cucumber hunt, of course, is a very simple example of this). Once found, two women were selected by Jasp to help demonstrate proper condom usage to Morro, in case it should prove necessary to use one if and when they finally arrived at the beach party.

What should be clear by now is that the Joey/Auguste framework discussed earlier in this chapter does indeed affect the nature of the interactions possible by each clown and type of activity or action required by them. Again, this observation is very much clown-specific, but suggests something larger – that an audience member's perception of character deeply affects their willingness to engage in an interaction. While both environment and story are key elements of world building and building trust, it is the actor, be they clown or character, which energizes and instigates interaction.

Without a strongly defined sense of the function of character, and the appropriateness of their relationship to the audience versus the interactions being initiated by them, the desire to share an experience, a secret, a story, is severely compromised and therefore so must be the general sense of belief, trust, and play. This notion will be discussed in much more detail in the breakdown of the overall observations and conclusions of this study.

To return to *Gone Wild*, the first of two "Hard" interactions involved exploration of sexual learning and, by extension, its awkwardness. The two women were required to position the cucumber between their legs to simulate an erect penis. From this point, Jasp would demonstrate the "correct" steps involved in putting on a condom, while Morro would try, fail, and then eventually eat the cucumber.

While the participants in this interaction were really quite still, and physically were little more than mannequins, their proximity to the action, and the nature of that action, made the sequence extremely intimate for them. On the other hand, as clowns, Morro and Jasp made the activity they were performing, and the subsequent awkwardness, amusing, and they made this awkwardness public. Similar to the first menstruation story in *Puberty*, what reduced the risk of potential embarrassment here was the celebration of the audience member's bravery that concluded the interaction. Risk, when present in play, is not rule-bound, and this interaction operated as a further example of "*Ilinx* or dizziness" play (Schechner 95), reflecting the performer's desire to create a sacred circle not necessarily bound by civilized or organized conventions, a "wild" space.

The next two interactions, a "Soft" and "Medium" one respectively, were also linked thematically. By this point, Morro and Jasp have given up their hopes of reaching the beach and instead have separated to learn what being alone at night in the woods means. Jasp, now believing she has killed her sister Morro, eats some mushrooms that she hopes are poisonous. They are, however, merely hallucinogenic.

During her "trip", Jasp sees the audience as the trees of the forest, and thinks she sees them swaying together in the breeze. She also comments on when and where their actions meet her expectations. This interaction often proved a litmus test for how the particular audience was invested in the experience, as their desire to participate rested almost entirely and literally in their arms.

In the outdoor production of *Gone Wild*, these actions were matched to real trees, positioning the audience not only inside the environment, but also as a physical part of it. (Again, as in *Puberty*, this interaction sought to re-bond the audience into a whole after the highly individuated condom tutorial).

Once satisfied with her swaying trees, Jasp decides that she needs the wisdom of nature to help her survive. Selecting an older gentleman from the audience, she then seeks advice from this "wise old tree" on how to self-actualize – something she has attempted to do throughout the story via a ratty old copy of Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*.

In this interaction, there is no right or wrong answer. That Jasp is seeking the wisdom of an elder positions this person as a member of some authority in the audience, and while not all the advice received was sage, this direct connection between actor and participant re-established that information could flow in both ways – a direct contrast to the power held by Jasp during the preceding "Hard" interaction.

Fig. 26 – Jasp and the "Wise Old Tree"

As Johnstone reminds us, if the goal is to allow "people to free-associate, then I have to create an environment in which they aren't going to be punished, or in any way held responsible for the things their imagination gives them" (118). That this advice is later re-incorporated into the resolution at the end speaks even louder to the need established in chapter one that interactors could and should be adept at the techniques of *improvisational comedy.* Indeed, the audience wants to "…admire the improviser's grasp, since he not only generates new material, but remembers and makes use of earlier events that the audience itself may have temporarily forgotten" (Johnstone, 116).

As well, Jasp physically sits on the lap of the "old tree" and as such reawakens the sexual element of the play space. The tension and titillation of this interaction marks the play as potentially dangerous – also extending the trust build-up between the actor and audience. This physical proximity positions the clown as vulnerable to both the potential advice and actions of the audience member, further reinforcing the shift in power dynamic already in effect.

After receiving the necessary wisdom, Jasp headed out to complete her self-actualization. It then became Morro's turn to deal with her own isolation and fear. She decides to drink the beer she has kept hidden from Jasp throughout the performance, which was to mark her entrance into adulthood during the beach party. Ever the destructive Auguste, Morro gives into the sense of recklessness which accompanies "going wild" and pulls a volunteer onstage, triggering a new series of interactions.

The next interaction was comprised of five components – the sharing of a (fake) beer; becoming a clothesline for the creation of two other fictional characters from the narrative; a wet t-shirt contest; another phone call, and finally, a hug. This series drew the participant into Morro's madness and completed the "*Ilinx* or dizziness" type of play being explored (Schechner 95). This lent a sense of danger and unpredictability to the shared actor-audience space that, in combination with Morro's destructiveness, kept the audience guessing as to what might happen next.

The beer sharing echoes the Cheetos sequence in *Puberty* with the actor and audience member both actively involved in the same activity. While the beer

was, in fact, non-alcoholic, it was not immediately apparent from first sight or taste. As the participants thought that they were engaging in an activity not typical of a theatrical experience, and with someone who they perceived as underage (again, like the smoking sequence in *Puberty*), a pact of secrecy was quickly forged between participant and clown.

After a celebratory swig, Morro then uses the audience member to evoke two of her friends she was supposed to meet at the beach – Sasha (her best friend) and Courtney (an antagonist who attempted to get Morro to ditch Jasp). While not able to confront them directly – due to her current predicament – Morro strings t-shirts across the outstretched arms of the participant, in effect creating two more characters on stage. A physical prop to Morro's desires, this stage of the interaction takes agency away from the participant in order that she might become, quite literally, swallowed by the performance. Not requiring action from the individual onstage, the audience member's presence nevertheless deepened the need for everyone to play along.

If the previous two components of this "Hard" interaction involved sharing, the next focused on trust; after watching Morro shake an unopened beer, would she, or would she not spray the participant with it. As mentioned above, the "*Ilinx* or dizziness" (Schechner 95) that permeated *Gone Wild* did not ensure that the audience was safe here. If, as has been established, the difference between make-believe and make-belief is important to the creation of conditions of play in interactive theatre, the genuine fear generated by this moment did more than any other to prove to all present that their involvement was real and could have real results. In the end, the actor sought

not to drench the participant, but instead soaked only the two t-shirts suspended from her arms, as well as herself.

Building from this, and reincorporating a participant from earlier in the performance, the next stage of this extended interaction saw Morro find the phone the clowns had used earlier to call the tow truck. (The notion of paying specific attention to one individual will be discussed in more detail in the next case study, *Go Bake Yourself*, as, in connection to the progressive and cumulative effects of interactions posited in this investigation, this is a key way to help reinforce the shared nature of the space). Realizing that the now soaking t-shirts were not actually Morro's peers, and with what she thinks is her impending death rapidly approaching, she now seeks a means to communicate with her beloved Sasha.

Leaving the beer-drinking participant onstage to fend for herself (not a common act in the Morro and Jasp series, but here appropriate due to the themes of isolation and abandonment inherent to the story), Morro finds the owner of the cell phone and asks to borrow it again. Here again, trust is being tested as Morro, by now soaked with beer, asks for something of value to be brought into the chaotic play space.

But the phone was always handed over. Here, Morro asks the participant to dial a specific number and then, after connecting to Sasha's answering machine – again, this was shared to the larger audience via speakerphone – left a message confessing her undying love. Morro then asked the participant if they had anything to say to Sasha. While the responses varied in terms of wit and worry over Morro's current state of mind, by giving the participant the

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literal "last word," the clown was recognizing that person's contribution to the game played.

Finally, after hanging up, Morro invited the participant – now thoroughly exhausted from being a part of such a series of frenetic experiences – to give a farewell hug. Again, with Morro drenched and dangerously destructive, this act asked them to put aside all protection of their self and appearance, and to give into the madness. (Also, once the hug was complete, Morro gave the cell phone to them as a gift. In order to return it to its proper owner, additional audience-to-audience interaction was required. This ripple effect, utilized more and more in the case studies to be discussed below, brought the audience, as a whole, closer together).

Representing a first attempt in many ways to expand and evolve Morro and Jasp's use of and relationship to the audience, *Gone Wild* set the stage for what was to follow. Its sense of chaos, however, and its ability to physically transform the space where it was performed, or to transform itself to allow for performance in a site-specific location, led to an important realization: that it was possible to achieve this transformation through both the creation of a shared world, as well as by the destruction (or disarray) of the play space itself. The creation of a mess, a key component of *Morro and Jasp Go Bake Yourself*, is, like interactivity itself, unpredictable. The trust inherent in one's attendance and participation in something which can and might go "wild" both loosens expectations as to the "right" way to interact, as well as allowing unforeseen moments to occur.

Chapter III

Beyond the Nose:
Sharing, Spect-Acting and Social Media

The art of any [interactive] work lies in the ability to reach people where they
are, while helping them stretch to what they might become.

—Jeff Wirth, *Interactive Acting*

Morro and Jasp Go Bake Yourself

If the creation of a world in which belief is possible is a necessary element of

engendering a shared, trust-filled play space, the next work under

examination, *Morro and Jasp Go Bake Yourself* (hereafter "*Go Bake Yourself*"),

best matches Schechner's definition of the difference between "make-believe"

and "make-belief" performances discussed above. "Make-believe performances

maintain a clearly marked boundary between the world of the performance

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and everyday reality. Make-belief performances intentionally blur that boundary" (35).

According to the Morro and Jasp website, *Go Bake Yourself* is described as performance in which

> Morro and Jasp have decided to host a cooking show, but they both have very different ideas of what that entails. Morro wants a battle in the kitchen, while Jasp is trying to host a classy show and cook her way into an unknowing audience member's heart ("morroandjasp.com").

An important point about *Go Bake Yourself*: it has never been performed on a stage or in a traditional theatrical setting. It has been performed in a bar space made to resemble a cooking space, as well as in a proper kitchen, complete with oven and stove. Designed *as* a site-specific piece of *environmental theatre*, it represents less an attempt to bring the audience into the world of the clowns, but rather to bring the clowns into the world of the audience; or, to echo Schechner, to make the boundary between reality and theatre blurry to the point of it being unnoticeable and unimportant.

As well, during *Go Bake Yourself* – unlike *Puberty* and *Gone Wild* – the audience was positioned *as* an audience attending a cooking show. This had a direct effect on the willingness to believe in the action and the interaction happening; as well, it shifted U.N.I.T. Productions' rubric, so that – with an audience of 40 – the physical orientation between audience and clowns was more intimate and thus more immediate.

In terms of the interactive techniques used during *Go Bake Yourself*, the first interaction, a "Medium" one, involved Morro giving an audience member a colander in order to catch an egg. Opening with a "Medium" interaction (like

Puberty) allowed both the tone of the experience to be shared, as well as the parameters of the risks involved in participating in it. Though no egg is actually thrown at an audience member, the possible danger of it, combined with Morro's Auguste-based destructive behavior, feels very real. Since the clowns exist in this case inside the "real" world, it shifts the nature of viewing perceptions and how such traditional rules are to be obeyed.

Pochinko believed clowns "were the ones who kept people in touch with the everyday while fulfilling the need for a connection with the sacred" ("On Meeting Richard Pochinko"). In this case, the sacred is the joy of play, and specifically, the joy of playing with food. This sense of play, and its contrast, represented in Jasp's Joey-based need for control, allowed the audience to decide and reflect on their own relationship with food and explore its role in their "real" life. Simply put, food cannot be faked if it is to be consumed, therefore the normal suspension of disbelief was completely replaced here by belief in a world one could touch, smell, and ultimately taste.

One thing quickly realized here is that food bonds people together. A "Soft" interaction was used early on. Cheese and crackers, served on a tray –the literal passing of the plate from person to person, and the eye contact this requires – allowed the audience to help in the building of a shared experience and in establishing trust, not only between actors and audience, but between the varied individuals in attendance as well.

Fig. 27 – Jasp asking the audience about favourite foods

The second part of this "Soft" interaction allowed the audience a voice and an option – qualities that are taken even further later in the performance. As Morro and Jasp asked those present what their favorite foods were, a sense of place and position was created. *Go Bake Yourself* is an investigation not only of how a clown might see and interact with food, but of the place it holds in the lives of the participants. The audience was invited here to see themselves as makers and sharers of food, not different in any way from the supposed performers of the show.

(A note here on a particular moment that occurred during this interaction: At one point, Jasp specifically asks an "unknowing audience member" about his favourite comfort food. As he responds, she attempts to say the same thing as he does at the same time. Along with her overt flirtations, this quickly places

special emphasis on him and he becomes the subject of her affections. That Jasp was so obvious in her pursuit, as only a clown can be, created within the audience a sense that they knew something important and, quite literally, made them willing to play along against their fellow audience member.

This represented an evolution of *Improvisational Comedy* utilized in the "wise tree" example from *Gone Wild*. Here, however, it was an actual individual and not just a person's words that became a recurring element of the performance and notion of the incorporation (and re-incorporation) of ideas proving an important aspect of creating audience investment in both *Go Bake Yourself,* as well as *Of Mice and Morro.*

Eventually, Morro wrests control of the performance from Jasp (distracted by her obsession with her own comfort food – Macaroni and Cheese), and in order to fulfill her desire for a more playful cooking show, Morro recruits two members of the audience and initiates a carrot-peeling contest. (She often chose younger members of the audience, as they were usually less constricted by the social norms of food play). Undoubtedly a "Hard" interaction, this instance allowed the audience to live inside Morro's vision of how one should approach food, one that was messy, and as will be seen, potentially dangerous.

This is also the first instance in the Morro and Jasp series of what play theorist Caillois identified as *Agon,* or competitive play. This term represents "games where there are winners and losers. The outcome is determined by the skills and/or strength of the players." This is probably the earliest example of having an immediate "stake" involved in the interaction (as opposed to *Mimicry* or

simulation where "playing within an imaginary make-believe or illusory world" is the intended goal). In this case, there is a clear winner.

Fig. 28 – "The Carrot Peeling Contest"

What is interesting here is that competitive play creates a very different sense of "make-belief" than almost any other interaction used during the Morro and Jasp series. No extraneous work is required, as the activity is not one rooted in anything imaginary or illusory, but in the participant's interest in emerging victorious. This echoes what Schechner identified, in that "from Plato to the Puritans, the playful has been considered frivolous, unimportant, and even sinful. Playing is a major distraction tempting people away from work, which is the 'real business' of living" (101). Contest is somehow not seen as frivolous

as it occurs "in specially designed places and according to well defined rules" (101), and thus is more acceptable.

This was very quickly realized when, during an early performance of *Go Bake Yourself,* one of the participants – armed with an oversized carrot and actual vegetable peeler – cut herself badly. That she continued to peel showed her intense investment in the competitive activity at hand; that the show managed to continue even after she had left the performance space for the washroom cemented the "reality" of the situation for both actor and audience. Indeed, what emerged here was that competitive play became so important, and the world built around it so tangible, that the very nature of the play shifted, from *Agon,* or competition to *Ilinx,* or dizziness play (Schechner 95).

(This interaction example also raises the question of safety in interactive theatre, and how trust is enhanced or compromised by the fear of harm. That is not to suggest that all interactions need be saccharine or sterilized, but rather that fear – as opposed to joy – does play a role in creating a space of play. This distinction will be discussed much more in following chapters in relation to how *ZED.TO* used fear to engage and motivate its participants).

The next interaction, also one that is "Soft" for the majority of the audience, but "Hard" (both in taxonomical and literal meaning) for one individual participant, built off a moment connected to the notion of "incorporation" mentioned earlier. In order to woo "him", and as a clown earnestly exploring the folksy wisdom that suggests the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, Jasp sought to concoct a meal to make "him" fall in love with her. However, in her role as Auguste, always seeking to disrupt her Joey's plans,

Morro had concerns over the ingredients Jasp planned to use, as some members of the audience might have allergies.

(It is important to note that at this point, Morro was as yet unaware of the true purpose of this recipe, believing that it was meant to be a bonding experience between her and her sister. This made her inclusion of the audience in its creation an honest, rather than malicious intervention and thus shaped the interaction as one full of genuine concern, rather than malicious guile. That said, the function of the interaction was not to destroy Jasp's vision, but rather to allow the audience to feel included and important).

Here, as in previous interactions such as the "hair removal cream" sequence in *Puberty* and the "wise old tree" in *Gone Wild,* the power rests completely in the audience's hands. That this control was given to the audience during what appears to them as *the* most important sequence in the performance furthered their sense of belonging and ability to play in a meaningful way. This giving over of control at a key moment during the performance is rooted in the definition of interactivity as discussed as something "that works together so the total effect is greater than the sum" ("Interactive").

When Morro asks the audience if there is anything anyone is allergic to from the list of 20 or so ingredients available, any item so identified would be removed from the recipe. During this interaction, the audience responded in one of two ways – honestly or playfully. Some asked for ingredients to be removed due to real allergies; others sought to support Morro's sense of play (or rather to toy with Jasp – they knowing her real intention.) Also, having knowledge that one of their number – Jasp's beau-to-be – might actually have

to eat some of this concoction created a sense of play in which the audience affected not only the clowns, but also the upcoming interaction with one of their own.

The second half of this interaction, then, was all about the individual and the choice they had to eat the concoction or not. This was not only an example of the power of the trust able to be built during an interactive performance, but also a very real test of it. Each member of the audience had seen it being prepared with ingredients including cayenne pepper, beer, pickles, Cheetos, whipped cream, and sausages.

Fig. 29 – The "Hardest" of interactions

It also was an act of solo participation, one in which the participant was *the* main focus of the experience. As Wirth states in *Interactive Acting*,

> Interactive theatre expands the experience of the audience by offering them a *proactive* role, in which they are invited to join as a collaborator in the creation of the performance (1).

In fact, that 100% of those invited to sample Jasp's love potion did so is perhaps testament to the power of these techniques. All were impressed that individual audience members would physically ingest something created by performers – let alone clowns – from a bizarre range of ingredients, decided upon in part by fellow audience members, which meant they ceased to be merely participants; they actually became players. "When the audience becomes players, they are moved, because they are not just observing the performance; they are living it as well" (Wirth 3). As in *Puberty* and *Gone Wild*, bravery was the thing on display, their risk rewarded in praise of their fellow participants.

In *Puberty* and *Gone Wild,* the purpose of interaction was to allow the audience to share in moments that the clowns were experiencing, at times allowing them some measure of control, at others making them the objects of enjoyment for both themselves and the audience. These represented simple or basic attempts at interactivity, instances of building a shared space of trust and play.

What they do not represent, however, is what Izzo simply calls *Interactive Theatre.* He defines this as occurring when "the interactive play is no longer aware of itself and when the audience operates as "fellow characters with the illusion" (25). He argues further "interactive theatre, then, can be defined as theater in which the audience actively and spontaneously co-creates, with the actor, the unfolding drama" (Izzo 26).

At the beginning of *Go Bake Yourself,* after the first "Soft" interaction with the egg, Morro and Jasp assemble and set out to bake pies. Morro, believing that this is the first act of many that will allow her and her sister to enjoy the "play" involved in cooking, by the end realizes that she has simply been a tool in helping Jasp get what *she* wants. When, at the close of the show, Morro presents the pies, the audience discovers that hers looks much better than Jasp's. Morro then offers it to her sister to share with her new man, claiming she only wants Jasp to "be happy." (The fact that the aroma of baking pie began to permeate and then dominate the environment throughout the performance was an unintended, yet unimaginably powerful tool for both creating the reality of the situation, as well as surrounding the audience with the world of the performance).

Overcome by her sister's selfless act, Jasp refuses to abandon her and they eventually decide to share the pie, not only with each other, but also with all present. This begins the largest interaction ever attempted in the Morro and Jasp series. Simultaneously a "Soft", "Medium", and "Hard" interaction, the communal sharing of the pie represents perhaps the most truly interactive moment in any Morro and Jasp performance. Each individual audience member was given a fork by Jasp, and then invited up to the kitchen counter to receive a piece of hot pie from Morro. Along with the taste, the audience is also given a blessing, created entirely on the spot by Morro based on some aspect of the individual participant's appearance or participation during the show.

During this sequence, which often took up to 20 minutes, those waiting for their turn were encouraged to talk amongst themselves, to sit, or simply

watch. This, unlike any other moment in *Go Bake Yourself*, seemed to be belief made manifest. Unstructured, no one person involved was more important than any other, clown or patron. In this way, the very function of theatre was inverted with the audience's actions the only ones in focus. This occurred, it seems, because the clown component of Morro and Jasp, can, to echo Pochinko, "defy accepted behavior, turn the world tospy-turvy and bring new insight into the truth about Man's place within the order of the universe" ("On Meeting Richard Pochinko").

It is also the prime example of how the role of the inter-actor is working primarily in service of the participant. The evolution of the show from spectacle to sacred ceremony is perhaps one of the final steps in how interaction can and does create play that is shared, believable, and trustworthy enough that the erasure of performance itself is not seen as an error, but rather as the growth of an experience formed through the efforts of the community present. That everyone sings a round of "Fish and Chips and Vinegar" as the clowns exit – Morro distributing a kind of holy water from a rainbow coloured whisk – brings the event to close in a manner in which all are invited to maintain faith, and belief.

Of Mice and Morro and Jasp

The next case study, *Of Mice and Morro and Jasp* (hereafter "*Of Mice and Morro*"), represents the latest work produced by U.N.I.T. Productions and the last piece under examination here not developed especially for children. The official description of the show reads "Morro and Jasp feel the pinch of the

recent economic downturn and arts cuts and decide to make ends meet by tackling John Steinbeck's classic tale" ("morroandjasp.com"). The piece is an investigation of worth versus value, and how what we do and what we make are not always the same things.

On the whole, *Of Mice and Morro* matches closely Izzo's sense of awareness in *participatory theatre*, in that "in participatory theatre the production is not only aware of the existence of the audience, as in intimate theatre, it is also aware of itself as a play" (22). That Morro and Jasp are *actually* staging their version of *Of Mice and Men* immediately creates for the audience – at least those familiar with Steinbeck's work – special insight into what is transpiring. Even before the clown's journey has begun, the audience understands that this is a fiction within a fiction, and thus is aware of coming events and actions before perhaps the clowns are.

The first interaction in *Of Mice and Morro* is a "Soft" one, and quickly establishes Morro and Jasp's plight and the audience's relationship to them. As Morro plays a modified version of *Brother Can You Spare A Dime?* Jasp solicits the audience for spare change. Through the use of a technique of *Street Theatre,* especially busking, the experience is immediately identified *as* performance. Using the "pay-to-play" model discussed earlier in connection to the work of Jarvis, the relationship between actor and audience is established as one in which the viewer holds direct power over the doer, and until the viewer activates the clowns, they are unable to proceed.

As well, and unlike *Puberty* and *Gone Wild*, where the stage operated as an environment transformed into Morro and Jasp's world, *Of Mice and Morro* was

very clearly recognizable as happening *on* a stage, and the theatrical trappings of the play space were then real and accounted for. For the first time perhaps, Morro and Jasp did not belong where they were. It was not their world they existed in, but rather the audience's, the theatre. This encouraged those in attendance to invest in the experience, as they were encouraged to imagine themselves as *the* reason for the performance's existence.

Indeed, this sense of place and one's role in it was further developed by the second interaction in *Of Mice and Morro.* When it is discovered that Morro had misplaced a prop important to the continuation of the show, Jasp asks that the lights be turned on to help find it. When the work lights were turned on (the unflattering illumination used when one works technically in the theatre), the entire illusion of the show was destroyed. The performance quite literally stopped five minutes after beginning and the audience was also literally exposed in an unexpected way.

While perhaps the "Softest" of interactions – as no activity or participation was required of the audience – this moment reinforced the idea and marked those in attendance first and foremost as viewers. If at first this seems counter intuitive, it must be remembered that trust requires honesty, that sharing requires the presence of participants who know their place in the play space. This literal exposing of the audience's state of existence allowed everyone present to remember themselves as they were – in this case starting out as consumers of a product rather than co-creators of an experience – so that they might better realize the upcoming shift in their position and outlook. (It should also be mentioned here that between each "scene" of the performance – the piece was broken into episodes to mirror the chapters of the original novel

– Jasp called for a blackout. Her power over the tools of the theatre only echoed both the fiction of the play and the reality of the situation).

Following this, the next interaction involved an individual with a particular role to play. Unlike most Morro and Jasp interactions, this "Medium" interaction required the volunteer to play a character in the story, "The Boss" of the future place of potential employment.

(It should be noted here that in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men,* the location is a farm. In *Of Mice and Morro*, however, it was a carnival – perhaps the most dreaded place for clowns and thus a place that mirrors the sense of despair evoked in the book. This brought into the production, elements of Izzo's *Variety Theatre* category. "In truth, the variety form is ancient; its roots run as deep as theatre itself. As long as there have been balls to juggle, ropes to walk, or any trick that fascinates, there has been variety" (23). Adding this extension into the show reinforced the sense that the action was meant *as* performance, but also that the clowns understood their roles as the ones who had to fascinate, to entertain, and ultimately, to seek approval).

In this instance, "The Boss" was given a hat, filled with a series of cue cards on which bits of text were written. They were to be read in no particular order, yet Morro and Jasp had to ensure that the scene progressed as necessary. An evolution of the "shaving cream" interaction from *Puberty* and the "ingredient" selection process in *Go Bake Yourself,* it is again the audience that has control over the events unfolding. As the cards held questions such as "What you looking at?" and "Why you still standing here?" the participant (closer now to the concept of "player" to be discussed in chapter four) is not

only in command of a part *of* the performance, but is also operating *as* one of the performers.

This repositioning of the participant's role in the realization of the play space further cemented the notion that in this show, Morro and Jasp existed *because of* the audience. Belief was not merely perceived, but rather was practiced by an individual for the group; trust was gained (and play encouraged) by the giving over of control from actor to audience. As well, this interaction reinforced Johnstone's understanding of the value of *Improvisational Theatre*'s tool kit when performing interactive theatre. "Good improvisers seem telepathic; everything looks prearranged. This is because they accept all offers made – which is something no 'normal' person would do. Also they may accept offers which weren't really intended" (99).

This style of interaction evolved further when a second individual participant was endowed with character. Also a "Medium" interaction, Morro and Jasp required someone to play the role of "Candy", an old man who shared in their dreams of escaping their current workplace and building a new life of his own. This interaction was much more detailed and in-depth than "The Boss", in that "Candy" was positioned as a confederate soul, someone whom with the clowns would grow and proceed. The first aspect of the interaction was simple and involved "Candy" reading aloud a condolence card, given to him by the clowns in anticipation of the death of his dog – a key element of the original story.

Here, Izzo's notion of the dictates of *Environmental Theatre* is salient, less for the use of a world that assists in the creation of belief – though the theatrical setting did have this effect in this case too – but more for the placement of the

audience inside the experience itself. "Each guest, singly or as part of a group, is endowed with a 'role' to play…Audience members are merely fellow characters within the illusion" (24). By assigning the participant a meaningful place inside the world of the clowns (which we must remember in this context is actually inside the world *of* the audience), the participant became complicit in the action.

After the reading of the card, and the off-stage shooting of the dog that followed it, "Candy" was asked what he would like to have when they had saved up enough by working to buy their own place (affectionately known in the show as the "Clown Farm" – an homage to John Turner's clown training facility mentioned earlier).
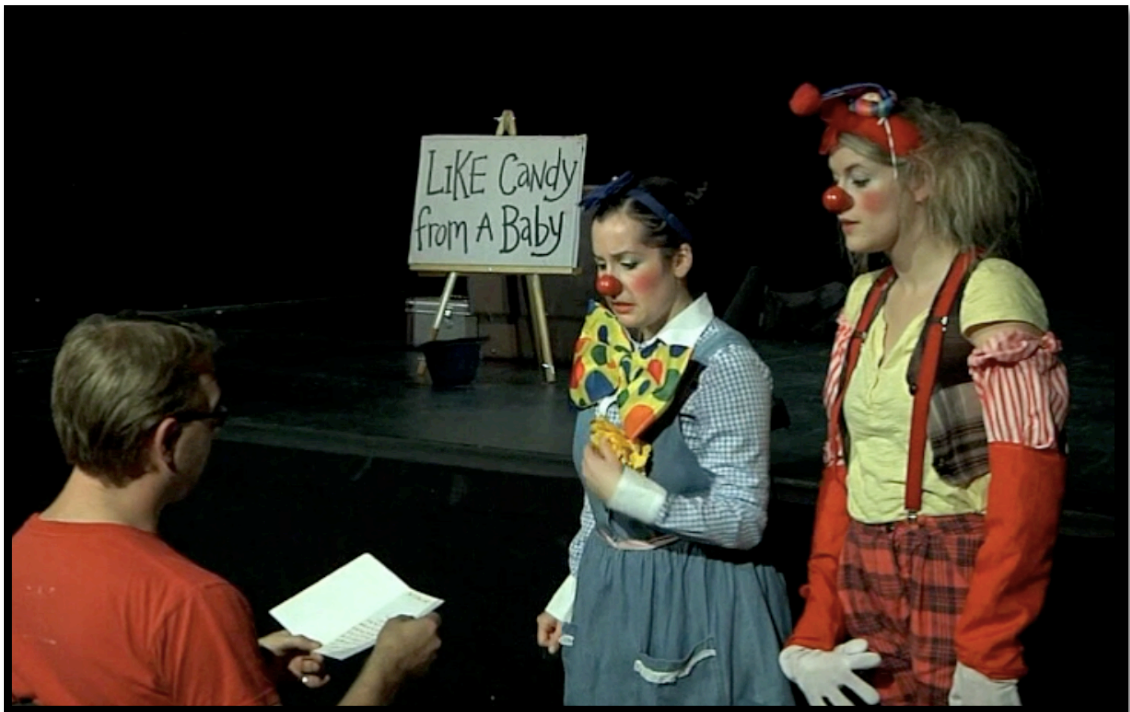
Fig. 30 – Morro and Jasp and "Candy"

This second phase of the interaction allowed the participant to contribute to the story, to offer something of himself to what Morro and Jasp sought to build. This sense of shared play was essential if the investment of both the individual and the larger audience was to be rooted in the belief that these dreams would actually come true and thus were worth pursuing throughout the course of the action. Quite literally, they had to "buy" into the clown's vision of a better tomorrow.

When it is finally agreed that "Candy" would come on the journey with the clowns, the third phase of the interaction began. The participant was, to start, asked to share any money in his wallet. Perhaps more so than any other interaction discussed previously, this moment required that the entire trajectory of playing, belief, and trust thus far developed be iron clad. Indeed, the *choice* to share was entirely in the hands of the individual. Acquiring these funds was what would enable Morro and Jasp (like Lenny and George in *Of Mice and Men*) to keep going, keep working, keep dreaming.

In every instance but one, the volunteer's wallet was given, though not always quickly. For an individual to participate in a dance or in eating pie is one thing; to ask them to give over personal property to clowns is quite another. Of interest, during the one instance where the participant was unwilling to share, something happened that, perhaps better than any other example given in this study, proved both the validity and value of the notion of interaction and how it can work.

After having tried and failed to acquire the wallet, the actors seemed stuck. It is important to remember that the wallet *had* to be given, for to take it without

permission would have broken any sense of trust. In this case, however, the rest of the audience came to their rescue. The collective audience had become so invested in the performance that they *chose* to act on the clown's behalf, demanding that "Candy" give up his wallet and in turn that he share in the show. That is, the participating members of the play space organically and on their own reinforced the unspoken rules of playing and insisted that the participant in question join in fully and without any further hesitation.

In light of this, Wirth's opening statement again bears repeating:

> In traditional theatre the audience assumes a *reactive* role, responding to the performance in a passive fashion. Interactive theatre expands the experience of the audience by offering them a *proactive* role, in which they are invited to join as a collaborator in the creation of the performance (1).

(A final note on this interaction: much later in the performance, after Morro has finally ruined any chance of actually obtaining the Clown Farm, Jasp gives "Candy" his wallet back. This act of giving back seemed to cement the tragic nature of the action. Unlike in *Puberty* or *Gone Wild*, and in a very different way than in *Go Bake Yourself*, the "failure" of the situation deepened the sense of investment the audience had built in the story. Their role as consumers shifted, they had become conspirators and companions. Not only did this shift alter the way in which the audience perceived inside the experience, but it later proved a core moment in the shared creation of the show's conclusion).

The next interaction, a "Hard" one, was also the last of the three that bestowed a character role onto an individual participant. In this case, an audience member was selected by Jasp to come up on stage and have a boxing match with Morro (who is trying to avoid letting out her destructive tendencies – something already present in her character and which again mirrors Lenny's

role in *Of Mice and Men*). In order to play his part properly, "Curley" was given two boxing gloves attached to poles and was instructed to hit Morro with them. When inevitably "Curley's" interaction with Morro proved fake and facile, due mostly to worry by the participant about causing the clown physical harm, Jasp identified it as such, prodding the participant to hit her harder.

Fig. 31 – "Curly" in action

This interaction is in effect a reversal of that offered to "Candy" and "The Boss". "Curley" – the major antagonist in Steinbeck's story – is essentially made into a puppet so that Jasp could cause Morro to play her required role in the narrative and thus bring about the tragic consequences of the play. (It should be remembered that this is the tragedy they had come to see). The

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participant's challenge here was one of belief. Should he hit her harder? What was required? Where was the line to be drawn between play and danger?

This interaction continued to explore the idea of artificiality begun with the busking at the start of the performance and through the "work lights" sequence discussed earlier. It forced the participant into the role of performer, again positioning that person as antagonist to the clowns. This aspect of the interaction created a real tension and perhaps even mistrust, as seemingly anyone could become the tool of someone else's plotting.

This did not discourage "play", however, but rather deepened its potential for danger. As the stakes of the narrative increased, so did the uncertainty of what was required to finish the story – from both audience and actor alike. This was magnified by the natural tendency of the clown to twist and rewrite rules as they see fit, and further blurred the line between fiction and reality.

As was the case in *Puberty, Gone Wild*, and *Go Bake Yourself*, in *Of Mice and Morro* a communal "Soft" interaction followed a "Hard" one. What was antagonistic in the first instance was healed by the next. After Morro had defeated "Curley" (her hand covered in the fake blood), she decided she must cleanse herself of her destructive ways. That it failed to save her in the end is beside the point. The cleansing led her to the purification of water in which, like the Christian pathos that pervades the novel's Depression-era setting, she sought to be both physically and spiritually washed.

In order to do that, and with the help of some "dead" mice in the well, she asks the audience to become a "choir of mice and men" and starts them humming *Amazing Grace* as they are all born again. Here, as in the productions before

it, this communal action bonds together and cements the trust. That this interaction is the second-to-last one is important, as the *entire* success of the performance's final moment rests solely with, and under, the audience.

While Morro sought to heal rifts created during the Curley sequence, the next interaction saw Jasp as she communicated with an individual audience member. Physically, this "Medium" interaction involved Jasp and the participant drinking shots of Coca Cola, mirroring George's journey into a bar in town that precedes the final action in the novel. Both actor and audience member drink in fairly rapid succession.

Of real significance here, however, were the questions and confessions Jasp would share while drinking. From literally asking the participant what they had thought of the show thus far, to asking their advice on how Jasp should proceed, this interaction highlighted one last time the production's split in realities. By now, the audience seemed to understand that Morro did not know the ending, and that Jasp would have to force her to experience it in order to finish the play. By confiding and confessing, Jasp was both finalizing the contract of participation, as well as reinforcing its ultimate inequality. Despite the earlier role-play, the audience's position as consumers was clear.

The final interaction in *Of Mice and Morro* was itself "Soft", and while it mirrored the final pie sequence in *Go Bake Yourself* – a communal interaction that allowed each member to become an active participant – it also moved the play away from the story being told in the novel. Izzo is very clear when he states that in interactive theatre "the guest [or participant, or player, or spect-actor] is as responsible for the outcome" (25). This, however, is no small feat to

accomplish. In this case, Jasp (like George) kills Morro (or Lenny) – though this is only symbolized in the bursting of a red balloon (echoing *and* mocking the final gunshot in Steinbeck's story). This could have been the end, but another option was offered – Morro and Jasp's option, not Steinbeck's.

So that the two clowns might heal the rift that has come between them, Jasp begins to help Morro to dream up the Clown Farm. Those familiar with *Of Mice and Men* know of Lenny's obsession with rabbits. Here, Morro (eyes closed) suddenly said she could see the rabbits coming over the hill. At this point, Jasp asked the audience to look under their seats. There, they each had a stuffed bunny rabbit. At the appointed moment, Jasp asks each person's help to make Morro's visions real by throwing them on stage. The choice ultimately was theirs.

Of interest here, in each and every performance, over a hundred of the toy rabbits soared through the air, a testament to the final act of understanding by the audience, a willingness to give back to those who had given to them. It was the participants – all of them – who created this and who shared, trusted, and believed enough to want to "play" right to the end. They *created* the final moment alongside the clowns.

As Ozone Prouducciones, creators of *Fuerzabruta*, put it of their own interactive work: "We can choose how actors respond to stimuli, but we cannot do the same with the public, they always respond in a true, unplanned way" ("Portfolio"). The line between life and play, identified as blurry by Schechner, was, in *Of Mice and Morro and Jasp*, eradicated by this simple act of compassion.

Fig. 32 – "Let There Be Rabbits!"

The Bully Show: Clown in the Round

The final case study in this chapter represents a very particular investigation into the techniques of Boal's Forum Theatre through the lens of U.N.I.T. Productions' clown work. Created in association with Mixed Company Theatre, *The Bully Show: Clown in the Round* (henceforth "*The Bully Show*") was a performed exclusively for children and exclusively at their schools.

Mixed Company mandate identifies it as an organization that

> Produces innovative, socially relevant drama as a tool for positive change. Founded as an artist-run collective in 1983, this nationally recognized not-for-profit today uses Forum Theatre and interactive arts to educate, engage and empower audiences in schools, communities and workplace ("Vision, Mission & Values").

This show was comprised of two very different types of interactions. The first followed for the most part the rubric developed by U.N.I.T. Productions in the creation and production of the Morro and Jasp series. The other type follows almost directly Boal's tools and techniques for activating audiences toward interaction though his notion of the "spect-actor".

Boal's technique for activating audiences involves transforming them into what he called "spect-actors". "The Theatre of the Oppressed is *theatre* in this most archaic application of the word. In this usage, all human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!). They are Spect-Actors" (Boal xxx).

> 'Spect-actor' is a Boal coinage to describe a member of the audience who takes part in the action in any way; the spect-actor is an active spectator as opposed to the passivity normally associated with the role of the audience member (Boal xxiv).

As well, Boal's notion of Forum Theatre's purpose bears repeating here as it illuminates how the two interactive tool kits were to be combined:

> Forum Theatre is not propaganda theatre, it is not the old didactic theatre [of say Brecht]. It is pedagogical in the sense that we all learn together, actor and audience. The play –or 'model'- must present a mistake, a failure, so that the spect-actors will be spurred into finding solutions and inventing new ways of confronting oppression. We pose good questions, but the audience must supply good answers (Boal 19).

The "mistake" or "failure" of each scene was created via the "Soft", "Medium", and "Hard" methodology of Morro and Jasp. These provided the "good questions". The "good answers" came out of interactive techniques associated with Forum Theatre.

What was immediately identifiable in *The Bully* Show, in relation to its interactive qualities, was its use of "theatre in the round." An extension of the

thrust stage mentioned in Izzo's *Intimate Theatre*, this orientation of actor to audience set the stage for an experience about an issue that surrounded the school children in their daily lives, but which in that moment, they themselves surrounded. The play space then was literally contained and created by them, their bodies shaping the borders of the world in which the clowns operated.

(A note here is needed about the structure of the performance. In it, Morro and Jasp were playing the part of the bully and the victim respectively. In addition to them, another character – called Wit Ness – operated as the narrator who used Morro and Jasp to help him recreate a situation he encountered in his school. Unlike in traditional Forum Theatre, where one actor fulfills the role of the "Joker", or Forum facilitator, all three performers had the ability to seek solutions to the problems being presented. The effect of this hybridization of techniques was to relax the nature of the interactions and the investigations, creating an atmosphere where anyone – audience or actor – could play a part in offering new ideas and alternatives).

The Bully Show's first interaction involved Wit leading the children in a classic crowd control exercise. By raising their hands in the air, any member of the ensemble could indicate that the audience had become too loud, or had lost focus. While eminently practical in terms of controlling children in grades four and below, this "Soft" interaction also established the nature of the sharing to take place in the performance. Engagement was encouraged, but so was respect. In terms of the creation of belief, a much different exercise with children than with adults, this went a long way to position the clowns and Wit as leaders of the adventure.

The second "Soft" interaction saw Morro pulling Jasp's pants down and thus embarrassing her on her first day at a new school. While humor was used throughout the performance as a means to keep the children entertained, the laughter that marked this interaction was purposeful and prompted. In order to establish her power over Jasp (the victim), Morro (the bully) used the children as pawns in the game. That they willingly followed Morro's goading both instantly illuminated the problem at hand – the lack of empathy towards fellow students in moments of bullying -- and implicated the children in how this problem was perpetuated.

(A mention here of the various teachers' reactions to *The Bully Show* is warranted. While most immediately saw the value of the experience for both them and their children, a select few became horrified when their students responded so quickly and viscerally to the interactions being offered by Morro. While expecting that a child possesses the ability to process their behavior *in situ* is questionable, that was never really the purpose. Instead, what was hoped for was that they might recognize how their behavior *affected* their peers and how they would change it. It is interesting to note that teachers who often had the biggest problem with the way in which a Forum performance occurs were also the ones who sought to present their students with quick-fix solutions.

Indeed, the teachers too became part of the performance. Usually seated and surrounding the circle of children, their reactions were an element of the experience and their reactions in some instances shifted their students' behavior. These shifts, however, usually involved the children seeking to please or avoid trouble, rather than invest in their own learning.)

The third interaction in the piece, a "Medium" one, allowed the children for the first time to become physically embroiled in the problem. When Jasp was asked to tell the crowd a bit about herself, Morro wrote a mean-spirited note and asked the children in the front row to pass it along. This interaction had two immediate effects. While it created trust between the children and Morro (despite that trust being misplaced), it also allowed individuals to take action against what she was trying to do.

Fig. 33 – Jasp maintaining crowd control

Perhaps more so than in any previous Morro and Jasp work so far examined, this standing up to Morro echoed the definition of interactive offered at the start of chapter one, where the Collins English Dictionary defined "interaction"

as "a mutual or reciprocal action or influence" ("Interaction"). This, of course, made the actor's job more difficult, in that her aim was to invite the children to make mistakes in order that they might examine their behavior later on, but it also created conditions in which the individual participant had real choice. Examples like these will be explored further in connection with Forum Theatre's own interactive techniques.

Following this, Morro began calling Jasp names like "smarty pants" and "teacher's pet". In order to maintain her power over her, Morro invited the crowd to join in the game. The second of three "Soft" mob interactions, this sequence allowed the children to slip back into anonymity and thus escape the decision-making represented by the note-passing. Here, children had the power to directly affect Jasp's sense of self. The play space then became one in which the fittest survived; the only safety to be found was in numbers.

After this, Morro decided that they should share lunches. Rifling through Jasp's backpack, she discovered some Rice Krispie snacks and began to eat them. The interaction, a "Hard" one, begins here when Morro invites children to join her in enjoying food that isn't hers. That in every performance at least one child came up to get a Rice Crispie snack may suggest that some bait is just too tempting. It also evidenced the belief the children had in the world created by the clowns and their own role in that world.

The final, non-Forum interaction brought the bullying to its most dangerous point. When Jasp attempted to get back her backpack, she comes into physical contact with Morro. In order to finally subdue Jasp, she threatened to beat her up. Almost without prompting, the students began chanting: "Fight! Fight!

Fight!", and through this "Soft" interaction, all control over the crowd seemed lost.

It was here that the Forum section began. Prompted by Wit – and with Morro and Jasp now "out of character" – the techniques shifted to those that might help the students reflect on how to change their behavior. It is very important to note here that their previous reactions and interactions were never judged, but rather were held up for examination so that their cause and effect could be explored. Here, though, the various scenarios were replayed so that different children could offer alternative solutions.

In fact, the participants were "spurred into finding solutions and inventing new ways of confronting oppression" (Boal 19). To quote again the definition of "interactive" offered by The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: "if users receive real-time feedback... so that they can modify the use...the system is said to be interactive" ("Interactive"). While this does represent Boal's notion of the role of interactivity in Forum Theatre, there was a key difference between his work and *The Bully Show.*

In this instance, the story that was offered for change was not simply one they witnessed, but rather one they had actively helped along. By offering them the opportunity to remake their own interactions, their role transcended the traditional position held by the "spect-actor" and they became co-creators. Like the final interaction in *Of Mice and Morro*, it was their choices that created the moments, not those of the actors. While Forum Theatre traditionally presents "a theatrical game in which a problem is shown in an unsolved form, to which the audience…is invited to suggest and enact solutions" (Boal xxi), this hybrid

form of interactive theatre positions the audience as both the problem causers and solution creators. The oppression under investigation then, to use Boal's terms, was of *their* making.

Three sequences – depending on time – were revisited: the note-passing, the snack-stealing, and the mob-mentality interaction (usually the name-calling, or the chanting of "Fight! Fight! Fight!"). In most cases, the children sought to actively resist the bully. However, as seasoned improvisers, the clowns could usually outwit the students' attempts. In some instances, a (real) teacher was brought into the scene. Often their attempts too failed to control the bully in any manner other than direct discipline.

Fig. 34 – Morro initiating the "Fight" interaction

Interestingly, it was only when the community acted as a whole that the bully would lose power; the creation of an atmosphere of trust, sharing, and belief again stood here in good stead. In this light, and quite fittingly, the interactivity of the theatre was seen as a reflection of interactivity in life. For the students, it was only through the proper engendering of a safe place to play that they learned to play fair.

Digital Presence and Pervasive Characters

One more element in the Morro and Jasp toolbox bears examination here – their digital presence online. In some ways more powerful than what is possible in their live performances, the clown characters exist pervasively inside the world of the audience through social media outlets (such as Facebook and Twitter), and they can be reached at almost any time.

Indeed, on Facebook alone, the clowns have over 1000 friends, most of whom have seen one or more of their shows, and many of whom either post or comment on pictures, thoughts, or links are added to the clown's fan page. Morro's on-going obsession with Cheetos is well known to her Facebook "fans" as is Jasp's perpetual search for love. On Twitter, they share their thoughts directly with a wide variety of the almost 1000 people who follow them.

While some of these interactions do operate quite clearly as publicity for upcoming performances and appearances, these are almost always done "in character." This relates very directly to Wirth's notion of encouraging the audience to "invest in belief," rather than "suspend their disbelief." Simply put,

people treat Morro and Jasp as real, as accessible, and as available to them when they want them to be.

This type of interaction is completely foreign to most types of interactive theatre, as the required tools to allow for it are relatively new. Though some examples do exist – such as David Copperfield's attempt to do "at home magic" – most do not allow for truly shared experience, or for play that shifts as each player contributes.

While Copperfield does have a Twitter account, he is not a fictional character like Morro or Jasp; while he can be reached via Twitter, his audience's understanding of the potential interactions lacks the made-up quality that the clowns provide. By interacting with Morro and Jasp *outside* of traditional settings, those using social media become part of their ever-expanding lives. Simply put, as "you" become involved in "their" lives, "they" become involved in "yours".

(It bears mention here that Morro and Jasp were invited to present five Dora Mavor Moore Awards at the 2013 ceremony. What is significant about this is that the *fictional* characters were treated, and presented, as *real*, by members of the theatre community in Toronto – the city where they premiere most of their work. In terms of their ability to exist outside of the confines of the stage or even site-specific setting, their introduction into an environment that positioned them not as *creations* but instead as *creators* marks a high water mark in terms of their pervasive quality).

Fig. 35 – Morro and Jasp at the Dora Awards

In order to better understand the nature, potential uses, and ramifications of this new digital interactivity, as well as a character's ability to exist well beyond the fourth wall, we will move on here to a discussion of some of the key concepts inside game design theory and will explore how The Mission Business' *ZED.TO* used these techniques, both on-screen and off, to sustain an interactive performance over eight months, over four live events, and involving thousands of continuously (and simultaneously) playing participants.

Chapter IV

Let the Games Begin:
Interactivity, Transmedia Fiction and Gaming

[Play is a] free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as
being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the players intensely and
utterly.

—Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*

The Mission Business

Founded in 2009, The Mission Business (TMB) is a collective of artists,

administrators, designers, and directors who became disillusioned with the

lack of "interaction" and "play" in traditional theatrical work.

> The Mission Business is an adventure laboratory and start-up
> company based in Toronto that designs connected live-action
> and online experiences to thrill you, challenge you, and make
> you think. The founding members of The Mission Business
> share a background in the performing arts, and have matured
> across diverse professional and creative disciplines. The team

has assembled in order to explore new platforms for sustainable
creative development and transmedia storytelling ("zed.to").

Based around the idea of providing interactions rooted in "choice, not chance,"

TMB created *ZED.TO*,

> An 8-month narrative told in real-time through an integrated
> combination of interactive theatrical events and online content.
> It told the story of the beginning of the end of the world, from a
> viral pandemic created by ByoLogyc, a fictional Toronto-based
> biotech company ("zed.to").

Fig. 36 – Title Image for *ZED.TO*

It is essential to note a major distinction between *ZED.TO* and the Morro and
Jasp series. The clown works of U.N.I.T. Productions can perhaps best be
described as a series of theatrical productions that feature instances of play,
but that maintain the basic structure of a theatrical performance. That is, the
narrative is both introduced and concluded during a finite experience. As seen
in chapters two and three, their interactive shows functioned as trust-building
exercises in which the audience – both in general, or those selected for specific
"Medium" or "Hard" interactions – were encouraged to trust and invest belief,
in order to share in the "play" being either offered or, on occasion, required of
them.

ZED.TO, on the other hand, was in its totality one massive invitation to play. The entire project, from open to close, was born from the notion of choice – be it through how one chose to enter into the story, with whom and how one chose to maintain relationships with the various characters and factions, and even in some cases, the viewpoint through which one chose to experience the project's live events. This was intended to allow a measure of agency to each participant.

This concept of "choice, not chance" would therefore not only remain a guiding principal of TMB, but would eventually become one of ByoLogyc's signature slogans. This corporate philosophy – and the subsequent interaction options and opportunities that derived from it – will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

At this point, however, something must be said about the major influences upon the nature and types of interactivity used in *ZED.TO*. These concepts, derived from game design and the notion of how to provide player agency, will illuminate a kind of thinking that (with the possible exception of work like Rimini Protokoll's *Best Before* that physically uses video game technology during the performance) is beyond the traditional relationship between creator and audience in the theatre.

Game Design and Interactive Fiction

What defines a game? While a complete survey of the history of and various theories behind gaming and game design is far outside of the scope of this project, there are a few definitions that will serve to better understand TMB's

goals in creating *ZED.TO*'s interactive components. Game designer and author Greg Costikyan proposes that a game "is a form of art in which participants, termed *players*, make decisions…in the pursuit of a goal" ("I Have No Words").

Alternatively, Professor Clark C. Abt defines a game as "an activity among two or more independent decision-makers seeking to achieve their objectives in some limiting context" (Abt 6). Finally Jesper Juul, a video game researcher, suggests that

> A game is a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the play feels attached to the outcome and the consequence of the activity are optional and negotiable (Montola 9).

Common to all these definitions is that the players function as "decision makers" who exert "effort in order to influence the outcome". "Whether play is entered into singly or as a group, it remains an individual's free choice" (Izzo 8). One can see, therefore, that games and interactive theatre share this quality. (Here Caillois' definition of the types of play is again useful – *Agon* or competition, and *Alea* or chance. Examples of *Agon* include races, weightlifting, and chess; examples of *Alea* are dice, roulette and bingo) (Schechner 116).

Both of these definitions, however, are entrenched in the notion of winning, whereas the interactions (and the resulting play) in *ZED.TO* were not. Indeed, this is perhaps the key difference between game as a model of play and interactive theatre, where one simply experiences playing and where one's experience *of* playing is in large part the purpose of "playing" at all.

Put another way, *ZED.TO* never functioned *as* a game, but rather used elements *of* gaming in order to enhance and expand the potential for interactivity. Indeed, as Schechner identified, "Play is very hard to pin down or define. It is a mood, an activity, an eruption of liberty; sometimes it is rule-bound, sometimes very free. It is pervasive" (Schechner 79).

Schechner's qualities of play are connected to a very specific type of game, not previously mentioned, namely the *pervasive game*. Often referred to by TMB as a model, a pervasive game "has one or more salient features that expand the contractual magic circle of play spatially, temporally and socially" (Montola 12).

In this definition, Markus Montola, author of the seminal work on the subject, *Pervasive Games: Theory and Design*, argues that

> The game no longer takes place in certain times, or certain places, and the participants are no longer certain. Pervasive games pervade, bend, and blur the traditional boundaries of game, bleeding from the domain of the game to the domain of the ordinary (12).

Looked at this way, we are again coming close to the notion of the "magic circle", or "Tementos", as introduced in chapter one, whereby sacred worlds are created within the ordinary one. Johan Huizinga, Dutch professor of cultural studies and author of the influential *Homo Ludens* ("Playing Man"), claimed that

> All play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the 'consecrated spot' cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc, are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds

within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an
act apart (Huizinga 10).

This definition allowed TMB, in the creation of *ZED.TO,* to blend and blur the traditional boundaries of the experience of interactive theatre, and thus set up and sustain a magic circle, a place in which "special rules obtain."

In his article "Interactive Fiction" (or IF), Nick Monfort, Associate Professor of Digital Media at MIT, quotes Juul (this time in reference to digital games specifically) as saying "Many computer games contain narrative elements" (312). Monfort, however, claims that "reversing this formula works for IF. It is a potential narrative that may contain game elements. Some interactive fiction works[, however,] cannot be 'won' and [therefore] do not keep score" (312). He later adds, "IF is neither a 'story' or a 'game' but, as all IF developers know, a 'world'" (Monfort 316).

While it is apparent that *ZED.TO* was not a game per se, in terms of winning or conquest, however, the commonalities between game design, interactive fiction, and interactive theatre allow us insight into its creation and realization. Thus, in the world created, in its sacred space where the player functions as 'decision makers' who exert "effort in order to influence the outcome," "audience members are merely fellow characters within the illusion" (Izzo 24).

Player Agency and Transmedia Story Telling

In the language of gaming, agency is defined as "the feeling of empowerment that comes from being able to take actions in the world whose effects relate to the player's intention" (Mateas 20). Director of the Center for Games and

Playable Media and Associate Professor of Computer Science at the University of California, Matthew Mateas suggests the difference between playing for the *sake* of playing, and playing that will *cause* change based on a player's choice. (The example of *Sleep No More* is once again relevant here, as a well-known example of interactive theatre in which the ability to interact with the environment was the high-water mark of immersion; at the same time, however, the ability to affect the story was virtually nonexistent).

Unlimited agency, however, is always a difficult thing to achieve. While interactive theatre can be defined "as theater in which the audience actively and spontaneously co-creates, with the actor, the unfolding drama" (Izzo 26), Mateas illustrates similar challenges in game design when seeking to allowing choice or agency for players. "This ability to take action is not completely free; it is constrained from below by material resources and from above by authorial formal causation from the level of plot"(Mateas 24).

In interactive theatre, such limitations are also present. The material resources of a live production impose harsh restrictions on what creators such as TMB can actually manifest, given the restrictions of monetary resource and available time. As well, authorial formal causation (plot) means that in many cases a choice made by a player outside the narrative might, as is said in the language of game design, "break the game."

In his article "Game Design as Narrative Architecture", the work of Henry Jenkins, Media scholar and Professor of Communications, is useful. Jenkins quotes Russian Formalistic critic Kristen Thompson's distinction between specific elements of the narrative. She identifies "plot" as "the structured set of

all casual events as we see and hear them presented," and "story" as "the viewer's mental construction of the chronology of those events" (Jenkins 126). This distinction helps to clarify the type of agency provided in *ZED.TO*. Seen through this lens, player choice was manifested by an ability to determine a particular pathway through the plot, resulting in the individual "story" they might take from the experience.

(For comparison, the Morro and Jasp series only ever has one entrance into the experience and one set of interactions to participate in. Online there was also only a singular means of communication with the clowns, in order to interact with the characters about their daily lives, but always *outside* of any plotted structure. This is not meant to downplay the value of these interactions, but rather to make clear that, unlike in *ZED.TO*, one could not for example follow Morro's plot as a separate entity from Jasp's. There was only one vantage point in the narrative).

Jenkins calls these vantage points "information channels" and extends this notion to the story world itself, which he labels functionally as a "body of information" (Jenkins 126). In *ZED.TO*, the ability to engage and interact, both live and online, with the characters and unfolding narrative took the nature of participation from simply the *chance* of being involved to the *choice* of how to become involved, and through which channels one might go about exploring the story world. Understanding this shift is the key to understanding the model of interactivity being theorized and tested in this chapter.

Of course, in order to be aware of all the potential choices available to them, a participant was required to follow *all* the various media through which the narrative was being played out. This type of transmedia storytelling

> Represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story ("Transmedia 101").

Jenkins also states that transmedia storytelling, like interactive theatre or fiction, first and foremost is about world creation. "Most often, transmedia stories are based not on individual characters or specific plots but rather on complex fictional worlds which can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories" ("Transmedia 101").

In another article, "The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling", Jenkins reflects on the value of both searching *and* sharing in a participant's experience, reminding creators to measure

> The ability and degree to which content is shareable and the motivating factors for a person to share that content VS the ability for a person to explore, in-depth, a deep well of narrative extensions when they stumble upon a fiction that truly captures their attention ("The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn").

In sections of this article labeled "Seriality and Subjectivity", Jenkins claims that

> Transmedia storytelling has taken the notion of breaking up a narrative arc into multiple discrete chunks or installments within a single medium and instead has spread those disparate ideas or story chunks across multiple media systems ("The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn").

For him, this means that

> Transmedia extensions often explore the central narrative through new eyes; such as secondary characters or third parties. This diversity of perspective often leads fans to more greatly

> consider who is speaking and who they are speaking for. ("The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn").

In Jenkins' sense, then, *ZED.TO* was an interactive theatre experience (or fiction) borrowing concepts of agency and choice from theories of game design. In doing this over an eight-month period, *ZED.TO* wound up as one of the most recognized Transmedia projects according to Wikipedia ("Transmedia Storytelling"), and also won a 2012 Digital Media award for Best in Cross Platform Fiction.

The core of *ZED.TO* fiction is to be found in the imaginary biotech company ByoLogyc, the major "information channel" and centre of the project's transmedia experience. The next section will highlight how interaction with the players was manifested through ByoLogyc, and how the corporate model it mimicked and repurposed reflects a style of interaction common in the real world, an element TMB used to "bend, and blur the traditional boundaries of game, bleeding from the domain of the game to the domain of the ordinary" (Montola 12), and back again.

ByoLogyc: Taking Care of You From the Inside Out

In *ZED.TO*, ByoLogyc was the entry point for most participants and, in many ways, operated as a major belief-building tool to sustain audience interest over the length of the project.

Because a large portion of this project occurred online, the main ByoLogyc website (www.byologyc.com) functioned as one of *ZED.*TO's most persistent sacred circles, one not bound by the physical limitations of distance or time.

Players across the country, across the continent, and even from around the world could access the ByoLogyc narrative from any computer at any time. The site offered a complete history of the company, details about its senior employees, as well as a breakdown of its product line and important updates on the plot. It operated as both the core "information channel" and as a major "body of information." In the language of IF, it was the gateway to this innovative theatrical world.

(In the language of another type of game, the *alternate reality game,* these gateways are referred to as "rabbit holes" – a term borrowed from Lewis Carol's *Alice in Wonderland. Alternate reality games,* in many ways, are similar to *ZED.TO* in their use of transmedia and cross-platform "information channels".

> Alternate Reality Gaming (also known as beasting, unfiction, or immersive fiction) is an interactive fusion of creative writing, puzzle-solving, and team-building, with a dose of role playing thrown in. It utilizes several forms of media in order to pass clues to the players, who solve puzzles in order to win pieces of the story being played out ("History").

These projects, however, are rarely manifested though live performance as frequently as was the case in *ZED.TO* .)

It was through this "rabbit hole" that audiences – players – bought into the narrative, and how through a mimicking of an actual corporation's approach to customer engagement, TMB shifted the participant's attitudes from the Aristotelian suspension of disbelief to a new poetics, an "investment in belief."

ByoLogyc's Vision

The vision behind ByoLogyc was encapsulated both by its maxim "choice, not chance", as well as its three-word slogan – *Persistence, Potential, Perfection*. The created mission statement from the company's website built on both:

> The old adage reads: If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got. And so, we at ByoLogyc strive to continually discover and develop techniques and technologies that reach beyond the horizon of the possible, and consistently endeavor to supply the best products we can so that not only you, but humanity as a whole, can take destiny into its own hands (byologyc.com).

This is, of course, the real world language of corporations such as Apple Inc., or the Starbucks Coffee Company. Indeed, Apple consistently creates slogans such as "All the power you want. All day long", or "Get your groove on" to sell their products ("List of Apple Slogans"). In order to sell their wider vision, they claim they exist to honor the "The ones who see things differently" ("List of Apple Slogans").

> Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do ("Think Differently").

As for Starbucks, their mission statement states they exist "to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time" ("Our Starbucks Mission Statement"). They remind their consumers that

> When we are fully engaged, we connect with, laugh with, and uplift the lives of our customers – even if just for a few moments. Sure, it starts with the promise of a perfectly made beverage, but our work goes far beyond that. It's really about human connection ("Our Starbucks Mission Statement").

Both these companies promote lifestyles, promoting their identical goods as designed for the individual consumer's wants and needs. ByoLogyc's imitation of this tone was obviously intentional. At first glance, many were unsure if this company was truly a fiction.

The use of this corporate language also sought to make participants realize both what kind of experiences were possible as well as perhaps hint at how they might go about playing inside of it. (This closely resembles some of the opening interactions in the Morro and Jasp series, especially *Puberty,* where Morro's confession that she was 'bleeding from the crotch' helped to set the tone of the narrative and nature of the subsequent interactions to come. This set up work is invaluable if sharing is to lead to play.)

The term 'ByoLogyc' reflected the notion of 'Byo' as in 'bring your own' or 'build your own' or even 'buy your own'. This mentality, coupled with the focus on their (fictional) individual consumer experience and (actual) individual player experience, encouraged the participant to invest in the plot and to ultimately live their own story inside the fictional ByoLogyc world.

> Our goal is always to provide the individual with everything they need to be their best, and our belief is that you know what's right for you, so who are we to tell you where, when and how to better yourself? (byologyc.com).

To better support this sense of choice and agency, the *ZED.TO* universe featured over twenty different characters, each with their own distinct outlook and attitude towards the events of the narrative, and towards one another.

ByoLogyc's Staff

Divided by TMB into the Major and Minor cast, the characteristics of the former were deeply interconnected to *ZED.TO*'s main plotline; the Minor cast were intended for the various subplots and were left intentionally open to respond to player preference.

What follows is a list of the ByoLogyc senior staff, presented to give some sense of the intricacy and variety of the options available to the participants of *ZED.TO*.

Major Cast			
Character	**Actor**	**Job**	**Motivation**
Chet Getram	Andrew Moyes	Chief Executive Officer	Pride
Olive Swift	Martha Haldenby	Vice President Quality Assurance	Desire
Davian Baxter	Liam Toshio-Morris	Vice President Research & Development	Fear
Minor Cast			
Bernice Hammersmith	Karen Donald	Chief Financial Officer	Tenacity
Renata Reinger	Janet Kish	Sanitation and Containment	Control
Henry Chan	Kwan Ho Tse	Senior Human Resources Offier	Power
Tyler Wyatt	James Fanizza	Creative Director	Survival
Dahlia Joss	Emily Schooley	Information Technology Director	Complicity
Adrian Quinn	Ariana Leask	Laboratory Manager	Sacrifice
Felicity Chapman	Jennifer Walls	Retreats Manager	Justification
Brad Mitchell	Burton Wright	Facilities Manager	Justice
Marie LeClerc	Caitlin Driscoll	Public Relations Director	Truth
Denis Kirkham	Shane Hollon	Executive Assistant to the CEO	Status

In many ways, the diverse selection of characters inside ByoLogyc (as well as those outside, who were involved in an anti-biotech resistance movement known only as EXE and whose role will be discussed later on) helped to combat the limitation of "material resource" identified by Mateas while maintaining the needs of "authorial causation", or plot.

Ten of the twelve ByoLogyc employees were available for contact, day or night via email or Twitter, and their activity greatly increased as the project progressed. They often interacted with numerous players and discussed issues involved with the main plotline, or with their own subplot. Because the actors portraying these characters were actually in control of their corresponding accounts, they were provided with monthly outlines about what was coming up in the narrative and how, through their interactions with participants, they might respond or support them.

The mixture of a diverse set of characters and modes of interaction like Twitter reflect very much the spirit of the *pervasive game,* which expanded "the contractual magic circle of play spatially, temporally and socially" (Montola 12). However, it was not only the *frequency* of this contact that made these interactions meaningful. Rather, it was the *nature* of them. Again, because the actors operated the accounts, the players could continue these interactions during the live events, building further upon the depth and significance of relationships begun over social media. This not only encouraged sharing, it also deepened a sense of trust with the characters, behavior often rewarded by giving the players access to new storylines or secret information.
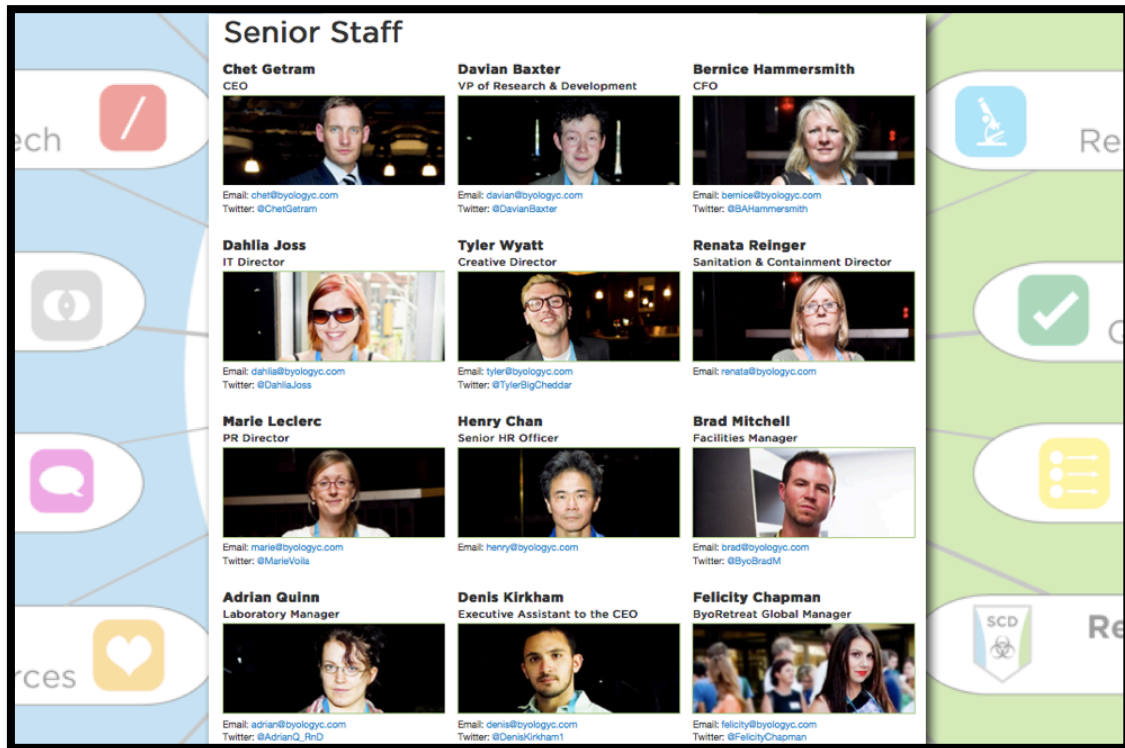
Fig. 37 – ByoLogyc Senior Staff

Indeed, the lack of face-to-face contact seemed to reduce some of the inherent tensions involved in interaction and allowed for the building of greater trust between player and performer. This meant that the Twitter component of *ZED.TO* brought into the experience some of the most passionate instances of play found throughout the entire project.

ByoLogyc's Image

Most modern high-level corporations represent themselves today through their image, or corporate logo. Apple's is just that – a bitten apple (perhaps the forbidden, biblical apple of knowledge); Starbucks is known worldwide through its signature coffee siren holding aloft a white star.

Byologyc was no different. Its logo was created to fit into contemporary thinking about image design.
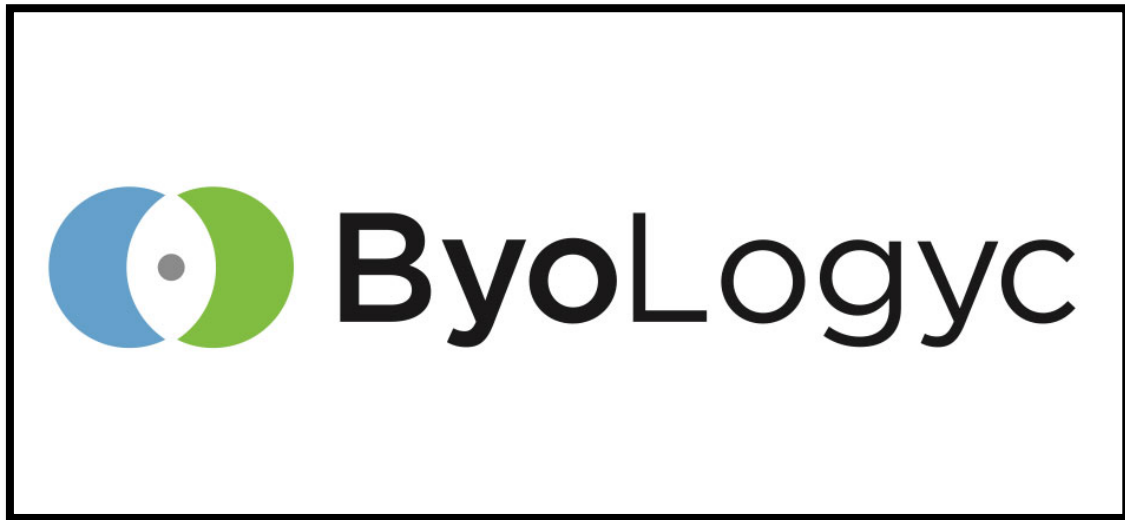
Fig. 38 – ByoLogyc Logo

Green, blue, and grey, the colours respectively evoked "life and renewal," "authority, success and security," and "authority, respect, and stableness" ("Color Psychology in Logo Design"). The structure of the final design, however, was intentionally left open-ended. Perhaps it was two cells dividing; perhaps a Venn diagram; perhaps an all-seeing eye. No statement was ever made by either ByoLogyc or TMB on the logo's specific meaning, leaving its interpretation to each individual.

During the later, large-scale live events, the strength of this corporate image generated a real sense of interest in ByoLogyc itself, building up belief in the persistence and extent of the world in which this "game" was being played. As Wirth says,

An interactive performance does not rely on the 'suspension of disbelief.' It calls for an 'investment of belief.' The experience seems real to an audience because they are making an active investment of their minds, bodies, and spirits. When the audience becomes players, they are moved, because they are not just observing the performance; they are living it as well (Wirth 3).

The role of ByoLogyc's image was to help evolve suspension into investment by mirroring the look and feel of familiar corporate entities the players encountered throughout their daily lives.

ByoLogyc's Outreach

The website offered two interactive portals that sought to bring people into the world of ByoLogyc. These portals operated as a means of providing an opportunity to participate and play based on the player's schedule, not TMB's.

The first of these was a simple phone number that allowed access to an extensive, recorded message system that claimed to offer 24-hour support for all the company's products. The "ByoLine" recording began with a welcoming message very much in-line with its on-line voice:

Thank you for contacting ByoLogyc. We are dedicated to helping you reach your full potential and part of that is providing support to you, inside and out, at any time of the day, anywhere you are. In order to allow us to assist you better, please select one of the following options ("ByoLine").

The options contained a selection for each of the six "ByoProducts" through which players could listen to imaginary concerns or complaints that a potential consumer might have about them. All told, a participant could listen to the "ByoLine" for over an hour and never repeat their experience. (There was also a hidden option). In addition, a message service existed through

which players could leave a message which would be replied to at a later date, usually via the official information channels such as the website, or the company's Twitter account.

The second outreach mechanism, and the most detailed of the ByoLogyc online interaction portals, was the V.I.P. or Versatile Intern Program:

> The first purpose of the V.I.P. Initiative is to make sure we keep one step ahead of our customers, so we can always feel confident in developing and designing new products that fulfill their needs. A large part of this is staying alert and responsive to how people behave in the world. As our ears and eyes, you will be an essential extension of our ability to gather information about those around you (vip.byologyc.com).

Thus positioned as the company's "eyes and ears," players wishing to be VIPs could decide with whom, and how, they would help ByoLogyc learn about the world-at-large.

> The VIP coordinators are pulled from the senior staff of ByoLogyc, one of the most accomplished and auspicious teams in the biotech industry. They'll be guiding you, working with the data you collect, and helping you to be a meaningful part of their work (vip.byologyc.com).

Not only did the VIP provide an opportunity to play, but also through it, TMB provided incentive for players to work, and work hard.

> The name is no coincidence; VIP members are a valued part of the ByoLogyc family, and we know how to take care of our family. VIPs receive preferential treatment at all ByoLogyc events, and receive unprecedented access to ByoLogyc's extensive logistical and human resources. Plus, whenever you perform tasks through the VIP website, you'll be rewarded with ByoPoints, which you can redeem for a growing list of cool swag and special privileges (vip.byologyc.com).
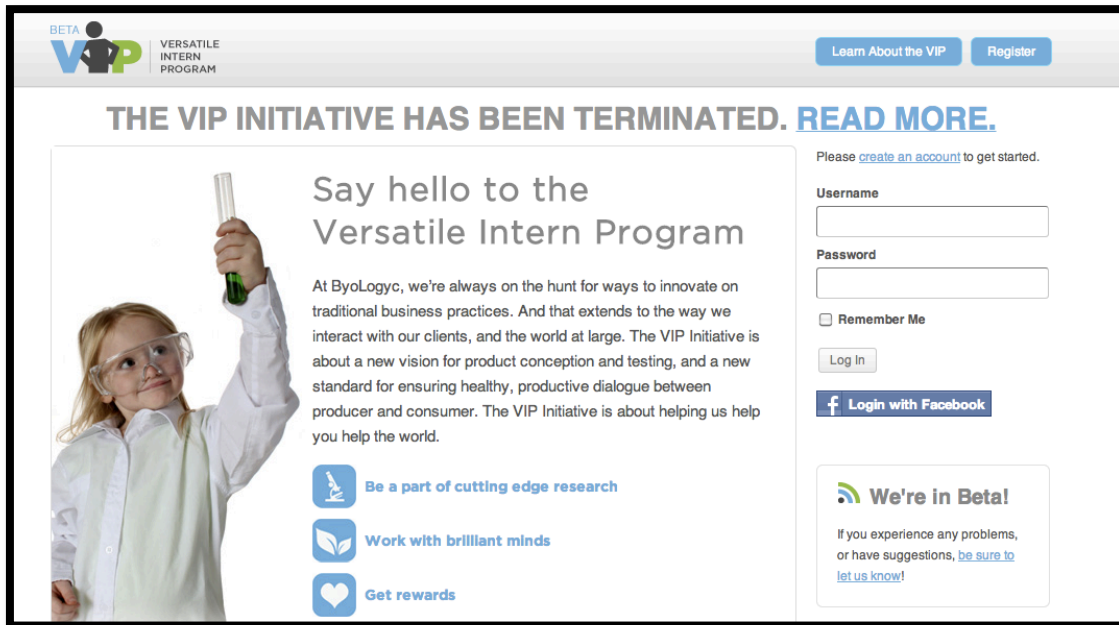
Fig. 39 – VIP Online Portal

These tasks included simple assignments such as field reports on a variety of subjects (and participants were allowed and encouraged to upload pictures and illustrations of their findings), symptom documentation (where they monitored their own vitals and behaviors through a series of questionnaires and physical tests), and even writing letters of support for the company during its darkest hours. Each of these tasks granted the aforementioned "ByoPoints".

> One of our core principles at ByoLogyc is the recognition and encouragement of excellence. ByoPoints are our way of measuring your progress in the Versatile Intern Program. You'll earn them for completing tasks, and for contributing to the Program in a positive way (vip.byologyc.com).

As well, through a monthly newsletter called "ByoSphere", players could see the results. The reflection of their time and effort proved invaluable in earning player trust and encouraging their ongoing interaction. In addition, the VIP site contained a leader board, which showed players who had completed the most tasks, and thus had accumulated the most "ByoPoints". In each issue of

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"ByoSphere", ByoLogyc honoured one of these hard working players by publishing a photo of and an interview with them about their experiences thus far.

Alongside this, early forms of online resistance appeared, seeking to disparage and disprove ByoLogyc's lofty claims of making the world a better place. This eventually emerged as a Wikileaks-style website, whose goal was "to bring important news and information to the public. We provide an innovative, secure and anonymous way for sources to leak information ("What is Wikileaks?").

On this site, mockingly called "ByoLeaks", TMB posted supposedly leaked documents, memos, and videos that players could discover. This gave rise to a full-blown resistance movement that would become known as EXE, and ultimately allowed for players to decide which side they wanted to be on. (What's more, ByoLogyc often issued press releases refuting these accusations, nudging players towards still another information channel they could experience, explore, and expand upon).

Reviews and Previews

By "opening", *ZED.TO* had constituted itself as a massive exercise in pervasive interactivity, a progressive transmedia experience that was linking live events with sustained online engagement, far from a series of simple performances. What follows is a survey of various reviews and comments about *ZED.TO* over its eight-month life in 2012. These will provide a variety of first-person accounts of the *entire* nature of the project's interactive scope, and will reflect the level dedication to the project by artists and players alike.

From *Fab Magazine*:

> ByoLogyc, and all that it entails, have been made to seem real. People have not just watched the story unfold, they've become involved in it—as interns at ByoLogyc, for instance—and they in some sense steer where the story will go. Characters from the story (actors) appear in the real world, but as their character, and people usually do not suspect them as fakes. [For instance, Chet] Getram goes to real corporate events in character, with business cards, and is usually thought to be an actual CEO…This is something the ByoLogyc project does all the time. The story does not only break the fourth wall, it's unclear where the fourth wall should be anymore (if anywhere) ("Retreat at the End of the World").

From *The Grid:*

> Some Fringe-goers wish that the festival could last for months at a time. *ZED.TO*, which represents the biggest Toronto venture into immersive theatre yet, will keep audiences engaged for the next four months. In this event, the department heads of the fictional biotech giant ByoLogyc have a meet-and-greet with their VIP customers (the audience), craftily revealing the characters, tensions, and plotlines that the performers have been developing over about two years. Their effort pays off—not a detail is missed. The corporate video is slick, the characters compelling, and at the end you're jolted and left wanting more ("The Fringe Top 10").

From *Torontist*:

> The interactive, mobile format is similar to a murder mystery, where the audience members must collect what information and office gossip they can between speeches and team-building exercises. The *ZED.TO* team prove themselves to be capable innovators in this intricate scenario, though sharing information with your fellow interns is crucial. The party's climax is only the beginning, setting things up for big events to come.
>
> If you're willing to take the plunge, we highly recommend taking a look at the extensive online material beforehand, and even signing up for the VIP Internship Program. Don't be overwhelmed—just grab a drink, keep your ears open, and hang out next to someone chatty ("Fringe 2012").

From *Now Magazine*:

> This first installment of the ambitious local sci-fi alternate reality game/immersive role-playing theatre experience happening between now and November introduces "volunteers" to the upper echelons of a fictional biotech corporation through

mock team building exercises. Over the course of 90 minutes you interact with dozens of actors each offering different bits that sow the seeds of the apocalyptic drama to come. Great casting and meticulous attention to detail give you that exciting feeling that anything can happen ("Fringe Festival 2012").

From *Mooney on Theatre* (review):

ByoLogyc is not a play, it's an experience. It takes viral marketing and interactive sharing to a whole other level. From the introductory phone call and the separate info line you're encouraged to call to the hands on experience inside the event. From the need to think fast and speak up when asked to progress the experience to signing up online for the VIP program and speaking to the characters over Twitter and on the forums.

Your experience grows the more you interact. You are not bored when you participate. You are a vital and integral part of the show. The fourth wall does not end in front of you, it extends and ends behind you so it is up to you as an attendee not to break that experience ("[ZED.TO] ByoLogyc").

From *Mooney on Theatre* (preview):

There are so many levels that it can be a little difficult to tell how far the experience spreads, and what one is actually intended to be able to see. ByoLogyc, on the one hand, is a fictional biotech company that has been creating and selling "enhancement" products for average people. The products have become increasingly ambitious, and in the recent weeks things have clearly started to go wrong. ByoLogyc is also the centerpiece of an Alternate Reality Game, and a surprisingly robust one – spanning multiple events, many locations and websites, video, text, and - maybe my favorite – an online graphic novel, drawn by a Toronto artist playing an Icelandic graduate student in "New Audiences and Innovative Practices at the Iceland Academy of the Arts." There are leaks, there's an organized resistance, there are ongoing plot twists. It's a lot of fun ("Preview: Retreat").

From *Dorkshelf*:

Despite some so-good-it-must-be-real promotional material, ByoLogyc is in actuality the public face of *ZED.TO*, the umbrella title for a year-long exercise in multimedia storytelling. *Retreat* follows in the footsteps of a Fringe show (*ByoLogyc: Where You Become New*) and a Nuit Blanche exhibit (*ByoLogyc: Patient Zero*).

So what should you expect if you head to the Brick Works? To be honest, I don't know. That's part of the charm, and the

organizers aren't about to give away any secrets so close to show time. What I can tell you after taking in *ByoLogyc* and *Patient Zero* is that *Retreat*, like its predecessors, is a theatrical production that draws heavily on gaming, technology, ARGs, and social media.

That's why you shouldn't dismiss ByoLogyc even if you're not a 'theatre person.' If anything, you should want to know more. The organizers are using the cultural shorthand of the zombie apocalypse to explore the impact of technological and social change in our society, and in the process, they've pioneered some wonderful new approaches to interactive entertainment.

ZED.TO is one of the first groups to recognize that new technology can enhance older forms of communication. In the case of ByoLogyc, that means a seamless integration of live performance with smartphones, tablets, and Twitter. At any given point, patrons can be presented with protests, placebos, free drinks, viral outbreaks, and text messages from anonymous hackers. If you feel like playing along, you might receive genuine (and increasingly paranoid) text messages on your personal mobile device throughout the duration of the show.

It's a relatively simple idea, but it works because ByoLogyc takes objects that we regard as 'safe' – objects like smartphones that are normally distinct from performance – and unexpectedly drags them into the experience. The resulting uncertainty makes it nearly impossible to fully distinguish fact from fiction. Trying to piece everything together consistently demands your attention, and that's what makes ByoLogyc so immersive. The entire show happens around you rather than in front of you, so you're as much a part of it as anyone in the cast.

And yes, there is a cast. This is, after all, still theatre. The actors in *ZED.TO* portray different members of the ByoLogyc executive team and mingle with guests throughout the event. The cast hasn't memorized a script so much as they've internalized key talking points like candidates on the campaign trail. You can talk to them and you're welcome to try and trip them up. Just know that it's not going to be terribly easy. Most of the actors have improv backgrounds and the narrative is flexible enough to account for any unruly civilians.

It's also not as if ByoLogyc is a monolithic enterprise. Your perspective changes depending on your choice of transportation (car, shuttle, or TTC) and then fractures even further after your arrival, so no two survivors will ever have an identical experience ("Zed.TO Presents ByoLogyc: Retreat").

These articles seem to support Izzo's notion, that "the rise of interactive styles

of entertainment reflects a need for the play element in today's culture" (Izzo

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5).   As well, the excerpts above can also be taken as a measure of the challenges writers and reviewers had in describing something outside their usual understanding of what constitutes an interactive theatrical production, or as it has been termed here, pervasive transmedia fiction.

(It is interesting to note here too the wide range of terms used to attempt to label *ZED.TO*, where the project is variously described as "the biggest Toronto venture into immersive theatre yet," an "interactive, mobile format similar to a murder mystery," and a "sci-fi alternate reality game/immersive role-playing theatre experience." One article cites the use of "viral marketing and interactive sharing" in "a year-long exercise in multimedia storytelling." At the end, however, the project was still positioned by some as "a theatrical production that draws heavily on gaming, technology, ARGs, and social media").

While this list of descriptions does not in itself prove or disprove the efficacy of the interactive techniques used during *ZED.TO*, it does illuminate the challenges faced by TMB in their attempt to communicate to both the press and public alike, their desire to "explore new platforms for sustainable creative development and 21st century storytelling" (themission.biz) inside an environment not previously exposed to this type of work. Clearly, a critical terminology for this work has not yet been fully invented.

Live Events

The live portion of *ZED.TO* was comprised of four major events: *ByoLogyc: 20 Years Forward* (March 20th, 2012); *ByoLogyc: Where You Become New* (July 4th-

14th, 2012); *ByoLogyc: Patient Zero* (September 20th, 2012); and *ByoLogyc: Retreat* (November 2nd-4th, 2012). Below is a brief description of each event sourced from the extensive project retrospective available online at www.zed.to.

For each of the events, locations were selected to create specific environments, whereby "the actual physical setting is used for its 'reality value" (Wirth 5). *20 Years Forward*, for example, was held at a high-end art gallery located in one of the most affluent areas of Toronto. *Where You Become New* was set at a local bar very close to, and actually overlooking, the central hub of the Toronto Fringe Festival. *Patient Zero,* on the other hand, took place inside a century-old church (a choice deep in irony), only steps away from the area of Nuit Blanche that sees the most foot traffic. Finally, the events of *Retreat* unfolded at the secluded Evergeen Brickworks, surrounded by forests and parks, and thus used to create a very real sense of isolation.

1. *ByoLogyc: 20 Years Forward* – Ingram Art Gallery, Yorkville

> Fifty of Toronto's movers and shakers were brought together by ByoLogyc for a cocktail reception celebrating their 20th anniversary, and the unveiling of their most exciting product yet.
>
> HIGHLIGHTS
> - A main cast of three, and a supporting cast of 10+, including ByoLogyc employees, reporters, and suspicious bartenders moving seamlessly through the crowd.
> - Free sampling of all of ByoLogyc's signature products.
> - A live opera performance from a fictional character.
> - Secret notes, hushed arguments, and incidents between ByoLogyc staff members provided a hint of conflicts to come (zed.to).

20 Years Forward represented in many ways a trial run for the model of interactivity that would come to characterize *ZED.TO*'s live events. Running

about ninety-minutes in length, players were able to interact with both the staff and product line of ByoLogyc (although at this stage they were more akin to participants than true players, having thus far little reason to invest in the narrative). As well, and as is indicated in the highlights above, secret notes, hushed conversations, and anti-biotech messages scribbled by persons unknown in chalk outside the gallery pervaded the experience and gave reason for the participants to look deeper and become suspicious.

These elements added a sense of mystery to the evening, and thus encouraged participants to ask questions and make connections with the characters. It also prompted them to share bits of information with one another. (This event, like Nuit Blanche's *Patient Zero*, was a one-night only experience. *Where You Become New* and *Retreat* played several times, presenting new challenges to sustaining the idea of a pervasive fiction).

20 Years Forward was also an invite-only event, and those in attendance had received a personalized invitation from ByoLogyc, one that positioned them as potential investors, looking to hear about the company's revolutionary new product ByoRenew. As such, they were treated to fine wine, catered hors d'oeuvres, and a live performance by an opera singer. While this musical interlude was to serve only to extend the length of the experience, one unintended benefit of it was to evoke a culture of excess in the experience of the plot that would later come to characterize the top tiers of ByoLogyc's management.

Fig. 40 – Composite photos of *20 Years Forward*

20 Years Forward also marked the "release" of ByoLogyc's newest product, the aforementioned *ByoRenew*. Based around the creation of a fictional BRV virus (a modified version of HIV) that was implanted in the host's body and would protect it against various diseases and infections, this product would prove, narratively, to be *the* linchpin of the end-of-the-world scenario that ByoLogyc and its staff (and to some extent its players) contributed to the whole.

> Through our groundbreaking work combating SARS and H1N1, we learned a great deal about the misunderstood life form known as the virus. A virus in itself isn't harmful—rather, it's the information that it transfers. Like a piece of software, a virus is just a tool, a way of conveying orders to a system. ByoRenew is a friendly virus—one programmed with the signatures of thousands of its dangerous brothers, so that it can recognize and destroy them. What's more, the ByoRenew "software" is updatable, so you can stay safe against diseases not even discovered yet (byologyc.com).

This first event also used volunteers, actors not part of the core story who filled various low level positions at ByoLogyc (product samplers and red carpet greeters). This would continue throughout *ZED.TO* and by *Retreat*, the fourth and final live installment, the ranks of such actors would grow to over fifty individuals. Indeed one of these individuals was even eventually promoted to the rank of an actual staff member.

Also of note here were the messages of despair handed out by the bartender at *20 Years Forward*, messages such as "Don't Play God" and "You've Been Warned" (this would later become the actual slogan for EXE itself). TMB continued to use this trend, hiding hidden messages spread around the various event spaces (including illustrations of the Major cast provided by players eager to participate in, but unable to attend the actual event).

2. *ByoLogyc: Where You Become New* - Toronto Fringe Festival, Wreck Room

> More than 1000 ticket holders got to know ByoLogyc, when it opened its Versatile Intern Program, and invited members of the public to join up at the launch party, held at a nightclub. Over 12 shows, participants became embroiled in bitter inter-office dramas, competed in some fun activities, sampled ByoLogyc's latest product, [ByoRenew] and witnessed the creation of the super-virus that would destroy our world.
>
> HIGHLIGHTS
> - Participants were split up into departmental groups, each led by a member of ByoLogyc's senior staff, who guided them through a number of activities that illustrated the high and lows of life at ByoLogyc.
> - Participants were encouraged to take an active role, by asking questions and performing tasks.
> - Loads of rabbit holes leading to the deeper world of ByoLogyc, including its website, its phone support line, product videos, a documentary comic, and mysterious phone calls received by participants from someone with a grudge against ByoLogyc.
> - A scripted climax where participants watched staff members respond to an escalating crisis, before being evacuated from the building.

- The world of ByoLogyc spilled beyond the show, into the rest of the Fringe, with company representatives moving through other festival venues, offering product samples. (zed.to).

Where You Become New (a play on words, named after the newest product *ByoRenew*) should be considered the real entry point for most participants to the live component of *ZED.TO*. It is here that many of them became players. This was due to a two key factors – a publicity campaign based on roving interactions during the Toronto Fringe Festival, as well as the already established physical and digital existence of ByoLogyc's world since *20 Years Forward.*

In terms of the event's publicity, accounting perhaps for what one reviewer called "viral marketing and interactive sharing," two separate campaigns were launched – one dedicated to promoting ByoLgoyc's bright vision of a better tomorrow, and one determined to expose the truth behind the corporation's hidden agenda. (This latter campaign is an example of EXE, the anti-biotech organization alluded to previously, and the activities they engaged in and would continue to encourage from the players who joined them).

For the promotion of ByoLogyc, however, a street team comprised of a senior staff member and a rotating crew of two volunteers visited a selection of the twelve Fringe Festival venues, offering free samples of one of the "ByoProducts" – *ByoBreath*, a spray that came in six different flavours – as well as distributing cards that listed, along with the information about *Where You Become New*'s performance times, the website and "ByoLine".

Fig. 41 – Composite photo of *Where You Become New*

(It should be noted here that this character was also the first point of contact for the attendees arriving at the Wreck Room – *Where You Become New*'s venue. For those who had previously encountered the street team, the reoccurrence of this character, and the subsequent reinforcement of the fictional world which had already been extended into their reality, was not only a means of encouraging belief, but also establishing trust, in that the extent to which the magic circle spread made them look for more, after the experience, online where both familiar and new sets of information channels awaited them).

In addition to this, the participants waiting to get in were also encouraged to call the "ByoLine", having been updated for this event to provide some additional context for the experience they were about to participate in. The communications service used to operate this phone line recorded the individual's phone number (but only for a set period of time, approximately four hours, after which it was erased) and allowed TMB to send text messages to them during the evening. While not truly interactive, as the players could not respond to these messages (as they would be able to do at *Patient Zero*), elements such as this increased the reality-value of the experience, and brought the world of ByoLogyc to them through their own cell phone. Indeed, fewer people than might be expected realized how it was that TMB managed to get their phone numbers in the first place, making ByoLogyc, as its logo suggested, appear all knowing.

The other side of this interactive promotion and marketing campaign was the anti-biotech protests led by a character named Paul Fisher, who would emerge as a key element of EXE, as well as the final, pivotal moments of *ByoLogyc: Retreat.* Indeed, the establishment of his character, nearly four months before the project's conclusion, provided those who wanted to oppose ByoLogyc with a means of doing so. During the Fringe, Paul sought to get people to boycott ByoLogyc's "Versatile Intern Program" and distributed to those interested a pamphlet listing the dangers of the "ByoProducts". As well, after each performance, he greeted the participants as they left the Wreck Room, manically attempting to glean information from them about what was happening inside.

What is interesting here is that, as stated previously, this pamphlet was made *by* players, who – because of distance – could not attend the performances themselves (they lived across Canada, the United States, and even Scotland. They contacted TMB though various anti-ByoLogyc, "in narrative" channels to see if they could still play along). This represents one example of what Izzo identified as a tenet of true interactivity, "theater in which the audience actively and spontaneously co-creates, with the actor, the unfolding drama" (Izzo 26).

Repeated twelve times during the course of the 2012 Toronto Fringe Festival, *Where You Become New* not only increased the size of the audience able to experience *ZED.TO*, but it also allowed the experience itself to evolve. Indeed, during the course of the run, the structure of the event evolved in response to the actions chosen by the participants.

During these performances, the participants were divided into ten groups, based on departments within the ByoLogyc corporation. These included Executive, Financial, Quality Assurance, Research and Development, Production and Facilities, Public Relations, Human Relations, Information Technology, Creative, and Custodial. Each group, or "track", was given a different series of activities, or "phases", terms developed by TMB through the course of *ZED.TO* and that will be used henceforth where appropriate. What was discovered about these tracks was that participants seemed to value access to a variety of "information channels" more than in-depth exposure to one in particular.

This led to the introduction of rotating schedules, thus reducing the amount of time any specific participant would spend with any one ByoLogyc character. Eventually, each participant would have access to three departments during three separate phases and thus three different perspectives on the experience. This not only increased the range of information and, to some degree, the interactions a potential participant had access to, but also provided a measure of choice moving forward, as they could continue to interact online afterwards with a wider range of characters that they had enjoyed or found commonality with in terms of motivation.

Another way the experience evolved was in the behavior of the characters themselves. In certain phases, the actors were given a certain (and arguably necessary) amount of room to solve for themselves the particular challenges that these types of live, interactive, and improvisational performances presented. While still maintaining the required attitudes and adherence to the plot points, the ways in which they manifested these continued to adapt and advance. In short, by the end of the run, characters engaged in attempts to upset, throw off, or even humiliate others, in order to gain favor inside the corporate structure of ByoLogyc. It should be noted here that these actions stimulated *in narrative* responses, and thus helped to develop their specific stories. What this provided, from the participant's perspective, was not only a means of viscerally understanding the contested nature of the company, but also served as additional interaction opportunities.

In all, this event raised both the public profile of *ZED.TO,* as well as its professional status. Indeed, *Where You Become New* won the Toronto Fringe's 2012 Innovation Award and ByoLogyc itself would go on to win "Best in Show"

at the World Future Society's Beta Launch event (beating out actual technological inventions).

3. *ByoLogyc: Patient Zero* – Scotiabank Nuit Blanche, Church of the Holy Trinity

> Over 2000 visitors moved through ByoLogyc's free Public Health and Community Wellness Clinic, set up for one night, in order to respond to a growing threat presented by the BRX virus. Scotiabank Nuit Blanche offered the perfect context for ByoLogyc's outreach, as an all-night arts festival with tens of thousands of potential victims roaming the streets. Those who responded to the invitation experienced an intense ten minute journey through a crumbling corporation and a disaster on the horizon.

> HIGHLIGHTS
> - A century-old church fully transformed into a medical processing facility, complete with quarantined areas, cleaning stations, and an examination area.
> - All visitors were efficiently introduced to ByoLogyc and the BRX virus by a combination of actors, video stations, detailed signage, and an online dissident faction communicating with visitors via SMS.
> - A team of [actors dressed as] medical staff administered a personal examination for every visitor.
> - An [free] immunization pill was offered to every visitor. Those who elected not to take it were photographed, and the image projected outside for passers-by to be alerted about the possible risk.
> - Outside the clinic, ByoLogyc's riot-equipped security force faced off against a group of protestors, while those in line for the clinic watched (or joined in) (zed.to).

The second of two, one-time only events, *Patient Zero* became a progression of the project's use of interaction, as well as a turning point in the narrative, for it marked the beginning of the end of ByoLogyc.

What became clear in this segment of the work was that ByoLogyc was secretly trying to prevent the spread of a mutated form of the BRV virus that formed the basis of the *ByoRenew* formula, a mutation caused by either ByoLogyc's arrogance, or EXE's interference (again, it was never clearly stated

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which). While the outbreak was, of course, fictional, for those already involved, it was clear that a dangerous situation was emerging where they might be a carrier or a victim.

Outside of *ZED.TO*'s Nuit Blanche site, the Holy Trinity Church, EXE, having grown in number since the Fringe (both in terms of characters and in players loyal to their cause), staged a protest, complete with chanting and the distributing of pamphlets, charging the ByoLogyc staff as being "terrorists".

This was exacerbated by the nature of crowd flow at Nuit Blanche, where the line sometimes contained over three hundred people, and the wait time to get into the church was well over an hour. Interactions such as these were designed then to give those waiting some means of learning about, and engaging with, the plot thus far.

As well, another phone line was activated, an evolution of the kind used during the Fringe, and while still recording the caller's phone number and thus allowing TMB to send messages to them from EXE, this time the participants were able to text. In fact, these responses were provided to the participant by a player – a sixty year-old man from Ohio who, because he could not attend the event, wanted to participate in it nevertheless.

As in all interactive performances, there are moments when the play went in directions that were unintended, or even undesirable. Given that *Patient Zero* was a large-scale event with over five hundred people onsite at any given time – by far the biggest in the *ZED.TO* experience to date – this meant that fully managing the numerous and variable interactions was almost impossible. In

addition, the party culture that has come to characterize Nuit Blanche brought drug and alcohol use (and abuse) into the equation.

Fig. 42 – Composite photo of *Patient Zero*

By 11 pm that evening, the EXE protest was in full swing. A group of participants had joined the protesters and were engaged in chanting slogans, making signs, and distributing pamphlets. While this greatly increased the interactive quality of the performance happening outside the church, and provided some of the strongest examples of participant-on-participant interaction to date, it also helped to increase the overall sense of chaos.

At one point, a group of intoxicated young males joined in, playing along for a time, using the narrative and physical materials provided. But eventually, they became belligerent. They began shouting obscenities and physically threatening the SCD, volunteers playing ByoLogyc's internal security guards, and soon, the shouting matches overwhelmed the narrative component of the protest and violence threatened.

(In the confines of a theatre, or even in a site-specific performance such as *Morro and Jasp Gone Wild*, the risk of audience interference is always present, but it is minimized by the theatrical framing which surrounds the production. As well, the characteristic of the clowns, and the narratives of *Gone Wild* or *Go Bake Yourself* do not really encourage resistance or revolt. The same cannot be said for *ZED.TO*).

Eventually, the police were brought in to deal with the situation and the inebriated teens were removed from the area surrounding the church. This, in many ways, was a necessary warning to everyone involved of the dangers of deeply immersive, interactive performance. Nuit Blanche is a free public festival where anyone is allowed to participate, and while there was a notice that listed *Patient Zero* as a fiction, it was completely overshadowed by the ByoLogyc branding. Indeed, many people in line were uncertain if the clinic was in fact a real clinic.

Even *Now Magazine*, which had covered *Where You Become New* earlier that year, were, perhaps intentionally, unclear in their listing of the event at Nuit Blanche. "A medical/pharmaceutical company sets up a clinic to screen patients for a pandemic illness," only adding at the very end that it was, "part

of an ongoing project by "adventure laboratory" The Mission Business." ("Nuit Blanche 2012"). They too, had begun to play along.

This type of confusion, however, also sometimes allowed for unintentional, but experientially beneficial interactions to occur. At one point, a police helicopter (before the aforementioned situation had escalated) hovered over the plaza in which the church sat, shining down its spotlight on the crowd. Noticed by the actors playing the EXE protestors and ByoLogyc employees alike (who after up to six months of participating in *ZED.TO* were ready and able to use such chance opportunities to enhance the experience) began shouting at either the helicopter or each other. This allowed those waiting in line to join in, and feel part of the fictional world unfolding around them in real time.

Despite this interruption, the event went on for almost twelve hours. Inside the church itself, after the fictionalized procedures (including a mocked-up laser scan, pressurized CO_2 burst, and six nozzle air bath), participants were brought into a section of the church that housed the "examination" room. Here, participants were put through a series of three or four physical and psychological tests. Those undergoing the tests were free to respond as they wished, answering truthfully or not. This process encouraged something that had been a part of the *ZED.TO* experience for some right from the start – the creation of an alternative identity.

Izzo has argued in his theory of interactivity that a key element of interactive theatre is that "each guest, singly or as part of a group, is endowed with a 'role' to play" as they became "fellow characters within the illusion" (Izzo 24). Because TMB chose to not "endow" the participants in any way with character

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or characteristics, the players experienced the project, live or online, in a way that each had to determine. While the "material limitations" affected the number of possible options, and the "authorial formal causation" meant that there was a more or less accepted type and style to those choices, the point remained that they were to be who, and what, they wished to be throughout it.

While compared to the earlier events, *Patient Zero* was, as a whole, perhaps the least able to offer participant choice. It was, however, the most attended – over two thousand people were processed that night. It continued the ByoLogyc narrative and helped prepare the cast for the challenges that would face them at the final event – *Retreat*.

In terms of finances, both *20 Years Forward* and *Patient Zero* were free events, while *Where You Become New* had a cap on ticket prices set by the Fringe Festival of $10 each. Seen from this perspective, and in light of the massive expenses about to be incurred, TMB needed more people to know about *ZED.TO* and thus potentially purchase tickets for *Retreat*.

In order to do that, two schemes were used by TMB. Both of these, however, still adhered to the goal of providing not only an opportunity to "play" but also to "choose". The first was a photo booth set up at *Patient Zero*; the second was an interactive Facebook app. Both these interactive opportunities were directly connected to progressing the narrative of *ZED.TO,* and as such were framed as measures taken by ByoLogyc to stop the spread of the BRX virus.

Specifically, after the medical examinations in this event, participants were taken in small groups to two areas inside the church where they watched a promotional video made by ByoLogyc about its safe havens. (This video also

functioned as a means of providing new, potential players with an additional summary of the plot thus far).

Each participant was then offered a small pill, like the ones given out at *Where You Become New*. A surprising number of people took the pill. Regardless of whether one chose to or not, each was then brought to the photo booth. It was here that their decision mattered, however, as each photo was projected outside the church for all to see. If they said they had taken the pill, their photo would be wrapped with a message informing those waiting outside that this individual was BRX-free and could be trusted. If they said they did not take the pill, the wrapper read, "If you see this person avoid contact, seek safety. This person has refused treatment for BRX virus. Should be considered infectious" ("BRX Risk Analysis").

While this allowed the individual participant to feel, and thus understand the nature of the feedback loops offered by *ZED.TO* to those who chose to play along (similar way to the issues of "ByoSphere" published online), they were also able to actually *see* themselves now as actually part of this world, rather than just another faceless individual at a play.

Over twelve hundred of these images were uploaded to Facebook after Nuit Blanche, allowing those who attended to tag themselves in these photos. This not only provided these individuals with a personalized entry into ByoLogyc, since this Facebook page linked to most of the other online content available, but it also allowed their Facebook friends, who perhaps had not actually been to the event, to be introduced to the project and potentially become curious about it a month before *Retreat* actually opened.
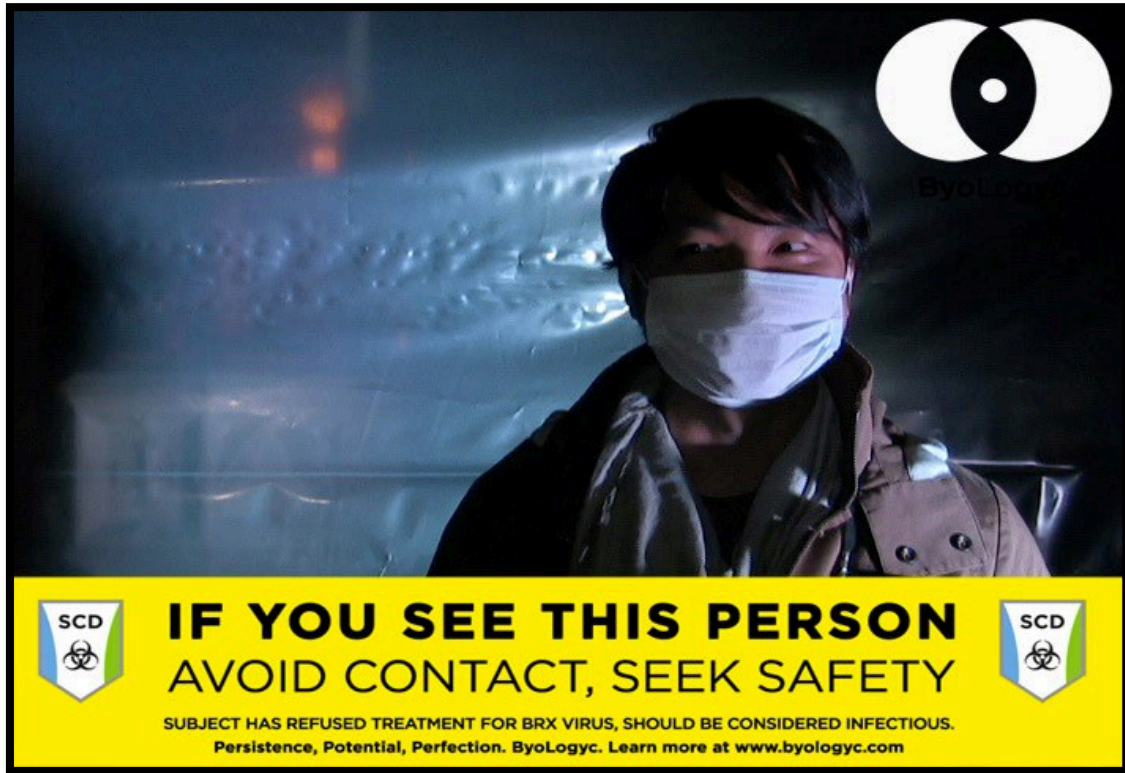
Fig. 43 – Photo sample from *Patient Zero*

As for the Facebook app itself, using data mined directly from individual Facebook pages (a surprisingly easy thing to do), this online interaction showed them which of their friends were most likely infected and profiled for the pictures of these individuals, tagged as at *Patient Zero*. As well, the app offered the participant a chance to test their own chance of "infection" and listed likely symptoms that were randomly generated from an extensive list so that no two individual's were the same.

Supposedly created by the Sanitation and Containment Division (SCD) – ByoLogyc's response to EXE – this "diagnostic" tool brought people up to date on the narrative of *ZED.TO* through an information channel *inside* of the

narrative itself, providing new, and ever-evolving opportunities for player interactivity aimed directly at them.

4. *ByoLogyc: Retreat* – Evergreen Brick Works

> As the world succumbed to the BRX virus, 500 ticket holders over 4 shows paid top dollar for access to the ByoRetreat, ByoLogyc's solution to the imminent collapse of society. Part refugee camp, part deluxe getaway, this large compound would serve as their home, along with the ByoLogyc senior staff. Unfortunately, over two hours, they witnessed the final breakdown of an institution built on greed and hubris. With 50 performers facilitating 9 participant tracks and 63 different possible paths through the evening, every participant was given the opportunity to truly decide what part they would play in the end of the world [scenario].

> HIGHLIGHTS
> - Held at the Evergreen Brick Works, a large site with multiple indoor and outdoor spaces tucked away in a pocket of Toronto wilderness, converted into ByoLogyc's stronghold.
> - Four different ticket types offered unique experiences. Adventure ticket holders joined the ByoLogyc senior staff on their personal journeys; Power ticket holders were integrated into ByoLogyc's fully equipped paramilitary force; Action ticket holders joined up with the resistance group working to destroy ByoLogyc; and Privilege ticket holders joined the CEO for refreshments, live opera, and world-altering decisions.
> - A huge, interactive space with loads of unique installations, including a medical processing centre, a welcome area, a military outpost, an archive room, a board room, a disaster relief area, and a campsite.
> - Dozens of individually designed participant-driven activities gave every kind of participant the opportunity to get into the story.
> - A grand finale depicting the final apocalyptic showdowns between characters, between factions, and between worlds (zed.to).

Set at the Evergreen Brick Works, the site was "a community environmental centre that inspires and equips visitors to live, work and play more sustainably" ("About"). Located along the Don River, away from most of the rush and riot of Toronto, the Brickworks offered the participants a real and immersive sense

of isolation and desperation that was to characterize the fall of ByoLogyc and the end of *ZED.TO.*

In all, this final event not only focused on the nature of how one chooses, but also offered participants a look at why. (Setting the narrative of *ZED.TO* during an end-of-the-world scenario was not by accident. The investigation *of* choice inherent to the project, on both a thematic and theatrical level, required a point in time that pushed the consequence of choices made to the fore). Of course, no one really believed that they were in danger, but again, the trust in the creators and the characters built up over months and across various media platforms caused them to invest in belief, and thus play along to the very end.

Retreat was also particularly unique in that it was accessible through four main ticket options – Privilege, Power, Action, and Adventure. Priced at $100, $60, $60 and $40 respectively, the purchase level determined the types of interactions one might encounter, the part of the narrative focused on, as well as the range of choices possible.

Those who purchased the Privilege ticket "joined the CEO for refreshments, live opera, and world-altering decisions" (zed.to). Positioned as a member of ByoLogyc's Board of Directors (again, given a role to play in terms of status, rather than in terms of character or characteristic), these participants experienced *Retreat* from on high, separated and saved from the more physical interactions that characterized the other three ticket types.

Fig. 44 – Ticket Options for *Retreat*

This privilege was apparent in all things. From preferential treatment during their arrival onsite, to a personal performance by the opera singer from *20 Years Forward*, these participants enjoyed the most comfortable experience *Retreat* had to offer. But with privilege also came responsibility. The majority of the Board's task was to decide how many could stay onsite, and therefore survive. This group dealt with imagined food shortage issues, discovering what percentage of the Adventure Ticket holders would be chosen to survive a real-time selection process. In terms of group dynamic, the members of the Privilege ticket group never divided. There were, however, disagreements, and even in one or two instances defections of a Board member who wished to stand amongst the people.

The Action and Power tickets were in many ways two sides of the same coin. The Power ticket saw the participant "integrated into ByoLogyc's fully equipped paramilitary force" (zed.to) as new recruits who had to prove themselves worthy of acceptance. Unlike the Privilege ticket holders, these individuals spent a large portion of the event apart from the rest of their fellow recruits, exploring the wide range of locations at the Brickworks with a *ZED.TO* volunteer as a part of a SCD "team".

Equipped with a security badge and a flashlight, it was their job to keep eyes out for EXE (Action ticket holders), to escort the Privilege ticket holders from place to place, or to interrogate any Adventure ticket holder who had gotten separated from their groups. This last job also helped to maintain safety at *Retreat*, as the play area was so large, anyone caught wandering around without an actor or volunteer present was kept busy. Indeed, some of the most improvisational interactions occurred via these "mistakes", of which the SCD recruit was, by necessity, an integral part.

On the other hand, the Action ticket holders, those who would be "joined up with the resistance group working to destroy ByoLogyc," got perhaps the most segregated experience of all. Operating outside of the ByoLogyc-held spaces (which included almost all of the buildings onsite at the Brickworks), and led by the cast members of the EXE faction, these people viewed the events as outsiders looking in. Whether gathering supplies in the park, or seeking to turn the loyalty of Adventure ticket holders, this track was defined by a sense of movement and danger throughout its interactions.

It must be noted here that, online, the EXE plotline ended up occupying a large portion of the late game interaction in *ZED.TO*. As ByoLogyc became increasingly locked down due to internal infighting over the BRX outbreak, many of the players became heavily involved in the EXE message boards and forums that were created. In fact, many of the people who posted on these sites were the out-of-towners who could not participate physically in the experience. These were the same people who created the first anti-biotech flyers (handed out at Fringe), and included the individual who ran the text messaging service at Nuit Blanche.

Those who purchased Adventure tickets were split into six subgroups, based on the ByoLogyc corporate structure and each group leader's individual motivations.

Character	Position	Motivation
Henry Chan	Senior Human Resources Officer	Power
Dahlia Joss	Information Technology Director	Complicity
Felicity Chapman	Retreats Manager	Justification
Brad Mitchell	Facilities Manager	Justice
Marie LeClerc	Public Relations Director	Truth
Denis Kirkham	Executive Assistant to the CEO	Status

Each audience member's narrative angle, interaction selection, and end goal was determined by these motivations. These motivations provided a necessary variety of perspectives through which the audience's live experience occurred. These groups were also by far the largest of any at *Retreat,* at least twenty per track. And the tracks could change. For example, if Marie's search for the truth

about her father's involvement with EXE failed to interest a participant, they could instead join Henry's quest for power and the company's secrets. If they didn't enjoy helping Felicity justify her involvement in ByoLogyc's misadventures, they could leave Denis to his desperate need for status.

Only permissible at certain moments in a phase, when the various tracks encountered each other throughout the night, this ability to switch groups represented one of *the* most choice-driven options available throughout all of *ZED.TO*. Here, choice really was just that – the chance to experience the events of the evening through the lens best suited to a participant's own tastes and interests.

The ending of *ZED.TO* at *Retreat* represented the culmination of eight months of narrative progression and player interaction. The final sequence saw the entire cast and participants huddled into a corner of the brickworks' manifesting plant, waiting for the "infected" to arrive. As the staff of ByoLogyc confronted each other on issues long in the making, they were attacked by their own underlings (volunteers who had been provisioned with blood capsules) and were dragged away one by one; the scene illuminated only by the strobe-light flash of simulated gunfire and underscored by the sound of alarms, screams, and weapons being discharged.

Regardless of ticket options, all fates were the same. The choices made by ByoLogyc, the denizens who inhabited it, and the people who followed or opposed it, had all led to this – a conscious decision by TMB to make sure that *ZED.TO*'s point was made clear to all present that the decisions we make, and the agency we think we have, might not always be as free as like to think it is.

Fig. 45 – Composite photo of *Retreat*

In the end, as the space finally settled into darkness, all that was left was the voice of Hewson Getram, the original founder of ByoLogyc.

> Ladies and Gentlemen. I'd like to personally thank you for helping us at ByoLogyc so we can help you help the world. By being a part of our little 'simulation', we've discovered countless useful ways in which to keep you safe, sound and satisfied.

> We hope you have learned that choice is always more powerful than chance. Please follow the blue and green lights to the exit and remember: If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got ("Retreat").

Nothing more was explained, nothing more was revealed. In the end, the individual had to decide what it all meant to *them*. The next day, the final tweet for each character read, for example,

> PROTOCOL 0 IN EFFECT:
> D. Baxter - Head of Research and Development.
> DOD - Nov 3, 2012.
> AUTHORIZATION KEY: HGLXR (@DavianBaxter).

ZED.TO, ultimately, was a story about choice, about motivations, and in many ways a warning about the potential consequences of following those motivations too blindly. There was no way one participant could have possibly taken in or experienced the entire project. As Jenkins put it earlier, here one is left with a story based on their own "mental construction of the chronology of those events" (Jenkins 126).

Of course, if the actors expected the audience to share and play, they themselves had to know first how to do so themselves. In the next chapter, we will investigate techniques used by TMB to aid the actors, and then break down the eight interactive levels achieved in the project.

Chapter V

End Game: Interactive Levels, Audience Evolution and Planned Chaos

If you always do what you've always done,
you'll always get what you've always got.

—Hewson Getram, Founder of ByoLogyc

Rehearsals for Choice

The events of *ZED.TO* required a rehearsal process to account for situations common to the project, including the notion of audience choice. This turned out to be somewhere between the Morro and Jasp series (where the interactive moments were scripted and planned, but the clowns were able to incorporate the individual participant's influence via improvisation), and works like Rebecca Northan's *Blind Date*.

> We have this structure that we play inside of, but no script —
> anything can and often does happen. . . So if the guy wants to do
> something entirely different — for example one show a guy
> said, 'Let's go to a casino,' and I could hear the two props guys
> in the back hustling around to try to make that happen — we
> will go for it ("Actor Slips").

Having no script per se, Northan's structure provided the framework she needed to guide the experience of the participant's journey through their "date". In this case, however, it must be remembered that the show only ever had one participant – the rest of the audience remained more or less passive.

In *ZED.TO*, there were certainly moments that were carefully scripted, but in many instances, the sheer number of the possible interactions and improvisations threatened to overwhelm the cast, interactions in which they have to not "only generate new material, but remember and make use of earlier events that the audience itself may have temporarily forgotten" (Johnstone 116).

Unlike the Morro and Jasp cast, who had years to discover and explore useful techniques for dealing with the unpredictable nature of interactive theatre, the cast of *ZED.TO* had only eight months to learn their skills. The army of volunteers (some of whom had as little as eight hours of preparation) looked to the behavior and commitment level of the Major and Minor cast members to lead them. It became essential for the actors playing ByoLogyc's senior staff to understand both the type and range of the ever shifting, improv-based scenarios they might be able to expect from these final events.

Also, because in *ZED.TO*'s plot some of the plot's actions happened months earlier, or amid an online conversation, it became necessary "to turn unimaginative people into imaginative people in a moment's notice"

(Johnstone 75). To do this, it is necessary to look at a rehearsal method internally referred to by TMB as "Character dates".

Specifically, after the casting process was complete, each of the actors received, via email, a series of instructions that told them to meet (in character, at a certain time and location) one of the other performers, in order to perform a shared task. These tasks, or "missions" (from which The Mission Business partially derives its name), were generally simple in nature, and were always rooted in the power dynamic that existed between the characters.

After casting, each actor also received a series of documents that detailed at length their past history, their current position in the company, and an "alliances and animosities" chart that mapped out who in the company they could actually trust, and who they might betray. This helped to provide a subtext of the relationships at ByoLogyc, a subtext that, like any actor in either traditional or interactive theatre, needed to be internalized and explored by them.

One of these "dates" involved the two actors portraying the CEO and his executive assistant. Located at a fine dining restaurant in Toronto, the missions given to each were straightforward – to the assistant, make his boss as happy as possible; to the CEO, have the assistant send back the meals three times.

What made this different from a traditional rehearsal was not only the lack of a script (which occurs in most workshop sessions of a new play regardless of interactivity), but the fact that other people were not interested in the action that surrounded them. For these dates, no directors, writers, or stage management were present. These meetings happened in real time in real

locations, surrounded by real people who had no idea a fiction was being played out. Therefore, was it a fiction?

Reminiscent of Boal's Invisible Theatre, which "offers scenes of fiction, but without the mitigating effects of the rites of conventional theatre" (Boal 286), the invisibility of these particular performances was for the actor's sake, not the audience's. What the cast learned during these dates was about how people might respond to situations they weren't sure were real or not. As Boal put it, "Invisible Theatre is not realism; it is reality" (Boal 15).

A second example took place between the CEO and the CFO. Each was asked to meet, in order to balance the company's budget based on the upcoming expenses of the launching of the *ByoRenew* product line. (For this, the actress playing the CFO, a former accounts manager, actually made a comprehensive budget and expense report for ByoLogyc, in order to make the experience more authentic for herself and for her fellow performer).

What neither of the performers knew, however, was that TMB also sent missions to a handful of other actors playing lower ranking, but still senior characters, to interrupt this meeting and request funds for their own department, or to increase their own salaries. This forced the actors playing the CEO and CFO to deal with unanticipated disruptions. For the other actors, it was an opportunity to interact within an unpredictable situation where they were not in control.

A third date involved the Head of Custodial and her chief of security. In this instance, both already realized that they would have to work together moving forward and decided, based on the value and enjoyment of previous character

dates, to meet at a gun range. Indeed, the bonding and in-narrative interaction that this date provided to each of them helped to form a base for the SCD itself – an element of the story not originally planned for, but which grew organically from this and other experiences.

One last example: a date that featured over half of the cast. This particular "date" was arranged without any assistance from TMB. Fueled by the cast's need to keep the narrative present in their minds, as well as the desire simply to keep playing with each other inside the world of ByoLogyc, this meeting also included some of the most dedicated and involved online players from in and around the city who longed for some connection to the "ByoWorld." Despite no recent live interaction, *ZED.TO* had still continued on the EXE message boards, through various memos and leaks from ByoLogyc, and most consistently on Twitter. Through the use of the character outlines (which also detailed plot progression) the actors were able to maintain a constant stream of interactions with an ever-growing number of participants online.

The cast members who assembled for this collective date and the players invited to join them arranged it all over "in narrative" digital channels. If it has appeared thus far that the route of interaction flowed mostly from the digital to the physical, this example proved that a two-way feedback loop had been created. The Twitter conversations had by this point been building and actors and audience members felt the need to take it further.

Put another way, a sense of agency was encouraged by TMB and it manifested itself in a live encounter (born from a rehearsal technique) during which non-scripted (but yet still narratively guided) interaction between characters (based

on their conflicting major motivations) and their player fans (or foes) became real. This rekindling of the live element of the experience helped build the necessary momentum heading into the final two events – *Patient Zero* and *Retreat*.

To be noted here is that the main cast of *ZED.TO*, who were amongst the project's original participants, had the world of ByoLogyc built around *them*, and in many ways it was they who were most often used by TMB to test the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed interactions. Clearly, a pervasive, interactive theatre piece such as *ZED.TO* is something that needs to grow outwards from a core group of participants, in order to develop in a way that allows for meaningful interactions with the ever-growing number of players.

A second element in negotiating the interaction and improvisational element of *ZED.TO* was time. Indeed, time charts were created, which allowed the actors a sense of confidence inside the chaos of the live events themselves. Like the Twitter narrative documents, these time charts showed the performers the various routes their track would take through the time and space of the performance. (These differ from a traditional script in terms of flow, in that in many instances, the amount of time a particular interaction might take could vary quite widely).

For instance, in *Retreat,* in order to be able to encounter another track, and thus make switches possible, the Adventure ticket leaders had to ensure that they were at the right location at a particular moment during a phase and make sure to allow travel time so that they might get to where they needed to be. These time charts, which started out as simple event flow documents (at *20*

Years Forward, for example), became increasingly more complicated as the complexity of the productions increased.

As TMB added more characters, the necessity for a track management system that would account for up to ten various groups moving throughout *Where You Become New* became necessary. At *Patient Zero,* with the addition of the EXE and SCD factions, the time chart model shifted again, not only to include new groups, but also to attempt to approximate the amount of time required per participant for the processing and examination component inside the church, as well as to accommodate the rotation of certain events and instances planned for those waiting outside. Finally, at *Retreat,* the time chart grew to its largest scale, accounting for each minute of time spent during each individual character's, group's, or faction's journey over eight hours. This led to the creation of a document containing over fourteen thousand entries.

TMB also produced a "First Person Walkthrough" for each live performance. An attempt to see the experience through the eyes of a hypothetical participant, these walkthroughs allowed TMB to approximate the length and effectiveness of the interactive opportunities at work. In the same way that the interactions, characters, and narrative elements worked together in the Morro and Jasp series to create the ideal environment for sharing, trust, belief, and play, these walkthroughs attempted to test that balance even when that was impossible. (In *Retreat,* there were over sixty-three possible routes through the experience). Nevertheless, this proved a useful component in the rehearsal process, not only for the actors, but also for TMB itself.

In all, the Character dates, motivation guides, time charts, and walkthroughs used during the run of *ZED.TO* sought to create conditions for the most seamless, detailed interactive experience possible for its participants. This allowed for a variety of exposure to various information channels, and for a range of different types of interactions dependent on the actions and movements of others; in short, they allowed the continual operation of a fully functional, fictional world.

An Eight Level Theory of Interactivity

Eight types of interaction were used in *ZED.TO's* live and online creation. Much like the "Soft", "Medium", and "Hard" theory of interaction created by U.N.I.T. Productions, each will be examined, from the simplest to the most complex in light of Wirth's basic definition of the form:

> In traditional theatre the audience assumes a *reactive* role, responding to the performance in a passive fashion. Interactive theatre expands the experience of the audience by offering them a *proactive* role, in which they are invited to join as a collaborator in the creation of the performance (Wirth 1).

From the simplest interactions (which required the least commitment from the participants) to the most complicated (requiring the highest level of engagement from the players), these eight levels of interaction (first theorized by TMB game designer David Fono) are described here as verbs, and represent the kinds of (inter)actions undertaken during the activities.

1. The Look/Listen Interactions

These include the various product pages and the company history on ByoLogyc's main website, the "ByoSphere" newsletter, as well as "ByoLine"

phone service. As the easiest to participate in, as well as for TMB to execute, the look/listen interactions operate on quick access and use the senses of sight and hearing.

Other examples of this interaction include a "missing persons" board at *Retreat*, where people could post notes to, or photos of, loved ones supposedly missing in the chaos of the final stage of the outbreak, or the radios which, located throughout the Brickworks, played a continuous loop of an emergency program, supposedly broadcasting the latest attempts and failures to halt the spread of the virus.

Another illustration of this type was a series of comics produced for the project by an artist working with TMB. The introduction to the site, playfully called "ByoOptic", welcomed the viewer.

> I'm Ariel Hume, a comic artist, completing my Joint Master of New Audiences and Innovative Practices at the Iceland Academy of the Arts [- an actual graduate program]. You are entering the world of ByoLogyc, as seen through the eyes of its employees, and rendered in the form of a graphic novel. Each comic is a small excerpt from my final thesis ("ByoOptic").

Each page of this graphic novel revealed a behind-the-scenes look at one of the ByoLogyc staff members, and helped to illuminate either an earlier moment of their personal journey, or the events (live or digital) that had taken place thus far. These comics found their way into almost every event and were usually placed somewhere that people could easily find and read them.

In any production, interactive or traditional, visual and audio components contribute to the experience as a whole. In *ZED.TO*, however, they fulfilled a slightly different role, in that, as in the pamphlets used during *Where You Become New*, they were often created *by* the audience, rather than merely *for*

the audience. In this type of game-based, pervasive interactive theatre, however, looking or listening revealed clues that began new interactions. Looking in this context sometimes led to finding, which led to solving, which led to telling others to look too.
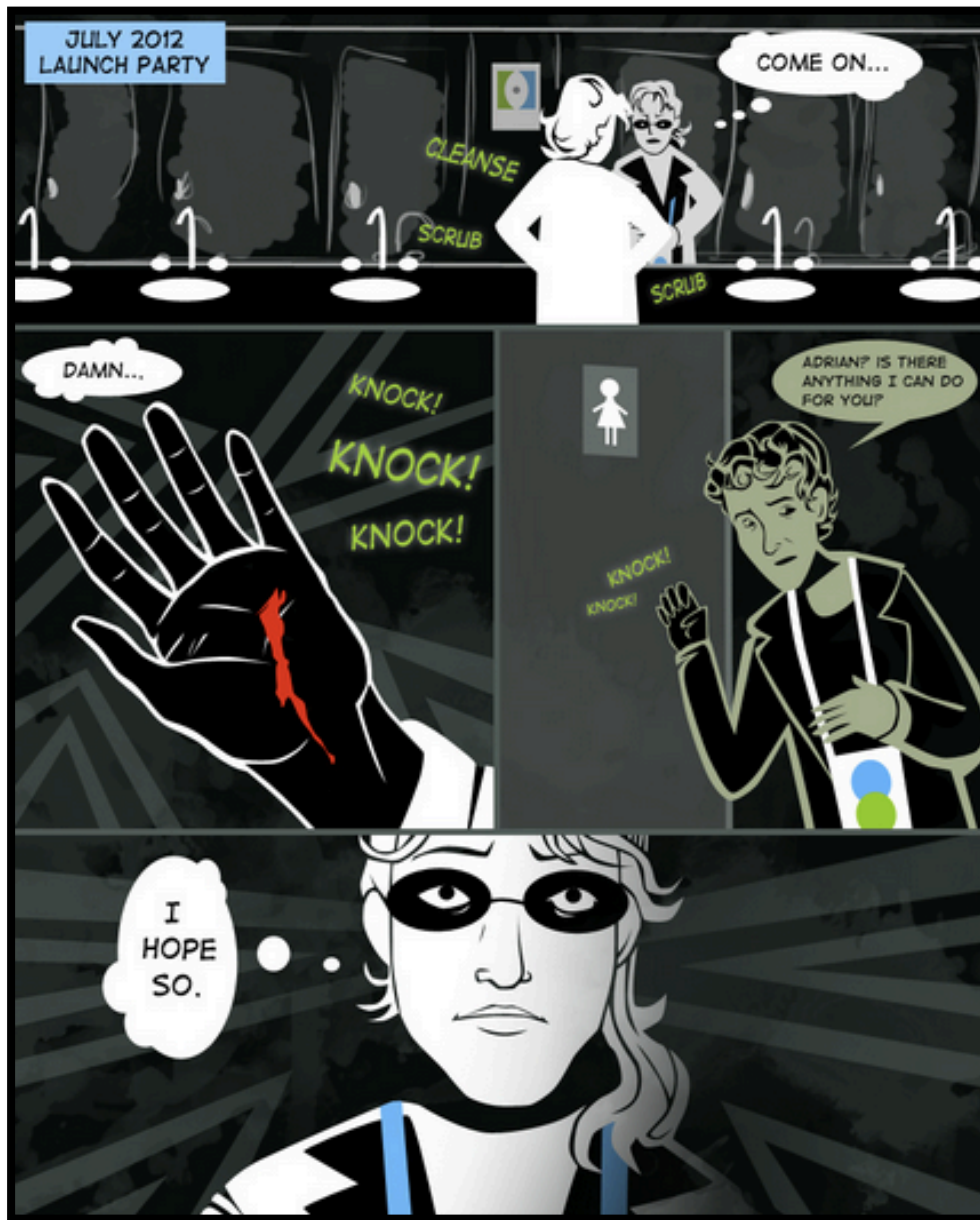

Fig. 46 – Sample comic from "ByoOptics"

2. The Touch/Taste Interactions

The touch/taste interactions require a measure of trust in the participant to be effective. Used throughout the live events, the sampling of the "ByoProducts" – the fictional biotech and lifestyle enhancement solutions produced by ByoLogyc – was initially tested at *20 Years Forward* and comprised the chief interactive opportunity of that first event. Indeed, the creation of the "ByoProducts" themselves represented a major proof-of-concept: would TMB be able to properly embody a futuristic biotech company? Would people physically interact with it?

At that time, four products were available for participant use: *ByoMate* (a pill, essentially a love drug), B*yoBreath* (a flavoured spray which turned the individual into an air purifier), *ByoEnrich* (a patch that released vitamins slowly, over the course of a day), and finally *ByoGrow* (a salve that accelerated or retarded hair growth depending on use). There was a fifth product, *ByoBaby,* which implanted a biological tutor in the womb to guide developing fetuses, but was administered by injection and so was never offered to the public for sampling.

Each product was required to offer a different sort of tactile interaction, thus a pill, a spray, a patch, and a salve. In addition, choice was also offered in *how* one could interact with them. For example, *ByoBreath* was offered in six different flavours and users could try one, all six, or any number in combination. *ByoMate,* on the other hand, was a single pill, all of them identical, but here participants were encouraged to take them with someone else, causing an unscripted and unplanned opportunity for participant-to-participant play.

In all these cases, the visceral qualities of the products served three main purposes. The first, as mentioned, was to provide a tactile way to explore and experience the world of ByoLogyc, thus allowing the fiction to quite literally "feel real." The second was to offer a choice that was physical, rather than intellectual. This sets these interactions apart from most of the other types used in *ZED.TO.*

Third and last of these purposes was the playful spirit created during the experience by actually allowing the participant to wear the results of their interaction. For example, *ByoEnrich* was fashioned out of a sticker and a costly transparent burn bandage. As a result, it was often not available to everyone in attendance.

Fig. 47 – Participant wearing *ByoEnrich* patch

This created an unintentional side effect – while everyone had choice, not everybody was going to be one of the chosen. Therefore, those who managed to acquire a *ByoEnrich* patch wore them with a sense of pride, all the while, of course, operating as living advertising for the ByoLogyc brand.

Another example of the touch/taste interaction was the issuing of *ByoRenew*. Given to all participants at the final three events, here too choice was a key component of the interaction, where the individual was issued the pill, but had the option to either take it or not. In some cases, such as *Where You Become New,* the percentage of those who took *ByoRenew* was disproportionally small. On the other hand, at *Patient Zero*, significantly more participants, proportionally, made the choice to take the pill.

Why? At the Fringe, the pills were given out by the ten group leaders, the same people who had been fighting and revealing the troubled dark side of ByoLogyc all evening. At Nuit Blanche, however, the participants received their pill from a volunteer performer in the guise of a nameless ByoLogyc employee. Perhaps this factor, plus the sense of danger prompted by the narrative, increased the participant's investment in belief, making the negative course of action seem somehow more appropriate. As well, the size of the group may also have been a factor. When in a large group, the participants seemed less likely to ingest the pill, perhaps due to seeing others not taking it.

3. The Transport/Deliver Interactions

If the touch/taste interaction level was mostly connected to the participants' trust in ByoLogyc, the transport/deliver type was rooted in the trust that the characters had in the participants. Offering the opportunity to both engage

inside the narrative by advancing a part of the plot, these interactions provided a (albeit controlled) chance to explore the various environments in which experiences took place.

Physically, the action inherent in this type of interaction is moving something or someone. Moving with the narrative this way, the messengers felt part of its progression. Two examples will serve to illuminate this interaction type – pay-cut letters issued during *Where You Become New*; and messages given to those waiting to enter the church at *Patient Zero.*

At the Fringe, during one particular performance, audience members in the financial department were tasked with the delivery of a letter to the heads of the other nine departments. The messengers and the actors were unaware of the contents. This was a way for TMB to test the training inherent to the "Character dates" rehearsals mentioned earlier.

This action triggered a series of interruptions and interactions in which every participant, regardless of track, was involved. While the original interactive task was simple – carry an envelope across the room to an actor – the resulting effect (based on the raw emotional response of the surprised actors) provided everyone with a sequence of play made more powerful because of its authenticity.

Indeed, surprise interactions such as these helped remedy one of the major challenges experienced during *Where You Become New*: the inherent contradiction of having to repeat a performance in a pervasive interactive fiction that is happening in real time. For the actors, unlike Morro and Jasp's Annis and Lee who, for the most part, perform under a "fictional" passage of

time, in *ZED.TO* everything was supposed to be happening for the first and only time, there and then.

Therefore, for an actor to repeat the discovery of a previous night's show was to somehow mute the true sense of play they might engage in the next time. In a closed narrative, as the works of U.N.I.T. Productions, this would not have been an issue. But, to be required to not only replay the same "new" interactions over and over again, in direct conflict with the sense of time the project operated on (and then to go back to one's Twitter account and have to find ways to negotiate around the questions of participants who have already been to the event with the curiosity of those who have yet to attend), was a serious challenge mitigated by unanticipated interactions such as the one described above.

A second example of a transport/deliver interaction occurred during the twelve-hour Nuit Blanche run of *Patient Zero.* At this point on the narrative timeline, the Ex-VP of Quality Assurance attempted to get participants waiting in line to carry messages to one or more of the other characters stationed inside the church. These were given to the participants sometimes almost an hour before they were to be let inside, giving them plenty of time to read, discuss, and share these notes with others. As in the previous example, the other cast members were unaware of the existence of these notes.

In this case, especially, the end result of this interaction amounted to an exclusive, one-on-one encounter with the recipient character. In terms of offering both agency (they could always say no to the request to carry the note) and variety (after the long wait outside), these interactions allowed the

participant the opportunity to feel special and to want to invest and trust further, to see what other opportunities for play might exist in the story world unfolding around them.

Finally, in *Retreat,* one particular track was involved in the transport of body bags from one location to another. Filled with materials that attempted to simulate a dead body, the participants who carried these got a somber, and singular take on what was "really" happening at the Brickworks. This interaction transformed the carrier into a unique information channels through which an exciting part of *their* story could be shared with others – player and performer alike.

4. The Fetch/Gather Interactions

The fetch/gather interaction is best characterized in *ZED.TO* as acts of theft or diversion. (This is not necessarily what defines this level, but in this study it is one of its constant characteristics and one of the main factors that separates it from its sister interaction – find/search). Again, two examples from *Where You Become New* and *Retreat* will be offered.

In one of the biggest interactions in *Where You Become New*, the ten departmental groups were challenged by the CEO to see who could build the tallest tower out of tape, string, uncooked spaghetti noodles, and a marshmallow. While the details of this challenge will be examined later on in the lead/guide section of this breakdown, suffice it to say there was a reward offered to the winners. The focus at present, however, will be on how some groups interacted [read: interfered] with their fellow competitors and how this provided opportunities for unscripted play.

Especially towards the end of the run at Fringe, the leaders of various groups – the ones motivated by power, or status, or desire mostly – encouraged their members to visit other groups and "borrow" supplies to help bolster their own department's chances of winning. (This interaction was created when it became apparent that in a group of six or more, not every participant was going to be able to engage first hand in the construction of the tower).

Being sent out to steal materials, each individual participant was confronted with the choice of how best to obtain the desired items. In terms of agency, this is a rare example of almost complete freedom of action (though some group leaders became more adept at convincing their participants to steal than others). Each participant could truly play, as they desired, resulting in actions and interactions with other players as varied as a smooth sell in some cases to a snatch and grab in others.

The second fetch/gather interaction was exactly that. As the members of the Action ticket on the EXE track struggled to figure out how they were going to stop ByoLogyc, it was revealed that the leader of EXE had arranged for a series of caches of ByoLogyc security passes to be hidden in the park. (This action was performed whilst the SCD recruits on the Power ticket track patrolled the park).

From this, it is clear to see that interaction flowed into more action. Any disruption to one might have delayed or jeopardized those coming later. That said, there was not a loss of even one of the interactions. This was the direct result of intense planning and training throughout *ZED.TO*, something that must be considered a necessity of any interactive project of this scale. Indeed,

the inclusion of complicated preparations seems essential in such work. This simple idea – intense rehearsal – needs to be understood, even in interactive theatre, especially in interactive theatre.

5. The Find/Search Interactions

Overall, more of the interactions in *ZED.TO* fell into the find/search category than into any of the others. Both in the physical and digital manifestations of the project, there was seemingly always something to find, something to search out and discover. Of course, to look is to find, but what TMB came to understand was the need – especially towards the end of the eight-month project – to provide players with an almost continuous stream of new information and interaction opportunities, so as to keep them "playing". This realization led to the need for a constant production of "secrets", including hidden web pages, videos and documents. These find/search interactions allowed players to use their own detective instincts to seek out content not immediately available to other participants.

What seems to separate these types of interactions from the look/listen interactions is to be found in the player effort required to discover them (this notion of effort has been hinted at already in this chapter, but will be discussed further following the current breakdown of the interactive types being investigated).

The two examples of find/search interactions to be explored here both occurred at *Retreat*. In many ways, these find/search activities, which revolved around the archive room at the Brickworks, are at the core of the definition of

this level of interaction. In the archive room itself sat twenty-plus boxes filled with the various records and documents ByoLogyc brought with it to *Retreat*. Here, particular groups had to find specific documents amongst thousands.

In actuality, the boxes in these archives held the collected memos, emails, pages, speeches, diagrams, illustrations, and everything else produced in the previous eight months by the TMB. As each participant sorted through these materials, they could literally find information about almost any part of the project's narrative. Put another way, the result of this find/search interaction was pre-determined; the participant's way of completing it was not.

A second interaction of this type also involved the archive room. These sorts of similar tasks were repeated not from lack of imagination, but to respond to the "material resource" limitation mentioned earlier. This allowed a variety of experiences to be offered through the same activity, in the same location at different times, and under different conditions.

For this second group, the task was to find a secret key inside the archives, the location of which was referred to in a document also contained somewhere in one of the boxes. Once found, and the corresponding key had been located, this interaction transformed into a race with a second Adventure ticket track (who had also found out about the secrets, but through an entirely different manner). In this regard, one find/search interaction led directly to another one, presented as the continuation of a goal, rather than simply another activity.

A third find/search interaction also involved this notion of connected activities, but on a much larger scale. It involved six lockboxes hidden on different days at various Fringe venues during the run of *Where You Become New*. This

interaction was the most complicated of any attempted, as it required a combination of both live and online interaction. (As such, this specific interaction was very popular with those who recognized the project as something akin to the *pervasive game*, or as a transmedia story, but those more familiar with the theatre, let alone interactive theatre, found it inaccessible due to its complexity and the exertion required).

This interaction was known as the "ByoRenew VIP Challenge". On a special VIP website set up for this purpose, the profiles of the six senior staff members associated with the VIP were made available. In these profiles were clues to the location of the hidden boxes. Once the players felt they had the clue, they were required to follow a series of interlinking steps that had to be completed in order to finish this find/search interaction.

> **1.** Visit the Fringe venues listed below, and find the hidden boxes outside. Visit byorenew.com on your smartphone when you're near the venue for a[n additional] clue on finding the box.
> **2.** Visit the VIP Launch Party at the Annex Wreck Room, and find the hidden keys. The locations of the keys are hidden on this webpage. Folks online, this is your time to shine!
> **3.** Use the keys to unlock the boxes. Work together! Use the forum, or tweet @byologyc for assistance ("ByoRenew VIP Challenge").

For those who participated in this interaction, both on-site and online, their eagerness was supported by the inherent social qualities of *ZED.TO*, so that the satisfaction a player felt in completing a find/search interaction (especially one that was combined with the following decipher/solve type) was directly linked to the opportunity to work together.

It is also interesting to note that as the interactions in *ZED.TO* became more complex, the more a measure of challenge was infused in them, a notion of interaction akin to that found in game design. As agency increased, so too did

the investment the players found in the narrative and world of the game. In the instance described above, and in the following discussion of the decipher/solve level of interaction activities, agency was rooted more in the figuring out of puzzles, rather than in prevailing or winning.

Fig. 48 – *ByoRenew* VIP Challenge online portal

6. The Decipher/Solve Interactions

Three examples will be presented here, ranging from the most direct, in terms of the problem to solve and the tools required in solving it, to the most open-ended, and perhaps most frustrating puzzle to decipher. The first of these occurred at *Retreat*.

During this interaction, and in order to supposedly protect the inhabitants of the "ByoRetreat" from the "infected" who threatened its safety, two SCD teams were tasked with setting up a laser perimeter that, if tripped, would alert

everyone to the incoming threat. (While this system did not actually exist, at one point in the evening alarms did go off, and a video was shown that simulated this perimeter being crossed, thus honoring the player's efforts). Regardless, it fell to the recruits to complete this task, not only fulfilling this interaction, but also contributing to another one – the proving of their usefulness to the SCD team leader.

Armed with a laser pointer and a receiver box with a reflector that, when hit with the laser, became illuminated and read "Power On", the recruits had to attempt to cover as much of the surface area of the park in which the participants on the EXE-based Action ticket were completing their find/search interaction. It fell to them then to figure out this puzzle and, by doing so, please their superiors. It encouraged a sense of not only choice, but also power in the situation.

On a few occasions, people coming to join the SCD track wore their own suits of tactical gear, making them nearly indistinguishable from the actors. For these individuals, the treatment they received by their team leaders, and subsequently by the rest of the participants that encountered them, was altered. Their personal investment in the situation was rewarded by an accelerated sense of acceptance that the other recruits had to work harder to earn.

The next example of a decipher/solve interaction occurred online and was created autonomously by a cast member, proof of the continually growing desire to play felt by both participant and performer. It mixed modern

technology with an industrial-era communication method to produce a series of hidden messages.

ByoLogyc's lab manager Adrian Quinn – infected with the BRX virus, and thus being the actual "Patient Zero" – was out of the rotation of most of the official ByoLogyc information channels. She retained power, however, over her own Twitter account. Through this outlet, the others could still learn about her ailing health and increasing desperation.

The actor playing this role sent coded messages to another character via Twitter in Morse code. The players soon picked up on it and began translating them, discovering an ever-increasing sense of urgency and leading to a series of videos of the Doctor and his patient – again, arranged and filmed by the actors exclusive of TMB. (At *Retreat*, Adrian's death occurred via video. This idea came *from* these unplanned interactions and represents a unique, internal feedback loop in *ZED.TO*).

Finally, this last example of a decipher/solve interaction actually occurred over two phases of one particular Adventure ticket group's track. Following Marie LeClerc (Public Relations) and her quest to find out the truth about her father and EXE, they discovered a series of maps of the area and an assortment of transparent plastic sheets with symbols on them. When the group assembled these sheets over top of the maps, a series of grid locations was revealed indicating where EXE was hiding.

After solving this puzzle (or being gently nudged in that direction – a necessary failsafe to ensure adherence to the time chart to allow for the next round of interaction and group swapping opportunities), this track made its

way to EXE's hideout. Here, they discovered that a message had been hidden in a stone monument nearby. This monument was a pre-existing feature of the lookout used as the EXE base camp. TMB used it to provide a site-specific canvas for this specific decipher/solve interaction.

Through a series of numerical sequences, the participants at this point were required to match the pattern of numbers to the pattern of letters. In this manner, they deciphered a phone number that, when called, revealed instructions that led the group back down towards the ByoLogyc compound.

7. The Coerce/Convince Interactions

This interaction saw the players test their abilities of persuasion (and intimidation).

Fig. 49 – Power ticket holders "interrogating" fellow participants

Power ticket holders could play together, or apart, functioning as a "good cop, bad cop" combination to try to get information they needed from Adventure ticket holders under interrogation, who in turn could work together or not as was their desire. In many ways, the players themselves guided this participant-on-participant interaction; only prompts were provided by TMB.

This level of interaction was one of the least common in *ZED.TO*. This was due to authorial intention limitation faced during the creation of any kind of player agency in interactive fictions. If the players had the ability to act in a manner that potentially diverts or changes another player's experience, the variable of how to manage the potential options threatens to become overwhelming. The other limitation – material resource – comes into play as well, as the assets necessary to create *anything* they might imagine can easily overwhelm a production's budget.

Online, however, these limitations were greatly reduced and allowed for extensive opportunities to try to coerce/convince. Shortly after *Where You Become New*, an online forum opened up where the players (and the actors involved in EXE) could post information, discuss the latest plot point of the narrative, and hatch new plans to expose ByoLogyc.

In order to offer variety to this coerce/convince interaction, this forum (unlike ByoLogyc's VIP program) offered anonymity to its users. Players could post what they wanted, whenever they wanted. Similar to how Twitter required less risk from a participant than a live interaction might, this encouraged unfiltered debate about what action EXE should take. Indeed, some of the

plans that appeared here actually became components of the Action ticket track at *Retreat.*

Another variation of the coerce/convince interaction type allowed, in a contained way, players to shift the course of a fellow participant's direction. This involved members of the Action ticket persuading Adventure ticket holders to join their cause. Exercising all the subtle tactics used to coerce/convince, during a specific phase, these individuals attempted to pick apart everything that the other participant claimed, using knowledge learned during the course of their Action ticket experience. If successful, the coerced player would finish the experience through the EXE track, their choice having been made.

8. The Lead/Guide Interactions

There were only two instances in which this interaction was offered to participants. The first interaction, played out by the Privilege ticket holders at *Retreat,* took the form of a compound-wide meeting, where the Adventure ticket groups, herded into groups by the Power ticket holders, were systematically surveyed. While each Adventure ticket leader was able to suggest their own choice of participants, these individuals were not always selected. In some cases, a different set of candidates was chosen. In others, no one made the cut. In all cases, however, the Privilege ticket holders were forced to choose. In a group never numbering more than ten, there was no hiding from this important interaction.

A communal sharing of food followed. Highlighting the absurdity of ByoLogyc's leaders' actions during a crisis – the Board was served fresh fruit

and cheese inside the final safe area – it also sought to heal any misgivings over the amount of agency required of the Privilege ticket holders (a technique borrowed directly from the "Soft" interactions of Morro and Jasp).

The final interaction to be discussed here is perhaps the only true instance of "*Agon*", or competitive play in *ZED.TO*. Similar to a game "where there are winners and losers", and where "the outcome is determined by the skills and/or strength of the players", the building of a tower in *Where You Become New* turned out to be just such a show of skills.

Fig. 50 – "The Marshmallow Tower"

Each group was free to determine how, and more importantly by whom the tower would be built. In some instances, would-be leaders even gained the support of a cast member – the result of a relationship built up over the course of the evening, or even from a previous interaction via online channels or Twitter. As the outcome of this contest had no bearing on the plot, it functioned as a purely playful interactive component of the evening.

This experiment, however, offered a glimpse into the nature of the ByoLogyc world enacted *by*, rather than *for,* the participants. The players who were actively engaged in this interaction interestingly mirrored the behavior the senior staff had exhibited earlier. The corporate desires of ByoLogyc, for power and control, were made manifest. To those watching from the sidelines, it was an essential insight into the narrative, given that the same desires overtaking their group would ultimately doom them all.

Playing Along

In game design, creators are keenly aware that in order to have participants invest belief and trust in the sharing and sense of play that characterizes interactive fictions, the player must first want to do so. Known as player effort, this desire is well known. In his article "The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness" Jasper Juul contends that it is a force which "*tends* to lead to an attachment of the player to the outcome since the investment of energy into the game makes the player (partly) responsible for the outcome ("The Game").

Connected to this effort is the idea of player attachment. "Attachment of the player to the outcome is a psychological feature of game activity which means

that there is a convention by which the player is attached to specific aspects of the outcome" ("The Game"). However, as he goes on to point out, this attachment is not as simple as it might first appear:

> A player may still feel happy when winning a game of pure chance. As such, attachment of the player to the outcome is a less formal category than the previous ones in that it depends on the player's attitude towards the game ("The Game").

In light of this, there are three players whose effort and attachment reached such a point, and who were perfectly positioned (in terms of what skills or resources they had to offer to the project), that they became an essential part of the story, the experience, and the world of ByoLogyc.

The first of these was the player who eventually would become the SCD Chief of Security. This individual became involved in *ZED.TO* during the Fringe as a participant. After attending *Where You Become New*, however, the individual became deeply integrated in the interactions happening on Twitter. Under an assumed name, he quickly began relationships with both other players, as well as the characters themselves, playing the role of a concerned citizen worried about the actions of ByoLogyc.

(Previous to the project, he was the leader of a local group known as the "Zombie Squad", a role-playing charity group. This group provided TMB with not only the tactical gear and weapon facsimiles used to create the atmosphere of real urgency at *Retreat*, but it also injected new life and much needed depth to the SCD plotline).

When officially added to the project, this individual decided to kill off his previous fictional identity. In creating his new character, as one of ByoLogyc's thugs, he went so far as to post pictures of himself on Twitter, claiming that he

was the victim of an assassination. Through interactions such as this, he not only progressed his own new story, but also helped to establish and enrich the ruthless reputation that would come to make the SCD a dominant force in the narrative moving forward.

Another example of a person who began their interaction with *ZED.TO* as a volunteer was the actress who portrayed Felicity Chapman. This character proved essential in the later stages of ByoLogyc's story. Of all the characters that used Twitter, Felicity was the most prolific. As the coordinator of the street marketing team for *Where You Become New,* she helped to increase awareness of the project, as well as providing countless individual Fringe goers with a touch/taste interaction. In *Patient Zero,* she was also instrumental in helping to manage the large, and at times riled, crowds waiting in line.

Still another individual gained her eventual place through the sheer volume of activity she engaged in as a player. Profiled in the June issue of "ByoSphere" (a month *before* the second live event had even occurred), this person connected with virtually every online opportunity for interaction available in *ZED.TO,* through VIP, Twitter, ByoLeaks, and the EXE forum.

Residing in Ottawa, she came to Toronto for not only *Where You Become New* and *Patient Zero,* but also for the large "Character date" organized by the cast themselves. Later, she joined the Nuit Blanche event, staging an autonomous incident inside the church itself. Eventually, she was invited to join the cast for *Retreat.*

A few words must be said here about why people chose to become not only players, but to play as often and as deeply as they did. It is true that the

majority of the participants who became involved in *ZED.TO* probably viewed its transmedia outreach options as curiosities, rather than opportunities to help shape the world of the interactive fiction they were playing in. However, many felt a need, as if something in their own "real" world was lacking. Izzo hints at this when he suggests that perhaps there is a lack of play in our own lives. He says, "what we are missing is simple creative play, the first play we ever knew, the play of connection, experimentation, and discovery, the play of make-believe" (Izzo 7).

The Beginning of the End

Before attending *Retreat,* each ticket holder received an email from TMB listing the various rules of the event: they were encouraged to wear warm clothing; they were made aware of the different arrival options open to them – walking, driving, or by bus; they were informed about how they were to find the characters or group with whom they would begin their experience.

Therefore, after the completion of the initial processing of the participants into ByoLogyc's compound, the Privilege ticket holders were led to the special section of the Brickwork's welcome centre waiting for them where they sat down to enjoy a drink; the Power ticket holders tried to make small talk, or hovered nervously around the SCD members guarding the space; the Adventure ticket holders looked for the character whose departmental symbol matched the one on their own security pass.

The Action ticket holders (the future EXE resistance fighters), however, just milled about, watching and waiting for the signal they had been told to expect – the arrival of a man with a red hat. When he finally did appear, it probably

went unnoticed by other participants, lost amongst a sea of people looking for where they belonged and wondering what might await them. To most then, the man meant nothing. To some though, it meant the beginning of something special. This scenario is described here because it represents an attitude towards being part of this project – curiosity and knowing the right place to look.

ZED.TO actually began with an online fundraising campaign that asked people to contribute towards the creation of

> An immersive narrative experience that simulates the end of the world, and encourages participants to engage with the story through various media. These include original online content, pervasive live interactions, and performance events linked to major arts festivals across Toronto in 2012 ("ZED.TO").

Managed through Indigogo, a "crowd-funding" platform that allows creators to set a funding goal and requires them to pick a specific number of days to achieve it, people were encouraged to donate as much, or as little as they wanted to.

In the case of *ZED.TO*, TMB attempted to raise a sum of $20,000 in sixty days, explaining to potential donors that they could become part of an "attempt to make theatre more relevant in the age of digital media. We [TMB] want to use the tools of interaction and immersion to turn audiences into participants, and bring them into the story" ("ZED.TO").

As an added incentive, Indigogo allowed project creators to offer a gift or "perk" to each donor who helped them meet their funding goals. It is here that the interaction in *ZED.TO* truly began. The range of perks gave people the opportunity to start their own story inside ByoLogyc's world, before it had even

actually begun. Some perks offered access to future online content; others guaranteed a spot in the Executive group for an upcoming performance. For $1000, TMB would create a special, pervasive role just for you (which one individual did donate). At the end of sixty days, the project had raised $20,790 through the kindness, excitement, and ultimately the curiosity of 333 individual donors who clearly just wanted the chance to play.

The final chapter of this study will examine both *ZED.TO* and the Morro and Jasp series in order to realize how they have contributed to the understanding of how interactive theatre can, and perhaps needs, to be created in the future.

Chapter VI

Interactive Theatre:
Choice, Challenge and Change

The rise of interactive styles of entertainment reflects a need for the play
element in today's culture.

—Gary Izzo, *The Art of Play*

Theatre as we know it is changing. As is shown throughout this study, there is
not only a desire on the part of theatre creators to make works that are
interactive, but there also appears to be a demand for it from the public –
some of which are outside the traditional theatregoing community.
Interactivity then, alongside the proliferation of ever more complex
technologies involved in creating live performance, seems to be key to
understanding how theatre as an art form is evolving in the twenty-first
century.

God From The Machine

It is impossible to discuss the use of technology in the modern theatre without mentioning Robert Lepage and his work with the company he created in Quebec City, Ex Machina. Founded in 1994, it defines itself as "a multidisciplinary company bringing together actors, writers, set designers, technicians, opera singers, puppeteers, computer graphic designers, video artists, contortionists and musicians ('Ex Machina').

Indeed, in many ways, Lepage shares with the projects in this study an interest in what can be created in live performance via the use of a variety of media. "Ex Machina's creative team believes that the performing arts - dance, opera, music - should be mixed with recorded arts - filmmaking, video art and multimedia." ('Ex Machina') Indeed, in an interview with the BBC, he points outs that "the audience we are telling stories to in the theatre nowadays have a different narrative education than we had, or the generations before us" ("Interview").

According to Lepage then, the use of technology, specifically visual technologies, mirrors the way

> Opera in the nineteenth century allowed all the different disciplines around to merge and meet and learn from each other, and I think that it's about time that we tried to push that forward and that's my interest right now to be as theatrical as I can but at the same time to embrace and use the tools of other storytelling technologies ("Interview").

However, this exposes a key difference between Ex Machina and companies like U.N.I.T. Productions and TMB. In the *Canadian Encyclopedia*, Lepage is noted as being a

> Master of dramatic illusion, his stunning use of light, space and perspective, complemented by acrobatics, haunting live music

and unusual sound effects, creates a total theatrical experience that has already begun to influence the language of drama worldwide ('Robert Lepage").

His definition of a 'total theatrical experience' at its best, however, is closer to Izzo's definition of *Intimate Theatre* where " the traditional proscenium stage is altered to bring the action on the stage closer to the audience" and the narrative "continues undisturbed in its preplanned order. Its harmony is never breached by the spontaneous act on the audience's part" (22). So what is to be made then of Ex Machina's use of technology? Does it exist to amaze people or to activate them? Is its purpose to confound the audience or to find new ways of connecting them to the experience?

While it is true that U.N.I.T. Productions occasionally, and TMB frequently, used other storytelling media such as video to enhance access to their own narratives, what truly separates Lepage and Ex Machina from the projects in this study is the use of *social* media.

Indeed, if we remember, the main purpose of the Morro and Jasp Facebook and Twitter accounts, (beside the obvious promotional opportunities they afforded U.N.I.T. Productions), was to allow the players to both participate in the clown's daily adventures as well as to enable them to share things *with* the clowns. Seen in this way, these social media operated as sites of interaction, not illusion, open to both performer and participant on which each member was free to shape the nature of the content posted there and thus the 'story' that developed around it.

In *ZED.TO,* of course, the variety of online outlets afforded the players something much more gripping than just a public forum. "*ZED.TO* amplifies

the logic of transmedia as a system of invitations. The audience is invited to participate and to actively contribute to how the future narrative is shaped during the events and online" (Ng-See-Quan 21). Lepage, then, never uses technology to build a participatory theatre experience or, to echo Jenkins' realization about 'transmedia extensions', never gives "a richer depiction of the world in which the narrative plays out." As such, he never permits participant engagement or "fan behaviors of capturing and cataloging the many disparate elements" ("The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn").

Fans And Feedback Loops

In *ZED.TO*, the 'capturing and cataloging' identified by Jenkins played a pivotal role in how not only some of the players experienced the project, but also how TMB understood that experience as they were creating it.

Dubbed the 'Purple Beaker People' (so called because an image they used for an icon on a Facebook page *they* created to discuss the project) this group, mostly experienced *alternate reality game* players or those already interested in interactive fiction, simultaneously recorded their experiences and examined the project as a creation, discussing its developments and where it might go next. (Again, in regard to how the relationship with the audience differed significantly between traditional and interactive theatre, this was also unique. While a fan culture might exist around large musical theatre production, such as *Rent*, it rarely has any effect on the narrative or realization of the production itself. It is merely reactive, never interactive.)

One of the most detailed studies of *ZED.TO* (created by a group of its player) was on the Unfiction website, an organization that offers

> A comprehensive resource for those interested in Alternate Reality Gaming, both from the players' perspective and from that of the puppetmasters [or creators]. It is also intended as a gateway to be used in introducing neophytes to this unique genre of gaming. Unfiction.com offers information about past, current, and upcoming campaigns; tools and resources to use in playing or creating campaigns; articles, editorials, and interviews about the genre; and a forum section for discussion of the site, genre, and game play ("About This Site').

From February to November of 2012, on Unfiction's public forum, participants of *ZED.TO* posted almost 600 entries that included comments, thoughts, ideas and discoveries made during their playing. Purposely 'out' of the narrative, this forum allowed TMB to constantly 'peek' into the minds of those who were experiencing it directly.

A lot has been made in this study of the feedback loops that exists inside the work, specifically in the work of TMB. The opportunity afforded by the Unfiction forum presented a unique chance for *ZED.TO*'s creators to understand, in almost real time, the effect of everything they were doing: from the construction of ByoLogyc, to the experience of the live events, to the perceived value of each interactive instance.

The fact that this was an independent venture by those who consider themselves 'professional' players ensured that none of the usual awkwardness that often surrounds more official feedback mechanisms occurred. This allowed the responses to be more genuine (and frequent) than is often possible with audience survey, published reviews, etc.

In addition, personal reflections on the project were offered.

From "Turtleey":

> This has to be one of the most expensive, realistic and immersive ARG I have ever seen.

From "Carickah":

> I tell you what, if this weren't an ARG, I'd be pretty freaked out about all this... Wow! Kewl and scary all at the same time!

From "SkelJelly":

> Even though it's small and silly, little things like this brighten up an otherwise mediocre night.

From "RichReader":

> I traveled by bus over 12 hours in both directions to get there, and it was so totally worth it. I felt like a kid on Christmas morning! The live interaction will enhance your online participation a hundredfold ("Zed.To ByoLogyc").

As has been suggested previously, the reason *why* players choose to become involved in interactive fictions is often intensely personal. Comments such as those from "SkelJelly" and "RichReader" illustrate what they offer – a feeling of being special, of being involved in something that *wants* you to be involved. In short, opportunities to play awaken child-like expressions of joy, what Izzo identified as "the play of connection, experimentation, and discovery, the play of make-believe." (7)

However, not all comments posted on Unfiction reflected personal experiences. Numerous astute, analytical statements were made about how *ZED.TO* differed from *alternate reality games* as well as how one might best enjoy the experience.

From "Thebruce":

> This one [*ZED.TO*] is sort of rare in that it's half performance as well, localized to planned live events in Toronto but available online to all, so all the characters are actors, rather than PMs [creators] dishing out acting roles piecemeal but doing most story themselves. In short, these are real people who've become their characters for a period of time. It's an interesting dynamic.

From "Greystone":

> As we see quite often in the ARG world, It is not the amount of interaction but getting or giving the game master what they want or need while still letting us be players in our roles working through the game…What can we say, we are the players. We can only influence a game as much as our masters let us ("Zed.To ByoLogyc").

This final comment reflects the notion (and need) for rules in the experiencing of interactive fictions.

Playing By The Rules

In many ways, the evidence of the need for rules did not emerge until after a series of incidents that proved their necessity had already passed. In the traditional theatre, rules as such do not really exist beyond the sense of decorum and etiquette that shapes theatregoing in general. In the interactive world, however, the rules change.

In a 2008 review of a British Pantomime for *The Guardian*, theatre critic Anna Pickard questioned just what is supposed to happen during an interactive performance. "Are we really moving toward a looser interpretation of the line between audience and performance, or is this only a patina of informality…What happens when that specially licensed moment is over?" ("Perils"). How much participation is too much then? Again, Pickard is unsure, realizing that "the situation does feel a little undecided" and argues that "we're all right with each other as long as we're interacting at the right time" ("Perils"). But who decides what these 'right times' are? Who sets these limits?

In Morro and Jasp, the 'rules' of play in action are much closer to those of the traditional theatre than in *ZED.TO*. That said, the work of U.N.I.T. Productions

sought to, through its interactive elements (and the singular mix of wisdom and innocence that characterizes the clown), actively break and bend these rules, in order to expose the ways they traditionally shape the audience/actor relationship.

Like the social taboos explored in works such as *Morro and Jasp Do Puberty* and *Morro and Jasp Gone Wild*, the calling out of traditional theatrical conventions allowed for instances of not only comedy but also freedom on the part of the participant. Once it was established that the rules were different inside the clown's sacred circle (which extended past the boundary of the stage to include the participants) new and exciting interactions and instances of play occurred between artists and audience, that is, those traditionally locked into passivity.

In some instances in *ZED.TO*, however, an individual's attempt to play threatened to overwhelm the performance. In response to "Greystone" and his comment about agency, where he claimed that the participants or players "can only influence a game as much as our masters let us" ("Zed.To ByoLogyc"), the decision of how much breadth to allow a participant in any given interaction becomes all-important and will be discussed below.

While this is true for the interactive creator or director certainly, it is also equally so for the interactive actor. In a recent interview, Annis and Lee pointed out this very fact. "Every audience is different. And because we interact with our audiences so much, that really impacts us and the show" ("Dossier"). For those on the front line of these interactions, the actors must somehow help in order to be able to offer meaningful interactions inside a

short time period with people who they are often meeting for the very first time.

Indeed, after a public disagreement over an interactive performance in Washington, D.C. in 2010, Travis Bedard, artistic director of Cambiare Productions in Austin, offered seven rules for actors and directors who want to interact with the audience.

> 1. Make it clear as strobes that there will be participation either in style or explicitly.
> 2. Give the participants status.
> 3. Never make participation involuntary.
> 4. Never make involuntary participation about the embarrassment of the audience member.
> 5. Have a specific reason for its inclusion.
> 6. Give the audience reason to trust you.
> 7. Rehearse it. Rehearse it. Rehearse it ("Audience Participation").

Clearly, these rules reflect the theory of interaction examined in chapters two and three of this study, and very closely match how, where, when and why U.N.I.T. Productions included interactive elements into the Morro and Jasp performances. What is most relevant, however, is Bedard's second rule: Give the audience status. That is to say, give the audience agency appropriate to their position inside the experience and thus form a meaningful relationship.

Indeed, as a review of their latest work, *Of Mice and Morro and Jasp* testifies, this status can have very powerful results.

> They rely so much on having a crowd that's deeply invested both in their characters and in the success of the show [the completion of their performance of *Of Mice and Men*] that they stake the entire ending on that connection. Unsurprisingly, it works – and as it works, the performers turn the tables on us, their faces beaming with delight at our own delight ("Toronto Fringe Diary").

Indeed, what has emerged time and time again in this study is essentiality for the participant to have a sense of trust and belief that allows them to

understand *why* they should interact. Interaction in the theatre must be understood as something that is never done *to* people, but rather done *with* people who are, if not equal to the performers in status, then of a position inside the story world that has both significance and responsibility. That is why they play.

In *ZED.TO*, this sense of play becomes even more complicated by the inclusion of agency and choice. As with Morro and Jasp, interactive play can only function if it has a mutually understood rule structure that defines the nature and type of interactions possible. While TMB did seek to provide opportunities for Callois' "paidia" or "spontaneous burst of play", it also realized the need for control. Indeed, if we recall Schechner's understanding of play as "ludus" or "a game governed by rule-bound behavior" (95), we come to realize that any game or game-like scenario – especially those that involve live and therefore potentially dangerous situations (such as the EXE protest at *Patient Zero*) – needs rules to ensure not only the safety of those involved, but their enjoyment as well. A few examples will serve to illustrate this.

The first of these occurred online via Twitter, between the actress playing Felicity Chapman and the player quoted above as "Mrshomersimpson". As has been stated previously, Felicity was not originally intended to be a main character, and as such the volunteer player (who had already set up a Twitter account of her own for that character) began interacting with the players.

Eventually, a conflict emerged between her and "Mrshomersimpson", leading to a heated debate about player/performer interaction on Unfiction's forum. "I know it's not possible for everyone to get on and be all friendly friendly but I

think it's important to respect other people and how others want to play the game" ("Zed.To ByoLogyc"). Another player, "Thebruce", sought to resolve the situation.

> One thing to keep in mind with campaigns that use real people as characters - their real life could get mixed in with fiction, and remind the rest of the players that the PMs [creators] *want* to provide a cool, awesome, memorable experience. So hopefully they won't intentionally make you feel like crap, or mistaken, or belittled, or ruin anything for you ("Zed.To ByoLogyc").

In this case, the actress playing Felicity was not prepared (personally or by TMB) for the intensity of this interaction, and as such responded as an individual being attacked rather than a character playing along. That the actress was in conflict with someone who was used to playing in such scenarios only further complicated the issue, as the player mistook the actress' inexperience for an "in-game" tactic.

Again, as an unofficial character (at the time of this conflict) she had not received the online interaction instructions given to the rest of the cast.

- Feel free to send messages freely, using VIP messaging, email, twitter, or whatever else.
- If a participant messages you in any way, respond to them.
- Remember to think carefully about your character's position and activities within ByoLogyc, as well as their day-to-day life.
- If referring to other characters, be sure you stay in accordance with the character relationship guidelines.
- You can make up details about your character, but be sure to record these, and send them to us when convenient.
- Don't make up details about ByoLogyc.
- Remember, these people take this very seriously and care about it, so play nice ("ZED.TO Online Actor Guidelines").

The Paradox Of Participation

The second example form *ZED.TO* occurred live, at *Retreat*. In this instance, two individual players (who had attended the previous events) broke into the

boardroom and barricaded themselves inside. Narratively, they did so because they wanted to confront the CEO of ByoLogyc and demand answers for the BRX 'outbreak.' Practically, however, this action led to the Privilege ticket holders being unable to get into the boardroom and start that phase of their track. (It should be remembered that while each track was separated, they were designed to interact at key moments so a delay could throw off the entire system.)

Put another way, this action was born from the player's desire to interact with the plot and experience something unique in his or her own story but could also lead to a potential destabilization of the overall event. What's more, some of the actors involved in this situation became desperate. To adhere to the time chart, they dropped out of character to attempt to resolve the situation. It was only when an out-of-narrative docent joined the situation, however, that it got resolved.

In an almost 3000 word review posted on the player's blog afterwards, they described their experience.

> Ignoring the protestations of the guards we ran upstairs (where the CEO was lounging with strawberries and champagne) barricaded the door and demanded answers. We were excited. We thought we were playing the game well and we would be either rewarded by the CEO and given some information or hauled off by the guards and interrogated (either of which would provide us with an interesting experience). But neither of these things happened ("ByoLogyc Review").

This incident happened because, according these particular players, TMB did not define clearly the nature of the rules at *Retreat* and they seemed to have expected that *ZED.TO* was going to function similar to something called live action role-playing.

(According to the website www.larping.org, a community site which serves as a hub for LARP designers and players, a LARP is a "continuation of a table-top role playing game that people choose to act out by becoming a character and staging a fantasy world experience in which their character lives" ("LARP Definition"). The root of the confusion here is the word 'game'.)

At no time, either in its own publicity material, in coverage in the popular press or via ByoLogyc, did *ZED.TO* identify itself as a game, despite using some of the systems inherent in game design. Indeed, in their review of *Retreat*, they identified that they believed the project was an "amazing and totally unique theatre event"; where TMB got into trouble, they claimed, was in the description of the event, which to them suggested that players would be able to "decide which part we played in the end-of-the-world scenario" ("ByoLogyc Review").

Indeed, they even went so far as to state what they had wanted to happen. "When we broke into Chet's office and the security came, I would have loved to have been 'shot to death' and paraded around as a lesson to people who disobey" ("ByoLogyc Review"). While these desires were very real, their belief that TMB should have known them or been able to accommodate them threatened the solidarity of the experience. Put another way, these players expected the opportunity for *Paidic* play, regardless of the *Ludic* framing around the event.

What this response did offer, however, was reinforcement that rules are important and that players must understand the creator's expectations of them.

In LARP, the rules act as the physics of the world, reward and punishment system and the consequences for your actions. Due to the lack of rules in the [*ZED.TO*] world, there was no physics, we couldn't touch it and it slipped through our fingers. It was like watching a phantom play. When the characters talked to us, they looked right through us because nothing we said mattered. It was a fragile, time sensitive world with nothing to make it real ("ByoLogyc Review").

In order to improve on these perceived shortcomings of *ZED.TO,* these players suggested five rules that, while still steeped in the 'game' principals of LARPing, prove useful to this study. Their suggestions (in a condensed list):

1) Safety word: You must let all attendees and cast know that if you call the safety word the game/event grinds to a halt. Everyone freezes while the problem is resolved. Anyone, both cast and players may call the word if they are in trouble and can rely on being helped immediately with whatever problem they are having.

2) Boundaries: Don't want players to break away and do things to disrupt the carefully orchestrated event? You have to tell them, clearly and explicitly.

3) Dropping character in emergencies: You absolutely must, unequivocally drop character and talk to players human to human when there is a problem. No halfway.

4) Proper training of venue staff and cast: All cast and venue staff must be informed and trained in the basic rules. This eliminates confusion and stops people from treating players rudely.

5) Marking items 'to take': Simple and effective if you don't want players dismantling and stealing your entire event ("ByoLogyc Review").

So what can be taken away from this experience? While LARPing is much more connected to the experience of a game than of an piece of interactive theatre, it does share the concern that the experience of either can be defined as "collaborative pretending with rules", rules that "give a framework to everyone so that pretending in the same space is viable" ("LARP Definition"). It should be noted here that some of these individual players are also attendees of Morro and Jasp performances, and while some respond excitedly

to the interactions here as well, none have never acted or spoken against the narrative. Why?

While it does seem, in light of their pervious experience with the *ZED.TO* project, that their expectation (they believed that they could simply do whatever pleased them at the final event) seems unrealistic, it is again perhaps the nature of the narrative itself that is to blame. *ZED.TO* encouraged active insurgency as a way to offer different pathways though the experience. Why these individuals did not choose the resistance option is unclear, however. "It was quite a let down to get so involved only to find I was just another sheep at the end of the day" ("ByoLogyc Review").

What the above review also illuminates is the ultimate challenge to theatre that seeks to be both interactive and choice-driven. The paradox of allowing agency inside an experience that aims to give the participant or player a complete and compelling narrative throughline is an ever-present reality to the interactive creator. The LARP suggests a way of collaborative pretending that seems to best accommodate the player's desires, but sacrifices the narrative causation of the author. On the other hand, a work like *Sleep No More* maintains its complicated narrative cohesion but at the expense of the audience being able to participate directly in the action of the plot.

Can this be remedied? Each project in this study sought to navigate these contrasting forces to their own purpose or design. An interesting insight can be gained here from the Morro and Jasp series as it roots its interactions inside the narratives being performed, thus giving the audience agency equal to their status and shared understanding of the experience. This is especially true in

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their later works, including *Morro and Jasp Go Bake Yourself* and *Of Mice and Morro and Jasp,* as during these productions, the interactions are framed as completions of tasks that forward the objective of the performance. This allows most participants to understand the limits of their agency, in terms of assisting the clowns by completing the interaction. Choice is still maintained, but it is housed inside a shared objective.

The Right Choice?

In a review of *Tamara,* director Richard Rose's early experiment in interactivity, Robert Cushman of *The National Post* responded to the 'value' of interactivity for himself as a viewer. "The effect, however close we may get to the actors, is not to make the event more real but to make it more artificial" ("Tamara Reviews"). He went on to reflect on what he perceived to be the limitations of being able to choose a personal path, or track, through the narrative.

> We become -- not our own dramatists, exactly, since the script has been written and we can't amend it -- but our own story editors. And of course, with the action multiplying amoebically, however we choose, we miss a lot. At the same time, we maintain the perverse belief that the bits we saw were the most important ones ("Tamara Reviews").

Here, Cushman pushes back against the notion discussed earlier, the formalist separation between 'story' and 'plot.' To him, it would appear, the consequences of *choice* outweigh the ability to *choose*. This raises another issue not yet discussed in this study, but one key to understanding the difference between interactive and traditional theatre, and that is what is assumed to be, for lack of a better word, the 'rights' of the audience.

Objectively, in traditional theatre, it is generally understood that an audience member, through no action other than their attendance, is allowed to "consume" the entirety of the work – and, as such, they expect that the narrative will be presented to them uncut and fully accessible. As has been seen, in some recent interactive works (even in the clown performances of Morro and Jasp) this is often still the case. Even though at each performance, certain audience members were offered an opportunity to experience some parts of the action more actively than others, the overall narrative was clearly available to everyone.

Where Morro and Jasp performances differ from traditional theatre, however, is in its relationship *with* the audience. With U.N.I.T. Productions' shows, because they all feature the same, pervasive characters in a serial succession of narratives, one seems able to experience any one of their particular plotlines along a continuum, each one becoming a part of the participant's personal story in which the clowns exist as not only co-inhabitants but also at times as co-creators. (This is, of course, enhanced by the fact that Morro and Jasp *are* clowns, beings who, as it has been shown, "were the ones who kept people in touch with the every day while fulfilling the need for a connection with the sacred" ("On Meeting Richard Pochinko").

In terms of audience 'rights' in *ZED.TO*, the issue became much more complicated. Not only was the project serial in nature but also it was literally impossible for anyone to experience the *whole*, either live or online. This was intentional, of course, and when taken as such, Cushman's claim that the individual audience member maintains "the perverse belief that the bits we

saw were the most important ones" becomes a measure of the individual's preferences.

That is to say, in this style of interactive, pervasive theatre, the very concept of what is important changes. When choice in *ZED.TO* was provided to an audience, the orthodoxy of importance was shattered. In projects like these where the authorial causation still determines what the narrative is about, the ability to decide what is important leaves the creator's control and is placed in the hands of the player. In this sense, each player has to decide *how* he or she wants to experience the narrative. This means that, in interactive theatre, one theatrical 'right' is exchanged for another; the traditional role of the all-seeing spectator is replaced by what Boal called an all-doing spect-actor.

It is perhaps these two notions of importance and choice that cause interactive theatregoers to invest so deeply in such events. It is also what seems to cause traditional theatergoers to hesitate before committing. In this light then, Cushman seems to privilege the traditional theatregoers' privilege of complete access to the narrative rather than experience of playing inside of a narrative he can never fully uncover.

The Tradition of the Traditional

According to a guide created by publisher McGraw Hill intended to help students understand their role or status as a theatregoer,

> At a traditional theater performance, the audience is expected to remain silent for the most part, and not to interrupt the performers. Audience members should not talk to each other as if they were at home watching television; they should not hum or sing along with music, unwrap candy or other food, eat loudly, search through a purse or backpack, or take notes in a distracting way; they should also shut off wristwatch alarms and beepers. Remember that the actors can hear the audience: noises and distracting behavior will have an impact on their

concentration and performance. Noise and distractions also affect the experience of other spectators (Goldfarb 12).

What is notable here are the final two elements of this guide – that the actor can hear the audience and that anything that contradicts this guide's advice can be said to affect the experience of other spectators. In interactive theatre, these are the very qualities that allow for an interesting and meaningful relationship between player and performer and that allow for a shared experience for all involved.

Indeed, seen in this light, the traditional theatre's regulation of the way in which a narrative is to be shared seems to suggest that the relationship between audience and actor is recognized as a powerful one, but is intentionally suppressed. In an article that appeared in the *Washington Post* connected to the interactive performance discussed earlier in this chapter, writer Peter Marks echoes Cushman.

> When actors come toward me, I go into defensive posture: I avert my eyes, twist away from them in my seat. Usually, that's enough to keep them at bay. But even these tactics are not fail-safe deterrents. A few years ago a performer interrupted her show to pull my notebook and pen from my hands and toss them into a corner. Interactive, schminteractive. Can't we restore that wonderful invisible fence between us and them? ("A Theatrical Manifesto").

So does Marks' 'invisible fence' really protect the audience from the play they are attending?

> Playwrights, directors and performers all seem to think that we want to be part of their act, that during a performance we're desperate for actors to descend into the aisles, converse with us, tussle our hair – even, occasionally, drag us back up into the footlights with them ("A Theatrical Manifesto").

The *New York Times* critic Charles Isherwood posited another approach. While he did identify his sense that "few of us take true delight in being

corralled into making an unwanted stage appearance when we expect only to play the role of attentive patron", he was also careful to identify specific interactions that ambush "innocent theatergoers when they are thrust unprepared into the glare of a spotlight to answer personal questions, or invited up onstage." His ultimate question: is "this scourge of contemporary theater completely ineradicable? Or are there instances when it is integral to the meaning of the show? Has anyone out there ever taken true delight in being asked to join in the fun?" ("Theatre Talkback").

This last question illuminates a key problem with interactive theatre. Isherwood asks if people take delight in joining in the fun, and Marks' rebels against the notion that interactive theatre creators "all seem to think that we want to be part of their act" ("A Theatrical Manifesto"). Obviously some do, yet other do not. This then is a problem for theatre creators working in this field.

So what causes this? According to a study on the role of the audience from the school of Media Theory at the University of Chicago:

> The role of the theater audience has changed over time. In Elizabethan England, for example, audiences customarily interacted freely with the performers, shouting suggestions, comments, and insults at will. In later times, possibly not coincidentally around the same time that the proscenium stage provided its formal barrier between audience and performer, the stricter rules of audience participation (which are still, largely, observed today) were established ("Theater").

To put it another way, interactive theatre is a part of our theatrical past as well as a part of our future. So why was a barrier, an 'invisible fence' erected to prevent the sharing of play, to create this division into active and passive roles?

This study has attempted to show *how* audiences could be made active once again in the theatre as well as *why* it may be important to do so. A key

element in both questions is the idea of positioning a participant as a member of a story world not just as a viewer of an unchangeable event or narrative. This is something that the traditional theatre simply does not and cannot provide. Indeed, this kind of performance falls apart when something "actually happens", "when an audience member violates one of these rules, or codes of conduct, that the essential fragility of theater as a medium is revealed" ("Theater").

All this is not to suggest that traditional theatre is flawed and that interactive theatre should be the only kind on offer. What it does illuminate very clearly though is that interactive theatre of the type examined here and clearly identified by both Morro and Jasp and *ZED.TO* is one possible bridge to a new generation of theatergoers who are finding enjoyment in experiencing this way of making theatre. But are there rules even here?

Phenomenal Play

GMD Studios, an advertising firm that specializes in experiential marketing, identifies four elements essential to effective interactivity.

1. Clearly articulated goals.
2. People make sense through narratives.
3. [Interactive] experience is the social currency.
4. Any plan must answer what, why and how ("Approach").

The CEO of GMD, Brian Clark explains the importance of this for the digital generation.

> We only know about the world (or ourselves) because of our experiences, and we only understand those experiences when we craft a story to describe it to ourselves: this is the moment of meaning. Because we're social, we're also wired to share the stories of our meaningful experiences with each other and we're

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wired to find the stories of other people's meaningful experiences as valuable as actual experiences ("Centering on the Audience").

Clark's insight parallels this study's main point: interactive theatre is first and foremost *about* the audience. He realizes that creators "have to put the audience at the center of our work and embrace [the fact] that we craft phenomena as much as we do objects. We only have to choose to be phenomenal" ("Be Phenomenal").

If the audience is at the active centre of interactive theatre, text then can be understood as the controlling centre of the traditional or actor-centred theatre. The demands of that actor-centering and the interpretation of text forces the audience to be physically inactive in the traditional theatre. It is precisely the lack of a fixed text that is the essential challenge for both audience and artist in interactive theatre and yet is the reason that people engage the ways that they do, the reason they follow it across media, down rabbit holes and into the future. Their position is not necessarily fixed; their role not limited to passive viewing.

The authenticity of interactive theatre occurs because it is rooted in shared experience, experience that happens *with* others rather than *for* others. In interactive theatre, regardless of the platform, the audience is "there". They don't pretend to be somewhere. They are intensely present and accounted for. They are involved, invested, and intertwined with the plot. They are inventors of their own story.

For newer generations of theatregoers, the traditional theatre seems to appear to be one in which the make-believe stays as such, safe behind barriers, free

from all interference. It is art on the wall, untouchable and unchangeable except through unwelcome intrusion. In interactive theatre, the fiction is situated inside reality, the reality of those in attendance – allowing for interaction, play, choice and change.

Finally, in traditional theatre the creators are privileged over the audience in that there is only one acceptable way in which to experience the narrative. Interactive theatre, on the other hand, trades isolation for the social experience, the illusion for personal investment allowing the audience to *create* experience along potentially infinite timelines.

Never-Ending Stories

Interactive theatre of the type suggested in this study could itself, in theory, continue shifting, changing and evolving through a constant influx of new players and new technologies, allowing for an ever more immersive and social form of storytelling. Indeed, since the production of the projects analyzed in this study, TMB and U.N.I.T. Productions have both continued to extend the reach of their particular story worlds into new narratives.

In 2013, for a project hosted by AutoDesk, TMB transformed a series of locations at the NASA Ames research park in California into the nerve centre of a new ByoLogyc mission, this time to "mine asteroids". Participants (including some of the world's best minds in aerospace engineering, computing, design and business innovation) engaged with ByoLogyc to solve a series of ever more complicated asteroid scenarios. Set in the year 2021, this three-hour event culminated in a vote to determine which of a range of issues

related to the imminent impact of the asteroid would be followed by the players.

This event, *ByoLogyc: Shadowfall*, sought to activate participants through engagement with each participant's own field of expertise so that they might have an experiential (rather than just a theoretical) sense of what the future of their profession might look and *feel* like. This engagement included attempts to communicate with malfunctioning artificial intelligence (with a performer responding in real time via a voice modulating microphone) to producing a cover up video for malfunctions.

Fig. 51 – *Shadowfall* at NASA's Ames Research Center

Clearly, the experience of ByoLogyc with *ZED.TO* moved its own approaches and narratives into the future. The evolution of TMB's work – from a public art

event to a private corporate conference – proved that their interactive approach had a future.

For U.N.I.T. Productions, a different sort of expansion was undertaken. Approached by a Toronto-based publishing house, Tight Rope Books, the experience of Morro and Jasp in *Go Bake Yourself* was transformed into a cookbook for the public entitled *Eat Your Heart Out.*

Fig. 52 – Cover image of *Eat Your Heart Out*

The two clown's emotionally rooted relationship with food was further explored in the cookbook, though the attempt at "play" was changed. Because

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print does not allow for social engagement, the recipes in *Eat Your Heart Out* were positioned as instructions *to* play with each accompanied by scenes of Morro and Jasp talking to the would-be cook, giving them hints and options, and sharing their thoughts on dishes or ingredients.

Were it the case that only the live performances and the cookbook existed, a feed-back loop of play would be impossible. Utilizing their online presence the clowns allowed and encouraged feedback to Morro and Jasp through these channels. In other words, *Eat Your Heart Out* was also a series of prompts for participants to play at home, on their own terms at their own pace, and another opportunity to be able to share the results of that play with others.

The End?

Recently, it became public knowledge that a group of ten individuals had been playing a game of tag for 23 years. They had begun playing in high school, at Gonzaga Preparatory School in Spokane, Washington. Like any game, their "tag" had rules. People could only be tagged during a specific month of the year. Everyone had to sign a 'tag participation agreement'.

The reason for their continuous play was to keep in touch. To keep connected. None wanted to be "it" for a year, but that was the cost of maintaining their friendship though "play".

> None of the ten participants enjoys the prospect of being ridiculed for a year and ending up as 'It' come the end of February, but all are agreed that it is much more important that the tradition is maintained and their friendship is preserved for many years to come ("You're It").

Play obviously breeds connection. We know it as children. We even, in rare cases, seem to remember it as adults. Interactive play, as was suggested earlier, means anything that 'works together so the total effect is greater than the sum'. Those grown men who were still playing this game of tag understood this. Interactive theatre has this same potential: a shared sense of play accessible not only to those who create it, but also to those who wish to continue it, to recreate it in their own image.

This chapter began by stating that theatre was changing, in part because the narrative expectations of audiences were changing. Robert Lepage certainly understands this well. "The audience we are telling stories to in the theatre nowadays have a different narrative education than we had" ("Interview with John Tusca"). As the world becomes more "connected", as interactions via social media allow greater interactions with both friends and fictions, audiences are seeking new relationships though play.

However, there is more, a shift that has been known for sometime in the world of game design and theory and is marked by a change in the way we understand our relationship to story – we are moving beyond a culture only determined by "narratology" or the passive consumption of plot towards one based in "ludology", one rooted in the desire to be involved, the desire to play.

> According to ludologists, the major difference between games and narratives is that the former address "external observers" who apprehend "what has happened," whereas the latter require "involved players" who care about "what is going to happen" ("Narrative, Games, and Theory").

So what does this mean for the theatre then? In an article in *Game Studies*, an international journal on computer game research, the difference is given clearly. "Narratologists will be happy to explain [that there is a] difference

between the act of throwing a ball and the act of recounting that (f)act” (“Narrative, Games, and Theory”). Indeed there is.

The distinction suggested here seems to be the foundation of the difference between the traditional theatre’s approach to its audience and that of interactive theatre – recounting something that has already occurred. In the traditional theatre, we are invited to experience the events occurring on stage as real, but not as a part of our reality - untouchable and unchangeable. While this does provide the audience with the opportunity to access the action, it does not allow them the means to experience it firsthand.

Fig. 53 – Still from the film *Anonymous*, depicting a recreated performance of *Henry V* at the Globe Theatre and the status of the audience

From Shakespeare to Brecht to Boal, each in their own way challenged this notion of a story unaffected by its viewers. Interactive theatre, while not necessarily politically minded, is inherently social. It is this social quality, this

interest in 'what might happen' as opposed to the traditional theatre's focus on 'what has happened' or 'what is going to happen' that makes interactive theatre appealing to those who, as Lepage says, have come to experience, and expect, different things from their narratives.

This study suggests, if nothing else, that understanding these differences may be key to understanding the future of the theatre. Once an interactive art, theatre is again experimenting with interactivity in new ways. Taking back the dithyramb, as Boal suggested in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, may be the result. It's time to bring play back into the play, to invite audiences to, once again, truly play along.

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